Developing Text for Media Products

When you are the planner/text writer…

Many parks are taking an active role in planning/producing their own media. Quite often this involves a park staff member who is tasked with developing a concept and writing the text for publications, waysides, site bulletins or exhibits. This process will be most effective if the interpreter works with a professional media designer from the beginning of the project.

Here is a suggested meanings-based strategy in which the interpreter works with a media designer to develop the concept and text of a media product:

Meet with the designer to discuss goals/objectives for the project and ideas for an overall theme that uses universal concepts to establish the "so what" – the meaningful thread that will be used to tie all the parts of the product together; this should be linked to the purpose/significance statements for park resources that are identified in the park's CIP/LRIP.

Decide on a preliminary topical division of the subject matter (panels or sections of the exhibit or series of waysides or sections of the webpage).

Develop a sub-theme for each section that says something meaningful about the topic/subject, and supports the product's overall theme. Sub-themes should link tangible resources and information to intangible meanings and ideas.

Discuss these big ideas with the designer and consider potential graphic elements that could support these ideas; encourage the designer to begin *designing to the meanings.*

Develop draft text for each section that supports the sub-theme; use your limited space wisely to speak to the meanings associated with the subject matter. Develop tangible-intangible links through the use of a variety of interpretive and literary techniques.

Discuss the first rough draft of text with the designer; explore additional ideas/approaches for graphics and layout; make sure the designer understands the meanings you want to convey.

Continue to refine the text and work with the designer to develop a layout/graphics plan that supports the meanings in the text. Take responsibility as the subject matter expert and park representative to guide the content direction of the project; the final product should communicate the meanings you want to help your visitors discover about your park's resources.

Text hierarchy of an exhibit or wayside panel – a model

Thematic title -- make it compelling/interesting – something more than a subject/topic; the title/sub-title should provoke the visitor to want to read more

Supporting sub-title (optional)

Primary text – introduce the "so what" of the panel's subject/topic; what is the meaning about this topic that you want to convey; connect this idea to the exhibit's overall theme; if this is all the visitor reads, they will at least have been introduced to some meaning about this subject/topic

Secondary text blocks and captions – weave the thread of the panel's meaning throughout the remaining text; reconsider the inclusion of any information that cannot somehow be related to the point/meaning of the section; do not waste the visitor's time, or risk losing their interest, with extraneous facts/data

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Developmental Activity: Choose a panel/section of an existing interpretive exhibit or wayside, or page from an interpretive publication or website in your park, and analyze its text elements.

- Identify all the tangible/intangible links that are developed in the text. What resource meanings are introduced? What interpretive and literary techniques (quotations, statistics, presentation of evidence, comparisons, description, etc) are used within the text to develop these meanings?

- Is the text arranged in a hierarchy? How effective is each part of the hierarchy (title, subtitle, primary text, sub-text in captions, etc) in presenting resource meanings?

- Can you identify a theme, central meaning, or "so what" that is introduced in the text? Is that idea carried/developed throughout the text?

- How well does the text work with the illustrations and graphic elements to convey resource meanings and the central idea or theme? Do the text and graphics support or detract from each other?

- Do all the elements of the media product -- text, graphics, design/layout, location, etc -- "work together" to create opportunities for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings/significance inherent in the park resources being interpreted?** If so, how?

**See the Interpretive Media Development peer review rubric at: *http://www.nps.gov/interp/idp/media_peer.htm.*