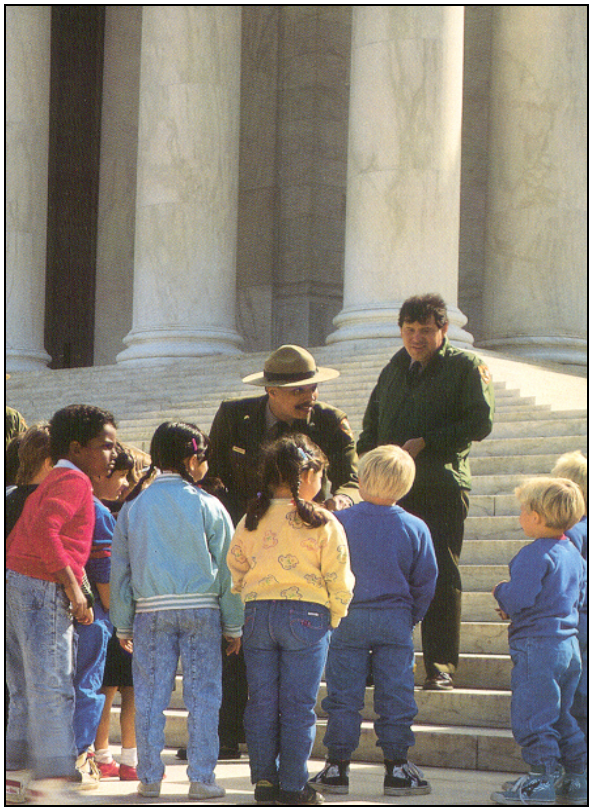
Part 2: Interpretation: the Essence of the 21st Century Ranger.



Introduction. If you are new to the Park Service, this chapter is designed to introduce you to the basics of interpretation within the National Park Service. If you are a seasoned NPS veteran, this chapter will remind you of the importance of interpretation and help you tailor your interpretive skills to meet the unique challenges posed by the National Mall.

Putting Interpretation into Proper Perspective. As federal employees, we are bound to support our agency's mission. To fully appreciate our responsibilities as Park Rangers, we must understand how interpretation fits into the National Park Service mission.

Our mission actually pre-dates the creation of our agency. When Congress reserved the Yellowstone region in 1872 ***"as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people"***, it set the tone of our mission.

In 1916, when President Wilson approved legislation that created the National Park Service, the government directed this new agency to:

conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment…of future generations

Where are we today? In 1996-1997, the NPS revised, refined, and refocused its mission statement:

The National Park Service is dedicated to conserving unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Service is also responsible for managing a great variety of national and international programs designed to help extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

It is not enough to understand this broad mission statement. Rangers must understand the underlying goals, tasks, and objectives.

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of our mission goals took place at the 1991 National Park Service 75th Anniversary Symposium where 700 government and private sector specialists met to discuss the future of the National Park Service. The group published its observations and recommendations as National Parks for the 21st Century: The Vail Agenda. The

attendees recommended that the National Park Service should focus on six strategic objectives:

- ***Resource Stewardship and Protection.*** *The primary responsibility of the National Park Service must be protection of park resources.*

- ***Access and Enjoyment.*** *Each park unit should be managed to provide the nation's diverse public with access to and recreational and educational enjoyment of the lessons contained in that unit, while maintaining unimpaired those unique attributes that are its contribution to the national park system.*

- ***Education and Interpretation.*** *It should be the responsibility of the National Park Service to interpret and convey each park unit's and the park system's contributions to the nation's values, character, and experience.*

- ***Proactive Leadership.***

- ***Science and Research.***

- ***Professionalism.***

In 1997, the NPS issued a revised strategic plan that incorporated some of the Vail Agenda recommendations. The plan introduced four specific Mission Goals:

- ***Preserve Park Resources.***

- ***Provide for the Public Enjoyment and Visitor Experience of Parks.***

- ***Perpetuate Heritage Resources and Enhance Recreational Opportunities Managed by Partners.***

- ***Ensure Organizational Effectiveness.***

Clearly, interpretation is not our first priority---protection, i.e. preservation is. And, as we are the caretakers of those places that people access and in which they may enjoy themselves, it is inherent that we add to and shape their enjoyable experiences.

Officially, Mission Goals IIb and IIc mandate interpretation:

- ***IIb: Park visitors and the general public learn and understand the purpose and significance of parks.***

  Visitors' park experiences grow from enjoying the park and its resources to understanding why the park was established and what is significant about its resources. Any long-term goals that would accomplish the transition from simply enjoying the park to learning and understanding facts about its purpose and significance are related and included here. All forms of education and interpretation can be related to this mission goal.

- ***IIc: The public supports the preservation of parks and their resources for this and future generations.***

  Ultimately, the outcome of satisfactory visitor experiences is public support for preserving the country's heritage as contained in the parks. This support can come in various forms. Many people contribute time and expertise as volunteers in parks, others donate money and materials, and still others promote support for parks through cooperating nongovernment organizations. Any long-term goals that focus on building or maintaining public support for parks and their resources through interpretation, education, and visitor experiences relate to this mission goal.

Our goals of protecting, providing access and enjoyment, educating, and interpreting are really sides of the same sphere---they are interconnected and mutually supporting. As Interpretive Rangers, we must not only teach people about our historic, cultural, and natural sites---we must ensure that visitors enjoy our sites so that they assist and support us in our preservation goals.

The Vail Agenda members more eloquently stated that:

The resources protected by the national park system harbor lessons that the nation wishes and needs to teach itself and replenish in itself, again and again, visitor after visitor. Thus, just as it is the responsibility of the system to protect and nurture resources of significance to the nation, so must it also convey the meanings of those resources and their continuing process of building the national community.

While public access and enjoyment are essential elements of the purpose of the park system, it should not be the goal of the National Park Service to provide visitors with mere entertainment and recreation. Rather, the objective should be to provide the public with enjoyment and enlightenment attendant to those park attributes that constitute each unit's special meaning and contribution to the national character. This is use and enjoyment on the park's terms. It is entertainment, education and recreation with meaning.

We, the Rangers, set the terms. We, the interpretive Rangers, tell people what we want them to know.

So, what is it we want people to know? According to the park-wide Interpretive Themes published by National Capital Parks-Central (NACC), we want visitors to:

reflect on significant individuals and events from the nation's history, inspiring and reinforcing values associated with democratic ideals and the American experience.

Each presidential monument and memorial within NACC symbolizes the life and achievements of that individual. The veteran/war memorials of NACC recognize the sacrifices of those who served during a war in our nation's history. All have become synonymous with universal concepts that transcend the lives of those being commemorated.

So, we are to tell people how the Lincoln Memorial symbolizes Abraham Lincoln's life and achievements. That seems pretty straightforward, once you do some basic research. But what's all this stuff about "universal concepts that transcend the lives of those being commemorated" ?

Well that, my new friend, is all about what we call INTERPRETATION.

Defining Interpretation. As part of the Ranger Careers developmental program, National Park Service training specialist Cynthia Kryston addressed the topic of interpretation in the following essay, Fulfilling the NPS Mission: An Interpretive Journey:

Interpretation is a journey, a never-ending quest for excellence reaching for wide horizons and challenging frontiers.

Interpretation is a guide, leading national park visitors throughout our history from real park resources to their underlying meanings, from the tangible to the intangible, from sight to insight. Through orientation, information, and education, interpretation facilitates the public's participation in resource stewardship, helping people understand their relationships to and impacts on those

resources -- helping them to care.

Interpretation is also a process -- dynamic, flexible, and goal driven -- leading from understanding to appreciation and through appreciation to preservation, the credo of the interpretive traveler. Done well, parks flourish; done poorly, parks perish.

You begin this journey. On it you will follow many tried and beaten paths and pause at many crossroads. You will travel in the hallowed footsteps of Tilden, Mather, Albright, and Mills, building on the turns and valleys they explored. Like them, be courageous in venturing onto uncharted highways. Like them, be open to new directions and destinations, remembering that your footsteps shape the history of interpretation and its legacy of enrichment.

Interpretation has many twists and byways, facets and definitions. It winds through many disciplines. It is a science based on accurate facts and current information -- methodical and exacting in its application of techniques and solid research. It is history-- portraying both the famous and the commonplace of human drama, chronicling not just dates and numbers but emotions, ideas, and universal concepts.

It is art -- rooted in passion and love for parks, ever moving the visitor's journey through memorable and meaningful experiences. Interpretation challenges the mind but engages the heart and the emotions.

A journey of such significance has mission and direction. Interpretation's mission is the National Park Service's -- a strategic mission based on preserving park resources, forging binding ties between visitors and their heritage, perpetuating strong park partnerships, and ensuring the effectiveness of our organization in achieving its mission. Our destination is clear but destiny will be determined by our devotion to its accomplishment.

You are about to embark on this journey with your first steps in developing interpretive competencies. You stand on the brink of learning why, what and how we do interpretation. You will need guides and those guides are embodied in knowledge -- of the resource, of the audience, of interpretive techniques.

But knowledge alone is not enough. YOU are the final key element in this equation. With your interest, enthusiasm, competencies and skills you create the opportunities for interpretation to occur. YOU are the future of interpretive quality.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE RESOURCE is a constant discovery, the compass to new insights and layers of understanding about the mountains, structures, rivers, artifacts -- the national treasures we care for. It is cultural history in context and not just in facts. It is natural history as ecosystem and environment, not just genus and species. It is an adventure into new interpretations of people, time, and place -- the courage to face controversy and challenge.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE AUDIENCE is the realization that no "average" visitor exists. Our visitors are infinite in their variety, outlooks, values, and opinions. They exist both inside and outside park boundaries. They are not only the captive audience in a visitor center auditorium or the repeat visitors who love our parks, but also the cyberspace generations not yet at our doors or in the circle of our programs. They are old and young, national and international. They question and challenge old ideas and priorities, ask "why" the full dimensions of heritage are not yet explored. They must be

respected as independent travelers on this journey of discovery, free to choose the meaning of the resource for themselves, free to determine what paths their stewardship will follow. And, in doing so, our journey will be exquisitely enriched.

Finally, YOU are part of this equation. KNOWLEDGE OF YOURSELF is essential because interpreters hold the ultimate responsibility and accountability for their own development. Interpretation is love, not lecture. Sensitivity, attitude, teamwork, and constant evaluation are the tools with which interpreters hone and evaluate their readiness to progress, understanding there will be obstacles along the way. Interpretive techniques and basic competencies are not islands but rather steppingstones to your career, the foundation for your future. Build strong because you construct a lifetime framework. The directions are in place; the pace is yours.

The interpretive equation is ever-shifting, but essentially stable. It is delicate balance, not perfect chemical formula. It is an intricate linkage where neglect of one part tragically weakens the whole. There is no one INTERPRETATION, no single perfect way, but rather multiple techniques and relationships, linking visitors with the real, the tangible, resource and its unmeasurable intangible and universal meanings to forge a lifetime bond.

The outcome of the journey is in all our hands. To effect interpretation, we must first affect a memorable change within visitors, moving them to see a kaleidoscope of meanings with critical and wondering eyes. We are the facilitators of connecting visitors to resources. We are the catalysts for creating interpretive opportunities and outcomes. But interpretation instructs; it does not inflict. We can lead visitors to the brink of learning but the leap of caring and concern must be theirs.

Let the journey begin. As you take your first steps on the path of interpretive competencies, hold your eyes on the road but your heart in the stars. And may your journey never end!

The previous description of interpretation is important because it was composed by NPS staff and summarizes the current NPS views on interpretation. However, it is not a huge departure from earlier definitions.

Consider the earlier work done by Freeman Tilden on Principles of Interpretation. As one of the recognized pioneers in the study and application of interpretation techniques, author Freeman Tilden explained the nature of our business:

Every year millions of Americans visit the national parks and monuments, the state and municipal parks, battlefield areas, historic houses publicly or privately owned, museums great and small-the components of a vast preservation of shrines and treasures in which may be seen and enjoyed the story of our natural and man-made heritage.

Thousands of naturalists, historians, archeologists and other specialists are engaged in the work of revealing, to such visitors as desire the service, something of the beauty and wonder, the inspiration and spiritual meaning that lie behind what the visitor can with his senses perceive.

The function of the custodians of our treasures is called Interpretation. --Freeman Tilden-Interpreting Our Heritage

Tilden believed in six principles of interpretation:

- Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or

described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

- Information, as such is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

- Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural.

- The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

- Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

- Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.

For further information on these principles look at Interpreting Our Heritage by Freeman Tilden. It is an older book but the principles are still fundamental to contemporary interpretation.

How To Do Interpretation. Okay, so interpretation is a journey and a process that helps people understand, appreciate, and preserve our sites**.** But how do we do it---where do we start?

The following chart shows the basic steps you should consider in your quest to become a more effective interpreter:

Building Effective Interpretation

Step # 1: Know the Resource

Step # 2: Know the Audience

Step # 3: Prepare Interpretive Material

Step # 4: Communicate

Step # 5: Evaluate

Step # 6: Refine and Revise

◆ **Step One: Know the Resource**. Most of the pages in this guidebook are designed to help you learn the history, facts, and figures of our sites. You will read about the architects and artists that created the sites as well as the Presidents, veterans, and historical figures honored by them. You will add to this knowledge in time as you look, listen, experience, and develop.

Learn the basics first—the "Maslow's needs" information like location of bathrooms, then the commonly asked questions, then the information you will need to build themes and interpretive talks. It will all come with time and some discipline.

Don't be shortsighted in your search for knowledge. Knowledge of the resource is more than just facts about the tangible resource, i.e. the Lincoln Memorial. In addition to knowledge about one memorial, its architecture and its works of art, interpreters must develop a broad understanding of the entire park, including its history, enabling legislation, condition, and available resources.

Don't stop there. It's not enough to know that Mr. XYZ designed this building in 1234 and the marble came from Blah, Blah, Blah, USA. True, many Americans love trivia, but if this is the only kind of information we learn and,

in turn, provide, then we are trivializing these memorials and the people and principles they honor.

Expand your knowledge. Go beyond the trivia and the facts. Interpretive Rangers must be knowledgeable about past issues and contemporary concerns. Like it or not, you will get the occasional visitor to the Lincoln Memorial who argues that Lincoln was an abusive dictator who defied the Constitution and undermined the Founding Fathers' philosophy of States' Rights. How do you handle that encounter if you don't understand the issues?

And when Rangers tell visitors about the Lincoln Memorial dedication address by Black academic Dr. Robert Moton, they should understand the inequalities of 1922 America. Ceremonial speakers hailed equality and emancipation, but their words fell on the ears of a segregated audience. And as the audience applauded Lincoln's attempts to "bind up the nation's wounds", how did they explain the blood spilled in 1922 at more than a dozen sites where mobs lynched Black Americans? Hopefully you learn that the Lincoln Memorial is about more than mere stone. It is about a man, his ideals, his legacy, his country, and his county's legacy in the eyes of the world.

As we learn about the physical attributes of memorials and parks, we must consider how they appeal to the emotions of our visitors. We must identify the many different intangibles and universal meanings which our sites convey to millions of unique visitors, each armed with diverse values, beliefs, prejudices, and ideas.

Most tangible resources (i.e. parks) hold some intangible, inherent meaning, symbolism, or value for those who visit or experience it. The NPS Interpretive Curriculum defines an "intangible resource" as:

> *something preserved or commemorated by the park that is not palpable or discernible by the senses. Examples might include the sacrifice, bravery, and loss at a particular battlefield, the ideas forwarded by an individual in history, the spiritual nature of a scene, and so forth. Ideas or concepts can also be intangible resources held within a site's story and significance.*

The NPS Curriculum defines "universal concepts" as:

> *Concepts that speak to the human experience and are understood in one way or another by most human beings. A trait or pattern of belief, thought, understanding characteristic of members of a particular culture.*

Moreover, universal concepts:

- provide the greatest degree of relevance and meaning to the greatest number of people
- are intangible resources to which almost everyone can relate
- might also be described as universal intangibles
- make meanings accessible and the resource relevant to a widely diverse audience

◆ **Step Two: Know the Audience.**
According to current training material published in support of National Park Service Ranger Careers (Competencies):

- There is no such thing as the average visitor.
- Not every visitor requires an "intensive" interpretive experience.

- Interpreters must recognize and respect the specific personal values and interests visitors associate with resources.

- Interpreters should keep in mind the "visitors' bill of rights." Whether visiting a park on-site or off, visitors have a right to:

  -have their privacy and independence respected

  -retain and express their own values

  -be treated with courtesy and consideration

  -receive accurate and balanced information

- Interpreters should recognize that visitors have numerous motives for joining us, with the top five being:

  -recreation/ "trophy hunting"

  -nostalgia/refuge/isolation

  -information/knowledge

  -connection/linkage

  -stewardship/patronage

Interpreters must ensure that each visitor has a positive experience despite his or her level of interest or rationale for visiting. We should try to help visitors reach a deeper and richer level of understanding if possible, but if they are simply seeking recreation or are victims of curiosity, it is not fair to treat them with contempt. No matter why they visit, give them something of value to take home. When performing interpretation remember that visitors have the freedom to leave your program when they get bored. They are on vacation--if you fail to provoke them they will simply walk away.

Author Sam Ham would call our visitor "a Noncaptive Audience". This type of person is:

- Voluntary
- Not driven by external rewards
- Not required to pay attention
- Willing to accept an informal atmosphere and a nonacademic approach
- Liable to switch attention if bored
- Motivated by:

  -interest

  -fun

  -entertainment

  -self-enrichment

  -self-improvement

  -a better life

  -passing time (nothing better to do)
- Prone to act similarly while:

  -visiting parks, museums, etc.

  -enrolled in an extension program

  -at home watching television

  -listening to a radio or reading a magazine

Although we said that there is no average visitor to the National Mall, we do know this: they come for different reasons but they don't stay long at any of our specific sites. Therefore, if you want to make a positive impact, be sure you are good at what you do and do it concisely.
Keep in mind that each of our sites has a somewhat different audience. It is easier to interest a group of senior citizens in a 60-minute program at the FDR Memorial than at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In the same vein, don't try giving that same 60-minute

FDR program to a group of 8th grade students.

◆ **Step Three: Prepare Interpretive Material.** Once you have an understanding of the resource and the audience, you may begin developing outlines for theme-based interpretive talks or articles. Because we at the National Mall do more talking than writing in the course of our daily duties, this section will focus on preparation of interpretive talks.

According to the Ranger Competencies program, a Ranger accomplishes an effective interpretive talk when he or she gives a presentation that is:

successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with meanings/ significance inherent in the resource AND appropriate for the audience, and provides a clear focus for their connection with the resource by demonstrating the cohesive development of a relevant idea...

To do accomplish these goals, the Competencies program encourages the interpreter to:

- Communicate an appropriate depth and amount of relevant information.
- Provide a balance of facts and points of view.
- Demonstrate creativity.
- Use park resources to create context and support content.

Still, that's not enough. Interpreters can creatively communicate a balance of facts in appropriate depth while simultaneously using park resources and still fail.

Why? Because they forgot about those intangibles and universal concepts. All effective interpretation must link a tangible resource to one or more intangible concepts in order to reveal a broader, more valuable meaning. Those broadly understood meanings are universal concepts.

And although we call these "universal", not all people will agree on the meaning of a universal concept, but all people will relate to the concept in so. For example, let's say an interpreter chose to frame his interpretive talk at the Lincoln Memorial around the universal concept of "sacrifice". To a 20-year old visitor, this concept translated into nothing more than having to settle for a Pentium II processing chip instead of a Pentium III. To a Korean War veteran, however, "sacrifice" reminded him of the day he carried the frozen bodies of his dead comrades from the truck and placed them in the mass grave.

Despite these seemingly incongruous images, the interpreter used a universal concept that sparked an emotional, meaningful, albeit subjective experience within each visitor and successfully tied that experience to the physical resource of the Lincoln Memorial. And although each visitor values the Lincoln Memorial differently because of their different set of values, each visitor walks away with a deeper meaning of the memorial because the interpreter used a specific universal concept.

Obviously, the implications of and techniques for presenting universal concepts will differ from audience to audience and from resource to resource. However, all interpretation should seek to steer the visitor toward broader meanings. You might not always have to explain or define universal concepts to have visitors experience or understand them. Conversely, don't assume visitors will absorb appropriate universal meanings by

themselves. Remember, we want them to take away universal meanings that support our approved park themes and encourage public support of our preservation mission.

However, interpreters can capture, illustrate, convey, and link tangibles, intangibles, and universal concepts within their interpretive talks, but unless they organize these pieces to support a relevant, central theme, they will fall short of true success. We can stand before the tangible statue of Abraham Lincoln and preach on about intangibles like perseverance, strength, determination, unity, freedom, democracy, piety, and potential and still fail.

Why? Because we didn't organize our material to support a single, all-important theme. The visitors will take away bits and pieces, but not a whole message.

Think in Terms of Themes - Not Topics. The *topic* of an oral or written presentation isn't the same as its theme. The topic is simply the subject matter of the presentation. The theme, on the other hand, is the principal message you want to convey to the audience. A theme strives to answer the question, "so what?".

Look at the following list of topics:

- Birds
- Jefferson
- The Statue of Lincoln
- The forest
- Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Notice that each topic is a sentence *fragment.* It gives a label to the subject matter. If you build a program around a topic, it won't motivate anybody to make an emotional connection or inquire about deeper importance. The statue of Abraham Lincoln is 19 feet tall. So what?

Each topic can have many themes depending on what message the interpreter wants to communicate to the audience. Consider these themes that support the topic "the statue of Abraham Lincoln" :

- This 19-foot tall marble statue of Lincoln is cold and motionless like history and Lincoln himself.

- You can see by the way we chained off the statue that we have to protect this treasure from visitors who want to sit in his lap for a souvenir photo.

- If you study this statue, you will come to appreciate the skills of the artist and the stone carvers that created it.

- Let's explore this wonderful statue of Abraham Lincoln and see how it is filled with elements that capture the essence of the man and the nation he led.

- The Lincoln Memorial was created as a tribute to "the man who saved the Union." This magnificent statue of Lincoln is only one of the many elements within this memorial that honor the democratic ideals of our great nation, the United States of America.

Notice that themes are expressed in complete sentences. They each have a subject, a verb, and a period at the end. Each of the preceding themes conveys a very different message, and each requires a different interpretive approach.

Develop a Theme. Sometimes interpreters have difficulty writing good themes because they aren't used to thinking thematically. Expressing a theme is easy, however, if you remember the difference between the topic (subject matter) of the presentation and the theme (the principle message you want to communicate to your audience about the topic). As a communicator, your task is to

relate messages to your audience, not just information about the topic.

Write a Theme in Three Easy Steps.

1. Select your general topic (for example, "the Lincoln memorial") and use it to complete the following sentence:

   "Generally, my presentation (talk, exhibit, etc.) is about (The Lincoln Memorial).

2. State your topic in more specific terms and complete the following sentence:

   "Specifically, I want to tell my audience about (the symbolism in the Lincoln Memorial that parallels and honors our Union)."

3. Now, express your theme by completing the following sentence:

   "**After hearing my presentation (or reading my exhibit, etc.), I want my audience to understand that** (the Lincoln memorial is, if taken at face value, a building that honors our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln. If we look deeper, we will see this memorial not only honors Abraham Lincoln for preserving our Union, but this memorial pays honor to our democratic quest for that "government of the people, by the people, for the people" of which Lincoln dreamed."

Try writing one yourself. It may not be perfect on the first try---continue to test and refine it. If you need more information on choosing themes, explore Environmental Interpretation, by Sam Ham.

Turn Your Theme Into an Interpretive Talk. Just as we shouldn't talk for the sake of talking, we shouldn't create themes for the sake of creating themes. We create powerful themes to convey a powerful and significant message about our site. A by-product of a theme is that it helps shape an interpretive talk. Remember these basics:

- Choose a topic that should interest your audience and one which you're interested in and know something about.

- Select an even more specific aspect of that topic that interests you and which you can address in the limited amount of time you have with that audience.

- **Then, determine the message or theme for your talk.** This is the most important decision you'll make in developing your talk because everything you say should somehow support or illustrate the theme. If it doesn't fit the theme, save it for another program.

As far as mechanics, every good talk has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion---each part accomplishes a different purpose. Preparing an effective talk is simple if you develop these three different parts, and if you make sure each part accomplishes its specific purpose.

Start with an Outline. One of the best sources that explains how to create effective outlines for interpretive programs is Sam Ham's book Environmental Interpretation. The following pointers come directly from that reference:

- **Try to summarize your entire talk in a short paragraph in which the first sentence is your theme**. Besides helping you determine how to begin and end a program, a short synopsis paragraph will help you focus your attention on what information you will need to develop and support your theme. In other words, it will help you identify what to

include in your talk as well as what to omit. By putting the theme as the first sentence of this paragraph, you force yourself to think thematically. As accomplished speakers will tell you, having this clarity of focus at the outset is an amazing advantage.

- If you can't find the words to write a summary paragraph, then you probably need to spend more time thinking about your theme because you're still not sure what message you want to communicate to your audience. But once written, this thematic visualization will ease development of your talk.

Once you have a synopsis of your presentation, create an outline. Try using the "2-3-1 Sequence": address the Body, the Conclusion, and then the Introduction.

Outline the body of your talk. Following the "2-3-1 Rule," outline the body first. List five or fewer main ideas, and under each, the selected facts, concepts, and illustrative information you think will help you communicate your theme clearly and in an interesting or entertaining way. The outline should show the sequence in which you plan to present these ideas.

As you sketch the main points for the body, decide how you want to organize and present your information. You may prefer to order your points in a chronological, topical, spatial, or step-by-step sequence.

Prepare the conclusion of the talk. After you outline the body, think about how you want to conclude your talk. Remember that the purpose of the conclusion is to reinforce the theme. You should develop your conclusion following the train of thought you established in the body. What can be concluded from these ideas? The answer, of course, is your theme. The theme, and therefore the conclusion, should always answer the question "so what?"

Many conclusions summarize the key points that were made earlier, and some offer ideas about the larger meaning of the theme (e.g., what the "bigger picture is" or "where we go from here").

Prepare the introduction. The introduction is the last part of the talk you'll develop, even though it's the first part of the talk you'll present. Remember that its purposes are to capture the audience's interest, reveal the theme, and tell how the body will be organized. Tailor your introduction to set the stage for your theme-based conclusion.

Remember, our audience members are usually on vacation with too many things to see and do in too short a time. We have to interest them in our programs—we have to convince them to stay longer than the few seconds it takes to get a souvenir photo. Your introduction will either encourage people to stick around or it will hasten their departure. Therefore, it is a good idea to begin with a jolt, a "grabber" , a "hook", or a gimmick that captures attention and piques interest. There are creative techniques:

- Recount an illustrative, interesting but brief narrative about the site or the person(s) it honors. "There are thousands of books on Abraham Lincoln, but there is one short story that, for me, captures the essence of Abraham Lincoln's personality. As President during the Civil War, Lincoln was called upon to review Courts Martial cases where Union soldiers had been sentenced to death for some crime. In one case, a young man had deserted his unit...he had run away. His general said he should be put to death, that the Army needed to make an example of him before others decided to desert. Lincoln reviewed the case, considered the crime, and said the

soldier's life should be spared. As the President said, 'I don't believe it will make a man any better to shoot him.' In that one small statement, we see the homespun humor, humility, goodness, and common sense of an uncommon man."

- Tell a relevant personal story. "I was working here (at the Lincoln Memorial) a few months ago. A man approached me and asked 'what IS this place?' Taken somewhat by surprise, I answered that this was the memorial for our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln. The man seemed pleased with that answer and left. However, I was plagued by that question for several days. I kept asking myself, 'What IS this place and WHY do people come here?' And at 3:00 AM one morning, I sat up in bed and had the answer: this is a place where people come to see freedom in action- -this is a place where people come because they can. All of us come here freely, and we owe that freedom to brave, revolutionary leaders like Abraham Lincoln."

- Ask a stimulating, provocative, or rhetorical question. "Did you know that the NAACP believes that 956 people were lynched or killed in racial violence during the eight years it took to build this memorial to the man who talked about 'a new birth of freedom'? If racial hatred was so bad that white Americans were lynching black Americans 57 years after Lincoln talked about binding up the nation's wounds, doesn't that mean that Abraham Lincoln was a failure?"

- Deliver a provocative, unusual, or colorful quotation or statement. "I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington."-Lincoln's farewell speech to the people of Springfield, Illinois, February 11, 1861. Lincoln would never return to the only home he ever owned.

- Refer to a problem which the audience can consider/ resolve. "Folks, I have a problem and I need your help in solving it. I see many people who visit the Lincoln Memorial to see if the statue shows Lincoln signing the letters 'A' and 'L', or to point at the reflecting pool and talk about Forest Gump, or to run up the stairs and do a 'Rocky' dance. My problem is this: How do I convince these visitors that this memorial is about more than trivial (and mythical) hand gestures or 20th century movies?"

◆ **Step Four: Communicate.** So, you've done your research—you know your resource and your audience to the best of your ability. You have developed a strong theme, sketched a solid outline, and transformed your outline into a theme-based interpretive program or talk. Now, you must successfully communicate with one of our very important audiences.

There are as many verbal communication techniques as there are Interpretive Rangers. People employ different styles from straight lectures to question and answer sessions, but remember, our job is not to drag visitors around and brag to them about how much we know—our goal is to inspire them.

Choose communication techniques that inspire your audience to ponder higher concepts. Do not fall victim to a common pitfall. Because the National Mall is a unique park where visitors are harried, hurried, and seemingly disinterested, Rangers all too often fall back on one style of interpretation: the didactic approach. In this approach, you are the only speaker. This is only one technique—and probably the least interesting to today's visitor.

Talking *to* people is probably the hardest delivery technique. You will have to be eloquent, charming, and melodic if you are to get people to stay very long. Most people who fail at this technique do so because they begin a one-sided lecture in which they talk down to visitors (or talk over their heads), quote dry facts, and speak in dull monotones. If you perform this technique improperly, you will soon see your visitors' eyes glaze over, their feet become restless, and the size of your audience should dwindle as you drone on, and on, and on, and… get the point?

Fun Communication Techniques. Remember, visitors are on vacation and want to have fun. Also, it's okay for Rangers to have fun, too.

If you can't be a one-person show, wax poetically, or mesmerize the masses, there is another approach. If you don't like the didactic approach where you talk *at* or *to* people, try to talk *with* people. Author and Ranger William Lewis calls it Involvement. In other words, give the audience a chance to become part of the experience, not just part of the audience.

If you let the audience energize the program at key moments, you may spark the visitors' interests and make your program more appealing. In his book Interpreting For Park Visitors, Lewis reminds us that these people are on vacation, hoping to have memorable experiences. He argues that visitors will more fully enjoy and remember their visit if they have done or experienced something. To get them involved, he recommends we:

- **Establish rapport with them.** Use the moments before your talk to find out where they are from, what they do, what their interests are. And then, make use of their interests and knowledge during your program. Let them be the experts at certain points.

- **Involve as many senses as you can.** People remember little of what they hear or read. They will remember more if they touch, feel, smell, taste. For example, the "Social Programs" reliefs within the FDR Memorial are a treasure of tactile stimulation--have them touch the Braille. If the site doesn't support any of these actions, invoke thoughts of these actions--make them think they sense something.

For example: "Remember the last time you stepped in a mud puddle? Your socks and shoes were wet and cold. And before long, the north wind began to blow and you started to shiver. You just knew you were going to catch pneumonia. Well, if you were standing at the East Portico of the Capitol on March 4, 1865, you would have been standing in a sea of mud because of weeks of rainy weather. But there was reason to stand there all wet—to hear the historic words of President Lincoln on the occasion of his Second Inaugural address.

- **Structure or organize your audience.** Break your audience up and give them something to do.

-Have individuals go find or do something and then come back and talk about it.

-Have groups meet and discuss something, and then re-assemble the groups and have a spokesperson from each talk about what they saw or did or felt.

- **Use questions to elicit participation.** Use leading questions to steer a discussion toward a desired conclusion. This Socratic method works well with controversial subjects like slavery, politics, or even universal concepts.

For example:

-Where did Martin Luther King, Jr. deliver his speech about his dream of equal opportunity for all?

-When King gave his historic speech here, did it transform the Lincoln Memorial into something greater than a tribute to Lincoln?

-If this is a place that reminds us of Lincoln and King, then what has this place come to symbolize? Freedom? Equality? Democracy "of the people, by the people, for the people"?

Questioning can be a very powerful interpretive technique. By asking good questions you not only steer a group to focus on your theme but you lure individuals into the discovery process by engaging their creative imaginations. Who knows, *you* might even learn something from the audience. When you use questions, be receptive to people's ideas and answers, but don't let the crowd steer your talk away from a theme. Capitalize on the visitors' differing points of view to broaden the experience for everyone. Try these types of questions:

Question Type	Typical Purposes	Examples
Focusing	To focus attention on something of interest	"Can you see the American flag in the Lincoln statue?"
Comparison	To bring out similarities and differences between things	"How would you compare the two hands on this statue of Lincoln?"
Inference	To get the group to generalize or reason beyond information you have given; to explore possible conclusions	"Why does the inscription above the statue call this memorial a 'temple'?"
Application	To get the group to see how certain information applies to different situations	"Lincoln said that if he could preserve the Union without freeing a single slave, he would do it. Why, then, did he issue the Emancipation Proclamation?"
Problem-solving	To get the group to think of solutions to real-world problems and issues	"By the time Lincoln got to Washington, seven southern states had seceded. What do you think he should have done?"
Cause-and-effect	To get the group to think about relationships that explain the occurrence of different events and objects	"Why did Martin Luther King, Jr. speak here, at the Lincoln memorial?"
Evaluation	To get people to express their opinions and to hear those of others; to illustrate possible choices and judgements	"If Lincoln had not been assassinated, would he have been as famous?"

Going beyond William Lewis' idea of involvement, Tilden believed that an audience's participation on a mental level was not enough. He believed that audience members would better understand and remember an experience if they performed some physical action. Tilden wrote about these techniques:

- **Demonstration.** Show the visitors how something was done at the site. Tilden talked about showing how to grind flour at a mill. Okay, we don't have a mill, so this is where we have to get creative.

Mall Rangers can demonstrate ideas. For example, demonstrate the concept of "Union" by having a child break a single twig in half. Then have him try to break a bundle of twigs. You can thus demonstrate an idea of strength and unity. It ties in nicely to the fasces on the Lincoln statue.

Or demonstrate the perseverance of our Korean War troops by packing a backpack with 30 pounds of sand---the weight of the .30 caliber machine gun we see in one of the statues at the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

- **Participation.** Freeman Tilden said that climbing the wooden ladder at a cliff dwelling is a form of participation. In other words, the visitor felt what it was like to do what the original inhabitants had done. Generally, our sites are not places where people did the things for which they are honored. After all, it is the *Gettysburg* Address, not the *Washington, D.C.* Address.

But don't you think it would enhance a visitor's experience if you had him or her read the poem about Abraham Lincoln that was delivered at the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial? Or part of King's speech?

Regardless which communication technique you choose for a specific talk, remember to deliver a message or a theme. Remember to use the great resources you have at your disposal. If you are standing in front of French's statue of Lincoln and you only talk about the battle of Gettysburg, or L'Enfant's plan for the federal city, or universal themes like freedom, then you missed something. And so did your audience. Trust me, they want to know why they find that statue so impressive. Make it more than a statue.

◆ **Step Five: Evaluate Your Interpretive Event.** This is subjective, but you have to find a way to evaluate how well your messages are getting across. Don't base this on the level of applause, but that is one indicator of your success. If people are moved to thank you for your efforts, then you probably have added to their experience. You can quiz some of your audience after your programs: "did you learn anything?", "did you enjoy my program?", etc.

◆ **Step Six: Revise and Refine.** Practice will tell you if you organized the pieces of your program in an effective, logical order. Keep looking at ways to improve your talk. Besides making your presentation better, making small changes will also prevent you from becoming bored with your talk. This is especially important when you give your talk several times each day. Obviously, however, you shouldn't fix something if it doesn't need changing. In other words, don't fix it if it's not broken.

Interpretation for Special Groups. You will frequently deal with groups of children, in both formal and informal settings. When presenting a formal education program, keep in mind that every school group is different---never generalize. As Freeman Tilden said, *"interpretation for children is not adult*

interpretation watered down." To be successful, get to know your school and the teachers. They are great helpers and they know their kids.

That said, do not allow the teachers to run the show---if you do, there is no need for you to be involved. Take charge and then keep control of your audience. Don't let them control you or your program, for you are the expert at the Mall---only you can lead them down the path that instills preservation and National Park Service ethics. For more about formal education programs, see the Competency chapter in this text.

Summary. This chapter merely scratches the surface of professional interpretation. In order to attain NPS certification in interpretive competencies, you will need to explore and master the information in that chapter of this document.

Hopefully you can see that interpretation on the National Mall will be both rewarding and challenging, sometimes at the same moment. The Mall provides a wide range of interpretative opportunities. You have great flexibility--if you are not interested in history or culture, you can periodically depart from those topics and deliver interpretive talks on wildlife in the Capital or something that better fits your interests.

Impromptu interpretation is by far the most frequent variety you will provide visitors, but you will have chances to perform formal interpretation and education programs at specific times. In other words, you will have opportunities to leave lasting impressions with visitors. Please prepare yourself for the task. Leave them with appropriate, inspiring messages that encourage them to help us in our endeavor to protect these national treasures for our children's children.