

Workshop: Better guiding for great visitor experiences

Presented by Interpretation Network New Zealand

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What is interpretation?

It is the art of revealing meanings about places to visitors on-site.

Three things that make for great interpretation:

1. Guide qualities – great communication and personable skills are one of the keys to successful interpretation.
2. Themes and stories are a highly effective way of leaving strong memories with visitors.
3. Interaction with visitors is critical to reaching them as individuals.

Visitor interaction

Key ways to increase visitor interaction (and hence, visitor enjoyment and understanding):

1. Questions—asking and answering
2. Using analogies to explain concepts
3. Engaging visitors with props

Questions

Two main types of questions:

1. Unproductive

- Require visitor to have prior knowledge
- Not everyone can answer correctly
- Do not encourage visitors to engage with the resource
- Can turn off those with little knowledge

2. Productive

- Do not require prior knowledge
- Everyone can answer correctly
- Encourage visitors to engage with the resource
- Involve active participation

Examples:

Unproductive questions	Productive questions
How many legs does an insect have?	Count the legs on this insect. How many does it have?
What kind of tree is this?	How does the bark of this tree feel?
How did the Southern Alps form?	This rug represents the earth's crust. What happens when you push it from both ends?

Types of productive questions:

1. Focus questions

- Engage visitors in directed examination of the resource
- Encourage observation and interaction
- These questions may start with “Can you see...”, “What do you notice...”, “How many...”

2. Comparison questions

- Ask visitors to compare observations
- Encourage sharper observation

3. Action questions

- encourage visitors to do something
- These questions may start with “What happens if...”, “Can you make...”

4. Evaluative or problem-solving questions

- Provide visitors opportunity to express their feelings, opinions, and thoughts
- Encourage visitors to integrate and consider information presented earlier
- May start with “What do you think...”

Key points about questions:

1. Everyone should be able to answer the question.
2. Questions should encourage the visitor to interact with the resource (physically, mentally, or emotionally)—they should be provocative.
3. Use unproductive questions sparingly.

Building analogies

Analogies help visitors connect new information with what they already know.

Analogies can make impersonal or “foreign” topics personal.

Some easy things to draw comparisons to are:

- Measurements – height, weight, length, time, dates
- Stages of life
- Highly emotional experiences – sex, love, death, war, jealousy, competition

Props

What are props for? Props can...

- Illustrate an idea
- Engage multiple senses
- Engage multiple learning styles
- Increase credibility
- Help you remember what’s next
- Increase curiosity
- Encourage physical involvement
- Provoke or evoke emotions
- Increase authenticity
- Increase fun!

Examples of props:

- posters
- slides
- hand lenses
- costumes
- music
- live organisms
- demonstrations
- feely bags
- photos
- binoculars
- microscopes
- puppets
- imaginary props
- models
- puzzles
- iPad or other mobile device

Key points about props

1. They must **add** to your presentation, not detract or distract.
2. Put them away when they are not in use.
3. Practice using them.
4. Simple is generally better.
5. They must be appropriate to your audience.