



Reading a book is most enjoyable when it is not only from an authoritative expert, but also one that invites the reader with an informal first-person approach that has touches of humor. Such is this new book by Andrew McFarlane where he seems to say, “Come sit with me and I will show you how to do it.”

Excellence in first day cover exhibiting has been demonstrated by McFarlane over the years and documented with his many gold and grand awards at national exhibitions. His expertise on exhibiting was previously revealed with his earlier book on *Creating the Philatelic Exhibit Synopsis: A Master Class* (2021). Exhibitors will welcome both books that help novice collectors as well as experienced exhibitors to create and improve their competitive displays.

Serious FDC exhibiting really began in the 1950s when the American First Day Cover Society held annual conventions with their own competitive entries. The convention with its exhibition was later named Americover. At the turn of the century, over a 5-year period, the AFDCS and American Philatelic Society worked together to bring the show into the mainstream of APS-accredited exhibitions that used APS-accredited judges.

McFarlane describes the many types of first day cover exhibits that have a specific focus: single stamp, stamp series (e.g. the Prexies), cachetmaker, postal history (e.g. auxiliary markings on FDCs), topical/thematic, and combinations of these. He explains that a single stamp or set study begins with the stamps themselves, showing essays and design work, die proofs if known, plate layout and marginal markings, formats (sheet, coil, booklet), phosphor-tagging, and even freaks like misperforations, missing colors, and double prints.

The next chapter deals with all aspects of the stamps’ issuance: first day ceremonies and programs, postal service promotions and announcements, press releases, and official first day cancellations. A major chapter covers many aspects of first day uses: cachets (first cachets, general purpose, etc.), cachet design material, unofficial cancels, predate or earliest known uses, autographed covers, and FDC servicers, among others.

Cachet production has its own chapter with various printing methods, hand-painted designs, use of labels, computer-printed, and silk screening. After the first day aspects are exhausted, the exhibitor should show commercial usage of the stamps with sections on rate classes, foreign destinations, censored FDCs, military post offices, penalty envelopes and even use of perfins or precancels if known.

McFarlane emphasizes that competitive exhibiting requires a lot of work. Begin with an outline to help organize the exhibit. The title page is a key part of the display, and he shows examples. Many exhibits end with a brief epilogue such as the next stamp issued, or when the stamp was taken off sale. He devotes many pages to studying the American Philatelic Society's Manual of Philatelic Judging and Exhibiting, currently in its 7th edition. Adhering to its guidelines will help achieve higher medal levels.

The author explains that the synopsis is a critical document for competitive exhibiting. It does not appear in the frames but is used to inform the judges of aspects that might be overlooked such as research or new discoveries, key items and why they are scarce, and a few literature references so the judges can better understand the material. The synopsis page content can also be organized by the Exhibit Evaluation Form (EEF) that the jury uses to provide feedback. Sections include treatment, importance, knowledge and research, difficulty of acquisition, condition of the material, and presentation.



More subjects covered by McFarlane include use of archival mounting materials, oversized exhibit pages, tools for preparing the exhibit (knives, paper cutters, hinges), mattes to set off items, and printers among others. Expertizing has a section of its own.

As detailed as this book is, an extensive bibliography will take exhibitors to other sources for further study. Indices for subjects and personal names together with a list of country names and U.S. Scott catalog numbers mentioned conclude this wonderful handbook. A list of abbreviations and their definitions, as well as acknowledgments, appear at the beginning of the book.

One nice feature is a humorous relief between chapters. If the last page of a chapter ends on a right-hand page, the reader will turn the page and see a cartoon by cachet maker Dave Bennett on the left, rather than a blank page.

The layout and typeface are pleasing. The fact that we are dealing with a book of over 500 pages indicates the degree of explanation and expertise that McFarlane provides. First day cover exhibitors now have an authoritative source for how to prepare and improve their displays. 🐘