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DIY Small Exhibit Labels

Supply List (see below for sources and costs)

1. Paper: choose a heavy weight stock (e.g. 60+ lb.). This makes it easier to handle and reduces bleed through of substrate color and/or adhesive.
2. Printing: Laser printer recommended. Might be easiest to send to local office printer (e.g. Office Depot) for nice laser prints. InkJet o.k., but might flake or fade quicker.
3. Backing material (substrate)
4. Adhesive
5. Plastic squeegee
6. Cutting tool(s)

1. Select Backing Material (Substrate)

Why: Gives your paper labels some substance so they will not curl or crease while on display.

What: Mat board, foamboard (regular, not acid-free), or gatorboard. Both available in black and white. Questions to ask when deciding which to use: Do I want the labels to blend in or stand out? (contrast or like color?) What size is the label? (bigger than 11x17, you might want sturdier gatorboard)

Where: Available at general craft and art supply stores, such as Michael's and JoAnn's, or through your local frame shop or framing supplier. The regular (aka paper or decorative) black-core mat board and foamboard sizes are 32"x40" (\$7+ for mat board, \$10+ for 3/16" foamboard) and 40"x60". Sometimes you will also find smaller sheets of foamboard (e.g., 20"x30") sold on the shelves at these stores and at office supply stores, such as Office Depot. I have increasingly found that frame shops only stock acid-free (aka rag, archival, conservation) foamboard, so you may want to order in advance. Most shops receive deliveries at least once a week, so you shouldn't have to wait long.

2. Mount Label to Backing Material

What: Spray adhesive or cold-mount adhesive. I have found **Super 77** by 3M to be the most reliable spray adhesive. Cold-mount adhesives come in rolls of various widths (e.g. 8", 16", 24") and lengths. I am using **Neschen's Gudy 831 or 870** (in place of **3M Positionable Mounting Adhesive 568, which has been discontinued**). Questions to ask when deciding which to use: What's my budget? Do I have a safe place to spray? How much time do I have? Which method am I more comfortable with? (Super 77, ~\$10/can; Gudy, 12"x33' ~\$31+)

How: Make sure label and backing material are free of dust. If using spray, use a well-ventilated area and protect spraying surface from overspray with newspaper. Mask recommended. Spray labels in batches, laying down new layer of newspaper between batches. For cold-mount adhesive, follow directions with package. In both cases, use squeegee to secure mount (protect labels with

scratch paper). There is a nice on-line tutorial here for the Gudy products:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwen4Ao9O_I

Where: Super 77 (\$9 - \$15) and other spray adhesives can be purchased at your local hardware store. Gudy products **can be bought online through Gaylord. I buy mine through Jayeness (framing supplier).** FYI, Gaylord also carries Super 77, but it's cheaper at Home Depot! Plastic squeegees (\$2+) are sold with wallpapering supplies at local hardware stores.

Note: You can find some foamboards sold with an adhesive surface. This route is more expensive than spray, but maybe less costly than buying the cold-mount adhesive. I haven't tested the "stickiness" of these adhesives, but it might be a route you'd want to consider.

3. Trim the Labels

What: Mat board, foamboard, and Gatorboard can be cut by hand using an X-Acto or utility knife with a heavy metal ruler / straight edge as a guide, OR with a mat cutter, OR by your local frame store. Questions to ask when deciding which to use: What's my budget? How crafty am I? How patient am I?

How: If cutting by hand, protect the table surface with scrap mat board or a vinyl cutting sheet. Practice to achieve a consistently straight 90° cut. If using a mat cutter, follow the instructions that come with the cutter. Again, practice makes perfect.

Where: X-Acto knives, blades, and heavy rulers can be purchased at your local hardware or craft store (\$10+). Mat cutters are available through fine art supply retailers, such as Daniel Smith and Blick Studio (\$150 - \$900). Both of these suppliers have online catalogs. You want a board-mounted mat cutter.

I have an online tutorial on cutting labels by hand: <https://www.chriserlich.com/single-post/diy-video-cutting-exhibit-labels-by-hand>

4. Hanging labels

What: Poster putty (e.g., Poster Tack, Fun-Tak, Poster Putty), or 3-M Command strips. Questions to ask when deciding which to use: How big is the label? (up to 11x14 okay with poster tack) How long will it be on display? (you want to choose the easiest to reverse without damage for temporary exhibits).

How: For poster putty, warm it up in your hands, then only use a little – not quite the size of pea – on each of the four corners.

Where: The putty (\$2+) and Command Strips (\$4+) can be found at your local hardware store and general art and craft suppliers, such as Michael's and JoAnn's (\$2+). The Command strips are pricey, but well worth it for the wear and tear they save your walls.

Tip: Consider "layering" – adding foamcore spacers behind some labels so they are further lifted off the wall. Not every label flat on the wall.