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to Creativity and Get Off Your Dead End.

g. New York: Putnam.

tation. Chapters 2, 6, and 7. Golden,

l Larry Beck. 1995. *Interpretation of*  
ters 3 and 4. State College, PA: Venture

b Games. New York: Putnam.

Side of the Head. New York: Warner Books.

## 5

### MESSAGE

### DELIVERY

### TECHNIQUES

#### Keep It Organized

Remember sitting around a holiday table, listening to a relative launch into a story of days gone by? Maybe it was your great-aunt Myrtle, telling about your second cousin once removed who married the boy down the street—he was a nice boy, now what was his name, and they moved to Albertsville, or was it Petersburg, but they had a dog, dogs are so cute, have you seen one of those little wrinkled dogs that come from China, you know they drink a lot of tea in China, and some tea would sure be good about now....

You get the idea. The story began and wandered aimlessly for an excruciatingly interminable time. Were you spellbound, or did your attention wander? Most likely, you tuned out everything after the word *cousin* and then checked back in when you heard the word *tea*, recognizing it as an opportunity to escape into the kitchen. You've probably attended a few interpretive presentations that took the same perilous path. Though there may have been individual words or phrases that drew your interest, you quite naturally invoked the power of selective listening and likely came away feeling no richer for the experience.

In *Environmental Interpretation*, Sam Ham points out that good interpretation is organized. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. When you organize your thoughts (unlike Great-Aunt Myrtle), you can convey a specific message in a way that keeps your audience engaged for the entire length of the presentation, thereby increasing the chances that they will remember the message long after the presentation is over. Think in terms of the beginning (introduction), the middle (body), and the end (conclusion) as you prepare your presentation. Each of these three pieces can be further broken down into specific elements. Learning the elements that make up the introduction,

the body, and the conclusion will help you organize your thoughts and develop a presentation that flows smoothly from beginning to end.

*Begin at the Beginning: Writing the Introduction*

People like to know what's going to happen. Though most people enjoy or at least take the occasional surprise in stride, you generally feel more comfortable if you have a sense of where you're headed. Educational psychologist David Ausubel called this an "advance organizer," something that lets people know where the presentation is going.

The introduction to your presentation gives you an opportunity to accomplish several things: (a) introduce yourself and your organization, (b) take care of any announcements, (c) find out a little about your audience, (d) address the basic needs of your visitors (see Chapter 3 on Maslow's Hierarchy), and (e) set the stage for what's coming. That's a lot to accomplish in a short time, but the introduction can make or break your program in a few simple sentences. It's your chance to hook your audience's interest and build a common bond with them that will keep them interested. Without a strong introduction, your audience's attention is likely to wander, tuning in and out to key words or phrases during the presentation, making it impossible for them to remember your point.

A good introduction structures the experience to come, so your audience knows what to expect and what is expected of them. It sets them at ease, so they can invest themselves wholly in your program. Whether you are presenting an in-place program or leading a hike, try to include the following elements in your introductory statements:

*Who you are and who you work for.* Always identify yourself, using the name that you would like your audience members to use for you. Be sure to work in the name of your organization. Don't assume that your audience knows what agency is represented by the insignia on your uniform.

*What is going to happen.* Give a quick overview of the program. A simple summation ("Today's program includes a short hike" or "We'll be watching a few slides before looking at real reptiles") can help the audience decide whether the program is for them before you really get started.

*Where you're going and where you'll end up.* If you'll be leaving the vicinity, let the audience know before they go, especially if you will end at a different location. Generally it's a good idea to plan your presentation so that you end up at the starting point to accommodate transportation or gathering needs of the visitors (for instance, if some family members elect to stay behind).

*How long it's going to take.* An approximation of the time investment required may make a difference in the participation of some audience members. Let them know about how long you'll be keeping them at the amphitheater, how

much time it usually takes to complete stop along the way (for extended tours).

*Take care of those basic needs.* If your program (two), be sure to indicate the availability of items that audience members might need.

*What will be required of the visitors.* It's important whether there will be any physical demands on someone who has obvious health problems otherwise unable or unwilling to participate to take her or him aside and offer an alternative vicinity of the program. Handle the situation your organization may be held liable if you're asking people for what may be required of them.

*When it's appropriate to ask questions.* Depending on your personal style, you may want to direct the questions during the presentation or hold their questions until an informal and open style that welcomes questions for an enjoyable experience; however, you must be sure the questions don't commandeer the program or conclusion.

*Theme statement.* The introduction is the first place to use wisely and creatively, to grab the attention of the audience. The theme statement throughout the body of the presentation.

Remember that this is your opportunity to be creative with your introduction. Try to tie it back to your theme. After greeting and welcoming the audience, a freelance guide in Cabo San Lucas, Baja California, with the prediction that, by the time the presentation is over, you'll think of sea turtles. The presentation seemed unrelated, creating a sense of intrigue. The guide, with the program, explaining the relationship between the cycle can be disrupted by ingestion.

You might want to start by sharing your theme or by asking audience members what they think. The introduction also provides an opportunity for someone already knows or is interested in by asking "What are your strategies?" in this chapter).

It's not critical that you follow the above guidelines as the applicable elements are included. Sort out the appropriate for each type of presentation, and sort out the elements to rearrange to emphasize certain points or to

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much time it usually takes to complete the hike, or how long you'll be at each  
stop along the way (for extended tours).

*Take care of those basic needs.* If your program is relatively long (over an hour or  
two), be sure to indicate the availability of restrooms, water, first aid, and other  
items that audience members might need.

*What will be required of the visitors.* It's important to establish at the outset  
whether there will be any physical demands made on the visitor. If you notice  
someone who has obvious health problems, is dressed inappropriately, or seems  
otherwise unable or unwilling to participate in the program, it is your responsibili-  
ty to take her or him aside and offer an option for staying behind or leaving the  
vicinity of the program. Handle the situation tactfully, but be aware that you or  
your organization may be held liable if you do not do an adequate job of prepar-  
ing people for what may be required of them.

*When it's appropriate to ask questions.* Depending on your presentation and your  
personal style, you may want to direct the audience to ask questions informally  
during the presentation or hold their questions until the end. Generally, keeping an  
informal and open style that welcomes questions at any time makes for a more  
enjoyable experience; however, you must be careful that overly exuberant question-  
ers don't commandeer the program or constantly derail your train of thought.

*Theme statement.* The introduction is the first chance you have to make a point. Use  
it wisely and creatively, to grab the attention of your audience. You'll want to support  
the theme statement throughout the body and then restate it during the conclusion.

Remember that this is your opportunity to establish a bond with your audience,  
so be creative with your introduction. Try using an attention-getting statement relat-  
ed to your theme. After greeting and welcoming her audience, Maria-Elena Muriel,  
a freelance guide in Cabo San Lucas, Baja California, Mexico, started a program  
with the prediction that, by the time the program was over, "whenever you see a  
plastic bag, you'll think of sea turtles." The two items in this theme statement  
seemed unrelated, creating a sense of intrigue about what was in store. She went on  
with the program, explaining the relationship between the sea turtle's life cycle and  
how that cycle can be disrupted by ingestion of plastic bags floating in the ocean.

You might want to start by sharing a personal experience that relates to  
your theme or by asking audience members to share briefly one of theirs. The  
introduction also provides an opportunity to find out what your audience  
already knows or is interested in by asking questions of them (see "Questioning  
Strategies" in this chapter).

It's not critical that you follow the above format in your introduction as long  
as the applicable elements are included. Some elements may not always be appro-  
priate for each type of presentation, and sometimes the elements may need to be  
rearranged to emphasize certain points or to create a special atmosphere.

### *Smooth Moves: Writing Transition Statements*

Within the body of your program, you'll be presenting two to five subthemes or ideas that support your theme (see Chapter 4, "Developing Your Message"). Ideally these ideas will flow smoothly from your introduction, then lead the audience through the body of your program to its natural conclusion. Transition statements help keep the flow going from one idea to the next and keep your presentation from sounding like a recitation of unrelated facts.

As you plan your presentation, think about how you will transition from one thought to another. If, for example, you're leading a guided tour through a desert area, you could use one stop to point out the identifying features of a cactus and then ask participants to look for other plants with those features while you move to your next stop. When you reach the next stop, take a few minutes and let your audience tell you what they saw. Their observations can then lead into your discussion at that stop, which might be a comparison between cacti and nonsucculent plants.

Transition statements can also be used to link one program to another, encouraging further participation immediately following a presentation or at a later date. Think of watching a television program that offers previously seen scenes at the beginning or next week's previews at the end. These are transition pieces that help the viewer understand what's come before or what will come next. You can apply the same technique to programs that might work best in a series of related sessions.

As you gain experience as an interpreter, you will be able to incorporate comments or questions from the audience as transitions from one thought to the next, helping to personalize each program for that particular audience. Until then, get in the habit of thinking through your transitions as you prepare your presentation outline (see Chapter 7, "Writing a Program Outline").

### *Wrap It Up: Writing the Conclusion*

The conclusion could be the most important part of your presentation. Since it comes last, it will leave the biggest impression in the minds and hearts of your visitors. A weak conclusion may leave your audience frustrated or unhappy. On the other hand, a strong conclusion can reinforce your message and leave your audience wanting more—more information about the topic, more involvement on a personal level, more contacts with your agency or company.

To make your conclusion as strong as possible, try to incorporate the following elements:

*Summary of subthemes and theme.* Use the conclusion as an opportunity to restate your theme. You may want to state it in a different way than you did in the introduction, but your audience should realize that they've come full circle, back to the original thought, at the end of the program. If you've done your job well, they will be having a different reaction than they did at the beginning. They will have discovered a new way of looking at things that will travel home with them.



Docents at the Waikiki Aquarium use discussion to complement their message about protection.





An interpretive guide for Hawaii Forest and Trails introduces guests to the wonders of red lava with cautions about the dangers of getting too close. Photo by Tim Merriman.

*Suggestions for continuing activities related to the theme.* If you are aware of additional programs or activities that relate to your theme, providing that information to your audience will be appreciated by those whose interest you have stimulated. Tracking their involvement in additional activities (such as participating in a beach cleanup or signing up for another tour) can also help you determine whether your program objectives have been met.

*Provocation of further thought or action.* As Freeman Tilden suggests in *Interpreting Our Heritage*, interpretation should be provocative. By asking thoughtful questions or offering opportunities for taking action, your conclusion can provoke audience members in a way that will encourage further discovery on their own. You might also provoke additional questions. Jim Covell of Monterey Bay Aquarium in Monterey, California, has said that his site's interpreters like their audience to leave with more questions than when they arrived. Good interpretation leaves the audience wanting to know more, curious about what they yet might learn.

*Opportunity to seek further information from you or your organization.* Let the audience know if, how long, and where you'll be available to answer further questions or if you have reference materials available that guests can use to research some-

thing related to your theme. If appropriate, that indicate sources of reference material handouts for the conclusion so that visitors get distracted by them during the presentation.

*Awareness of the example you provide.* Make sure you are a good example in your theme. If you helped your audience, be sure you are not doing it for yourself. You'll find your guests will do the same—that you believe and practice what you preach.

*Promotion of a good feeling about the site, and with a smile—on their faces and yours.* It's your memories. Coupled with the good experience, it will seal their commitment to come visit in a positive light.

### Questioning Strategies

People enjoy being made to feel welcome and being involved in and keep them engaged with their opinions. Instead of standing in front of them as an expert as you "present" information, ask them questions. You'll find yourself surprised by their answers. On a group who can offer different perspectives, draw them into unexpected experts down, draw them into learning from them. Do not be careful not to program or intimidate other visitors.

Questions can be used as an icebreaker for a quick audience analysis that can be drawn upon. For example, if you ask whether any of the audience has been to the site before, you can get an immediate sense of a lot of basic information about the site or region. Questions also give you clues that will help you make a presentation. Sam Ham suggests in *Environmental Interpretation*.

You might want to ask audience members questions during your introduction. If their expectations turn out to be different from your program content, you then have an option for adjusting your strategy or for providing structuring comments about what will actually be delivered, giving them a sense of what to expect. Keep these introductory questions simple and to the point. Find which questions work best with which groups.

Developing a questioning strategy for your presentation process the information you'll be introducing into the program through the question-and-answer session.



introduces guests to the wonders of red  
so close. Photo by Tim Merriman.

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e available to answer further questions  
hat guests can use to research some-

thing related to your theme. If appropriate, you might want to prepare handouts that indicate sources of reference materials or additional activities. Save these handouts for the conclusion so that visitors don't have to keep up with them or get distracted by them during the presentation.

*Awareness of the example you provide.* Make your actions consistent with the message in your theme. If you helped your audience understand the dangers that plastic bags present for turtles, be sure you notice litter as you walk and pick up pieces yourself. You'll find your guests will do the same and they will get the other message—that you believe and practice what you say.

*Promotion of a good feeling about the site, agency, or company.* Leave your audience with a smile—on their faces and yours. It's the last image they'll carry in their memories. Coupled with the good experience they've had attending your presentation, it will seal their commitment to coming back or telling others about their visit in a positive light.

### Questioning Strategies

People enjoy being made to feel welcome and important. One simple way to get them involved in and keep them engaged with your presentation is to ask their opinions. Instead of standing in front of the group and setting yourself up as an expert as you "present" information, ask the audience what they think. You may find yourself surprised by their answers. Often you will uncover an expert in the group who can offer different perspectives on your topic. Instead of shutting the unexpected experts down, draw them into the presentation as a resource and open yourself to learning from them. Do be careful not to allow such a person to dominate the program or intimidate other visitors.

Questions can be used as an icebreaker in your introduction, providing a quick audience analysis that can be drawn upon later in the program. For example, if you ask whether any of the audience members have ever been to your site before, you can get an immediate sense of whether you need to provide a little or a lot of basic information about the site or resource. Some of their answers might also give you clues that will help you make your presentation more relevant, as Sam Ham suggests in *Environmental Interpretation*.

You might want to ask audience members about their expectations during your introduction. If their expectations turn out to be quite different from your program content, you then have an option for quickly rethinking your program strategy or for providing structuring comments that will let your audience know what will actually be delivered, giving them the option for participation or not. Keep these introductory questions simple and few. As you gain experience, you'll find which questions work best with which groups.

Developing a questioning strategy for your presentations can help your audience process the information you'll be introducing. Since they'll be actively involved in the program through the question-and-answer process, they will be more likely

to retain the message. Although questions can be asked of the audience at any time, a logical sequence in the types of questions that you ask can be used to "pull" the audience through the program, allowing them to interpret their own observations.

Begin early in the program with open questions. These questions have no right or wrong answers. They are used to give everyone an opportunity to participate regardless of their experience or knowledge level. An open question might ask the audience to make an observation, such as, "What do you see as you look at the hillside?" or "What do you remember about the first sunset you saw?" Everyone will see or remember something different. It's not necessary or even desirable to get a response from everyone in the group, but you should allow those who want to contribute an observation to do so.

Most groups will include two or three people who readily supply answers to your questions. Other individuals might be hesitant to respond at first but can be drawn out if you look at them as you ask the question. As you gain experience in questioning, you'll be able to discern who might be likely to respond and who would prefer to be left alone. In any case, don't rush to supply an answer to your own question. Give the audience time to think, allowing up to fifteen seconds before you jump in. Studies have shown that the longer you wait, the more in-depth the response you will receive.

As the program continues, you might want to focus the audience's attention. Do this by asking data-recall questions. With these questions, you're asking for specific numbers, lists, or other facts based on previous information you've given or the visitor's prior experiences or observations. Though you're asking for specific information, try not to be judgmental in your responses. For example, you might ask, "What are some things that are helping this log decay?" Clearly there are correct answers for this question; however, there is also room for interpretation on the part of the audience, and creative thinking should be encouraged.

Once the audience's attention has been focused, ask the audience to interpret the data by thinking about comparisons or relationships that might apply. You might ask, "How does the wood strength or texture of these two trees compare?" Again, there are correct answers, but there are still opportunities for unexpected answers.

Towards the end of your program, perhaps as part of your conclusion, ask the visitors to summarize or apply a principle you've discussed. These capstone or application questions help the audience see things from a new perspective. Their answers may also shed some light on whether you've accomplished your objective. An example of an application question might be, "Now that we've seen how fires affect the forest, how do you think this area would be different if it hadn't burned?"

Questions, used with some forethought in a sequenced strategy, can get and keep your audience's attention, allow them to participate in your program, and give you an understanding of the audience's perceptions. However, questions can also be overused and become a hindrance to the progression of the program. Learning appropriate response strategies can help keep you on track with your questions and the audience from taking over the program.



Viewing wildlife, whether captive or  
be enhanced with the right approach

The way you respond to the tone for your interpretive presentation or comments, more discussion is enhanced. The most appropriate presentation and the personal style of the

The ideal response is an acceptance smile or a simple nod of the head. Active acceptance offers an expression that you comprehend what he or she is saying, you might respond with a nod or a smile. You can also provide data to support their response in a presentation or directed observation. You can also provide information or refer to other sources.

Many visitors enjoy the opportunity to view their own if you simply direct them to a bird book along and allowing the



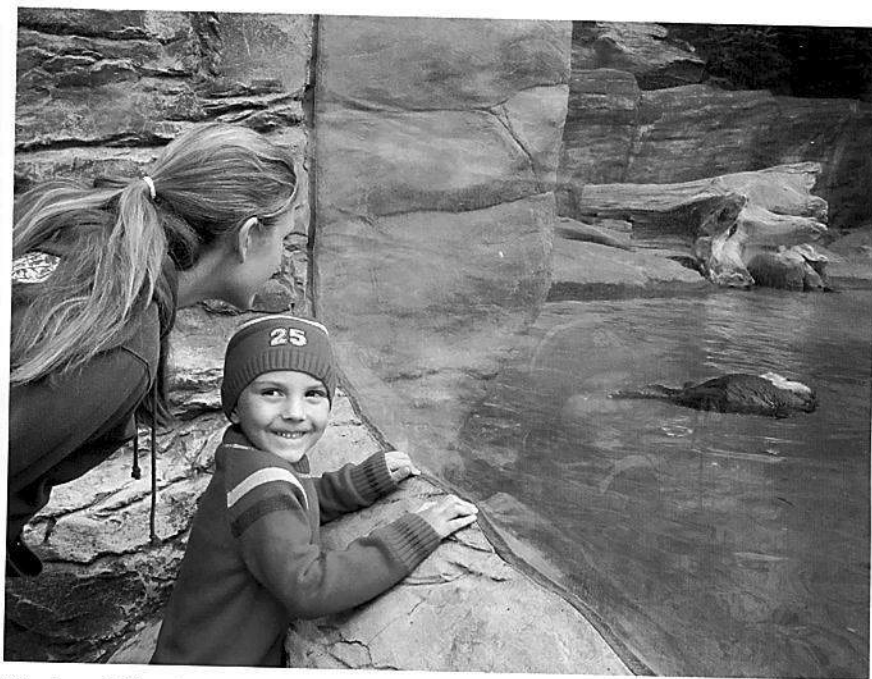
can be asked of the audience at any time, what you ask can be used to "pull" the audience to interpret their own observations. Questions. These questions have no level. An open question might ask is, "What do you see as you look at the first sunset you saw?" Everyone's not necessary or even desirable to but you should allow those who want

people who readily supply answers to hesitant to respond at first but can be the question. As you gain experience in might be likely to respond and who don't rush to supply an answer to your thank, allowing up to fifteen seconds the longer you wait, the more in-

ant to focus the audience's attention. In these questions, you're asking for previous information you've given answers. Though you're asking for specific responses. For example, you might "this log decay?" Clearly there are corners is also room for interpretation on the could be encouraged.

ocused, ask the audience to interpret relationships that might apply. You might of these two trees compare?" Again, opportunities for unexpected answers. As part of your conclusion, ask the we've discussed. These capstone or applications from a new perspective. Their answers accomplished your objective. An example that we've seen how fires affect the different if it hadn't burned?"

in a sequenced strategy, can get and participate in your program, and perceptions. However, questions can the progression of the program. help keep you on track with your the program.



Viewing wildlife, whether captive or in native habitat, creates emotional connections that can be enhanced with the right approach by an interpreter. Photo by Tim Merriman.

The way you respond to the people who answer questions you've asked sets the tone for your interpretive program. If you are welcoming and receptive to visitor comments, more discussion is generated and the likelihood of success is enhanced. The most appropriate response will be dictated by the individual situation and the personal style of the interpreter.

The ideal response is an accepting one. Passive acceptance is indicated by a smile or a simple nod of the head, suggesting that you've heard the response and are saying the answer is okay without any additional judgment or evaluation. Active acceptance offers an expression of understanding, letting the visitor know that you comprehend what he or she has said. If you aren't sure what the visitor is saying, you might respond with a request for clarification. Finally, you can offer data to support their response in a number of ways. You can provide an opportunity for them to discover additional information on their own through experimentation or directed observation. You can also invite other audience members to supply information or refer to other sources you've brought with you.

Many visitors enjoy the opportunity to investigate or research information on their own if you simply direct them to the proper reference material. Bringing a bird book along and allowing the audience to look up an unidentified bird is often



more effective than simply naming the bird for them. The process of looking up the information gives you the opportunity to talk about characteristics of different bird families and may give the visitor exposure to a new resource. Practice responding appropriately until an "accepting" response becomes second nature. It's easy to say no, especially when you know there is a correct answer, but negative responses tend to shut people down and discourage further participation. Making a habit of issuing positive responses makes it easy to answer with an encouraging smile. You might respond to a wrong answer with, "Thank you. That's a logical answer and what many of us have heard or been taught. However, the best answer is a little more complicated. Are there other suggestions?" You don't want to leave a guest believing something you know to be incorrect, but your correction has to be appropriate and gentle.

No matter how inappropriate a visitor's answer might seem, avoid ridiculing their attempt. No one likes to be laughed at, although if you have excellent people skills, you might be able to turn a potentially embarrassing answer into an opportunity to laugh with someone. Just be careful and cognizant of the individual's feelings before you go too far with trying to make a joke of their answer.

#### Recommended Reading

Ham, Sam. 1992. *Environmental Interpretation*. Golden, CO: North American Press.

Knudson, Douglas M., Ted T. Cable, and Larry Beck. 1995. *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.

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## ILLUSTRATIVE TECHNIQUES

### Make It E

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launched into your program, you'll be just fine. To help make things a little easier, try to create the optimum setting for your presentation, so you and your audience will feel more comfortable.

Remember Maslow's Hierarchy (see Chapter 3)? Check your program setting to see if it will meet the basic physiological needs of you and your audience. Is the temperature comfortable? If not, are there ways to make it more comfortable? If you're indoors, the thermostat should provide relief. If you're outdoors, look for shady spots to deliver your messages if it's hot or places out of the wind if it's cold. Although your own comfort is important, the comfort of your audience is more important. Be aware of your positioning, especially on sunny outdoor hikes. Keep your audience facing away from the sun, so they can direct their attention to you instead of to keeping the glare out of their eyes.

For short presentations of an hour or two, you probably don't need to worry about providing food and drink, but refreshments always make guests feel more comfortable and cared for. If going on longer outings or daylong tours or programs, plan ahead for how your visitors will find refreshment. Check out the shortest route to the nearest restroom facility so you can advise your visitors of its location.

Find the best location from which you can address the audience. Standing behind a podium in an auditorium may work for a classroom lecture, but most interpretive audiences will feel more comfortable with an informal approach. Set up your visual aids and make sure they can be seen clearly from every audience angle. If your group is large, be sure to position yourself so that everyone can see you. If you're on a trail, stepping up onto a rock or other elevated ground might raise you just enough so the people in the back of the group can hear you easily. Check with the audience periodically, either verbally or visually, to make sure that everyone can see and hear you. Take the time to scope out the best locations in your presentation room or along the trail before your group arrives, and your audience will thank you for it.

### Helpful Hints

#### *Overcoming Fear*

Fear can be a good thing. It can motivate people to accomplish extraordinary feats they would otherwise be incapable of achieving. Fear stimulates your adrenal glands, speeds up your heart rate, and gives you an edge. But there's a point at which the positive aspects of fear begin to backslide behind an avalanche of negative emotion. The key to overcoming fear is to learn to recognize and walk that fine line between energizing anxiety and outright terror. Then you begin to use your fear instead of letting it use you.

Remember that your audience is made up of people just like you. They laugh and cry and act silly sometimes. They have families and pets and hobbies and problems. We're really not very different after all, when it comes right down to it. Interpretive audiences are looking for a good time, and while they may consider you an authority on your subject matter, they also view you as a person. They want you

to relax and have a good time right along with them. If you get so nervous or tongue-tied that you can't speak, the audience of it will usually put them and you at ease.

Know your material. Most of the time, the nervousness of the group is caused by that sneaking suspicion that you don't know what we think we do. We're afraid that some day you will forget everything we ever knew as soon as you leave. No interpreter can ever know all there is to know, but you shouldn't even pretend that you do. Know your material well enough to recognize your presentation and enough to recognize when you're wrong. Bill Lewis, author of *Interpreting for People*, is well acquainted with the organization's general information. He retains 90 percent of the essential information.

If someone asks for more detail than you can provide, if you're not sure and direct them to another resource, or if someone in the audience will offer up a correction, ignore or correct them for stepping on your toes. It's their opinion they have to offer and help put it in perspective.

Practice your presentation. Run through it several times to increase your comfort level. Ask a friend, a league or family to see if it all makes sense. Don't memorize a script. Scripted speeches are easy to forget. If you forget the script, you're likely to go off on a tangent, you lose your audience as well. Use your own words, your key points but leave the exact words to the audience's interest. If certain phrases come up often, remember them for the next time, but don't use the same in every presentation, or you'll sound like a robot.

Get wrapped up in your passion for the topic. When you speak from the heart and see that your audience is listening, your fear will simply disappear. In fact, you'll be able to take the audience on home with you because they'll share your love of the topic.

#### *Nonverbal Communication*

In *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare says "The body is the soul's temple." It's true that you can sometimes communicate more with your heart, but your overall body language is a critical part of your interpretive presentation. Your posture, and facial expressions, you either help or hinder too busy for them.

Remember the last time you were

to relax and have a good time right along with them. They want you to succeed. So if you get so nervous or tongue-tied that your audience is aware of it, making a joke of it will usually put them and you at ease and your program back on track.

Know your material. Most of the fear we experience in speaking before a group is caused by that sneaking suspicion that we don't really know as much as we think we do. We're afraid that someone will expose our ignorance or that we'll forget everything we ever knew as soon as we get past our name. The reality is that no interpreter can ever know all there is to know about a given subject. You shouldn't even pretend that you do. Ideally you know enough to be comfortable in your presentation and enough to recognize what you don't know. If new at a job, Bill Lewis, author of *Interpreting for Park Visitors*, recommends that you get well acquainted with the organization's general brochure for the public. It usually contains 90 percent of the essential information about interpreting the area.

If someone asks for more detail than you have on hand, simply admit that you're not sure and direct them to another source of information. Sometimes someone in the audience will offer up the information. Avoid the impulse to ignore or correct them for stepping on your lines. Instead, embrace the information they have to offer and help put it into perspective for your audience.

Practice your presentation. Run through your program from start to finish several times to increase your comfort level. Take it for a test ride in front of your colleagues or family to see if it all makes sense. Tweak it till it feels right, but avoid memorizing a script. Scripted speeches sound stilted and get stale quickly. Worse, if you forget the script, you're likely to get flustered and confused. If you lose your place, you lose your audience as well. A better approach is to practice the order of your key points but leave the exact wording to unfold in spontaneous reaction to the audience's interest. If certain phrases seem to elicit a desired reaction, try to remember them for the next time, but don't worry over getting every word exactly the same in every presentation, or your audience will be as bored as you are boring.

Get wrapped up in your passion for the subject matter. Once you begin to speak from the heart and see that your audience is engaged in the presentation, your fear will simply disappear. In fact, you may find that you just want to take the audience on home with you because you've become so close through sharing your love of the topic.

#### *Nonverbal Communication*

In *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare says that "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." It's true that you can sometimes paint on a smile, regardless of what's in your heart, but your overall body language often conveys a message completely different from what you thought you said with words. Nonverbal communication is a critical part of your interpretive presentation. With your posture, your attitude, and facial expressions, you either welcome people or let them know you're too busy for them.

Remember the last time you were at a department store? You had a question

about a potential purchase, but the sales clerk was on the phone with her boyfriend and clearly not interested in helping you until she'd attended to her own needs. She even turned her back slightly, refused to look you in the eye, and kept her voice low so you would know you were intruding on her personal conversation. Her body language spoke volumes, and she never had to say a word to you. In fact, you couldn't have gotten her to say a word to you. So you gave up in frustration and left the store without making the purchase.

When you slouch or sigh, fold your arms or roll your eyes, you give out signals to your audience. They've come to buy into your interpretive message, and you've just told them you're not interested in helping them find what they need. If you show up in a soiled uniform or tattered field clothes, you've let them know you don't respect them enough to keep yourself neat and clean. Remember that you represent an agency or a company that wants repeat business. How often do you think you'd go back to the same store if the sales clerk continued to ignore you or frightened you with her unfriendly behavior or hostile appearance?

Stand in front of a mirror or videotape yourself as you run through your program. Check your posture and your facial expressions to ensure that they welcome people and invite participation. Give yourself points if you smile frequently and make eye contact. Look at what you do with your hands and feet. Avoid scratching yourself, rocking back and forth, or pacing like a tiger in the zoo. These body movements are distracting and don't add to the program. Practice standing naturally and using your body as a natural extension of your voice. When you have a strong point to make, open your arms wide. If you're whispering for emphasis, keep your hands closer in to your body. Just act naturally, and your body will automatically help you make your point without seeming contrived.

Keep your hair out of your face. It doesn't need to be pulled back severely, but if your hair tends to fall in your eyes, it will mask your expression and make it difficult to establish or maintain eye contact. If you have shoulder-length hair or longer, you might want to consider pulling it back into a ponytail, especially if you're going to be outside on windy days. Nothing's worse than trying to speak through a mouthful of hair, unless it's trying to listen to someone trying to speak through a mouthful of hair.

Avoid wearing excessive amounts of jewelry. Simple rings, earrings, and necklaces might be fine if they don't violate your organization's dress code, but elaborate jewelry and multiple bangle bracelets, dangling earrings, and unusual body piercings are distracting and may even be dangerous if you suddenly find yourself in a rescue situation. Save these items for after-hours wear. Some organizations tell guides that they will not be allowed on the floor with guests if they are dressed to be more appealing than the exhibits and the site. Interpreters are often asked to wear uniforms or not wear the extras so that guests understand that you are there to help them enjoy the resource. You are not there to be the attraction.

If you wear sunglasses on sunny days, contact is important, and sunglasses are important ways. It is often said that your impression. Be aware that your appearance conveys messages as well or better than the spoken communication is what you say and how you want to be effective communication.

### *Voice Modulation*

You can't all be James Earl Jones with that pure film voice-overs, but you can work on a more expressive speaking voice. What's the variety and speed. Variety breathes life into a monotone or so annoying pattern, like always lilting up and down. A monotone becomes a question. In either case, it takes sixty seconds. If you can't find one, it's like dragging their fingernails across a blackboard.

A videotape or audiotape of you speaking can help if your voice is varied enough to hold attention. Practice where speeding up, slowing down, getting the appropriate emphasis and help you in your presentation.

If you have a pronounced accent, a strong accent is part of what makes you a unique voice. It's difficult to listen to or understand. Regional accents (something) can add local color to your presentation. Using regional vocabulary that your audience doesn't understand at the time to explain the unfamiliar words.

Practice enunciating difficult and unfamiliar words. You expect your diction to be perfect, but you will lose credibility with your audience if you mispronounce. Pronunciation after your presentation is absolutely right, and you would rather practice self-improvement rather than taking shortcuts.

### *Registers of Voice*

Can you recall times when you have spoken in a very familiar tone? Or you read a story and you read the bear in the story with your own voice? We have a phone voice, an informal one for our supervisor or a professional one from sentence to sentence.



If you wear sunglasses on sunny days, take them off when speaking. Making eye contact is important, and sunglasses remove your ability to express yourself in very important ways. It is often said that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Be aware that your appearance, body language, attitude, and voice project messages as well or better than the spoken word. It is also said that 10 percent of communication is what you say and 90 percent is how you say it. As professionals, you want to be effective communicators on all levels and in every way.

#### *Voice Modulation*

You can't all be James Earl Jones with a mellifluous baritone sought after for feature film voice-overs, but you can work with what you have to develop a pleasant and expressive speaking voice. What you're after is variety in pitch, tone, volume, and speed. Variety breathes life into a presentation and holds the interest of the audience. Listen to a monotone or someone whose voice never changes from an annoying pattern, like always lilting up at the end of a sentence so that each statement becomes a question. In either case, you're looking for the nearest exit within sixty seconds. If you can't find one, it's like being in a closed room with someone dragging their fingernails across a blackboard. Repeatedly.

A videotape or audiotape of your presentation is one of the easiest ways to tell if your voice is varied enough to hold audience interest. If not, look for places where speeding up, slowing down, getting louder, or even whispering might create appropriate emphasis and help you make your point.

If you have a pronounced accent, try to soften it but not eliminate it. An accent is part of what makes you a unique individual. However, some accents are difficult to listen to or understand. Regionalisms (Texans are always "fixin' to" do something) can add local color to your presentation, but make sure you're not using regional vocabulary that your audience may not understand unless you take the time to explain the unfamiliar words.

Practice enunciating difficult and commonly mispronounced words. No one expects your diction to be perfect, but if you frequently mispronounce words, you will lose credibility with your audience. If someone takes the time to correct your pronunciation after your presentation, thank him or her. Chances are good he or she is absolutely right, and you would do well to take the correction in a spirit of self-improvement rather than taking offense.

#### *Registers of Voice*

Can you recall times when you have spoken politely to someone on the phone, and then covered the mouthpiece so you could yell the message to a friend in a very familiar tone? Or you read a story to a child, and soon you were portraying the bear in the story with your own gruff voice as the bear speaks. We all do this routinely. We have a phone voice, an informal tone for family members, a more formal one for our supervisor or a professor, and we switch from one to the other from sentence to sentence.

These registers of voice are useful tools in programs when you deliver quotes, tell stories, or read from a well-written book. With some practice it is easy to develop a different voice or register for a character in the story. You can sound more masculine or feminine, younger or older, and have a regional accent as a character. Using varied registers adds interest for your audience. Don't be afraid to experiment with it when appropriate.

Whispering is used by many storytellers to emphasize important passages. Children and adults will lean forward and listen more carefully to hear what you say.

Reading aloud to your children, friends, or family members from storybooks or fairy tales is a great way to practice. Allow yourself to become each different character with voice and expressions. Then when the opportunity arises to tell a story in a program, use vocal registers to bring it all alive for your audience. Like kids listening to their favorite bedtime story, your audience will be enthralled.

#### *Using Humor or Anecdotes*

Humor is part of the human condition, which might lead you to think that it's always appropriate to be funny. Unfortunately, what's humorous to one person might not be so clever to someone else. In fact, some people might be offended by a specific joke or a joking manner. For some, a jokester is someone who lacks respect for the audience. Using humor in a personal presentation can be a bit tricky, to find a balance between universal humor and personal affront. If you aren't blessed with a naturally overdeveloped sense of humor, you would do well simply to play things straight instead of trying to spice up your program with forced jokes.

In any case, avoid jokes that poke fun of individuals or groups of people, even if you personally find the jokes enjoyable. Similarly, avoid humorous comments about religion or politics. Instead, look for the irony of a situation or put a new twist on looking at things. Remember, you're there to convey a message, not to get laughs. If the laughter comes spontaneously, that's a bonus.

Using foreign accents can be effective if you are from the ethnic group being portrayed. However, be aware that it may be offensive to people you are trying to portray when you do it badly or when they perceive you as making fun of their culture. Humor created in this way can backfire and alienate guests.

If you're not comfortable using humor in your programs, think about using personal anecdotes or stories of famous people to illustrate your points. Storytelling is a natural interpretive tool and one which can be used to great effect. Keep the stories short and to the point. Make sure they relate directly to your program's theme and aren't just a time-filler.

#### **Recommended Reading**

- Knudson, Douglas M., Ted T. Cable, and Larry Beck. 1995. *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources*. Chapter 19. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Lewis, William J. 1991. *Interpreting for Park Visitors*. Chapter 8. Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National.

## **INFORMAL INTERPRETATION**

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