

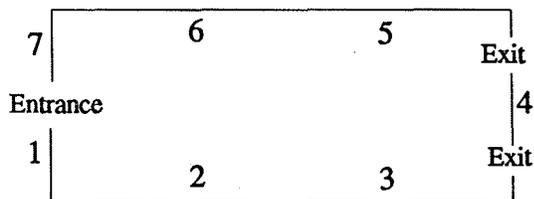
Visitor Turning and Exiting in Museum Galleries

From A. W. Melton (1935), *Problems of Installation in Museums of Art*. American Association of Museums Monograph New Series No. 14.

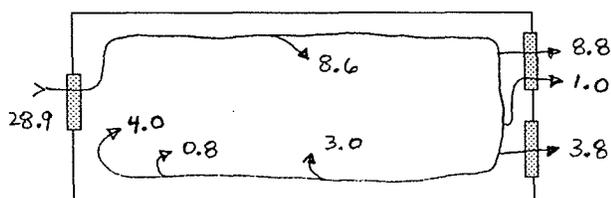
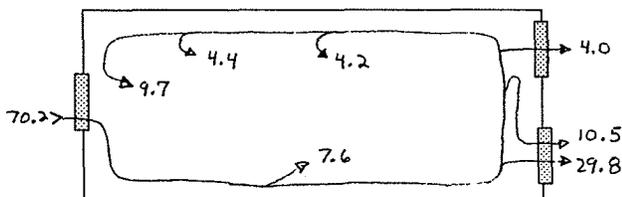
Melton described a series of studies that demonstrated two important factors that exert strong control over the behavior of visitors. The first is the tendency for visitors to turn right when entering a museum gallery. The second is the strong attraction of exits. The results of several studies provide convincing evidence of the power of these factors.

Study #1

This study examined visitor behavior in a simple gallery with one entrance and two exits (see diagram below:



For purposes of reporting results the gallery is divided into seven sections. Melton found that visitors were more likely to stop to view paintings in the first three sections than any other. The circulation patterns are shown below:



From these results, Melton made the following conclusions:

1. Visitors have a strong tendency to turn right when entering a gallery.

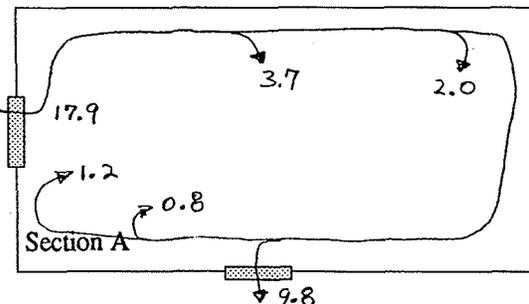
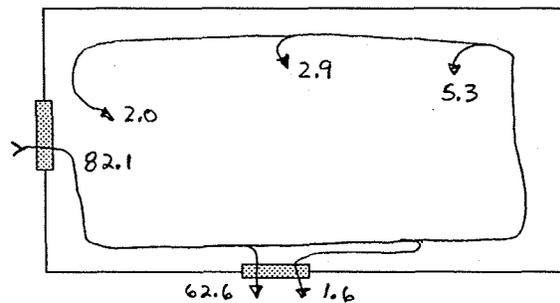
Over 70% of the visitors turned right in this study. Other studies revealed a similar trend for visitors to turn right as they enter a gallery.

2. Visitors are strongly attracted by exits.

According to Melton, exits compete with the exhibit objects. Exits function very much like exhibits for the attention of visitors. The closer one is to an exit, the stronger its attracting value. Thus, the closer visitors are to an exit, the less likely they will attend to an exhibit object since they are drawn to the exit.

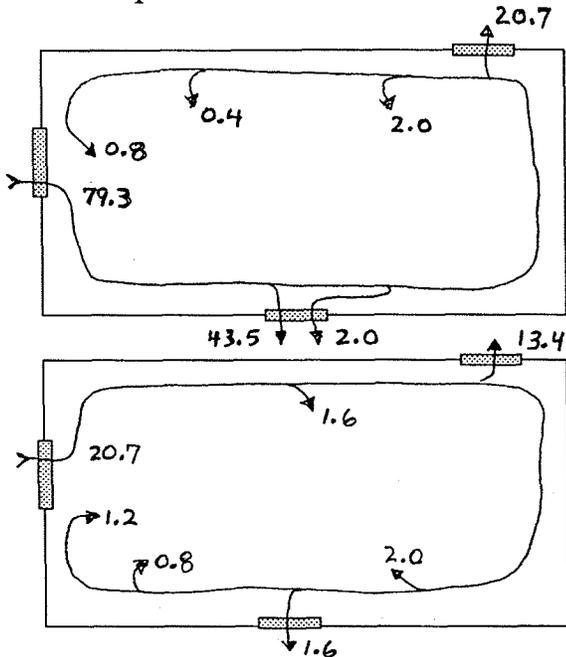
Study #2

This study examined the effect of opening a second exit in a gallery. Before Exit 2 opened, the following circulation pattern was observed:



In this gallery over 80% turned right. Most of these visitors (62.6%) left when they reached the exit instead of first circulating around the gallery. The left turners were also likely to exit when they reached the exit. In terms of frequency of stops to look at paintings, Section A had the highest stopping rate. Frequency of stops decreased as one circulates from Section A to the left-hand wall.

After Exit 2 was opened the following circulation patterns were observed:

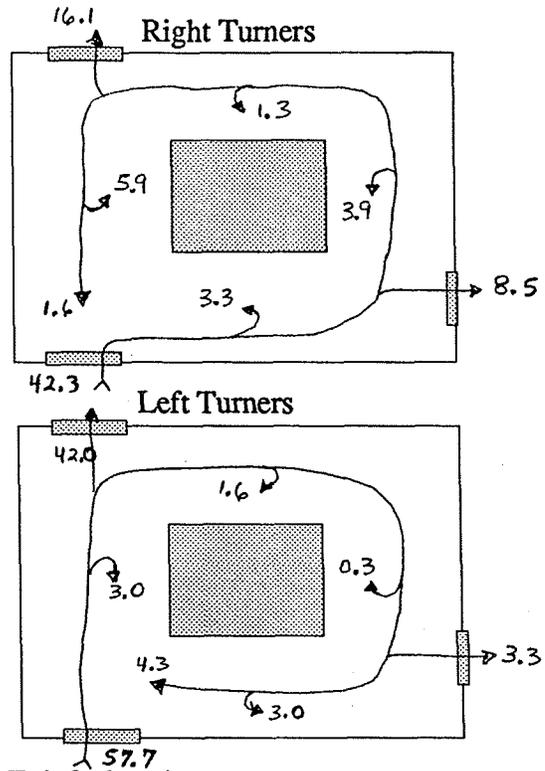


Although about 80% of visitors still turned right, the number who went out when they encountered the first exit decreased from 62.6 to 43.5. After Exit 2 was opened, left turners were less likely to view any area except the left wall since 13.4 of the 20.7 exited when they reached Exit 2. In terms of the frequencies of stops by visitors, the far wall (between the two exits) was hurt the most when Exit 2 was opened. Visitors were less likely to stop at paintings in this area, presumably because of the attracting force of the exits.

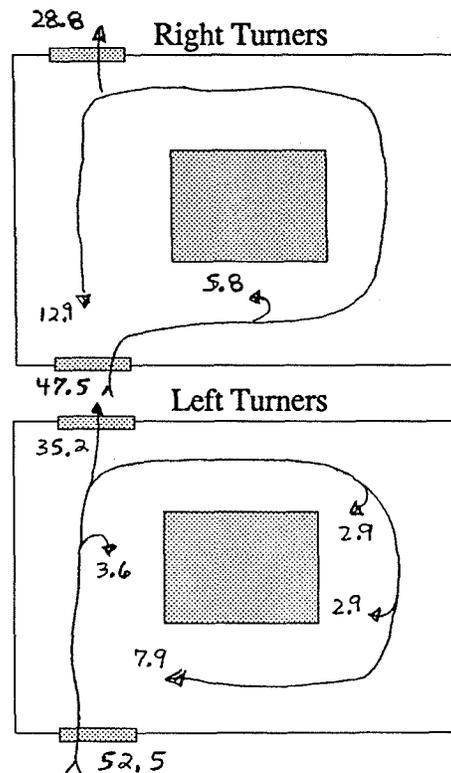
Study #3

Another study was conducted in the Highway Transportation gallery at the New York Museum of Science and Industry. This gallery was more complex than studied previously and involved a science museum rather than an art museum. In addition, the gallery initially had two exits and during the study one of the exits was closed. Melton measured the circulation patterns of visitors before closing one of the exits and again after the exit was closed. As with previous studies, Melton tracked visitors from the time they entered the gallery until they exited. The changes in visitor circulation patterns are shown in the diagrams below.

Before closing Exit 2:



After Exit 2 closed:



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Not only did the circulation patterns change dramatically when the second exit was closed, but the average time in the gallery increased from 134.1 to 230.7 seconds!

Study #4

There are times when the circulation pattern is arranged for the visitor to proceed from left to right. Such a gallery was studied in the Buffalo Museum of Science. Since it was too costly to change all of the exhibits to accommodate the right-turning bias, Melton attempted to influence visitors' direction-turning behavior by the use of a direction sign. The sign had an arrow with the words, "Please go to the left [or right]." The gallery was about 50 feet long with the entrance also serving as the exit. Initially, it was found that 70% of visitors turned right as they entered the gallery, even though the gallery was set up for visitors to see the left side first. Melton varied the sign (directions to turn right vs. directions to turn left) and the distance of the sign from the entrance. The following results were found when the sign was placed 0, 2, 4, and 6 feet from the entrance:

Percent visitors turning right when the sign said to turn right:

0 ft	99.5%
2 ft	98.0
4 ft	92.0
6 ft	89.3

Percent visitors turning left when the sign said turn left:

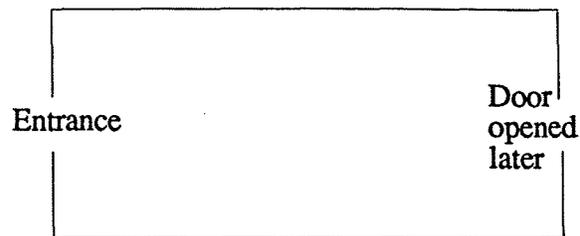
0 ft	90.0%
2 ft	85.0
4 ft	77.0
6 ft	65.8

Clearly, the right turning bias was not completely overcome with the direction sign. It was easier to increase right-turning than left-turning behavior.

Study #5

This study examined the effects of opening a second door in a gallery in the Pennsylvania Museum of Art. Before the second door was

opened, the entrance also served as the exit. A simplified illustration of the gallery is below:



Before opening the second door, visitors averaged 73.3 seconds in the gallery. After opening the second door, visitors averaged 22.7 seconds if they entered the original entrance and 34.9 seconds if they entered the second door. Time viewing the paintings and furniture both dramatically decreased when the second door was opened. Melton argued that the exhibition value of the gallery was reduced to a minimum as a result of this second door.

Conclusions

Taken together these five studies by Melton demonstrate persuasively that exhibit designers cannot ignore the right-turning bias of visitors nor the tremendous attracting power of exits. □

A Review of: Museum Audiences Today: Building Constituencies for the Future by Lee Draper with Contributions by Ann Bunn.

Reviewed by Randi Korn
J. Paul Getty Museum

In 1982 the Visitor Studies Committee of the Museum Educators of Southern California (MESOC) started planning a cross institutional investigation of museum visitors in Southern California. Museum Audiences Today: Building Constituencies for the Future is the product of this ambitious endeavor. The study includes 25 museums of various types and sizes and covers five counties in Southern California. It was coordinated by a volunteer committee consisting of museum professionals, interns and community consultants. The survey was conducted between January and March, 1984.

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