

IMN Interpretation Subject Guide

Indiana Master Naturalist



The IMN Advisory Council highly recommends Interpretation to be the Elective or People and Natural Resources topic.

Interpretation

What is Interpretation?

Interpretation is what happens when a visitor comes into an environment in which there are three things—the visitor, the resource (the thing to be interpreted), and you, the interpreter. Interpretation involves the giving of information in a manner that makes it relevant to the audience. Freeman Tilden says that information is not interpretation, but all interpretation involves the giving of information. Interpretation is an art that combines many arts. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation. Whether your topic is historical, scientific, architectural, or something else, the way it is presented to the audience is the key ingredient—the interpretation. Ted Cable and Larry Beck in their 15 principles say that interpretation should instill in people the ability and the desire to sense the beauty in their surroundings—to provide spiritual uplift and to encourage resource preservation. **Passion** is the essential ingredient for powerful and effective interpretation.

Whether leading a hike or conducting a nature program, the use of good interpretation methods will lead to success. Interpretation includes the following:

- 1) An educational activity that aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by **firsthand experiences**, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information. (Freeman Tilden)
- 2) Informational and **inspirational** processes designed to enhance understanding, appreciation and protection of our natural and cultural legacy. (Cable and Beck)
- 3) A communicative process that forges emotional and intellectual **connections** between the interests of the audience and the inherent meaning of the resources. (National Association for Interpretation-NAI)
- 4) When done well, interpretation is entertaining, educational, informative, recreational, inspirational, and **provokes further thought and/or action**. (DNR SPR)

What does good interpretation include?

- 1) **Interaction**- Making your audience part of the presentation is a vital way of promoting learning.

Asking questions

You ask the questions

Encouraging your audience to ask questions

Be positive in your response to **every** question

Use all the senses (Not just sight)

Feel the item being talked about (the spray of the water, etc.)

Taste or smell the item

Hear the rustle of the leaves

Make something/try the activity (fly fishing, etc.)
Role playing (Historical presentations work well)
Singing

- 2) **Planning**- Plan your talk- Choose something you know. (If the topic is assigned, do your research. It's OK to say you don't know, but don't apologize for not having done your basics.)

Pick a **topic** and narrow it in your theme:

Plants-Tree ID-The Sassafras tree
Geology-Formation of the Dunes
Ecology-Unique Bird Adaptations
Life-Now and Then-Maple Sugaring
Historical relevancy- The Development of Fly fishing

Develop your **theme** focusing on 2 to 5 points you wish to make.

Write a **conclusion** restating what it is you hope the audience takes away after your talk. Then practice your talk so you are sure of the things you want to say and the way you want to say them.

- 3) **Enjoyment** - Check your talk for your audience's enjoyment.

- a) Create a favorable atmosphere
 - Refer to special interests of your audience
 - Honestly compliment the audience
- b) Arouse interest in your topic
 - Ask one or more stimulating question
 - Use an unusual statement
 - Relate a relevant personal story
- c) Clarify the purpose of your presentation:
 - Summarize
- d) Your conclusion should be interactive also.
 - Ask a parting question relating to what the future may hold
 - Work in a final, memorable sentence
 - Don't simply thank your audience and end the presentation. Make it memorable.

- 4) **Organization** – or, Giving Life to a Skeleton

Choice of Supporting Material:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Relate factual data for support○ Use anecdotes and examples○ Compare and contrast | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Cite testimony and quotations○ Employ narration○ Visual materials |
|---|---|

Choice of Language:

- Help your audience follow your transitions
- Use understandable words

- Use informal language
- Use concrete word

Your Delivery:

- Be enthusiastic
- Use variety
- Feel self-assured
- Be physically direct (eye contact)

- Use abundant bodily activity (gesturing)
- Be friendly, pleasant, informal, and casual
- Adapt your pace to the situation

Accuracy

Again, do your research, but be honest. No one can know everything. Sometimes it is good to learn something new. It can strengthen future presentations.

Safety

Always put the safety of your audience first. Warn visitors of any dangers and check to make sure that they are following your guidelines.

Some Final Thoughts

Interpretation principles can be used for all types of programs:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ○ Walks and Tours | ○ Cultural History |
| ○ Bird Hikes | ○ Characterizations |
| ○ Night Hikes | ○ Programs for Schools, Scouts, and Other Groups |
| ○ Talks with Props | ○ Roving Interpretation |
| ○ Live Animals | ○ Recreation Programming |
| ○ Power Points and Film Slides | ○ Interpreting Resource Management |
| ○ Astronomy Talks | |
| ○ Campfire Programs | |

Successful interpretation is **POETRY**:

- Purposeful
- Organized
- Enjoyable
- Thematic
- Relevant
- Yours

Take time, know your subject, have a point you want your audience to remember, practice before your program, and keep it enjoyable. You will make a memory, and your audience will want to come back again.

For further information, please refer to the References page. Section on the basics of good interpretation are taken from [Interpretation for Park Visitors](#) by William J. Lewis (Eighth printing 2001).

[References:](#)

Tilden, Freeman – **Interpreting our Heritage** (Third Edition), University of North Carolina Press, 1977

Brochu, Lisa & Merriman, Tim- **Personal Interpretation - Connecting your Audience to Heritage Resources**, National Association for Interpretation, 2002

Beck, Larry & Cable, Ted – **Interpretation for the 21st Century – Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture**, Sagamore Publishing, 2002

Cornell, Joseph – **Sharing Nature with Children II**, Dawn Publications, 1989

Ham, Sam – **Environmental Interpretation – A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets**, Fulcrum Publishing, 1992

Lewis, William – **Interpretation for Park Visitors**, Eastern National Publishing, eighth printing 2001

DNR Handbook – The manual prepared for the interpretive staff from the Division of Indiana State Parks and Reservoirs and the Division of Forestry (available at park offices)

Websites:

IMN: Like us on Facebook

NAI (National Association for Interpreters): www.interpnet.com

NAI Region 4 (includes Indiana, Michigan, Ohio & Ontario): <http://nairegion4.weebly.com>