

# Foundations of Interpretation

## Classroom Training Packet



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## Introduction

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Every interpreter needs a firm grounding in the foundations of interpretation. Understanding why we do interpretation, what interpretation is, what skills interpreters need and how to do interpretation fuels interpreters' recognition of the importance of their role in the visitor experience.

By training interpreters in the foundations of interpretation you are providing them with the context they need to develop meaningful interpretive products and services. The artistic nature of interpretation means that there are multiple ways to create interpretive products and services. But elements of every art are teachable. In providing training on the foundations of interpretation you are providing interpreters with the basic tools of our profession, tools they will need to become master interpreters.

### How to Use this Manual

This manual provides five basic elements to support your informal visitor contacts classroom training. It includes:

- A Lesson Plan
- Four PowerPoint presentations
- Three Activity Sheets
- One Training Evaluation

### Lesson Plan

The lesson plan is structured to guide the class in answering four basic questions about interpretation: why do we do interpretation, what is interpretation, what skills do interpreters need and how do we do interpretation. The lesson plan includes suggested activities and references possible content for PowerPoint presentations. Estimated time requirements are provided for each section so that you may select pieces that support your training strategy, rather than using the entire lesson.

### PowerPoint Presentations

The content for the two PowerPoint presentations included in the lesson plan is located in the appendix. You may add to or modify any of this content to meet your staff's training needs. The complete PowerPoint presentations are available to download on the Interpretive Development Program website at [www.nps.gov/interp.idp](http://www.nps.gov/interp.idp).

### Activity Sheets

Throughout the lesson plan, participants are asked to practice their learning through a series of activities. The activity sheets may be found in the appendix and are intended to be printed and distributed to training participants.

### Supporting Content

Extensive curriculum content has been developed by subject matter experts to aid interpreters' understanding of the foundations of interpretation. Supporting materials are intended to provide background content for the lessons you will present during a training session. These materials may be printed for future reference by training participants. The supporting content is available to download on the Interpretive Development Program website at [www.nps.gov/interp/idp](http://www.nps.gov/interp/idp).

### Evaluation

The evaluation found at the end of the manual was designed to solicit feedback from the participants on how to improve the training materials and delivery. It may be modified to meet your specific needs. Any feedback on the usefulness of these materials, either from you as the trainer or from the training participants themselves, would be appreciated. Please email completed evaluations or comments in any format to [Katie\\_Bliss@nps.gov](mailto:Katie_Bliss@nps.gov).

## **Objectives**

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At the end of the session, participants should have an understanding of the following:

- The importance of providing interpretive services
- The philosophy of interpretation
- The skills needed to be an interpreter
- What the interpretive process is

## **Materials**

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The following materials may be necessary in order to complete an effective training.

- A tangible item (actual park resources or replicas/representations of park resources if necessary) for each participant. You may also ask each participant to bring their own tangible park resource (or a replica/representation of it) to the training. If you choose this option be sure to bring a few tangible items in case some participants forget.
- Copies of handouts in Appendix B. One for each participant.

## Lesson Plan

---

**Number of Activities:** 3 (plus 4 PowerPoint presentations)

**Total Time:** 2.25 hours

**Introduction:** You're attending a training session on the foundations of interpretation because you may be developing and delivering interpretive products and services. Before you begin you need a clear understanding of why we do interpretation. The reason we interpret our resources is to help visitors discover and understand the national significance and personal relevance of our sites. We hope that by helping visitors care about the resource, they will help care for it. Helping visitors develop a stewardship ethic is central to the NPS mission.

**PowerPoint:** Why do we do interpretation?

**Time:** 10 minutes

NOTE: See *Appendix A.1* to view the content of the *Why do we do interpretation PowerPoint* presentation.

**Transition:** We've just gone over the official reasons we do interpretation but to be an effective interpreter, you should know the personal reason or reasons you do interpretation. The personal passion you have for interpretation is an important element of effective interpretation. Tilden identified it as the "priceless ingredient" in interpretation. Identifying the source of your interpretive passion will help you facilitate meaningful experiences for visitors.

**Activity:** (To help participants identify their personal reasons for wanting to develop interpretive products and services, ask participants to reflect on their interpretive passion. A handout is available in Appendix B.1.) Let's take the next 10 minutes to reflect on our personal reasons for doing interpretation and our interpretive passion. (10 minutes later) Would anyone like to share their reason for doing interpretation with us? (Spend about 5 minutes sharing responses so participants can benefit from hearing what motivates their peers.)

**Time:** 15 minutes

**Transition:** Now that we have a common understanding of why we do interpretation and have had a chance to reflect on our personal motivations for interpreting, let's take a look at exactly what interpretation is.

**PowerPoint:** What is interpretation?

**Time:** 10 minutes

NOTE: See *Appendix A.2* to view the content of the *What is interpretation PowerPoint* presentation.

**Transition:** The idea of linking a tangible resource to its intangible meanings may be new for some of you. Even for those of us more familiar with the idea, practice is always helpful.

**Activity:** Each of you has a tangible resource in front of you. Briefly describe the tangible resource and then take 5 minutes to brainstorm a list of intangible meanings that resource could represent. (See Appendix B.2 for a handout)

(7 minutes later) Now that you have a list of intangible meanings, get with a partner and try to add to each other's intangible meanings list. Spend about 5 minutes on each list.

(10 minutes later) When you feel like you have a solid list of intangible meanings, each team should spend 5 minutes examining the lists to identify which of the intangible meanings are universal concepts.

(10 minutes later) Let's talk about this exercise. How did it feel to brainstorm that list of intangibles? What was it like trying to identify universal concepts? What do you think about the idea of linking tangible resources to their intangible meanings instead of trying to share lots of interesting information about the resource? (spend about 10 minutes debriefing on this exercise, especially for classes that are not familiar with the IDP process)

**Time:** 40 minutes

### **Break**

**Time:** at least 10 minutes

**Transition:** So we've covered why we do interpretation (ask the class to list the 3 reasons we do interpretation: to fulfill the NPS mission, to reveal national significance and to facilitate discovery of personal relevance). And we talked about what interpretation is (ask class what it is: a catalyst in creating opportunities for visitors to form their own intellectual and emotional connections done by linking a tangible resource with its intangible meanings). But we haven't discussed what skills you need to link tangible resources with intangible meanings. So let's take a look at the skills you need to cultivate as an interpreter.

**PowerPoint:** What skills do interpreters need?

**Time:** 25 minutes

**NOTE:** See *Appendix A.3* to view the content of the *What skills do interpreters need* PowerPoint presentation.

**Activity:** There is a lot to knowledge of the resource, audience and appropriate techniques. For the next 10 minutes take some time to think about where you need to focus your skill building efforts right now. (See Appendix B.3 for a handout)

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Transition:** The interpretive equation shows us the components of an interpretive opportunity but it doesn't document the actual process used when developing interpretive products and services. Interpretation is a very creative process, and there

are various approaches to developing interpretive services. The Interpretive Process Model provides a framework for interpreters. It's a useful tool for novice interpreters and a nice reminder of the essential steps of developing interpretation for everyone.

**Powerpoint:** Interpretive Process Model

**Time:** 15 minutes

**NOTE:** See *Appendix A.4* to view the content of the *Interpretive Process Model PowerPoint* presentation.

**Conclusion:** The process model is a tool to help preserve our national parks. Interpretive products and services play an essential role in fulfilling the mission of the National Park Service. Interpreters facilitate opportunities for visitors to discover and understand the personal relevance and national significance of our sites. Without this visitor discovery and understanding, the preservation of the national parks is threatened. The concepts you have learned in this training session and the interpretive products and services you develop and deliver are powerful tools that shape meaningful visitor experiences. As Margaret Mead noted, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Your role as an interpreter helps preserve the national parks, visitor by visitor.

See *Appendix C* for an evaluation that may be used with any seasonal training sessions based on these Foundations of Interpretation materials.



## Appendix A: PowerPoint Contents

## Appendix A.1: Why do we do interpretation PowerPoint Content

---

### Page One

Why do we do interpretation? (title page)

### Page Two

Through interpretation, understanding,  
Through understanding, appreciation,  
Through appreciation, preservation.

### Page Three

#### 3 Fundamental Reasons for Interpretation

- To fulfill the NPS mission of conserving resources while providing for their enjoyment in an “unimpaired” way.
- To help reveal the national significance of our resources.
- To help visitors understand the personal relevance of our resources.

### Page Four

#### The NPS Mission

...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

-NPS Organic Act 1916

### Page Five

#### Fulfilling the NPS Mission

- Interpretative products and services enhance visitor enjoyment of the resources.
- Providing visitors with opportunities to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the significance of a site should help them care about the site.
- Caring about a site is the first step toward caring for it.

### Page Six

#### Revealing National Significance

- The resources at your site possess meaning at a national level or they would not be national parks.
- Interpretive services and products help visitors understand why a site is a national park.
- Developing understanding of the national significance of a site is essential to ensuring its preservation through continued protected status.

### Page Seven

#### Discovering Personal Relevance

- Visitors are seeking something of value for themselves.



- Interpretation facilitates a connection between the interests of the visitor and the significance and relevance of the park.
  - The primary goal is not to provide information, but to provide access to these meanings
  - The interpreter must be able to subjugate his or her own passions for and understandings of the resource in order to allow the audience to form theirs
- As Freeman Tilden noted, the visitor “may be there for the explicit hope that you will reveal to him why he is there.”

Page Eight

In the end, we conserve only what we love.

We will love only what we understand.

We will understand only what we are taught.

- Baba Dioum, Senegalese poet

## Appendix A.2: What is interpretation PowerPoint Content

### Page One

What is interpretation?

### Page Two

#### National Park Service Definition

Interpretation is “a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings and significance inherent in the resource” (National Park Service, 2001)

### Page Three

#### Intellectual and Emotional Connections

insert intellectual and emotional graphic

It is important to provide opportunities to connect in both ways.

### Page Four

To provide an opportunity to connect with the significance and relevance of the resource you must ...

Link a **tangible resource** to an **intangible meaning** it represents.

### Page Five

Tangible resources are the physical elements of a site.

They are things you can:

- See
- Touch
- Taste
- Hear
- Smell

### Page Six

Intangible meanings are abstract concepts.

They include:

- Ideas
- Feelings
- Relationships
- Values
- Beliefs

Page Seven

Some intangible meanings are universal concepts, concepts to which everyone can relate but no two people see exactly the same way.

Examples include:

- Love
- Death
- Freedom
- Justice
- Passion
- Hate
- Adventure
- Tragedy
- Grace
- Joy
- Sorrow
- Birth
- Mystery
- Change
- Family
- Tradition
- Jealousy
- Sacrifice

Page Eight

So what is interpretation?

Interpretation, at its core, is a bridge between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitors.

- It connects the tangible resources of a site to the intangible concepts they can represent.
- It is the interpreter's role to ensure that those connections are built around the interests of the visitor.

## Appendix A.3: What skills do interpreters need? PowerPoint Content

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### Page One

What skills do interpreters need?

### Page Two

Visualizing the Components  
(KR + KA) AT = IO

Knowledge of the Resource,  
plus Knowledge of the Audience,  
times Appropriate Technique(s),  
equals an Interpretive Opportunity

### Page Three

Knowledge of the Resource

- Includes knowledge of the tangible resources and their intangible meanings
- Interpreters must understand many different perspectives about the resources to offer opportunities for visitors to understand the personal relevance of the site.
- To be most effective you should use your knowledge to convey your site's primary interpretive themes.

### Page Four

To build knowledge of your resource you will need to:

- Immerse yourself in the resource
- Read a wide variety of written information
- Be aware of recent and on-going research about your resources
- Talk to experts
- Know the local news

### Page Five

Knowledge of the Audience

- Essential to providing opportunities for visitors to form their own intellectual and emotional connections

You should know:

- Who is and is not visiting your site
- Why people visit your site
- What visitors to your site expect
- What visitors to your site need
- What visitors to your site are experiencing
- What visitors to your site are interested in
- What visitors to your site believe in and value.

Page Six

- Sources to build knowledge of your audience include:
- Site visitor surveys and demographic studies
- Site supervisors, historians, planners, and colleagues
- Local, national, and international news
- Textbooks, journals, and websites
- Personal observation log

Page Seven

Appropriate Techniques

An interpretive technique is a skill (like telling a story, asking a question, or using an analogy) that helps connect the physical resources of a site (the tangibles) to the ideas and concepts they represent (the intangibles).

Techniques must be appropriate for:

- The resource
- The audience
- The interpreter

Page Eight

Some helpful resources for learning new techniques include:

- Watching or reading other interpretation
- Supervisors and colleagues
- Books or articles about techniques

Page Nine

No matter which techniques are selected, interpretive services and products should be actively engaging. Asking thought-provoking questions can be just as interactive as having visitors participate in a hands-on activity.

Page Ten

The artist is nothing without the gift,  
but the gift is nothing without the work.  
-Emile Zola

## Appendix A.4: Interpretive Process Model PowerPoint Content

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### Scenarios

**Visitor:** It is 1:40 p.m. You have just arrived at the site. You want to find a place to walk your dog before he has an accident in your camper. You are anxious about finding a good spot to take him quickly so that you may put him back in your camper and catch the 2 p.m. tour. Approach the interpreter and ask where you can walk your dog.

**Visitor:** You have visited this site many times before. In fact, your father brought you here when you were a small child. The site means a lot to you but it has changed. You want to tell the Park Ranger how great this place used to be and discuss why it has changed so much. Approach the Ranger and ask how long they have worked at the park.

**Visitor:** You and your family are picnicking at the park. You think it would be nice to gather some wildflowers and stick them in a water bottle for your family to enjoy. You are unaware that this is not allowed. Pick some flowers and wait for the interpreter to approach you.

**Visitor:** Although you haven't necessarily come to this site to see birds, you are an avid birder and take any chance you can to see new species. You think you might have just caught a glimpse of a bird you have never seen before and didn't expect to see here. You really want to verify its identity and learn more about why it would be here. Approach the interpreter and ask if there is a bird list for the site.



## Appendix B: Activity Handouts

## **Appendix B.1: Interpretive Passion Activity**

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Distribute a copy of the following handout to each of the participants in your training session.

## My Interpretive Passion

The goal of National Park Service (NPS) interpretive and educational programming is to provide memorable and meaningful learning and recreational experiences, foster development of a personal stewardship ethic, and broaden public support for preserving park resources. Such programs will be successful when they forge emotional and intellectual connections among park resources, visitors, the community, and park management... Interpretation and education is the key to preserving both the idea of national parks and the park resources themselves.

-Director's Order #6

As an interpreter, you are the key to the preservation of national parks. Through your words and actions you can inspire and provoke countless visitors to care about and for park resources by providing them with opportunities to form their own intellectual and emotional connections to the national significance and personal relevance of your site.

In order to inspire others, you should be aware of your own inspiration. Take a moment to reflect on the reason(s) you interpret. Did you attend an interpretive program that changed the way you look at the world? Is there a place that has such meaning for you that you want to help others connect to the meanings a site can hold? Do you want to protect the environment or preserve history? In the space below, write 3-4 paragraphs about why you do interpretation and what you are trying to accomplish as an interpreter.

## **Appendix B.2: Tangibles, Intangibles and Universals Activity**

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Make a copy of the following handout for each training participant

### Tangible Resources, Intangible Meanings and Universal Concepts

1. Describe your tangible resource:
  
2. For five minutes brainstorm a list of intangible meanings in the space provided below.
  
3. Get with another class member to complete your lists of intangible meanings. You should spend 5 minutes rounding out each list.
  
4. Together with your partner, determine which intangible meanings on each list are universal concepts and record them in the space provided below. The lists of universal concepts should be shorter than the intangible meanings lists. Spend 5 minutes on each list.

<i>Intangible Meanings</i>	<i>Universal Concepts</i>

Examples of universal concepts include:

- |           |             |             |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| • Love    | • Adventure | • Mystery   |
| • Death   | • Tragedy   | • Change    |
| • Freedom | • Grace     | • Family    |
| • Justice | • Joy       | • Tradition |
| • Passion | • Sorrow    | • Jealousy  |
| • Hate    | • Birth     | • Sacrifice |

## **Appendix B.3: Skills Activity**

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Distribute a copy of the following handout to each of the participants in your training session.



### Skill Building Ideas

In the next 10 minutes identify what type of knowledge you feel you need to acquire and how you will go about gaining that knowledge. This is the first step toward building your skills as an interpreter. Take the next step and discuss your ideas with your supervisor so that you can develop a skill building plan together.

The tables below contain ideas to get you started. Use the space in each table to document what type of knowledge you need and an effective way for gaining that knowledge.

#### Knowledge of the Resource

<i>Types of Knowledge</i>	<i>How to Gain Knowledge</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tangible features</li> <li>• Intangible concepts (relationships, systems, processes, human values)</li> <li>• Park history</li> <li>• Park research</li> <li>• Multiple points-of-view of park history, tangibles and intangibles</li> <li>• Current park conditions</li> </ul> <p>I feel I need to know more about....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immerse yourself in the resource</li> <li>• Read a wide variety of written information</li> <li>• Review recent and on-going research about your resources</li> <li>• Talk to experts</li> <li>• Know the local news</li> </ul> <p>I will gain this knowledge by.....</p>

#### Knowledge of the Audience

<i>Types of Knowledge</i>	<i>How to Gain Knowledge</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic characteristics</li> <li>• Needs</li> <li>• Motivations</li> <li>• Interests</li> <li>• Expectations</li> <li>• Beliefs</li> <li>• Values</li> <li>• Experiences</li> </ul> <p>I feel I need to know more about....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site visitor surveys and demographic studies</li> <li>• Site supervisors, historians, planners, and colleagues</li> <li>• Local, national, and international news</li> <li>• Textbooks, journals, and websites</li> <li>• Personal observation log</li> </ul> <p>I will gain this knowledge by.....</p>

Continued on the next page

**Skill Building Ideas**  
(continued)

**Knowledge of Appropriate Techniques**

<i>Types of Knowledge</i>	<i>How to Gain Knowledge</i>
<p>Techniques must be appropriate for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The resource</li> <li>• The audience</li> <li>• The interpreter</li> </ul> <p>I feel I need to know more about techniques that are appropriate for ....</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watching or reading other interpretation</li> <li>• Supervisors and colleagues</li> <li>• Books or articles about techniques</li> </ul> <p>I will gain this knowledge by.....</p>





## Appendix C: Foundations of Interpretation Training Evaluation

The training you received on the foundations of interpretation is being designed for use by parks throughout the Service. Please take 10 minutes to provide feedback on this training so that the materials can be improved.

### Interpretive Passion Activity

1. I will apply the information in this activity in my work. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. The activity increased my commitment to the profession of interpretation. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. This training increased my understanding of why we do interpretation. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. Please comment on the strengths of the interpretive passion activity.

5. Please suggest ways to improve the interpretive passion activity.

### Tangibles, Intangibles and Universals Activity

1. I was able to easily identify the intangible meanings of my tangible resource. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. I was able to easily identify the universal concepts my tangible resource represents. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5                    6                    7

3. The activity increased my understanding of tangible and intangible links. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5                    6                    7

3. This training increased my understanding of what interpretation is. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5                    6                    7

4. I will apply the information received on tangibles and intangibles in my work. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5                    6                    7

5. The what is interpretation portion of the training was useful. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree  
1                    2                    3                    4                    5                    6                    7

6. Please comment on the strengths of the tangibles, intangibles and universals activity.

7. Please suggest ways to improve the activity.

8. Please comment on the strengths of the what is interpretation portion of the training.



9. Please suggest ways to improve the what is interpretation portion of the training.

**Skills Activity**

1. I will apply the information in this activity in my work. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree						strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. I feel like my plans for gaining knowledge are useful. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree						strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. I will review this activity with my supervisor. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree						strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. I understand the skills needed by interpreters. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree						strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. Please comment on the strengths of the skill building activity.

6. Please suggest ways to improve the skill building activity.

**Interpretive Process Model**

1. I will apply the information on the Interpretive Process Model in my work. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree						strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. I think the Interpretive Process Model is a useful tool. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. I understand what the interpretive process is. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. Please comment on the strengths of the training you received on the Interpretive Process Model.

5. Please suggest ways to improve the training you received on the Interpretive Process Model.

**Overall Training**

1. My understanding of the foundations of interpretation was improved by attending this training. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. Please comment on the strengths of the training.

3. Please suggest ways to improve the training.



The Foundations of Interpretation provides the learner with the fundamental theories and practices of effective interpretation and is ideal for those new to the field or simply interested in a refresher on interpretation concepts. + See More. Course Schedule. Log in. Get started. Foundations of Interpretation. LS. Published with reusable license by Lauren Swanson.Â Interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meaning inherent in the resource. Basically, people will take better care of things that they care about. <http://www.interpnet.com/>. Your job as an interpreter is to Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation seeks to identify and clarify the basic problems of interpretation that affect our reading of the Bible today....Â Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation seeks to identify and clarify the basic problems of interpretation that affect our reading of the Bible today. These six books cover the interface between hermeneutics and the major disciplines. 5.0 out of 5 stars The Rorschach, Basic Foundations and Principles of Interpretation Volume 1 (Hardcover). Reviewed in the United States on January 6, 2014. Verified Purchase.Â Whole of Part four is dedicated to the interpretation of the Rorschach test. Here Dr. Exner starts with general guidelines regarding interpretation, followed by controls and stress tolerance, institutionally related stress, affect and information processing.