

Rijksmuseum guidelines for accessible exhibition design

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Version 14-4-21

Accessibility for all

The Rijksmuseum is for everyone. An exhibition should be designed so that everybody can enjoy it, including visitors with a disability or impairment.

Visitors with an impairment should be able to visit the exhibition independently and have the same experience as visitors without disabilities.

Guidelines

These guidelines (design, wall labels, preconditions) provide a basis for the project group and designer. Every exhibition is different and must be flexible. It is not always possible to design exhibitions that are fully accessible to all visitors. However, when designing an exhibition, it is crucial to go through these guidelines and think about creative solutions, as well as whether there are any unnecessary obstacles in the design, education products or communication.

It is also important to test ahead of time.

1. Design

Aisles

A wheelchair, walker, or baby buggy requires at least 90 cm between objects and the wall or between two objects. Please keep in mind that this is the absolute bare minimum.

Please allow enough space for people to pass each other if there is an aisle or entrance between exhibits; this should be at least 180 cm.

If a wheelchair user needs to turn to enter another room, a clear space of at least 210 cm in diameter is required for a 180-degree turn.

Routing

The routing must be logical. Visitors with low vision should have no difficulty finding their way around. The route should ideally be marked on the floor so that visitors can easily navigate the space. Check that the circulation path is clear of obstacles.

If an exhibition contains a lot of stimuli, it is even more important to provide visitors with quiet areas where they can take a break and relax for a while.

Seating

Make sure there are benches with arm and backrests and a seat height of 47cm in at least every other room. Make sure the bench is a contrasting colour to the wall or floor. Another tip is to avoid placing all of the benches directly in front of the high-stimulus environment; include seating in quieter areas where visitors can sit and catch their breath.

Doors

Max. pull/push force is 3 kg. The best solution is an automatic door.

The minimum passable width is 85 cm.

There should be a 50 cm gap next to the door so that a wheelchair user can open it on their own.

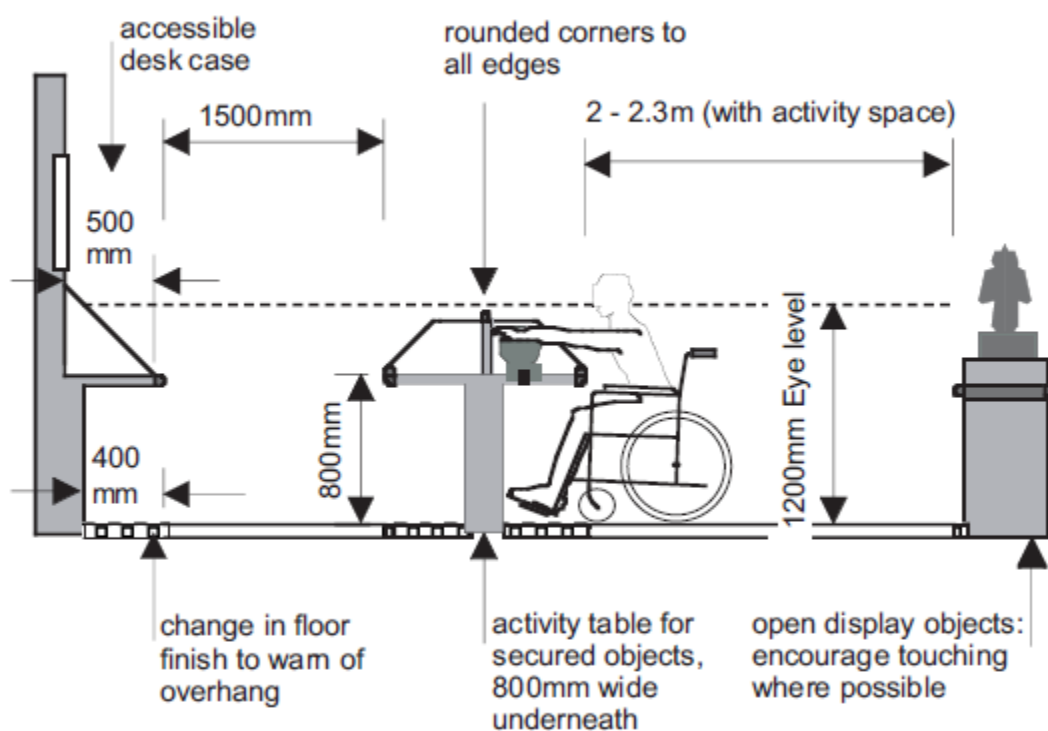
Make sure there is a 210 cm turning radius in front of and behind the door for wheelchair users.

Display cases

Non-reflective glass should be used.

Objects in display cases should be displayed at a maximum height of 1 metre, with an optimal height of 80 cm.

The items and informational texts in the display cases must be tilted at a 30 degree angle. Ensure that display cases have sufficient 'knees-under' access to allow for wheelchair users to get close enough to view the object. The free height under the display case or table must be at least 80 cm. At least 40 cm of free depth is required. The clear width is 80 cm.



Barriers around art objects

Ropes or other barriers around artwork must be clearly visible, and take visitors with low vision into account. Black ropes close to a black wall will be difficult to see. To avoid collisions for visitors with vision impairment, the presence of objects that extend above the ground must be indicated by tactile markings on the floor.

An object should not protrude more than 10 cm from the plinth.

High objects

Install a ramp instead of stairs if objects are displayed at a height that requires visitors to mount steps to view them. Alternatively, provide a wheelchair lift next to the stairs.

Threshold

Sloped thresholds are preferable. If this is not possible, a threshold no higher than 2 cm should be used.

Colours

Wall and floor colours and patterns must clearly indicate the depth, height, and width of a room. Visitors with a visual impairment may not be able to tell where the wall begins, so ensure that the colour of the walls contrasts with the colour of the floor. Never put busy wallpaper behind artwork.

Colours are visual stimuli as well. Overstimulation can be caused by reflections and different (bright) colours. In the design/furnishing phase, consider materials, colours, and lighting to create an accessible environment.

Lighting

The labels must have enough light, at least 100 lux. If using the same level of light to illuminate objects is not possible, ensure that the circulation route is sufficiently well-lit.

Visitors with low vision take a long time to adjust to changes in light levels; try to keep light levels consistent throughout the galleries.

Lighting in the gallery	50-300 lux
Labels	100-300 lux
Signage	200-300 lux
Artwork	100-300 lux
Thresholds, steps, routing	100-300 lux

Light is a visual stimulus that can cause overstimulation, but when used properly, it can actually prevent it. Bright lights and abrupt transitions between rooms (different levels of light or from light to dark) can generate a lot of visual stimuli.

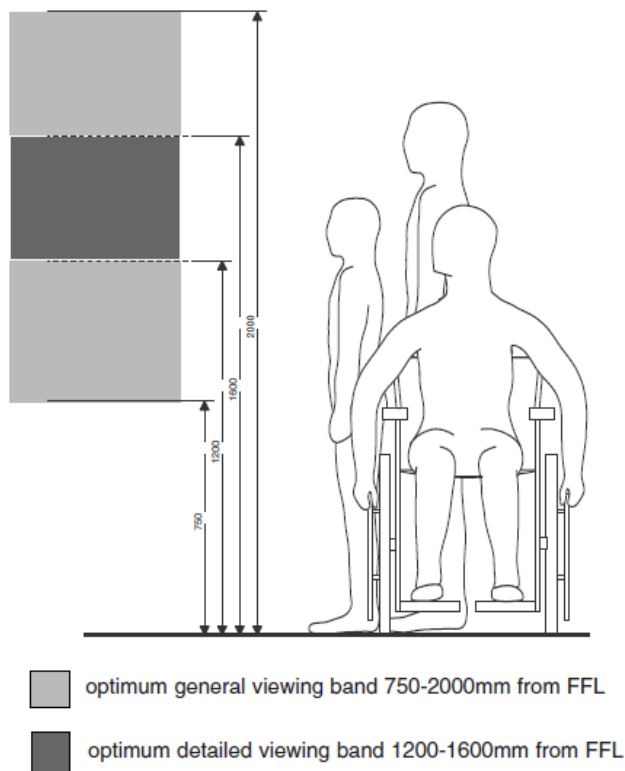
Carefully chosen lighting creates a pleasant environment in which visitors feel at ease. Indirect sunlight is the best type of lighting. When using artificial light, ensure that the lamp and light are consistent; preferably indirect, diffuse, and static. Always ensure that light does not reflect from surfaces such as the floor, display cases, and walls. Another thing to consider is how the lighting is directed; it should always be angled so that it does not shine in visitors' eyes.

Glass walls

Markings must be visible between 130-140 cm at a height of 10 cm due to the risk of collision.

Height of objects

All art should hang between 120 and 160 cm from the ground. Small objects should hang no higher than 120 cm; an adult person in a wheelchair has an average eye height of 120 cm.



Signage

Signage that assists people in easily finding their way around allows them to avoid unnecessary additional stimuli. Good signage is an essential component of accessibility.

Signs should be clear and concise, and they should always be placed at the same height, between 140 and 170 cm.

There should be a good contrast (70%) between the colour of the text and the background.

Magnifying glass

If magnifying glasses are available, make sure that they are not attached so that visitors can use them at the desired height.

Sound

Use soft materials to ensure good acoustics in the space. Similarly, it is critical to maintain the same volume level for sounds that cannot be eliminated. This is due to the fact that changes in volume result in a constant flow of new information that must be processed. If background music is required (does it really enhance the exhibition experience?) it is always a good idea to provide a quiet room where visitors can take a break and relax.

Scent

Certain scents can be overpowering for some people. Scents are processed differently by each individual. Some people are extremely sensitive to certain odours. As a result, it's critical to avoid strong scents and, during an exhibition or performance, to use odours only

if they can be (temporarily) filtered out, and to ventilate galleries and rooms as much as possible.

Monitors and screens

Monitors are frequently used as a source of information. They can, however, contribute to sensory overload by providing an excess of visual stimuli such as light, colour, and movement, as well as information for visitors to process.

Monitors and screens should be avoided whenever possible. If information must be conveyed via a monitor, consider providing it in another format, such as a printed handout. If a screen is required, use static visuals and keep information to a minimum. If the exhibition includes screens, make sure that they can be turned off and that there is a route for visitors who want to avoid them.

2. Exhibition labels

Font

Use lowercase text and minimise the use of capitals; capitals are hard to read.

Positioning

Place the object label as near to the object as possible. People with low vision may need to be within 7.5 cm of a label in order to read it. Make sure there aren't any obstacles that prevent visitors from getting close enough to read the object labels.

Labels should be positioned consistently in the same place so that visitors can find them easily.

Height

The wall labels ideally hang at a height between 120-160 cm. The labels next to objects ideally hang at a height between 120-140 cm

Type Size

Viewing distance	0-1 metres	1-2 metres
Wall label	72 point	96 point
Label	18 point	24-36 point

Avoid placing labels on the floor. But if floor labels are essential the font must be at least 36 point. The label should be at an angle of between 40 and 45 degrees.

Colour

Make sure there is a high contrast between the text and the background. Avoid colour combinations that are too close to each other on the colour wheel, such as blue text on green or yellow on red. A colour contrast of 70% is essential.

Light text on a dark background is more tiring to read than dark text on a light background. It's certainly an option, but is not advisable in the case of lengthy wall texts.

Light text on a dark background

Dark text on a light background

Background

Avoid using shiny materials. This can result in reflections, making the text harder to read and adding unnecessary visual stimulation.

Never print text over an image or a busy background

3. Preconditions

Touch

When designing an exhibition, can you offer visually impaired visitors a chance to touch a real object to experience it more fully? If that isn't possible, could you offer alternatives such as a replica or the material from which the object is made?

Film

1. If the exhibition includes a film, it should be subtitled in Dutch and English for people with hearing impairments.
2. The film should include a sign language interpreter in the corner so that deaf people can follow along. You might decide to make the film available only on the website, and indicate this on the object label.
3. A descriptive audio tour that runs concurrently with the film should be available for visually impaired visitors.
4. There should always be a bench with back and armrests positioned in front of the film.
5. There must also be enough space for wheelchairs, walkers and baby buggies.
6. Provide visitors with headphones with volume control so that they can adjust the sound level.
7. If you cannot provide headphones, make sure that visitors can bypass the screening area.

Peepholes

If peepholes are used to view an object such as photographs, ensure there is at least 1 pair of peepholes at a height of 120 cm.

Digital touchscreens

The best angle for placing touchscreens so that they can be used by both standing and seated visitors is 55-70 degrees off the horizontal.

Audio tour

For hearing-impaired visitors, the audio tour should include a transcript of each stop; for visitors with vision impairments, include a description of the object in addition to the audio information. Make a low-stimulus version of the audio tour available as well.