



# Handles

Helping Visitors to Grasp Resource Meanings

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## A Survey of Interpretive Techniques

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National Park Service  
Interpretive Development Program

This manual contains an overview of many techniques used by interpreters in and outside of the National Park Service.

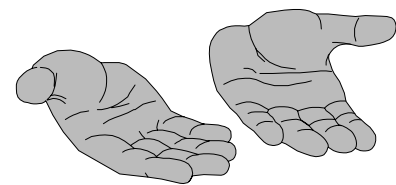
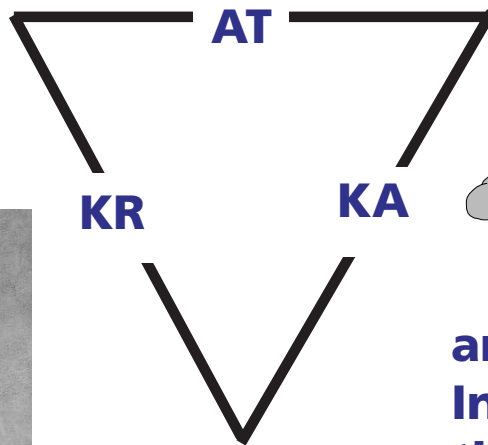
Appropriate techniques provide the audience with opportunities to make their own intellectual and emotional connections to resource meanings.

The best writers, speakers, and communicators use various, multiple, and often interwoven techniques to create interpretive opportunities. In developing tangible/intangible links, they apply appropriate techniques in an intentional and conscientious manner.



**Appropriate  
Techniques  
Facilitate  
Connections**

**Between the  
Meanings of  
the Resource**



**and the  
Interests of  
the Visitors**



**The Interpretive Development Program sets standards of excellence and provides learning resources that motivate and enable interpreters to create opportunities for the public to form their own meaningful connections with National Parks.**

**Use of Appropriate Techniques is HOW interpreters "create opportunities".**

Appropriate Techniques are used in all types of interpretive programs, including:

- formal talks**
- guided walks**
- conducted activities**
- demonstrations**
- traveling trunks**
- curriculum-based programs**
- exhibits**
- publications**
- special events**
- junior ranger programs**
- informal interactions**
- film productions**
- illustrated programs**
- web sites**

## Activity

**An educational procedure designed to stimulate learning by firsthand experience.**

Example: An interpreter teaching about the Lewis and Clark Expedition has a cloth tape measure cut to the circumference of a tree recorded in the journals. Audience members hold the tape measure and form themselves into a circle, using their bodies to recreate the tree's girth.

Example: Very young children toss Velcro "plankton" at a giant fuzzy coral polyp to demonstrate one source of nutrition for these animals.

*People learn better when they are actively involved in the learning process. Consider that people retain about 10% of what they hear, 30% of what they read, 50% of what they see, and 90% of what they do.*

## Allegory

**An elaborate literary form in which the characters, events or setting of a story is understood to represent something else. An allegory is a kind of extended metaphor, telling two stories at once: the surface narrative and a more meaningful subtext.**

Example:

"If you want to live, you have to die; you cannot have mountains and creeks without space, and space is a beauty married to a blind man. The blind man is Freedom, or Time, and he does not go anywhere without his great dog Death.

Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Example:

There is an allegory for historians in the diverse functions of saw, wedge, and axe.

The saw works only across the years, which it must deal with one by one, in sequence. From each year the raker teeth pull little chips of fact, which accumulate in little piles, called sawdust by woodsmen and archives by historians; both judge the character of what lies within by the character of the samples thus made visible without. It is not until the transect is completed that the tree falls, and the stump yields a collective view of history

The wedge, on the other hand, works only in radial splits; such a split yields a collective view of all the years at once, or no view at all, depending on the skill with which the plan of the split is chosen.

The axe functions only at a diagonal to the years, and this is only for the peripheral rings of the recent past. Its special function is to lop limbs, for which both saw and wedge are useless.

The three tools are requisite to good oak, and to good history.

Aldo Leopold  
*A Sand County Almanac*

## Alliteration

**Alliteration is the repetition of initial vowels or consonants.**

Example:

Okefenokee burns. The **flames flash** through **titi tangles and blast the bay trees and blackgums**, then drop and creep, chewing into the peat floor of the swamp itself.

Chip Campbell  
*Okefenokee Adventures*

More Alliteration:

The horsehair worm, for instance, wriggling so serenely near the surface, is the survivor of an impossible series of squeaky escapes.

Sea water seems suddenly to be but a breath of barnacle bits.

*Well-crafted language can slow readers down and encourage them to pay more attention to the sentence.*

Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

## Allusion

**An allusion is an indirect mention, often a reference to a well-known saying or fact without quoting exactly or spelling it out.**

Example: Aldo Leopold alludes to Don Quixote in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*:

We tilt windmills in behalf of conservation in convention halls and editorial offices, but on the back forty we disclaim even owning a lance.

## Analogy

**The comparison of two pairs which have the same relationship. The key is to ascertain the relationship between the first so you can choose the correct second pair. In the first example below, the partridge is to the dog what gold is to a pros-**

Example:

(Regarding evolution) Say you are the manager of the Southern Railroad. You figure that you need three engines for a stretch of track between Lynchburg and Danville. It's a mighty steep grade. So at fantastic effort and expense you have your shops make nine thousand engines. Each engine must be fashioned just so, every rivet and bolt secure, every wire twisted and wrapped, every needle on every indicator sensitive and accurate. \* You send all nine thousand of them out on the runs. Although there are engineers at the throttles, no one is manning the switches. The engines crash, collide, derail, jump, jam, burn... At the end of the massacre you have three engines, which is what the run could support in the first place. There are few enough of them that they can stay out of each others' paths. \* You go to your board of directors and show them what you've done. And what are they going to say? You know what they're going to say. They're going to say: It's a hell of a way to run a railroad.

Is it a better way to run a universe?



Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Example:

The dog, when he approaches the briars, looks around to make sure I am within gunshot. Reassured, he advances with stealthy caution, his wet nose screening a hundred scents for that one scent, the potential presence of which gives life and meaning to the whole landscape. He is the prospector of the air, perpetually searching its strata for olfactory gold. Partridge scent is the gold standard that relates his world to mine.

Aldo Leopold  
*A Sand County Almanac and  
Sketches Here and There*

# Analysis

**Analysis is the separation of a whole into its component parts.**

Example:

If you analyze a molecule of chlorophyll itself, what you get is one hundred thirty-six atoms of hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen arranged in an exact and complex relationship around a central ring. At the ring's center is a single atom of magnesium. Now: if you remove the atom of magnesium and in its exact place put an atom of iron, you get a molecule of hemoglobin.

*Freeman Tilden wrote  
"Interpretation... aims to reveal  
meanings and relationships..."*



Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

# Anecdote

**A short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident.**

Example:

I experienced a minor irritation myself when I arrived at a 'port of entry' on the northern California border, where my car and baggage were searched by a quarantine officer. He explained politely that California welcomes tourists, but that he must make sure their baggage harbors no plant or animal pests. He recited a long list of prospective garden and orchard afflictions, but he did not mention the yellow blanket of cheat, which already extended from his feet to the far hills in every direction.

Aldo Leopold  
*A Sand County Almanac and  
Sketches Here and There*

# Anthropomorphism

**The act of attributing human forms or qualities to entities which are not human (see personification.)**

# Aphorism

**A memorable definition of a principle or pithy statement of some insight.**

Example:

As if you could kill time without injuring eternity

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden and Other Writings*

# Apostrophe

**When an absent person, an abstract concept, or an important object is directly addressed.**

Example:

With how sad steps, O moon, thou climbest the skies.

## Artifact

**An object providing tangible evidence of a culture or civilization.**

Example:

An exhibit which interprets a frontier settlement may include authentic arrowheads, clay pipes and hand-made nails.

## Arts and Crafts

**The creation of useful, decorative or illustrative products.**

Example:

During Women's History Month at Biscayne National Park, audience members weave palm fronds into small mats, while learning about the life of pioneer women in South Florida.



*Freeman Tilden wrote, "Interpretation addressed to children 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."*

## Assignment

**A specified task.**

Example:

On a guided tour of a historic house, the interpreter gives the children in the group an assignment. She asks them to look for desert animals that are carved into the building architecture and furnishings. The children are congratulated for their findings, and the animals found are worked into the narrative of the guided tour.

## Assonance

**The repetition of vowel sounds but not consonant sounds.**

Example:

And so, all the night tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride...

Edgar Allan Poe  
from *Annabel Lee*



## At-the-Place

**Using the actual location of historic event as a staging area for discussion or reflection of that event.**

Example:

An interpreter leads a group of visitors to a field where a Union camp had been ambushed by Confederate forces. The visitors can better understand the details and significance of the field's battle by being immersed in the actual geographic setting.

## Before and After

**A comparison of relationships, resources, or persons prior to, and following, a specific point in time.**

Example:

Before the war, it was said, "The United States are..." Grammatically, it was spoken that way and thought of as a collection of independent states. After the war, it was always 'the United States *is*...' as we say today without being self conscious at all. And that sums up what the war accomplished. It made us an "is".

Shelby Foote,  
Civil War Historian

## Beginning and Ending Cohesion

**The conclusion's reinforcement of the introduction. The example below is the first and last paragraph of a letter.**

Example:

The dismissal of Mr. Albert M. Day as director of the Fish and Wildlife Service is the most recent of a series of events that should be deeply disturbing to every thoughtful citizen.

It is one of the ironies of our time that, while concentrating on the defense of our country against enemies from without, we should be so heedless of those who would destroy it from within.

Rachel Carson  
*Mr. Day's Dismissal*

## Body Language

**Body language refers to the communication of ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized gestures, postures, and actions.**

Example:

An interpreter establishes rapport with audience members by using good eye contact, exhibiting open and non-threatening postures, and maintaining appropriate distances.

## Body Movement:

**Changes in position and posture of the human body.**

Example:

An interpreter is teaching how various animals deal with a deep snowfall. He accompanies his narrative with appropriate postures, gestures, and movement.



# Brainstorming

A group problem-solving technique that involves the spontaneous contribution of ideas from all members of the group.

Example:

An interpreter is giving a talk to a group on a remote island. He asks the group, "If you were stationed to work as a lighthouse keeper out here one hundred years ago, what kind of things might you want to bring from the mainland?"

# Buzz Groups

Assemblages of people tasked with discussing specific issues.

Example: an interpreter wants the audience to think about the pros and cons of removing feral horses from the island. In order to give everyone an opportunity to express their views, he breaks the audience up into groups of 4 and allows the groups to discuss the question among themselves.

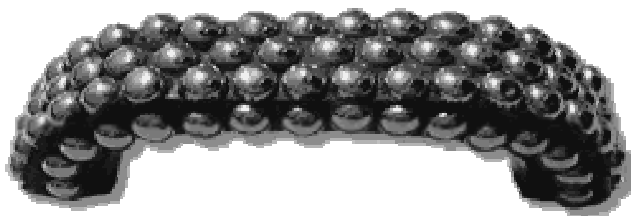
# Cacophony

Harsh, discordant sounds. In the example below, the technique reinforces the visual and conceptual image of the cypress.

Example:

Cypresses are tough trees, survivors of the cataclysm that killed the dinosaurs. They heal their wind-broken limbs but recoil from the insult, the new growth contorting in baroque angles and oblong diameters, driven by an internal geometry unique to cypress.

*Chip Campbell,  
Okefenokee Adventures*



*Are the techniques selected  
appropriate for your audience?*

# Caesura

A natural pause or break.

Example:

Crystals grew inside rock like arithmetic flowers. They lengthened and spread, added plane to plane in an awed and perfect obedience to an absolute geometry that even stones – **maybe only the stones** – understood.

*Annie Dillard  
An American Childhood*

## Call and response

**A style of singing in which an individual or group responds to or echoes the melody sung by one singer.**

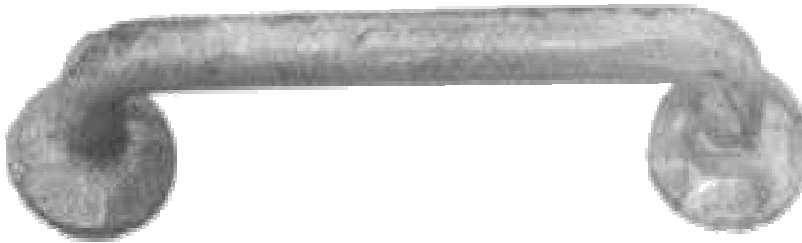
Example:

An interpreter engages the audience during a program on bears by using this classic song, perhaps changing some words to convey a resource protection message:

Interpreter (call): Audience (response):

<i>The other day</i>	<i>The other day</i>
<i>I met a bear</i>	<i>I met a bear</i>
<i>A great big bear</i>	<i>A great big bear</i>
<i>Away up there</i>	<i>Away up there</i>

All together: *The other day I met a bear, a great big bear away up there.*



*Techniques that are not applied to resource meanings do not serve as handles.*

## Cause and effect

**A precipitating situation and the result it induces.**

Example:

The Great Depression of the 1930s hit Lowell hard, especially affecting residents in the Acre. Textile mills closed and workers suffered from massive layoffs and deteriorating neighborhoods. The destruction of tenements, restaurants, and shops to the urban wrecking ball dramatically changed the face of the Acre as many people, especially the Greeks, were forced to move elsewhere.

Amy Glowacki, NPS  
*The Acre*

## Character

**One of the persons of a drama.**

Example:

In a story about a village that surrounded an iron furnace, an interpreter presents, describes, and develops the distinctive qualities of an actual or hypothetical person in order to help audience members understand how furnace issues might have affected individual civilians.

## Chronology

**An arrangement in order of occurrence.**

Example: an interpreter narrates the sequence of political events that led to the 1803 Louisiana Purchase.

## Commentary

### An expression of opinion.

Example:

Nature is, above all, profligate. Don't believe them when they tell you how economical and thrifty nature is, whose leaves return to the soil. Wouldn't it be cheaper to leave them on the tree in the first place? This deciduous business alone is a radical scheme, the brainchild of a deranged manic-depressive with limitless capital. Extravagance! Nature will try anything once.

Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

*Appropriate Techniques are opportunities for intellectual and emotional connections*



## Compare and Contrast

### An examination of two or more items to establish similarities and dissimilarities.

Example:

These two pine trees are a lot alike. Both have three needles to a group, and they grow in the same kinds of places. But if you smell the bark, you'll notice that one of them smells like vanilla and the other liketurpentine.

Sam H. Ham  
*Environmental Education*

## Conjecture

### To form a conclusion deduced by surmise or guesswork.

Example:

At the birth home of a U.S. president, an interpreter talks about how the infant's grandmother was first to hold the baby. He asks the group if they have ever held a newborn, and wondered what the future held for it. He then proceeds to conjecture about what the infant's grandmother might have thought about her grandson's future.

*Appropriate Techniques help the audience to grasp concepts and meanings*



## Context

**Relating the unfamiliar to what is familiar.**

Example:

De Soto saw (the Mississippi River) in 1542... The date standing by itself means little or nothing to us; but when one groups a few neighboring historical dates and facts around it, he adds perspective and color....for instance, when the Mississippi was first seen by a white man, less than a quarter of a century had elapsed since... the death of Raphael... Catherine de Medici was a child; Elizabeth of England was not yet in her teens...Shakespeare was not yet born...

Mark Twain  
*Life on the Mississippi*

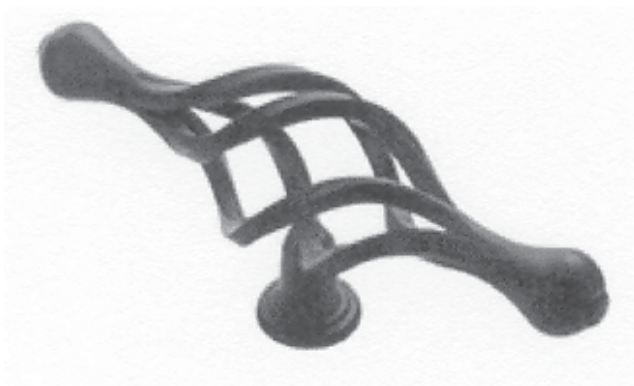
## Contrived Situation

**An artificial combination of circumstances.**

Example:

Demonstrate the need for forest conservation by making up a story about a town in which there is no such thing as wood or wood products; go forward or back in time; pose a hypothetical problem or set up an illustrative situation (e.g., "What would life on earth be like if its average temperature increased just 5 degrees C?" or "What if there were no predators?"

Sam H. Ham  
*Environmental Interpretation*



*Appropriate Techniques are tangible/ intangible links that are significantly and intentionally elaborated upon by the interpreter*

## Conversation

**The oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas. In conversation, the roles of the sender and receiver of information often switch frequently and quickly.**

Example:

An interpreter and a visitor enter into an informal conversation in a park cemetery. The visitor shares insight into family and community relationships that adds significance to several of the burials, while learning from the interpreter some administrative background of the site.

## Critique

**A critical estimate, discussion, or review.**

Example:

An interpreter dons several clothing items that label him as a buffoon, and pretends to be teaching a group of young scouts how to safely build a campfire. He makes obvious mistakes. After the lesson, he resumes his role as a ranger and leads the scouts in a critique of the lesson.

## Cultural Reference

**An allusion to the customary beliefs, social forms, or material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.**

Example:

Polynesian navigators steering across the South Pacific from atoll to atoll, find their way by the cloud rising like a kite from each pinpoint of warm land.

Rachel Carson

## Cumulative effect

**Summing or integrating overall data or values designed to produce a distinctive or desired impression.**

Example:

The overall effect of a written article about desert plants may prompt feelings of awe or respect in the reader, even though those words were never stated in the piece.

## Dance

**A series of rhythmic or patterned bodily movement.**

Example:

At the site of a historic colonial village, an interpreter leads the audience through the steps of a historic dance. He uses the customs of the dance to illustrate the culture's values of order, formality, and gender roles.

## Deconstructing a Myth

**Disproving a generally accepted idea.**

Example:

For most people snakes are about fear.

That reaction is not inherent. Studies have shown that, when approached with a snake, very young children are not afraid—just curious. So where does the fear come from? Scientists maintain it is a learned response. As we grow, we are taught many things. Our first impressions come from home and family. How many times have I heard the phrase “the only good snake is a dead snake”? Throughout our lives we are bombarded with negative images of snakes. The serpent in the Garden of Eden is not only sneaky and tempting but is also blamed for the fall of mankind. In Greek mythology Medusa, with snakes for hair, can turn a person to stone with just a look. And Hollywood is a master at making the quiet and secretive critters vindictive hunters of man.

Amazingly, more people are struck every year by lightning than bitten by venomous snakes. Of the poisonous snakebites recorded each year, 90% occur when the person is trying to kill or harass the snake.

Andrea Durston, U.S.FWS  
*Of Fear and Choices*

## Definition

**A statement of the meaning of a word or word group.**

Example:

In a dry wind like this, snow and ice can pass directly into the air as a gas without first having melted to water. This process is called sublimation...

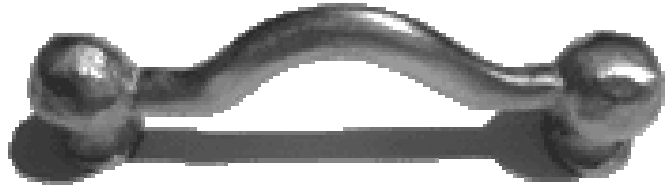
Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Example:

Ecologists define a relict as an organism "of an earlier time surviving in an environment that has undergone considerable change."

Bob Audretsch, NPS

*Because people learn in different ways and on multiple levels, using a variety of techniques is more effective than using just one or two over and over again.*



## Demonstration

**Proving or making clear by showing evidence, illustration, or example.**

Example:

Colonial settlers used leather for clothing such as moccasins, as well as equipment like pouches and cartridge boxes. Interpreters at a Revolutionary War site demonstrate the tanning and preparing of hides.

## Description

**Discourse intended to give a mental image of something experienced.**

Example :

I have just learned to see praying mantis egg cases. Suddenly I see them everywhere; a tan oval of light catches my eye, or I notice a blob of thickness in a patch of slender weeds. It is over an inch long and shaped like a bell, or like the northern hemisphere of an egg cut through its equator. The full length of one of its long sides is affixed to a twig; the side that catches the light is perfectly flat. It has a dead straw, deadweed color, and a curious brittle texture, hard as varnish, but pitted minutely, like frozen foam.

Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

# Dialog (Dialogue)

**A conversation between two or more persons.**

Example:

In my mind, the father often says, "Son, you have lost the meaning of 1776. I was a craftsman. I spent eight years of my life working as an apprentice to gain the knowledge and skill needed to make an entire weapon with hand tools. I owned those tools. If I did not like the way I was being treated in the factory, I could move away and set up a gun shop anywhere. I had freedom. I controlled my own destiny. I was proud.

But you son. In your wildest dreams you will never own the machines it takes to make a rifle now. The day the men who own those machines decide they no longer need you, you will be lost. You have become a slave to those machines—not a free man."

The son responds, "But I'm making more money than you ever could. My home is made of brick with smooth plaster walls. The house we lived in was log and washed away in the last flood. My house has carpet and my daughters go to school. I own books and buy newspapers. You could only afford to buy us things we had to have to stay alive. No Father, I understand what 1776 was about and the money that flows out of that gun factory and into my pocket buys more freedom than you ever dreamed of."

David Larsen, NPS  
*The Gun Talk*

*Care must be taken to insure that techniques do not become an end in themselves; it is possible for them to be distracting. Visitors may be discouraged from seeking out resource meanings because they are so overwhelmed by the techniques.*



## Discussion

**A discussion refers to the consideration of a question in an open and usually informal debate.**

Example:

An interpreter leads students in a discussion about the value of having natural areas set aside in various climate regions.

## Euphony

**Soothing, pleasant sounds.**

Example:

Soft subtle top-knots of yellow-eyed grass  
Lemon carpets of marsh golden glow...

Joy Campbell,  
*Okefenokee Adventures*



## Exaggerated Size Scale

To enlarge or reduce beyond the normal dimensions.

Example:

If we were small enough to actually walk inside of a wasp's nest, you'd be amazed at what you'd see.

Sam H. Ham

*Environmental Interpretation*

*Interpretation is a dynamic activity. To "allow the resource to speak for itself" does not count toward interpretation.*



## Exaggerated Time Scale

To accelerate or retard the rate of the passage of time.

Example:

If time were speeded up so that a thousand years went by every second, you'd be able to stand right here and watch continental drift for yourself.

Sam H. Ham

*Environmental Interpretation*

## Examples

Items, facts, incidents, or aspects that are representative of a group or type.

Example:

These orchids are a good example of a plant that grows on other plants.

Sam H. Ham

*Environmental Interpretation*

## Exclamation

A sharp or sudden utterance; vehement expression of a passionate, strong, or sudden emotion.

Example:

For myself I hold no preferences among flowers, so long as they are wild, free, spontaneous. **Bricks to all greenhouses! Black thumb and cutworm to the potted plant!**

Edward Abbey

## Explanation

**To show the reason for or cause of.**

Example:

The life of a totem pole begins with a particularly difficult form of change—death. In order to carve a pole, a tree, usually a cedar, must be felled. Southeast Alaska cultures hold that objects in the natural world have a spirit of their own. Consequently, the taking of the life of a tree must be accomplished with the utmost respect. Ceremonial protocol is followed before the tree is cut. Songs are sung with dignity, speeches are made praising and thanking the tree for its sacrifice, and dances are performed in its honor. Only then is the tree cut.

Michele Simmons, NPS  
Life after Death?

## Flashback

**A literary or presentation device in which an earlier event is inserted into the normal chronological order of a narrative.**

Example:

In the program “Gifts From the Sea” described below under “foreshadow”, photographs of a refugee raft are shown to the audience. On the side of the boat is painted “Los rapidos de Minas,” or “The fast ones from Minas”, with Minas being a small town on the north coast of Cuba where the raft presumably set out from. After a discussion of conditions that might be encountered in crossing the Florida Straits, the talk turns again to tangible items brought in by the sea (the topic with which the program began.) One item discussed is a religious tract recounting the story of a fishing voyage which had set out from Minas in 1620.

## Foreshadow

**To present an indication or a suggestion of beforehand; to presage.**

Example:

at Biscayne National Park, Gary Bremen presents a talk called “Gifts From the Sea”. The tangible items that wash onto the beach, such as sea shells, drift seeds and international trash, foreshadow the more intangible meanings revealed later in the program. Ideas are added to the list of “gifts” (such as a dried swim bladder from a fish representing the idea behind a scuba vest), as well as universal concepts (such as the freedom that many in South Florida have received from the sea, including rafters from Cuba.)

## Framing

**Intentionally structuring an opportunity for the audience to experience visual, auditory, or other sensory experience of the resource.**

Example:

an interpreter gives a guided tour of a prison. At one point he asks the visitors to be silent for one minute, in order to listen to the sounds of slamming cell doors, footsteps overhead, and other sounds magnified by the building's acoustics.

# Game

**A physical or mental competition conducted according to rules.**

Example:

Carpet squares with numbers pinned to them become a giant game board on the lawn. A roll of the giant die determines how many spaces a player may move, and the numbers on the squares correspond to pages in a booklet full of excerpts taken from a memoir of a woman who lived on one of the park's islands during the depression. The treasures she finds while beach combing become keys to jumping ahead a few spaces, while her adventures with rum-runners, alien smugglers and other ne'er-do-wells send her packing backwards.

Biscayne National Park's Dante Fascell Visitor Center:  
*The Adventures of Charlotte*

*Bill Lewis wrote,  
"Friendly competition stimulates learning."*



# Gathering

**Drawing ideas together from a group of people.**

Example:

An interpreter introduces a wilderness film by asking each audience member to write one line about what wilderness means to him on an index card. The interpreter collects the cards, and during the film arranges them into a "poem". When the film concludes the sentences are read back to the audience in the form of prose.

# General to Specific

**Moving from a characteristic of the majority to a particular individual, situation, or relation.**

Example:

These people don't have the grocery stores many other Americans find conveniently located near their home. They harvest their food from the River and surrounding lands. They are living a subsistence life style.

In one village on the Yukon, a man rises early in the morning to check the family's fishnets. He is checking two nets this summer because his parents are no longer able to haul the fish laden nets to shore.

Andrea Medeiros, USFWS:

# Gestures

**The use of motions of the limbs or body as a means of expression. Gestures are used to emphasize thoughts and emotions, and to give direction.**

Example:

An interpreter opens his hands palms upward when presenting an idea to the audience, turns them downward in a slicing movement to condemn another idea, and makes a fist to illustrate determination.

# Historical Reference

## An allusion to past events.

Example:

Already, as appears from the records, "At a General Court held at Boston in New England, the 7<sup>th</sup> of the first month, 1643-4." – "Wassamequin, Nashoonon, Kutchamaquin, Massaconomet, and Squaw Sachem, did voluntarily submit themselves" to the English; and among other things did "promise to be willing from time to time to be instructed in the knowledge of God." Being asked "Not to do any unnecessary work on the Sabbath day, especially within the gates of Christian town," they answered, "It is easy for them; they have not much to do on any day, and they can well take their rest on that day."

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden and Other Writings*

*When placed at the beginning of a piece, a hook offers a bit of bait, and serves to lure the reader further into the piece.*

## A device for catching, holding, or pulling.

## Hook

Example (opening line):

"Nurse, get a CBC and Chem Screen. I think this patient has been poisoned."

Kathy Reshetiloff, USFWS

Example (opening line):

Perched on an international border, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia changed between northern and southern armies nine times during the Civil War.

Melinda Day, NPS

## Humor

## That quality which appeals to a sense of the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous.

Example:

One entymologist says that walking sticks, along with monarch butterflies, are able to feign death – although I don't know how you could determine if a walking stick was feigning death or twigginess.

Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*



*Good gestures are directly associated with an idea or image.*

Example:

An interpreter talking about communication among pioneers on his park's islands says "they didn't have eMail, or faxes back then. In fact, the easiest method of communication over semi-long distances was the shell phone." He then pulls out a conch shell with its end sawed off, and blows a loud, clear note that echoes across the water.

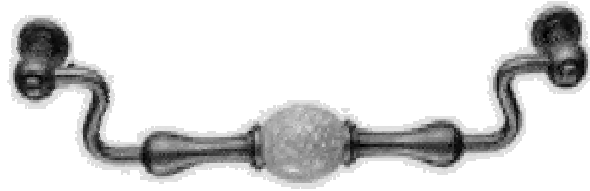
# Hyperbole

**Exaggeration or overstatement.**

Example:

People moved slowly then. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County.

Harper Lee  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*



# Icebreaker

**An activity that serves to establish a positive and productive rapport between the interpreter and members of the audience.**

Example: at the beginning of a program about 19<sup>th</sup> century railroads and canals, the interpreter asks the audience to separate themselves into groups that reflect the mode of transportation they used to arrive at the park: railroad, plane, motor home, or boat. Insight gained by the activity serves as a starting point for the talk, and promotes camaraderie and interaction among the audience members.

# Illustration

**A picture or diagram that helps make something clear.**

Example: during a guided tour among the ruins of an ancient village, an interpreter shows the audience a drawing of what the village may have looked like in its heyday.



*Meanings are more important  
than information.*

# Image

**A word or phrase that appeals directly to the reader's taste, touch, hearing, sight, or smell.**

Example:

I have discerned a matchless and indescribable light blue, such as watered or changeable silks and sword blades suggest, more cerulean than the sky itself, alternating with the original dark green on the opposite sides of the waves, which last appeared but muddy by comparison. It is a vitreous greenish blue, as I remember it, like those patches of the winter sky seen through cloud vistas in the west before sundown.

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden and Other Writings*

Example:

Yet each gentle breeze brought the very slightest rustle of aspen leaves – nature's most gentle snare drum. A more sturdy gust of wind left the gully filled with the sound of applause.

Bob Audretsch, NPS

# Imagination

**The act of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality.**

Example:

We are going to pretend we live on the bottom of an ocean—an ocean of air in which clouds are adrift- just as sponges and coral and spidery crabs inhabit the floor of the ocean water. But it will not be hard to pretend that, for in fact that is just what we do. In relation to the air ocean, we are exactly like deep-sea fishes, with all the weight of tons of air pressing down upon our bodies.

*Lost Woods: The Discovered Writing of Rachel Carson*

Example:

Imagine a courtyard full of people all rushing to their machines, answering the call of the bell. The very size of the buildings, reaching one hundred feet into the sky, and the clock towering over the millyard with its clanging bell – imposing reminders of the drastic change from Farm to Factory.

Tess Shatzer, NPS

# Inclusion

**Embracing the readers or audience members as part of a larger group.**

Example:

For most people snakes are about fear.

Andrea Dunstan  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

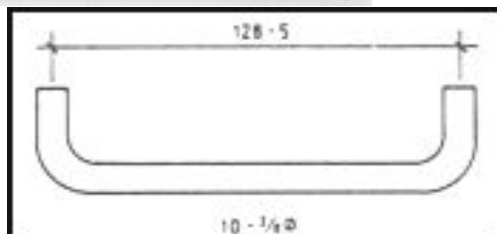
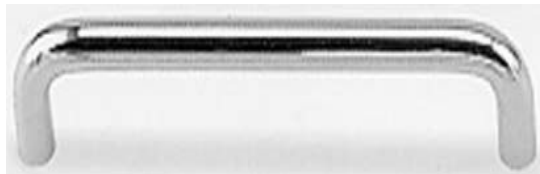
# Information

**Knowledge obtained from investigation, study, or instruction; intelligence, news; facts, data.**

Example :

Whether eggs in a single clutch will hatch simultaneously or sequentially over an extended period of time is determined by the onset of incubation.

*The Birders Handbook*



*Freeman Tilden wrote, "Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information."*

# Insight

**Apprehending the inner nature of things.**

Example:

Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under a calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population.

Ralph Waldo Emerson  
*Nature*

# Instruction

**To impart knowledge in a systematic manner.**

Example:

An interpreter shows visitors how to snorkel safely and with minimum impact to the ecosystem, while having fun and fully experiencing the unique environment.

# Irony

**An attribute of statements in which the meaning is different – or more complicated – than it seems. A subtle form of sarcasm, verbal irony is a rhetorical device in which the speaker either severely understates his point or means the opposite of what he says.**

Example:

Slugs, of all creatures, hibernate...

Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

# Joke

**A brief narrative with a climactic humorous twist.**

Example:

Living on earth is expensive, but it does include a free trip around the sun.

# Labeling

**Classifying people (or kinds of people) in either a positive, negative or neutral way.**

Example:

Positive labels: People who understand the value of a forest know that...

If you're the kind of person who cares about wildlife, then you probably...

Choosy mothers choose Jif!

Negative labels: The worst criminals are the ones who commit crimes against nature.

If you don't care about protecting endangered species, then you probably don't believe that...

Neutral labels: People who live in the Northwest...

We Oregonians...

Sam H. Ham  
*Environmental Interpretation*



# Layout

**The arrangement or design of visual or 3-dimensional media.**

Example:

When creating a site bulletin, an interpreter arranges the textboxes and graphic elements so that they work together to produce a clear and engaging whole.

# Lecture

**A formal discourse given for instruction depending heavily upon oral techniques.**

Example:

An interpreter at a marine park delivers a lecture to members of a local marina at their annual meeting. The interpreter stands behind a podium and uses notes written on index cards to insure that the lecture remains organized, and that all the key points are covered.

# List

**A simple series of words.**

Example:

When one pine shows a short year but his neighbors do not, you may safely interpolate some purely local or individual adversity: a fire scar, a gnawing meadowmouse, a windburn, or some local bottleneck in that dark laboratory we call the soil.

Aldo Leopold

*A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*



*Remember that "The Audience Seeks Something of Value for Themselves".*

# Listening

**To hear with thoughtful attention.**

Example:

during an informal contact, a visitor shares his memories of visiting the park as a child. The interpreter is receptive to the visitor's information, refraining from dominating the conversation.

# Living History

**The portrayal of real people experiencing past events. Care must be taken to insure that this engaging technique does not become an end in itself, but is used to connect visitor interests to resource meanings.**

Example:

Guided tours of a 1930s era house are given by interpreters pretending to be living in the 1930s.

# Made-up words

## Fancifully devised terms.

Example:

At the far end of town

Where the Grickle-grass grows

And the wind smells slow-and-sour when it blows

And no birds ever sing except old crows...

Is the Street of the Lifted Lorax.

Dr. Seuss

The Lorax

# Map

**A representation, usually on a flat surface, of the whole or a part of an area.**

Example:

A giant map of southeastern New England as it appeared in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is used to give school children a sense of how different the area was back then, and serves as a stage on which Roger Williams' travels can be re-enacted. As discussion progresses, tangible objects are placed on the map one at a time by the children. By the end of the program, what was once just a flat piece of canvas with blue and green paint becomes a living map created by the participants to tell the story of America's foremost proponent of religious liberty for all.

Roger Williams National Memorial

Example: In a Civil War park, an interpreter uses a map to show the locations of encampments and troop movements.

*The Interpretive Equation:*

$$(KR+KA) \times AT = IO$$

*Knowledge of the Resource,  
plus Knowledge of the Audience,  
times the Appropriate Technique,  
equals an Interpretive Opportunity.*



# Metaphor

**A comparison implied or stated between two usually unconnected objects (without using the words like or as. In the first example below, boards=books.**

Example:

Our lumber pile, recruited entirely from the river, is thus not only a collection of personalities, but an anthology of human strivings in upriver farms and forests. The autobiography of an old board is a kind of literature not yet taught on campuses, but any riverbank farm is a library where he who hammers or saws may read at will. Come high water, there is always an accession of new books.

Aldo Leopold

*A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*

More Metaphor:

When I walk with a camera, I walk from shot to shot, reading the light on a calibrated meter. When I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens, and the moment's light prints on my own silver gut.

When the leaves fall the striptease is over; things stand mute and revealed.

Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*



*"A newly invented metaphor assists thought by evoking a visual image, while on the other hand a metaphor which is technically dead has in effect reverted to being an ordinary word and can generally be used without loss of vividness. But in between those two classes there is a huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves." George Orwell*

## Metonymy

**A figure of speech in which a thing, concept, person, or group is represented by something closely associated with it.**

Example: referring to a king as the throne.

## Mirroring

**Adaptation of an interpreter's speaking qualities and body language to reflect the communication style of the audience. This skill might be used to quickly and effectively establish rapport.**

Example:

A roving interpreter approaches several visitors who are sitting on some benches at dusk. The visitors are laughing and ask the interpreter if the bats swooping past them will get in their hair. The interpreter finds a place on the bench to sit down, observes the bats, and shares in the visitors' delight by imparting some humorous stories about bat and human interactions.

# Multiple Points of View

Numerous positions from which something is considered or evaluated.

Examples:

Every living thing... pays heed to that call. To the deer it is a reminder of the way of all flesh, to the pine a forecast of midnight scuffles and of blood upon the snow, to the coyote a promise of gleanings to come, to the cowman the threat of red ink at the bank, to the hunter the challenge of fang against bullet.

Public policies for outdoor recreation are controversial. Equally conscientious citizens hold opposite views on what it is and what should be done to conserve its resource-base. Thus the Wilderness Society seeks to exclude roads from the hinterlands, and the Chamber of Commerce to extend them, both in the name of recreation. The game-farmer kills the hawks and the bird-lover protects them in the name of shotgun and field-glass hunting respectively.

Aldo Leopold

*A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*



*One of the implications of the fact that "Resources Possess Meanings" is that each resource means different things to different people.*

# Music

Vocal, instrumental, or mechanical sounds having rhythm, melody, or harmony.

Example:

at one stop during a guided tour of the site of an ancient Native American village, the interpreter uses a native instrument to play a traditional tune.

# Mythological Reference

An allusion to a traditional story that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon.

Example:

In Greek mythology Medusa, with snakes for hair, can turn a person to stone with just a look.

Andea Dunstan,

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Freeman Tilden wrote, "Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable."

## Observation

**An act of seeing or sensing through directed careful analytic attention.**

Example:

Usually the red squirrel (*Sciurus Hudsonius*) waked me in the dawn, coursing over the roof and up and down the sides of the house, as if sent out of the woods for this purpose. In the course of the winter I threw out half a bushel of ears of sweet-corn, which had not got ripe, on to the snow crust by my door, and was amused by watching the motions of the various animals which were baited by it. All day long the red squirrels came and went, and afforded me much entertainment by their maneuvers. One would approach at first warily through the shrub-oaks, running over the snow crust by fits and starts like a leaf blown by the wind, now a few paces this way, with wonderful speed and waste of energy, making inconceivable haste with his "trotters," as if it were for a wager, and now as many paces that way, but never getting on more than half a rod at a time; and then suddenly pausing with a ludicrous expression and a gratuitous somerset, as if all the eyes in the universe were fixed on him, - for all the motions of a squirrel, even in the most solitary recesses of the forest, imply spectators as much as those of a dancing girl, -wasting more time in delay and circumspection than would have sufficed to walk the whole distance, -I never saw one walk, -and then suddenly, before you could say Jack Robinson, he would be in the top of a young pitch-pine, winding up his clock and chiding all imaginary spectators, soliloquizing and talking to all the universe at the same time...

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden and Other Writings*

## Onomatopoeia

**A word that imitates the sound it represents.**

Example:

Over my head I heard a sound of beaten air, like a million shook rugs, a muffled whuff.

Annie Dillard  
*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Example:

The rattling trumpet blares of sandhill cranes; the thwarp thwarp of their wings vibrate the morning mist as they seek out a landing for their morning meal.

Joy Campbell  
*Okefenokee Adventures*

## Oxymoron

**A combination of contradictory or incongruous words.**

Example: synthetic natural gas

## Paradox

**Reveals a kind of truth which at first seems contradictory.**

Example:

The longest journey begins with a single step, not with the turn of the ignition key.

Edward Abbey  
*The Journey Home*

## Parallel

**Something equal or similar in all essential particulars.**

Example:

My bricks being second-hand ones required to be cleaned with a trowel, so that I learned more than usual of the qualities of bricks and trowels. The mortar on them was fifty years old, and was said to be still growing harder; but this is one of those sayings which men love to repeat whether they are true or not. Such sayings themselves grow harder and adhere more firmly with age, and it would take many blows with a trowel to clean an old wiseacre of them.

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden and Other Writings*

## Period Clothing

**Garments representing a particular historic stage of culture.**

Example:

Interpreters who are demonstrating frontier skills wear period clothing to add to the historic effect, and to serve as props in themselves.

*Freeman Tilden wrote,  
"The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction,  
but provocation."*



# Personification

**Giving human qualities to animals or objects.**

Example:

Like many another treaty of restraint, the pre-dawn pact lasts only as long as darkness humbles the arrogant. It would seem as if the sun were responsible for the daily retreat of reticence from the world. At any rate, by the time the mists are white over the lowlands, every rooster is bragging ad lib, and every corn shock is pretending to be twice as tall as any corn that ever grew. By sun-up every squirrel is exaggerating some fancied indignity to his person, and every jay proclaiming with false emotion about suppositious dangers to society, at this very moment discovered by him. Distant crows are berating a hypothetical owl, just to tell the world how vigilant crows are, and a pheasant cock, musing perhaps on his philanderings of bygone days, beats the air with his wings and tells the world in raucous warning that he owns this marsh and all the hens in it.

Aldo Leopold

*A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*

*Some techniques may lend themselves best to creating opportunities for emotional connections, while some might lend themselves to intellectual connections.*



# Photograph

**A picture or likeness obtained by the process of producing images on a sensitized surface by the action of radiant energy.**

Example:

An interpreter carries a photograph in her pocket. It shows the park setting 150 years ago, when only a few coconut palms dotted the otherwise treeless island. When visitors inquire about why the Caussyrina trees are being burned by resource management, the photograph helps her explain how invasive exotics have altered the landscape.

# Poetry

**Metrical writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm.**

Example:

The morns are meeker than they were,  
The nuts are getting brown;  
The berry's cheek is plumper,  
The rose is out of town.

The maple wears a gayer scarf,  
The field a scarlet gown.  
Lest I should be old-fashioned,  
I'll put a trinket on.

Emily Dickinson

*Autumn*



## Polysyndeton

**The repetition of conjunctions between clauses, often slowing the tempo or rhythm.**

Example:

I said, "Who killed him?" and he said, "I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right," and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Key and she was all right only she was full of water.

Ernest Hemingway  
*After the Storm*

## Prediction

**An act of foretelling on the basis of observation, experience, or scientific reason.**

Example:

When I passed the graveyard again on 3 August, the fence had been removed by a road crew, and the Silphium cut. It is easy now to predict the future; for a few years my Silphium will try in vain to rise above the mowing machine and then it will die. With it will die the prairie epoch.

Aldo Leopold  
*A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*

## Presentation of Evidence

**A descriptive or persuasive account of something that furnishes proof.**

Example:

Glacier National Park has approximately 50 small glaciers. The glaciers have receded since they were first described in 1901, and tree-ring studies indicate that glacial retreat began about 1850. At that time there were more than 150 glaciers within Glacier National Park.

[nrmsc.usgs.gov/research/glaciers.htm](http://nrmsc.usgs.gov/research/glaciers.htm)

## Problem Solving

**Finding an answer or explanation for a question or source of perplexity.**

Example:

An interpreter asks the group how a particular pine tree reproduces, since there are no cones to be found on the ground. The ensuing discussion reveals information about reproduction cycles and the role of wildland fires.

## Prop

**A physical aid that strengthens or supports an interpretive message.**

Example:

An interpreter brings a collection of props when visiting a school to talk about the Lewis and Clark expedition. Among the items she brings are a beaver fur, a peace medal, a reproduction journal, and a plug of tobacco.

## Proverb

**A brief popular epigram or maxim.**

Example:

A calm sea does not make a skilled sailor.

African proverb

## Pun

**The humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest different meanings.**

Example:

The parallel lines along the shoreline of Elliot Key is a result of successive high tides and waves carrying dead grasses mixed with a variety of flotsam and jetsam up onto the shore. It is called the wrack line. See the land hermit crab scurrying along looking for a new shell to move into? He gets his clothes off the wrack!

## Puppetry

**The use of small-scale figures, usually with a cloth body and a hollow head.**

Example:

Interpreters at Biscayne National Park use a puppet of a polyp on their boat trips to explain how corals work and grow. The puppet looks nothing like what most people think of when they think coral: the shape is bizarre, it is white ("colorless"), soft, and floppy: completely incapable of ripping a hole in the bottom of the ship. They use the puppet to "deconstruct the myth" of what a coral really looks like. Body parts, form and function, zooxanthellae, are all discussed using the polyp puppet.

*Sam H. Ham wrote,  
"Puppets are entertaining, versatile,  
interactive, a grabber, low-cost, and especially  
valuable when tough or controversial topics  
must be dealt with."*



## Question

**A point of debate or a proposition. Questions can be used to focus attention on something of interest, to make comparisons, to make inferences and explore possible conclusions and implications, or to think of solutions to real-world problems and issues. The examples below illustrate Rhetorical Questions, which are asked merely for effect with no answer expected.**

Example:

I am glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in. Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map?

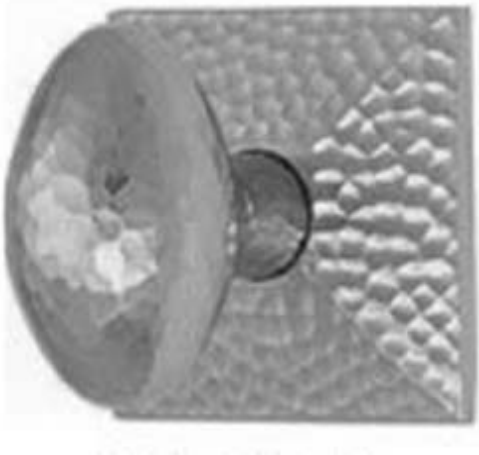
Aldo Leopold

*A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*

More Question:

How is one to live a moral and compassionate existence when one finds darkness not only in one's culture but within oneself? There are simply no answers to some of the great pressing questions. You continue to live them out, making your life a worthy expression of leaning into the light.

Barry Lopez:



*Questioning can intellectually engage the audience in the subject matter.*

## Quotation

**A passage referred to or repeated, especially in substantiation or illustration.**

Example:

It cannot but affect our philosophy favorably to be reminded of these shoals of migratory fishes, of salmon, shad, alewives, marsh-bankers, and others, which penetrate up the innumerable rivers of our coast in the spring, even to the interior lakes, their scales gleaming in the sun; and again of the fry, which in still greater numbers wend their way downward to the sea. "And is it not pretty sport," wrote Capt. John Smith, who was on this coast as early as 1614, "to pull up twopence, sixpence, and twelvecence, as fast as you can haul and veer a line?"

Henry David Thoreau  
*Walden and Other Writings*

Example:

This dilemma was eloquently expressed by Harriet Farley, a Lowell mill girl: "Each new invention was looked upon as a portent from the evil one for our destruction... yet think of the toil which would befall us were we to return to clothing the nations by hand."

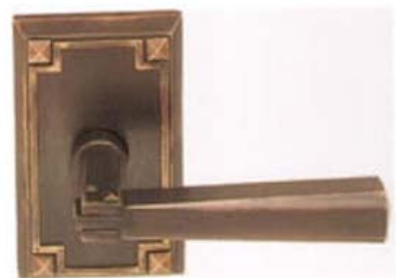
Tess Shatzer, NPS

## Quiz

**A short oral or written test.**

Example:

An interpreter engages the audience before he begins his formal talk by asking the group to jot down the answers to four or five pertinent and intriguing questions. As he reviews the answers with the group, he is also setting up the outline for his talk.



*Words from an historic person help bring the past to life.*

## Reenactment

**A reenactment is the staging of a performance which repeats the actions of an earlier event or incident.**

Example:

At a special event at an American Revolution park, a reenactment features a drill by interpreters pretending to be 18<sup>th</sup> century militia members, and a subsequent inspection by their captain.

## Referring to Authority

**Directing attention to a conclusive statement from an individual cited or appealed to as an expert.**

Example:

"If Lewis and Clark had died on the trail, it wouldn't have mattered a bit," says Notre Dame University historian Thomas Slaughter, author of the forthcoming *Exploring Lewis and Clark: Reflections on Men and wilderness*.

David Plotz

*Lewis and Clark: Stop Celebrating. They Don't Matter*

## Repetition

**The act of expressing again in the same words, terms, or form.**

Example:

I see the creek pour down. It spills toward me streaming over a series of sandstone tiers, **down, and down, and down.**

Annie Dillard

*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Example:

Contemporary with the whole race of men, and older than the first man, Niagara is strong, and fresh to-day as ten thousand years ago... In that long—long time, never still for a moment. Never dried, never froze, never slept, never rested."

Journal of Abraham Lincoln:

## Rhyme

**A correspondence in terminal sounds of units of composition or utterance.**

Example:

You have brains in your head  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
Any direction you choose.  
You're on your own.  
And you know what you know.  
And YOU are the one who'll  
Decide where to go...

Dr. Seuss

*Oh! The Places You'll Go*

# Rhythm

**The flow of sound and silence.**

Example:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going to heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.,

Charles Dickens  
*Tale of Two Cities*

# Role Playing

**“Stage” representation of a socially expected behavior pattern usually determined by an individual’s status in a particular society.**

Example:

At one stop on a guided hike, the interpreter gives each audience member an index card with a quote printed on it. The quotes reflect the conflicting views from the early 20th century, when the establishment of the park in which the group is hiking was being hotly debated. Audience members take turns reading their quote, and then discussing their “opinions”.



*Placement of silences can reflect sadness or simplicity, while running sentences together can reflect desperation or excitement.*

# Sarcasm

**A mode of satirical wit depending for its effect on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language.**

Example:

Water, water, water... There is no shortage of water in the desert but exactly the right amount, a perfect ratio of water to rock, of water to sand, insuring that wide, free, open, generous spacing among plants and animals, homes and towns and cities, which makes the arid West so different from any other part of the nation. There is no lack of water here, unless you try to establish a city where no city should be.

Edward Abbey  
*Desert Solitaire*

# Scavenger Hunt

**A scavenger hunt is an activity in which participants are tasked with finding articles which are challenging to locate.**

Example:

An interpreter in a natural park gives students a scavenger hunt list. The students are not given the actual names of the items but only clues, and are challenged to figure out, as well as locate the item. Asked to find a drinking straw, one student might come up with the answer “tree roots”. For protective armor, one

*Freeman Tilden wrote, “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.”*



# Self-Referencing

**Getting people in the audience to think about themselves and their own experiences as you give them new information. This makes them relate to that information at a personal level, and increases the likelihood that they will pay attention to it, understand it, and be able to remember it later. It helps them to connect the new ideas you’re giving them with something they already care about, themselves.**

Example:

How many of you like to skip stones across water? Have you ever noticed that the best skipping stones are found near rivers? Why is that, do you think? That’s right, they’re smooth and polished from the water’s current... just the way wood is smooth after you rub it with sandpaper. And if you’ve ever used sandpaper on a piece of wood, you know that all that rubbing can cause quite a mess. “Sediment” is just another word for the mess.”

Sam H. Ham  
*Environmental Interpretation*

# Sensory Experience

**Direct participation by sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch. People learn better when they are using as many senses as appropriate.**

Example:

On a guided walk through a forest, an interpreter encourages group members to close their eyes and differentiate and describe the bark of different trees, using only their sense of touch. members to close their eyes and describe the bark of different trees, using only their sense of touch.

## Show and Tell

Exhibiting an item and providing some information about it.

Example:

An interpreter presents a program about early settlers traveling west in wagon trains. In preparation for discussing the material items the settlers carried with them, she asks each audience member to discuss an item that they find indispensable to contemporary travel.

## Silence

Forbearance from speech or noise. A pause in speech can reinforce an important point.

Example:

An interpreter tells the story of a soldier's involvement in WWII. After conveying the circumstances of a particularly poignant adventure, the interpreter states, "The soldier remembered the details of that day for the rest of his life." After which he refrains from speaking again for several long moments.

*Various Techniques may lend themselves best to different audiences and resource meanings.*



## Simile

The comparison of two unlike things using *like* or *as*.

Example:

Biscayne Bay is a very moody place. Some days, it is flat calm, and boating across can feel like flying, so clear is the water. Other days the wind kicks up creating waves that bite like teeth at a coal-black sky.

Gary Bremen, NPS

Example:

The wind, rustling the oaks and hazels, impressed us **like** a wakeful and inconsiderate person up at midnight, moving about and putting things to rights, occasionally stirring up whole drawers full of leaves at a puff. There seemed to be a great haste and preparation throughout Nature, **as** for a distinguished visitor; all her aisles had to be swept in the night, by a thousand hand-maidens, and a thousand pots to be boiled for the next day's feasting; - such a whispering bustle, **as** if ten thousand fairies made their fingers fly, silently sewing at the new carpet with which the earth was to be clothed, and the new drapery which was to adorn the trees.

Henry David Thoreau  
Walden and Other Writings

## Skit

### A brief dramatic performance.

Example:

Prior to showing a film about wilderness, an interpreter invites several audience members to join him on the stage. There he seats them as if in an automobile, and asks them to play the roles of a family on vacation. As he talks about the meanings of wilderness, he gradually removes from them the factors that make them feel safe in “civilization”, including gas power, the car’s steel shell, the roof that repels weather elements, etc.

## Song

### A short musical composition of words and music.

Example:

At a campfire program at the edge of the ocean, an interpreter leads the group in a song about sea life. The group accompanies the lyrics by playing coconuts, conch shells, and other native “instruments”.

## Specific to General

### Moving from a particular individual, situation, or relation to a characteristic of the majority .

Example:

The Eagan girl’s murder was not unusual. Other war time stories illustrate this same lack of concern or value for human life. It is difficult to comprehend how wartime deprivations endured by both soldiers and civilians could promote drastic shifts in human values and cause people to wage random acts of violence.

Melinda Day, NPS

## Statistics

### A collection of quantitative data.

Example:

The experimenters studied a single grass plant, winter rye. They let it grow in a greenhouse for four months; then they gingerly spirited away the soil—under microscopes, I imagine—and counted and measured all the roots and root hairs. In four months the plant had set forth 378 miles of roots—that’s about three miles a day—in 14 million distinct roots. This is might impressive, but when they get down to the root hairs, I boggle completely. In those same four months the rye plant created 14 *billion* root hairs, and those little strands placed end-to-end just about wouldn’t quit. In a single *cubic inch* of soil, the length of the root hairs totaled 6000 miles.

Annie Dillard

*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Example:

Amazingly, more people are struck every year by lightning than bitten by venomous snakes. Of the poisonous snakebites recorded each year, 90% occur when the person is trying to kill or harass the snake.

Andrea Durston, U.S.FWS

Of Fear and Choices



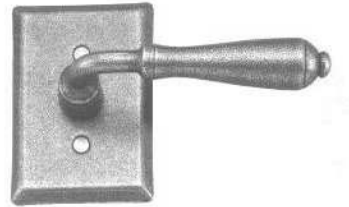
# Story

A fictional narrative shorter than a novel.

Example:

In a program about the nature of wilderness, an interpreter narrates the fable of “The Dog and The Wolf” to introduce the concepts of wildness and domesticity.

Freeman Tilden wrote,  
“Interpretation should aim to  
present a whole rather than a part,  
and must address itself to the whole  
person rather than any phase.”



# Superlative

Denoting an extreme or unsurpassed level or extent.

Example:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...

Charles Dickens  
*Tale of Two Cities*

# Symbol

An object, sign, or image that is used to stand for something else, as a flag may be used to symbolize a nation.

Example:

Thus, he who owns a veteran bur oak owns more than a tree. He owns a historical library, and a reserved seat in the theater of evolution. To the discerning eye, his farm is labeled with the badge and **symbol** of the prairie war.

Aldo Leopold  
*A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*

# Synecdoche

To use a synecdoche is to have a part represent the whole.

Example:

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears...

William Shakespeare  
*Julius Caesar*

# Team Activity

An organized, supervised pursuit in which a number of persons are associated together.

Example:

During a field trip to the seashore, an interpreter breaks the students up into several work groups. She tasks one group with sketching animals they see, another with sketching plants.

## Tension

**Striving, unrest, or imbalance within an artistic work which may provoke emotion.**

Example:

After waking up yet again to the sound of crunching overhead I asked my husband “Which do you prefer? Mice gnawing on the wood and wires or encountering a loose snake in the house?”

Andrea Durston, U.S.FWS  
Of Fear and Choices

## Testimony

**Firsthand authentication of a fact.**

Example:

It’s a huge thrill to hook a salmon—eight pounds of pure muscle and resistance, the essence of the struggle for life clearly transmitted through the taut fishing line. Yet when I land a salmon I feel an internal conflict; joyous of my success I also know I’m responsible for extinguishing the life I hold in my hands. The salmon is a gift from nature. After a hard knock on the head, I cut the gills.

Mary Price, USFWS,  
A Spirited Salmon

## Theater

**Dramatic representation intended to tell a story usually involving conflicts and emotions.**

Example:

An audience is gathered in the center of a courthouse, watching the “stage” in front of them for the speaker to begin. Their attention is drawn, however, to a character on the balcony above them to their left, who speaks to another character appearing across the room. Other characters have been planted in the audience, and soon a play is taking place all around them.

*Interpretation Facilitates the  
Connections between the  
Meanings of the Resource  
and the Interests of the  
Visitors.*



## Theme

**An organizational, rather than a presentation technique. A theme is a single sentence that expresses meaning.**

Example:

The care of rivers is not a question of rivers, but of the human heart.

Tanaka Shozo

Example:

Win or lose, the dogsled and the team pulling it symbolize how simplicity and teamwork characterize living in the wilderness of Alaska.

John Morris, NPS  
*Season of the Dogsled*



*In IDP language, a theme is "the cohesive development of a relevant idea."*

## Tone

**Style or manner of expression in speaking or writing.**

Examples:

Farmers are respectable and interesting to me in proportion as they are poor, - poor farmers. A model farm! where the house stands like a fungus in a muck-heap, chambers for men, horses, oxen, and swine, cleansed and uncleansed, all contiguous to one another! Stocked with men! A great grease-spot, redolent of manures and buttermilk! Under a high state of cultivation, being manured with the hearts and brains of men! As if you were to raise your potatoes in the churchyard! Such is a model farm.

As for the Pyramids, there is nothing to wonder at in them so much as the fact that so many men could be found degraded enough to spend their lives constructing a tomb for some ambitious booby, whom it would have been wiser and manlier to have drowned in the Nile, and then given his body to the dogs.

Henry David Thoreau  
*Waldon and Other Writings*

## Tools

**Instruments, resources and apparatuses that facilitate learning.**

Example:

An interpreter leading a guided walk through a natural area carries in his backpack bird, mineral and plant identification books, several pairs of binoculars, and magnifying glasses.

## Trip-Hammer

**A repeated word, phrase, or gesture that serves to reinforce a concept.**

Example:

Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth.

Abraham Lincoln:

More Trip-Hammer:

**I have a dream** that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”

**I have a dream** that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brother hood.

**I have a dream** that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

Martin Luther King, Jr.  
*I Have a Dream Speech*

## Voice Modulation

**Changes in the inflection of tone or pitch of the voice.**

Example:

A storyteller whispers when telling a secret, uses a falsetto when saying the words of a goldfinch, and speaks in a deep, slow tone when telling of the falling dusk.

## Word Choice

**A deliberate selection of words to produce a particular effect.**

Example:

After failing to bludgeon his way into Petersburg in June and July, Grant decided to strangle the city instead.

John Hennessy  
*Petersburg Waysides*

## Word Picture

**A description so vivid or graphic as to suggest a mental image or give an accurate idea of something.**

Example:

On a walk through the Acre, one might hear the driving beat of Latino music and smell native foods like sousi pa, kai lao, cabbage, and taskebap. Southeast Asian and Greek restaurants coexist on the same block. The steeple of St. Patrick’s Irish Catholic Church reflects in the golden Byzantine dome of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church. There is diversity in the faces of children who speak English while playing with friends, but answer their parents in Khmer, Spanish, or Portugese.

Amy Glowacki, NPS  
*The Acre*

## Word Play

**Verbal wit.**

Examples:

When Meriwether Lewis and William Clark pushed up the Missouri River in 1804, Big Muddy was both a portal to the unknown and a cloudy cocktail of islands, oxbows, and shifting sands that threatened to **sink the expedition** from the start.

A mapmaker re-creates the river of 1804 and changes the **course** of history.

Cathy Riggs Salter  
*National Geographic “Lewis and Clark’s Lost Missouri”*



**The Interpretive Development Program sets standards of excellence and provides learning resources that motivate and enable interpreters to create opportunities for the public to form their own meaningful connections with National Parks.**



## **Space For additional Techniques:**