



## Interpretive Writing Practice Activity

For each of the following writing examples identify:

- Tangible resources – what is the primary resource that drives the piece?
- Intangible meanings – list as many as you can find
- Universal concepts – on your list of intangibles, circle the ones that are universal concepts

Write what might be a possible theme statement for each piece, based on one of the universal concepts you identified.

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### Example 1

#### Wayside Exhibit Text -- Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

##### **Prairie Communities**

Long before cattle ranching communities were established here, grazing animals of another sort roamed these hills.

Bison, elk, and antelope were major members of a diverse association of plants and animals that once comprised the tallgrass prairie community. Hundreds of species of flowering plants, grasses, insects, birds and mammals were among the neighbors of this community. Each one had a function that served the community as a whole. Each one was adapted to the conditions that made the community unique – soils, topography, climate, grazing and fire.

The prairie we see today has been altered by human use so that some of the community members are no longer here. We must carefully protect what is left – because humans are the members of the prairie community with the power to preserve or destroy it.

***“The prairie is an intricately constructed community... much more than land covered with grass. It is a slowly evolved, highly complex, organic entity, centuries old. Once destroyed, it can never be replaced by man.”***

J.E. Weaver, *North American Prairie*, 1954

Example 2

**Conclusion from**

***Oregon Trail Center – The Story Behind the Scenery***

By Joyce Badgley Hunsaker

Covered wagons continued to haul goods and families along the route of the Oregon Trail even into the 1920's, but these were isolated passages. Land had been bought up, built over, and plowed under until 90 percent of the original Oregon Trail ruts were gone.

But the lore of the trail grew ever larger. Its romance was so pervasive and convincing that, over the years, we tended to lose sight of what really happened and why...

Pioneers were common, ordinary folk in extraordinary circumstances. In acting on their dreams, in overcoming the physically challenging and emotionally devastating, they changed the face of a nation. They suffered daily that for which they were unprepared and ill-equipped. They were determined, diligent, brave -- also arrogant, irresponsible, and opportunistic. They brought their prejudices and peculiarities with them. They were just like us.

And that, perhaps, is the lesson -- ordinary people make a difference. Ordinary people make history. We are all stewards of our heritage. We are all shapers of the future. It is up to us to make sure the legacy of the Oregon Trail -- in all its truths -- endures.

Example 3

***Exhibit Label Copy – White House Visitor Center***

What draws us to the White House? Why do we wait for hours in good and bad weather to enter in, only to glimpse briefly and incompletely at what it might be like to live and work within these walls? Partly we wait because...

The White House is power and humility. It is action and idea. It is the multiple facets of who we are. It is our national sense of ourselves conveyed by architectural details, by furniture that dates back to the first presidents, by the intangible influences of previous occupants and events, and by the fine threads of protocol that bind historical courtesy to present hospitality.

We visit the White House to see ourselves and our history reflected within a small provocative space. If we were to lose this physical structure of sandstone and paint, we would have lost merely an icon of our nationhood. Yet if we were to permit a dictator to take control of these rooms, we would have lost everything. It is the idea of the White House that perpetually draws us back.

## Example 4

**Park Newspaper Article – North Cascades National Park****Spirit of a Nation**

The images we link to the bald eagle are wild and sacred ones. Soaring birds ride the air currents swift as thought and graceful as a breeze. As our national symbol the bald eagle embodies much that we hold to be good and admirable in ourselves. It is a bird full of power and beauty. Its scavenger habits make it a proud survivor. The freedom expressed by a bald eagle on the wing is envied and admired by all.

It is no surprise then that these birds attract a lot of human attention whenever they visit an area in large numbers. The Skagit River is one of these places, attracting one of the largest winter gatherings of bald eagles in the contiguous United States. They travel here from places such as British Columbia and Alaska to take advantage of the late run of fall chum salmon. The spawned-out salmon carcasses are a desired commodity for bald eagles trying to eat enough food to sustain themselves through the winter. The bald eagles in turn provide a much needed service, cleansing the river of decaying remains, and returning the nutrients stored in the fish to the land.

The United States is not the first nation to hold the bald eagle in high regard. Many nations of Native American people viewed this awe inspiring raptor as a sacred being, and a much loved teacher of the lessons of life. When a bald eagle was seen flying at great heights it seemed at times to disappear into the sun, to “touch the heavens.” Hence the belief prevailed that they could provide a connection for the earthbound people to the spirit realms. The possession of a sacred bald eagle feather is considered a privilege, and perhaps even a mark of courage and honor. *Note: a permit is required for possession of feathers of any bird of prey, including bald eagles.*

There is much to admire about the bald eagle. The Skagit River is fortunate indeed to host this splendid bird in such large numbers every winter. It does not bring just its physical presence to this already rich and diverse area. It also bears the spirit of many nations.

# Types of Writing

**Scientific or historical:** text most commonly written to share knowledge with a group of similar academic background; typically reports research findings; poses questions relating to theories and proposing hypotheses

**Technical:** leads the reader to accomplish a specific task or learn a skill; has its roots in statistics, operations, and mechanical processes

**Informational:** provides factual data for reference or other use

**Creative writing:** artistic expression in written form; evokes sensory impressions and images

**Interpretive writing:** draws from technical, informational, scientific, historical, and cultural sources and incorporates creative techniques; intends to result in a response from the readers by connecting them emotionally and intellectually to the meanings and significance of the resource(s) being interpreted

**What type of writing...**

**Describes a theory regarding the evolutionary relationships of the Black-footed ferret and the results of a related research project**

**Provides a sequence of related facts for the layperson that describe the life history of the ferret**

**Describes how to set up a baseline data program to gather information on the ferret**

**Is a children's story about a fictional ferret named "Freddy" who runs away from home to join the circus with his friend, "Penelope", the prairie dog.**

**Tells a compelling story of near-extinction that provides opportunities for readers to form intellectual and emotional connections to the significance of the Black-footed ferret as a valuable member of the prairie community.**

## Interpretive Skills II

**LESSON PLAN:** 3

**SESSION TITLE:** ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

**SESSION LENGTH:** 2 hours

**PREPARED BY:** M. Wagner 1/92

**OBJECTIVES:** At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify **design** as the organization of written and visual information in such a way that the significance of the subject is highlighted;
2. Describe the "rule of thirds" as it relates to space;
3. Define "chaos of emphasis" as it relates to scale and proportion;
4. List 2 advantages and 2 disadvantages of using color in design;
5. Analyze a selection of illustrative media, identifying effective and ineffective design elements, and suggesting reasons behind the designs;
6. List 4 characteristics of contemporary park visitors that dictate specific design techniques.

**HANDOUTS:** annotated bibliography of resources, type - styles and sizes, type - as pictorial image, justification, grids, chaos of emphasis, definitions of design jargon (all in progress by M. Wagner, ARO)

Some Basic Resources

White, Jan V. Editing By Design. R.R. Bowker Company, New York, NY, 1974.

Lauer, David. Design Basics. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985.

Parker, Roger C. Aldus Guide to Basic Design. Aldus Corporation, Seattle, WA, 1988.

Training Aids: flip charts; assortment of graphics - magazines, books, folders, etc., examples of layout grids.

Content	Method	Time
<p>A.Introduce concept of design as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.a system of organization</li> <li>2.a hierarchy of information; the establishment of priorities</li> <li>3.a method for capturing a viewer's attention</li> <li>4.the power to express the significance of ideas and concepts</li> </ul> <p>Use some simple examples that obviously show organization and purpose.</p>	Lecture discussion	10 Minutes
<p>B.The Balancing Act</p> <p>Introduce the concept of space and the relationships between design elements (text, graphics, objects, white space, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.Rule of Thirds (balance) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a.1/3 text</li> <li>b.1/3 graphics</li> <li>c.1/3 white space</li> </ul> </li> <li>2.Proportion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a.refers to relative sizes</li> <li>b.size as measured against other elements</li> </ul> </li> <li>3.Scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a.refers essentially to size</li> <li>b.is related to thematic importance</li> <li>c. dynamics of opposing visuals</li> </ul> </li> <li>4.White Space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a.not a random "nothing area"</li> <li>b.active participant in design</li> <li>c.gives the eye a rest</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Highlight each of the above points with good graphic examples using slides, actual pictures, overheads, or handouts.</p>	Lecture discussion	20 Minutes



Content	Method	Time
<p>C.The "chaos of emphasis"</p> <p>Explore the use of type styles and sizes, divider bars, boxes, and design element size. Focus on the need to maintain a hierarchy (see A.2)</p> <p>1.Define "chaos of emphasis"</p> <p>The combination of too many bold, competing elements, preventing a clear hierarchy of information.</p> <p>2.typography</p> <p>a.variety</p> <p>b.readability</p> <p>c.categories</p> <p>1.serif</p> <p>2.sans serif</p> <p>d.weight</p> <p>e.mixing typefaces and fonts (includes definitions)</p> <p>f.consistent application of type</p> <p>g.upper and lower case</p> <p>h.justification (columns)</p> <p>3.bands, bars, and boxes</p> <p>4.standardizing</p> <p>a.grids as framework</p> <p>b.spacing elements</p> <p>1.between headlines/titles and text</p> <p>2.between pictures/objects and captions</p> <p>3.between other elements as needed</p> <p>5.too many visuals - the clutter syndrome. Also discuss the level of information that needs to be presented - i.e., a simple piece of line art may be a better approach than a complex photograph that includes a lot of extraneous information</p> <p>Use good visuals to emphasize the above points. Much of this discussion will only make sense with well-chosen examples and good clear explanations.</p>	<p>Lecture discussion</p>	<p>15 Minutes</p>
<p>D.Color</p> <p>1.Functions</p> <p>a.as background tint</p> <p>b.as a tool for emphasis</p> <p>c.as a working element rather than a decoration</p>	<p>Lecture discussion</p>	<p>5 Minutes</p>

Content	Method	Time
<p>2.Expense - color costs more</p> <p>3.Expertise - color is more complicated</p> <p>Have good examples to demonstrate section 1 elements.</p>		
<p>E.Visualizing</p>	<p>Group exercise and discussion</p>	<p>50 Minutes</p>
<p>This activity gives participants the opportunity to use newly introduced concepts by analyzing a variety of printed materials.</p>		
<p>Small groups will be given a selection of magazines, books, folders, etc. The group task will be to identify both positive and negative design elements. They will also suggest possible reasons for why particular designs were chosen.</p>		
<p>Each group will select one of those materials and present a "design critique" to the class. (Option: if desired, the instructor may pre-choose materials for presentation to ensure a better variety of designs).</p>		
<p>Class discussion will follow each presentation for added insights, debates, etc. This will be the opportune time to introduce the subjective aspects of design.</p>		
<p>The materials chosen for this group exercise need to be chosen carefully. A series of books such as Time-Life or a guide book series would be ideal to show several publications created on the same grid. The NPS handbook series will work as well, but the grid structure is a little more complicated.</p>		
<p>Also note magazines like Newsweek or Time that use a consistent design style each week. Beware of just using advertising. Often ads are excellent for illustrating proportion and emphasis as the product is made to stand out. But, advertising mentality is subtly different from other kinds of design presentation.</p>		
<p>F.Who's Out There?</p>	<p>Lecture discussion</p>	<p>10 Minutes</p>
<p>This section looks at the perspectives of contemporary park visitors - what they want and expect to see. The visitor today as a visually (vs written) oriented should be stressed.</p>		

Content	Method	Time
<p>1.visually oriented materials  2.short sections of text  3.color vs. black &amp; white  4.accessibility</p> <p>Some up-to-date behavioral information is needed here that discusses the perceptual processing of information in the post-modern world. It will deal with the change in emphasis from the written word to television, video, etc. Some hard hitting examples from studies will be helpful to emphasize this section.</p> <p>G.Conclusions</p> <p>Design is very intentional, but should be based on a plan that includes an analysis of the viewer and the function of the media.</p> <p>Design is not something you learn in two hours. This class is a very basic introduction to some of the basic principles underlying design. Course participants can use their new basic knowledge to "notice their surroundings" from a new perspective.</p> <p>Instructor should have some everyday examples of designed materials (e.g., cereal boxes, airline tickets, bill boards, forms, etc) to highlight the principles. Encourage everyone to take a closer look at their visual world as a way to heighten their perception of design and to assist them in becoming better designers themselves.</p>		5 Minutes

**INTERPRETIVE SKILLS II**

**LESSON PLAN:** 4

**SESSION TITLE:** INTERPRETIVE WRITING

**SESSION LENGTH:** 6 Hours    **ORIG. PREPARED BY:** Beck & Coughlan

**REVISED BY:** P. Givens 1/92

**OBJECTIVES:** At the end of this session, participants will:

1. Create a 250-500 word sample of interpretive writing;
- 2 Explain the need for and role of an editor;
- 3 Edit a sample of interpretive writing.

**TRAINING AIDS:** Flip Chart. Examples of creative, interpretive writing the participants have brought in as pre-course assignment.

**HANDOUTS:** Strunk & White's Elements of Style. Active & Passive voice exercise. Kurt Vonnegut's "How to Write With Style". Edward Thompson's "How to Write Clearly". Malcolm Forbes "How to Write a Business Letter."

Content	Method	Time
<p>I. Introduction and Overview</p> <p>Instructor can "role play" a famous person writing, editing and revising a famous speech. Alternate activity if time allows is to bring in a guest writer to share ideas.</p> <p>State session objectives.</p> <p>Share the examples of good writing that the class has brought in. Emphasize the varying styles. Different styles can all be effective.</p> <p>Instructor shares his/her favorite writing passages with the class.</p> <p>BRAINSTORM THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:</p> <p>What kind of writing do you do? How do you define good writing?</p>	<p>Instructor</p> <p>Drama</p> <p>Class</p>	<p>1 Hour</p>
<p>II. Basic Grammar Elements</p> <p>Introduce the class to Strunk &amp; White's <u>Elements of Style</u> &amp; give them their own copy. Go through the eleven "Elementary Rules of Usage" in Chapter 1. Possibly use small groups to look at three or four of the rules and "restate" them or demonstrate them to the class.</p> <p>Use "Converting Passive Voice to Active Voice" handout as an exercise.</p>	<p>Instructor</p> <p>Class</p>	<p>1 Hour</p>

Content	Method	Time
Use <u>Elements of Style</u> , Chapter 4, to familiarize class with commonly misused and phrases and words. Perhaps give choices and see which they choose <u>OR</u> create a matching quiz with words and definitions.		
Poll the class on their background in regard to learning grammar and writing. If participants do not feel comfortable with their knowledge of grammar and writing suggest:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Classes in community college, etc.</li> <li>(2) Read and study <u>Elements of Style</u></li> <li>(3) Have a friend review your writing.</li> </ul>		
Importance of learning the basics cannot be overemphasized!		
III.Organization of Writing	Lecture	1 Hour
<p>Introduce the participants to the Lecture "4 R's":  Read, Research, [W]rite, Revise. All four are important to your success as a writer.</p> <p>1.Read</p>	Class Discussion	
How does this help your writing?		
<p>By exposing you to a variety of styles.  For information on your subject.  For improvement of vocabulary.  For finding "quotable quotes".  For inspiration.</p>		
2.Research		
How does this help your writing?		
<p>All of the above reasons.  Accuracy and credibility.  Easier to write about familiar subject.</p>		
<p>During research, you are not only gathering information, but at the same time you should be (1) thinking your thoughts out clearly, and (2) keeping a journal or notes of what you learn.</p>		
3.Write		
<p>Now is the time to put words on paper. Even though your ideas may be in your head, it is best to get them down on paper. The visual image helps you out.</p>		

Content	Method	Time
<p>ABC Exercise illustrates this concept:</p> <p>Ask one participant how many combinations can be made from A&amp;B. (AB and BA). Ask the same participant how many combinations can be made from A,B &amp; C. (ABC,ACB,BAC,BCA,CAB,CBA) This is a bit tougher, but not impossible.</p> <p>Ask how many combinations are possible from A,B,C,D. It is all but impossible without a pen and paper. (Answer 24            ABCD, ABDC, ACBD, ACDB, ADBC, ADCB, BACD, BADC, BCAD, BCDA, BDAC, BDCA, CABD, CADB, CBAD, CBDA, CDAB, CDBA, DABC, DACB, DBAC, DBCA, DCAB, DCBA).</p> <p>The conclusion: The brain alone is surprisingly limited, but when you see the ideas on paper, the capacity is greatly increased.</p> <p>SO... Begin writing. Somewhere, but not necessarily the introduction or beginning.</p> <p>Get rid of the internal critic. Let it be rough...Right now, its only for your eyes... Let it flow.</p> <p>Find out when your best time of day is to write. Write down your ideas and thoughts regardless of the place or time.</p> <p>Get a random list of your thoughts and ideas on paper, then work to organize, massage, see how they connect or logically come together.</p> <p>Just like a talk, the beginning should be a "grabber", a "show stopper" or very thought provoking.</p>	Class	
<p>4.Revise</p> <p>Let your writing "cool off" for a while before you try to revise it.</p> <p>Read it out loud at a rapid pace to see how it flows and where you stumble.</p> <p>Read it in a monotone to remove all inflection and concentrate on words.</p> <p>See how many words you can remove and keep the meaning.</p> <p>Try replacing as many "fancy" words as possible with simple words.</p>	Lecture	

Content	Method	Time
<p>Let a friend read it and instead of asking "What did you think?", get specific:</p> <p>Where did you have to slow down?  Where did you have to stop &amp; go back?  What parts do you remember?  What could be left out?  What was confusing?  What is the main idea?</p> <p>Get feedback from the class on good and bad experiences with editing someone's work or having your own edited. An editor looks at the whole work, then the specifics.</p> <p>Talk about the importance of honest, open editing (and the <u>acceptance</u> of honest, open editing) in the writing exercise coming up.</p> <p>An alternate activity if time allows is to bring example of N.P.S. interpretive writing and allow everyone to edit, comparing ideas.</p>	Lecture	
<p>IV. Clarity and Style</p> <p>Writing is communicating. Unless you write clearly, it is worthless. Hand out "How to Write Clearly" and go through the seven points.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outline.</li> <li>2. Start where your readers are.</li> <li>3. Avoid jargon.</li> <li>4. Use "first degree" words.</li> <li>5. Use familiar combinations of words.</li> <li>6. Stick to the point.</li> <li>7. Be as brief as possible.</li> </ol> <p>Style is a difficult thing to teach if it is possible at all. But you can learn how to "discover" yours.</p> <p>Handout "How to Write With Style" and go through the seven points.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Find a subject you care about.</li> <li>2. Don't ramble.</li> <li>3. Keep it simple.</li> <li>4. Have the guts to cut.</li> <li>5. Sound like yourself.</li> <li>6. Say what you mean to say.</li> <li>7. Have pity on the readers.</li> </ol>	Discussion Lecture	1 Hour

Content	Method	Time
<p>GIVE ASSIGNMENT FOR THE LAST TWO HOURS. WRITING SHOULD BE 500 WORDS MAXIMUM. PAIR UP FOR EDITING. INSTRUCTOR CHOOSE A GENERAL TOPIC SO THAT IT IS EASIER TO COMPARE. PERHAPS USE A NATIONAL PARK POSTER WITH LOTS OF GRAPHICS AND DESIGN FOR EVERYONE TO WRITE AN ESSAY ABOUT. IN REAL PARK WRITING SITUATIONS, WE ARE USUALLY ASSIGNED TOPICS.</p>	Class	2 Hours
<p>VI. Writing and Editing</p> <p>Each partner writes a 250-500 word essay, edit each others work, and rewrite. Instructor should make certain that the "switch" is made half way through the two hour block of time.</p> <p>VII. Conclusion</p> <p>Review the session objectives.</p> <p>Recall the 4 R's.</p>	Class Discussion	2 Hour
<p>End with a grand piece from Aldo Leopold's <u>Sand County Almanac</u> or a similar work.</p>		