

- **WHAT IS A THEMATIC EXHIBIT?**

Some collectors like to share their collections publically by making exhibits, which they enter in stamp shows. They may do this for pleasure, for awards, or both. They usually enjoy doing the research and often make new friends.

The ATA's annual National Topical Stamp Show (NTSS) includes about 20 thematic exhibits (as well as dealers, meetings and seminars). A thematic exhibit tells a story, illustrating that story with a wide variety of philatelic "elements." There are hundreds of kinds of elements, including stamps, varieties, covers, coils, booklets, postmarks, meter stamps, and postal stationery.

To understand a thematic exhibit, look for

- "Thematic knowledge" - text above items tells the topic's story.
- "Philatelic knowledge" - text below items explains the items.

Sample pages of recent NTSS winners:

<http://americantopicalassn.org/exhibiting.shtml>

- **HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ATA?**

The ATA website at

[www.americantopicalassn.org](http://www.americantopicalassn.org)

is a treasure of information. ATA's slogan is "Boldly to the Future" because we believe that thematic collecting is the future of philately. The American Topical Association is for beginning collectors. And the ATA is for advanced philatelists, too.

It's all . . .



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**A BASIC GUIDE TO TOPICAL STAMP COLLECTING**

- **WHAT IS TOPICAL COLLECTING?**

A topical collection consists of stamps chosen for their topic or design. In many countries it is called a *thematic* collection.



- **WHY MIGHT I BE INTERESTED IN COLLECTING "TOPICALS"?**

Many collectors are drawn to the colorful designs – some even say they can be exciting! Often new collectors begin with topicals – and many stay with them because they enjoy finding out about the person, animal, place or event pictured on them. Others benefit from their contacts with other collectors of the same topics. Many enjoy topicals because there are no printed album pages to fill – they like the freedom of arranging their collection any way they choose. There is no burden of needing to "complete" a topical collection – you collect whatever you prefer. Traditional collectors sometimes turn to topical philately when they have completed their collection, when they can no longer afford the stamps they don't have, or when they want something different. They come to cherish the philatelic freedom of topical collecting. So will you!

- **WHERE CAN I OBTAIN TOPICAL STAMPS?**

Many dealers sell topical stamps. Those who advertise in *Topical Time* especially offer topicals.

“TopicalsOnLine” is the ATA’s on-line stamp shop designed especially for topical collectors. Stamps are listed by both catalog number and topic.

Although everyone may purchase items, only ATA members may sell. And they receive a 10% discount. Prices are fixed—this is not an auction. See



[www.topicalsonline.com](http://www.topicalsonline.com)

- **HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT A SPECIFIC TOPIC?**

ATA members who share a specific topic band together to form "study units" to share knowledge and encourage research. They publish specialty journals. There are about 50 units in the ATA, including Biology, Christmas, Engravers, Halloween, Judaica, Penguins, Railroads, Scouts, Space and Sports. The ATA publishes print and electronic “handbooks” on popular topics, such as Disney, Insects, Ships, Birds and Computers. The ATA website lists them all:

<http://americantopicalassn.org/studyunits.shtml>

- **HOW CAN I STORE MY TOPICAL STAMPS?**

Almost any way you like! Since everyone’s topical collection is different, many collectors use blank pages rather than printed ones. Or they produce their own customized pages by using a computer. Or they keep their collections in “stock books” which allow the stamps to be easily moved. You may be as flexible and creative as you like. There is much freedom in topical collecting!

- **WHAT TOPIC MIGHT I COLLECT?**

Any topic you want! Many collectors choose a topic related to their personal lives – where they’ve lived or worked, a favorite writer, artist or sport. Typical topicals include space, Harry Potter, Scouts, trains, birds and animals. Less common ones include mosquitoes, candles, fireworks, beer, venereal diseases, Dracula, tattoos, marijuana, rock and roll, and fingerprints. You can collect any topic that appeals to you. Members of the American Topical Association (ATA) collect more than 1000 topics, ranging from abacus to zoos.

- **HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT TOPICAL COLLECTING?**

The ATA, largest topical organization in the world, is a huge source of information. Members live in about 60 countries and are encouraged to communicate with others who have similar interests.

The ATA’s gold-award winning journal, *Topical Time*, edited by Wayne Youngblood, is published six times a year both in print and electronic editions. Its 92 pages include informative topical articles on various topics and regular features on different aspects of topical philately, including topical postmarks and meter stamps. A digital archive/searchable index to all 65 years of the journal is available.

- **HOW CAN I FIND OUT ABOUT STAMPS FOR MY TOPIC?**

You could spend countless hours paging through a stamp catalog. Or you can join the ATA and purchase ATA’s “checklists.” They list a stamp’s country, date of issue, denomination, catalog number and description. Checklists for 1200 topics are available for a very nominal price, to members only, either in electronic or printed form. As long as you continue to be a member, you may request annual updates. And if there isn’t a checklist for your topic, the ATA will create one just for you!