



Informal Visitor Contacts

Training Packet
May 2006



Informal Visitor Contacts

Training Packet



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Introduction

As a professional interpreter and trainer, you already know the importance of conducting effective informal visitor contacts. Visitors can receive orientation, information, and interpretation in a variety of ways, but it is only through the informal visitor contact that the visitors receive individualized attention tailored to their needs.

A trained interpreter should be able to read visitor cues and combine their in-depth resource knowledge with appropriate techniques to facilitate enjoyable visitor experiences. Such well-crafted, responsive interactions offer visitors what they need just when they need it. That means an interpreter knows not only how to meet the visitors' comfort and safety needs, but also how to satisfy their curiosity or help them in their quest for understanding, inspiration, meaning, rejuvenation, or solace. By meeting visitor needs, interpreters are facilitating enjoyable visitor experiences. In turn, these experiences may motivate visitors to help protect and preserve our precious resources.

How to Use this Manual

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

- A Lesson Plan
- Two PowerPoint presentations
- Three Activity Sheets
- Three Units of Supporting Content
- One Training Evaluation

Lesson Plan

The lesson plan is structured to guide the class through the four elements of effective informal visitor contacts: quality customer service, assessing visitor needs, knowledge of the site, and using appropriate interpretive techniques. 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. Or you can request a copy of the PowerPoint presentations from Mather Training Center.

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 how to meet professional standards for informal visitor contacts. Supporting materials on Customer Service, the Interpretive Continuum and Visitor Cues are intended to provide background content for the lessons you will present during a training session. These materials may also be printed for future reference by training participants.

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.

Objectives

At the end of the session, participants will be able to do the following:

- Design high quality customer service strategies
- Apply the concepts of the interpretive continuum to informal visitor contacts
- Use knowledge of the audience and resource to select appropriate techniques.
- Develop interpretive opportunities for informal visitor contacts

Materials

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

- Assistants to help stage informal visitor contact situations OR self referencing questions for the class that get them to describe informal visitor contacts they have experienced as a visitor
- Flip chart or board to write brainstorm responses on
- Markers
- Hand outs (customer service activity, body language translations, knowing your site activity, informal visitor contact techniques activity)
- Projector for PowerPoints
- Index cards
- Visitor cues activity instructions

Lesson Plan

Number of Activities: 8 (plus 2 PowerPoint presentations)

Total Time: 3.25 hours

Introduction: Informal Visitor Contacts are a big part of what we do as interpreters—from staffing the visitor center desk, to roving the park trails, to answering questions at the fee booth or after a program. They also tend to be one of the most challenging and most rewarding parts of our job—most challenging because they require a lot of knowledge and skill, most rewarding because we get to interact with the visitor in a more spontaneous and personal way. Our understanding of customer service, the visitor's needs, our resources, and interpretive techniques are all essential to making these informal contacts effective in meeting the needs of the visitor and our park, and in laying the foundation for becoming effective interpreters.

Transition: So what does an effective informal visitor contact look like?

Activity: To help participants understand what an informal visitor contact might look like, begin by role playing staged informal visitor contact situations typical of your site with another staff member: perhaps role play an interpreter answering a visitor's question about where they should go for dinner, or an interpreter approaching someone looking at a map in a confused way or addressing someone endangering a resource due to lack of knowledge of resource issues.

Alternately, if another staff member isn't available to role play typical informal visitor contacts, participants can reflect on their own experiences as visitors:

- Ask participants to describe a situation where they needed to get directions while on vacation.
- Ask participants to describe a situation where they needed specific information to make their visit more enjoyable.

Time: 20 minutes

Transition: The scenarios you just saw/described are typical informal visitor contacts. This training session is designed to give you some skills in conducting effective informal visitor contacts. But why are informal visitor contacts important?

PowerPoint: IVC Competency Core

Time: 15 minutes

NOTE: See *Appendix A.1* to view the content of the *IVC Competency Core PowerPoint* presentation.

Supplementary Material: See *Appendix B.1* for the *Interpretive Continuum Tutorial*.

Transition: The first component of effective informal visitor contacts is providing quality customer service.

Activity 2: Brainstorm a list of essential elements to good customer service. Write responses on a flip chart or board. Perhaps include a discussion of the worst customer service to flush out things not to do as well as things to do.

Time: 10 minutes

Here are some things that you might want to make sure are on your list:

- Personal grooming
- Posture
- Attire
- Accessories
- Courteousness
- Helpfulness
- Knowledge
- Neutrality
- Objectivity
- Patience
- Personal Safety
- Body Language Skills
- Conflict Resolution
- Listening Skills
- Verbal Skills

Supplemental Material: See *Appendix B.2* for the *Customer Service Tutorial*.

Activity 3: Best Practices in Customer Service Activity Sheet

Time: 20 minutes

NOTE: See *Appendix A.2* for the Best Practices in Customer Service activity sheet.

Transition: While quality customer service is essential for effective informal visitor contacts, you also need to be able to appropriately assess a visitor's needs.

Activity 4: Imagine going on your dream vacation. What is it you want from that experience? (Write responses on flip chart.) If our class has a wide range of needs from vacation experiences, then clearly our visitors are bringing a wide range of needs with them to our site.

Time: 10 minutes

Transition: Appropriately assessing visitor needs is essential in conducting effective informal visitor contacts. Visitor cues help you not only to determine the visitor's initial needs, but also to continually evaluate your options while guiding the progression of each contact.

Supplemental Material: See *Appendix B.3* for the *Visitor Cues Tutorial*.

PowerPoint: Visitor Cues

Time: 15 minutes

NOTE: See *Appendix A.3* to view the content of the *Visitor Cues: The Driving Force* PowerPoint presentation.



Activity 5: Have pairs of participants role play informal visitor contact scenarios. If the group is large, split into smaller groups of 4 to 6 and rove through as they participate in the activity. One person will act as the visitor, using the visitor scenarios provided in *Appendix A.4: Role Play Scenarios*. Be sure this individual knows to provide cues that help reveal his or her state of mind. The other participant should play the interpreter as if in a real informal visitor contact. The role play interpreters must do their best to read and react to the visitor cues and provide for the visitor’s needs. Providing participants with a copy of the *Body Language Translations* hand out located in *Appendix A.5* will help them complete this activity.

After each scenario is played out, ask the participants playing the interpreter which visitor cues they saw. Ask the class whether they witnessed any other cues. Next, have the participants playing the visitor explain which cues they were attempting to portray and ask them to read the scenario to the class.

Finally, ask the class where they felt the visitor was along the interpretive continuum. Did they stay at the same spot on the continuum or did they move along the continuum? Did the interpreter seem to read and react to the visitor cues and continuum position appropriately? Finally, ask how easy it was to figure out what the visitor wanted.

Time: 30 minutes

Transition: Did any of you feel like you need to know more about our site to completely meet the visitors needs? The third component of effective informal visitor contacts is knowing your site. Even though an informal visitor contact is spontaneous, you can increase your ability to take the contact in different directions based on the cues you receive by enhancing your knowledge of the resource.

Activity 6: Know Your Site Activity Sheet

Time: 30 minutes

NOTE: See *Appendix A.6* for a copy of the Know Your Site activity sheet.

Transition: To move a contact from information to interpretation what do you need beyond a tangible and an intangible concept? The final component of effective informal visitor contacts is selecting appropriate interpretive techniques. There are certain techniques that are easier to use in an informal visitor contact.

Activity 7: Brainstorm a list of useful IVC techniques. When props are mentioned also brainstorm a list of useful props.

Time: 15 minutes

The list may include:

- Activity
- Analogy
- Compare and Contrast
- Demonstration
- Description
- Discussion
- Examples

Informal Visitor Contacts

- Explanation
- Illustration
- Metaphor
- Photograph
- Presentation of Evidence
- Props
- Questioning
- Quotation
- Sensory Experience
- Storytelling

Transition: Working with this list of techniques, let's revisit your frequently asked questions that would most likely lead to interpretation.

Activity 8: Informal Visitor Contact Techniques activity

Time: 30 minutes

NOTE: See *Appendix A.7* for a copy of the Informal Visitor Contact Techniques activity sheet.

Conclusion: Informal Visitor Contacts form the foundation of what we do as interpreters—from providing good customer service by assessing the visitor's needs and knowing intimate details about our site, to helping the visitor to connect intellectually and emotionally to the meanings of our park. By mastering the components of effective informal visitor contacts we gain essential tools to becoming effective interpreters—learning to meet the needs of the visitor while preserving and protecting our resources.

See *Appendix C* for an evaluation that may be used with any seasonal training sessions regarding Informal Visitor Contacts.



Appendix A.1: IVC Competency Core PowerPoint Content

Page One (title page): Informal Visitor Contacts: Competency Core

Page Two: What is an informal visitor Contact?

- An encounter between a visitor and an interpreter during which the progression is based on the visitor's needs and responses.
- The contact is highly personalized.
- The interpreter must be able to evaluate, respond and adjust to the visitor's needs during these spontaneously initiated interactions.

Page 3: Why are informal visitor contacts so important?

- Perhaps the visitor's only opportunity to interact with a park representative.
- The "visitor-centered" approach communicates respect and helps build constituency.
- Well-crafted, responsive interactions offer visitors just what they need, just when they need it.

Notes to slide:

- Emphasize how the one on one nature of informal visitor contacts allows the interpreter to better access and meet the visitor's needs.

Page 4: What types of informal visitor contacts are there?

The Interpretive Continuum (following information included in photo):

- Orientation: for the visitor about the visit
- Information: for the visitor about the resource
- Interpretation: for the benefit of the visitor for the benefit of the resource

NOTE: See *Appendix B.3* of this document for the *Interpretive Continuum Tutorial*.

Page 5: How do informal visitor contacts help fulfill the NPS mission?

- Orientation provides for the safety and security of park visitors and park resources.
- Information enhances visitor enjoyment by increasing understanding of the park resources and policies.
- Interpretive informal visitor contacts provide opportunities for the visitor to form emotional and intellectual connections to our site, increasing their enjoyment and encouraging preservation of resources.

Page 6: What are the pieces of an informal visitor contact?

- Providing Quality Customer Service
- Assessing Audience Needs
- Knowing Your Site
- Selecting Appropriate Techniques

Best Practice	Could Improve or Almost Perfect	Strengths or Weaknesses	Plan for Improvement

Appendix A.3: Visitor Cues: The Driving Force PowerPoint Content

Page One: Visitor Cues: The Driving Force

Page Two: What's the big deal about visitor cues?

- The visitor is sovereign.
- Inflicting interpretation may prevent visitors from caring about and for the resource.
- They inform how we should proceed.

Page Three: How do visitors communicate their needs?

- Verbally – statements and questions
 - Tone of Voice
- Non-verbally – body language
- Behaviors

Page Four: Verbal Communication

The question behind the question

- What time is the 1 o'clock movie?
- Are bears dangerous?
- What is here to see and do?
- Can you tell me where to go?
- What time of the year do deer turn into elk?
- Where is the orientation video?

Notes to the slide:

- Movie – Should I come early to see the movie at 1?
- Bears – Do I need to be concerned about bears here?
- See and do – Please tell me what I shouldn't miss.
- Where to go – Please tell me what I shouldn't miss.
- Time of year – I need more information about those animals out there. What are they? What is the difference between deer and elk?
- Orientation video – body language will help answer this question. If they are looking around and pointing away from you, they probably want a short answer. If they smile and lean on the VC desk, they may be trying to start a conversation about what there is to do at the park.

Page Five: Body Language

- A major part of how we communicate.
- Difficult to understand: is someone who crosses their arms bored, angry or just cold?
- Look for multiple body language cues.

Appendix A.4: Role Play Scenarios

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 A.5: Body Language Translations Handout

Visitor Cues	Possible Translations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open posture • attempts to make the body look big • frowns, sneers • threatening arm movements 	<p>dominance, authority</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no eye contact • repetitive motions such as tapping toes or drumming fingers • slouching • leaning against a wall • yawning 	<p>disinterest or readiness to proceed</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crossed arms and/or legs • looking away 	<p>defending, hiding, cold, relaxing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sweating • sudden movements • minor twitches of muscles (especially around the mouth and eyes) • fidgeting • distracted speech patterns 	<p>avoiding detection, persuasion</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts to make the body look smaller • rigidity • covering sensitive parts of the body (chin down to cover neck, arms across chest) 	<p>safety, security</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stroking chin or other parts of face • intense gaze 	<p>deciding, judging, thinking</p>



Visitor Cues	Possible Translations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arms open, palms up, legs open • looking around room • looking at speaker • relaxed posture 	<p>accepting, passive threat, aggression, supplicating, relaxing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • walking with exaggerated swing of arms • palms down • elbows out to appear wider • shakes hands with palm down • grabbing elbow and pulling in 	<p>authority, dominance</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pointing with foot, eyes or whole body leaning • gripping armrests to get up • gripped hands 	<p>desire to leave, if action is directed toward speaker this may be a desire to add to conversation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts to make the body look smaller • head down • motionless 	<p>safety, security, esteem</p>

Based on information from Straker, D. (2006). Using body language. *ChangingMinds.org*. Retrieved January 23, 2006, from http://changingminds.org/techniques/body/body_language.htm

Appendix A.6: Know Your Site Activity Sheet

Informal visitor contacts progress based on the visitors' needs. Although this spontaneity is hard to plan for, you can be prepared. Many visitors have similar questions. By developing answers for some of the questions you will receive most often, you'll have the knowledge base needed to meet the visitors' needs.

1. Develop a list of at least 10 frequently asked questions at your site. Combine your personal experience with input from your colleagues. Write each question on an index card.
2. Sort your questions into piles based on their topic. For example, your questions might fit into three topic areas: general history, troop movement, and amenities or wildlife, scenery and amenities.
3. For each topic, sort your questions based on their position along the orientation-information-interpretation continuum.

Tip	<p>"Where" questions are usually orientation opportunities. <i>Where is the bathroom?</i> <i>Where can I fish?</i> <i>Where can I see big cannons?</i></p> <p>"What" and "how" questions are usually information opportunities. <i>What kind of flower is that?</i> <i>What happened here?</i> <i>How did this valley form?</i></p> <p>"Why" questions typically offer an opportunity for interpretation. <i>Why was this site so important in the war?</i> <i>Why are all those trees dying?</i></p>
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4. Select a topic that contains questions which span the continuum. For the orientation and information questions, develop basic and in-depth answers. For the interpretive questions, identify potential tangibles and intangibles.

Orientation Questions

Frequently Asked Question	Basic Answer	In-depth Answer

Information Questions

Frequently Asked Question	Basic Answer	In-depth Answer

Interpretation Questions

Frequently Asked Question	Potential Tangibles	Potential Intangibles

Orientation Questions

Frequently Asked Question	Basic Answer	In-depth Answer

Information Questions

Frequently Asked Question	Basic Answer	In-depth Answer

Interpretation Questions

Frequently Asked Question	Potential Tangibles	Potential Intangibles



Appendix A.7: Informal Visitor Contact Techniques activity sheet

For each frequently asked question you have that could easily progress to interpretation, develop an answer designed to facilitate an opportunity for the visitor to form an intellectual or emotional connection with the meaning or significance of the resource.

Then identify the following:

- Which interpretive technique you used
- For which audience it would be appropriate
- Which type of connection you tried to facilitate (emotional and/or intellectual)
- Which tangible resources you attempted to link to which intangible meanings

Interpretive Question	Interpretive Answer
Which interpretive techniques did you choose?	
For which audiences would this be appropriate?	
Which type of connection did you attempt to facilitate?	
Which tangible resources did you attempt to link to which intangible meanings?	

Interpretive Question	Interpretive Answer
Which interpretive techniques did you choose?	
For which audiences would this be appropriate?	
Which type of connection did you attempt to facilitate?	
Which tangible resources did you attempt to link to which intangible meanings?	

Interpretive Question	Interpretive Answer
Which interpretive techniques did you choose?	
For which audiences would this be appropriate?	
Which type of connection did you attempt to facilitate?	
Which tangible resources did you attempt to link to which intangible meanings?	



Appendix B.1: The Interpretive Continuum

Welcome to the interpretive continuum tutorial. In this tutorial you will explore the differences between orientation, information, and interpretation, as well as how each applies to informal visitor contacts.

Objectives	<p>By the completion of this tutorial you will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the pieces of the interpretive continuum. • Identify the differences between orientation, information, and interpretation. • Identify the role of orientation, information, and interpretation in meeting visitor needs.
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Overview of the Interpretive Continuum

A continuum is defined as a coherent whole characterized as a collection, sequence, or progression of elements. The interpretive continuum is a sequence of informal visitor contact options.



At the orientation level, the main goal of the contact is to help visitors get their bearings and provide directions.

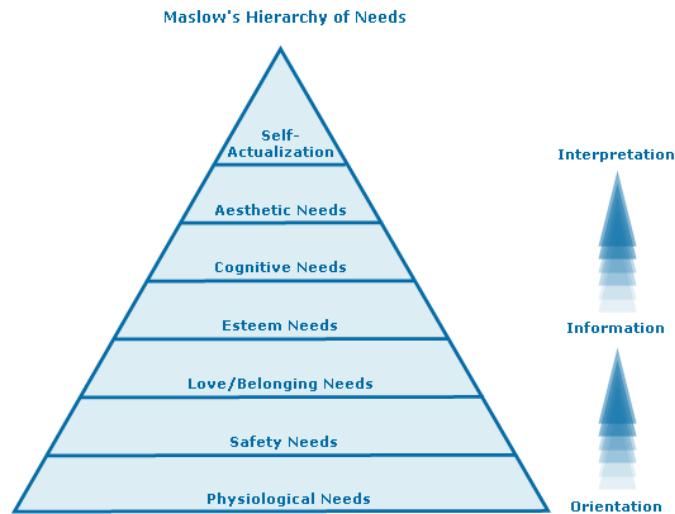
At the information level, the contact involves facts or explanations.

The interpretation level of the continuum moves beyond information and involves appropriate techniques for developing links between tangible resources and intangible concepts. This provides opportunities for visitors to form their own intellectual and/or emotional connections with the meanings and significance of the resource.

An informal visitor contact can begin at any point along the continuum. Where the contact begins is determined by the visitor and the cues they communicate. Often these cues are visitor questions.

Tip	<p>“Where” questions are usually orientation opportunities.</p> <p><i>Where is the bathroom?</i></p> <p><i>Where can I fish?</i></p> <p><i>Where can I see big cannons?</i></p>
	<p>“What” and “how” questions are usually information opportunities.</p> <p><i>What kind of flower is that?</i></p> <p><i>What happened here?</i></p> <p><i>How did this valley form?</i></p>
	<p>“Why” questions typically offer an opportunity for interpretation.</p> <p><i>Why was this site so important in the war?</i></p> <p><i>Why are all those trees dying?</i></p>

Sometimes visitor cues are non-verbal. The interpreter may see a puzzled visitor pouring over a map, or they may see someone damaging resources or feeding wildlife. Assessing visitor cues takes patience and practice. A tutorial to assist you in understanding visitor cues is available in appendix B:3 of the informal visitor contacts seasonal training packet.



The various stages of the continuum correspond closely to Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, which suggests that humans seek to fulfill needs in a hierarchical way. Physiological needs (bodily things such as air, food and water) and security (safety) needs must be taken care of before social, self esteem and personal fulfillment needs can be addressed. Applying this theory to the interpretive continuum, it

is clear that orientation needs must be met before a visitor will be receptive to an interpretive opportunity.

Defining Orientation, Information and Interpretation in Informal Visitor Contacts

Orientation

Orientation refers to concepts such as direction, location, proximity, way-finding, etc. In the orientation process, interpreters help visitors understand where they are and how to get where they need to go. Orientation may also involve helping visitors understand what opportunities are available at your site. Visitors who are properly oriented will be more likely to have a quality experience and be more open to receiving and understanding park messages. Orientation fulfills the basic needs of survival and safety. These needs must be met before visitors are willing or able to make larger connections to park resources.

Examples of Orientation Questions:



Q: Where can we go to see a condor?

A: They can be found anywhere in the Grand Canyon region and though not very predictable I can tell you that yesterday a pair were seen near the North Rim Lodge.

Information

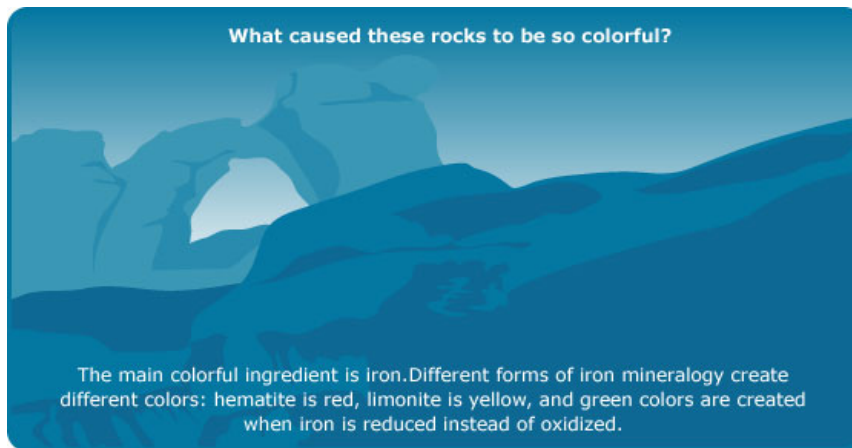
Information about the resource provides an important context for the visitor's experience, answering the questions that visitors have with tangible details about the resource. Information fulfills visitor needs for knowledge, which enhances their self-esteem. It may also fulfill belonging needs.

Interpreters have a responsibility to ensure the accuracy of all information they pass on to the public. All too often, we are guilty of accepting what we hear from others as truth. Just because you heard a co-worker say it, or heard it during an interpretive program doesn't mean it's accurate. When interpreters pass on inaccurate information – and the

audience knows it – their credibility suffers. When one interpreter is discredited, the credibility of all interpreters comes into question.

Tip	Information should be: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. current2. accepted3. thorough4. accurate5. objective
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Examples of Information Questions:



Q: How many people lived in the fort?

A: The number fluctuated seasonally, but the average was around 50 people. There were 5 gentleman officers and their families, a doctor and his family, servants, and cooks. Hundreds of other laborers lived in villages surrounding the fort.

Q: What are all those piles of wood along the road?

A: Those are slash piles waiting to be burned. Forestry crews trim back 100 feet from the road and place all of the woody debris in piles to be burned during winter.

Interpretation

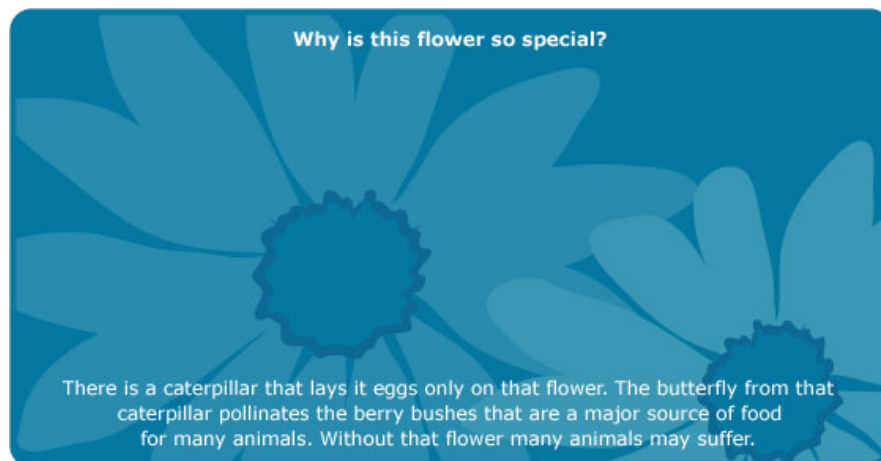
Interpretation provides opportunities for visitors to form their own meaningful connections (emotional and/or intellectual) with the resources within our parks. Interpretation meets higher-level needs for understanding and self-fulfillment. A thorough knowledge of resource information provides the tangibles to which intangible meanings can be linked. Information can be presented at increasingly complex levels, leading to an opportunity to connect audiences with resource meanings and

significance. The opportunity to interpret may arise infrequently depending upon circumstances.

You may want to be on the lookout for an appropriate opening for an interpretive opportunity. You should even occasionally test the waters to see if you can create interest in a discussion or exploration of resource meanings, rather than just waiting passively for the visitors to express interest in interpretation. This is a sophisticated but important skill – to be able to ask a question or make a provocative statement or point something out that might pique the visitor's curiosity. This may then open new avenues for the contact to proceed in ways the visitor might not have thought about on their own. It may really enrich the contact and their visit and possibly lead them to care a little bit more about the resource.

This ability to be interpretively proactive helps us develop a stewardship ethic among our visitors by contributing to the quality of the visitor experience. However, you must never impose or inflict interpretation on visitors. If you try to engage someone and they give any type of cue indicating they are not interested, do not continue with the interpretation. Always remember that some people will act interested because they are too polite to show their true feelings. If you are trying to move a contact to interpretation without a clear cue that it meets a visitor need, keenly search for any disinterested cues.

Examples of Interpretation Questions:



Q: Why did the strike start?

A: The workers were told that many of their jobs were going to be automated. Can you imagine how threatened or vulnerable you would feel if your boss told you that your job was going to be replaced by a computer? That threat of losing their job, their livelihood, and their way of life likely sparked the strikers into action.

The Basic or In-depth Distinction

The detail you provide in your answer to an orientation or information question will be either basic or in-depth. Proper reading of visitor cues will help you decide what level of detail is needed. Questions like those illustrated in the definition section of this tutorial are cues that basic orientation or information is needed. Other questions indicate that more in-depth orientation or information is needed.

Body language is another visitor cue that will help you decide what level of orientation or information to provide. A visitor that maintains eye contact, smiles and leans forward is often indicating interest in more details. A visitor looking away frequently or standing with crossed arms or legs probably does not want more details.

Orientation vs. Information vs. Interpretation

Orientation and information are similar, but not necessarily the same thing. Orientation refers to such things as direction, location, proximity, and way-finding. These elements help visitors understand where they are and how to get where they need to go. Visitors who are properly oriented will be more likely to have a quality experience and be more open to receiving and understanding park messages. Orientation fulfills the basic needs of survival and safety, needs which must be met before visitors will be able or willing to make larger connections to park resources. All orientation contains information (facts, figures, times, etc.), but not all information contains orientation. Orientation is primarily concerned with the logistics of the visitor's visit, while information focuses on visitor's questions about the resource itself.

Interpretation also contains information, of course, but interpretation refers to much more than basic or in-depth facts.



Quote	<p>Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">--Freeman Tilden</p>
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Informal interpretation is more than providing information in an interesting way. It provides information in a way that illuminates ideas and meanings in which the audience may be interested. Ultimately, informal interpretation provides opportunities for the audience to connect intellectually or emotionally with these meanings. Accomplished effectively, it inspires the audience to care about and care for park resources.

During an informal visitor contact you may move back and forth along the interpretive continuum. Sometimes a contact might start with information, move logically to interpretation of resource meanings, and then move to orientation, based on visitor cues and questions as the contact progresses. This is a true test of your sensitivity to visitor cues and needs. It involves continually applying your knowledge of the audience, knowledge of the resource and appropriate techniques, We should make the point that this is the test of the interpreter's virtuosity in using their KA, KR and AT as well as a test of their sensitivity to visitor cues and needs. We need to be able to "think on our feet" and move easily from one type of customer service to another as needed.

Applying the Continuum to an Informal Contact

There are many ways to initiate contacts; most arise naturally. Sometimes someone will walk up and ask you a question that easily leads to interpretation. Or you may see a visitor who looks confused and seems to need orientation to the park. While roving you may encounter someone violating resource protection regulations.



Tip	Maintaining your personal safety should be one of your top priorities during an informal visitor contact. Stepping away from a contact that is escalating into a confrontation and calling for backup is always appropriate.
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Each of these examples begins at a different place along the continuum. Some of the contacts may involve in-depth material, but that can only be determined based on the cues you receive from the visitor.

Tip

It is best to begin contacts on a friendly note. If a friendly manner is not appropriate be certain to remain professional and courteous in your interactions with the visitor.

If the visitor's words and actions suggest they are open to further communication, good conversational skills can carry the contact along the continuum. Answering a basic orientation question with enthusiasm, or perhaps offering an interesting fact about the site while you orient the visitor, may open up an opportunity to provide in-depth information about the resource. As the conversation progresses, you may be able to use some sort of technique to link a piece of your park to a broader concept. There are numerous techniques that interpreters can use to help connect tangibles and intangibles. For example, asking questions can help clarify the needs of the audience and can ensure that you and the visitor understand each other. Open-ended questions also give visitors the chance to develop their own, personal sense of the meaning of a resource.

Tip

It is important to ask relevant, meaningful questions when talking with visitors. Asking trivial questions shows a lack of interest in and respect for the visitor. A disinterested, insincere question will end a visitor contact very quickly.

In addition to recognizing positive signs to begin an interpretive contact, there are many cues for breaking off contact with an audience. Some may be easy to spot (the visitor says, "Thanks," and walks away), while others may be difficult to see (audience responses become increasingly short and fewer questions are asked; mere "I'm awake... sort of..." phrases like "yes" and "I see" grow more common, body positioning becomes increasing distant and oriented away from the interpreter). Looking at body language and carefully assessing interest by asking questions works very well. Similarly, when you the interpreter need to be somewhere else, it's OK to say so and leave.



Some cues to end the contact may be easy to spot.



Some cues to end a contact may be more difficult to see.



Looking at body language and carefully assessing interest by asking questions works very well. There are times when you will need to end the contact to get to your next assignment. Just courteously explain this to the visitor to end the contact.

Appendix B.2: Customer Service Tutorial

Introduction to Customer Service

It is appropriate that “service” is a part of the name of the National Park Service. Our desire to serve influences our priorities as an agency and as individuals. How we appear, act, and interact with visitors greatly affects not only the quality of their visit, but also the quality of the support our agency and our agency’s mission receives. As an interpreter for the National Park Service, superior customer service should be a top priority. To ensure that you deliver high-quality customer service you should have a plan for presenting a professional image, professional behavior, and effective interpersonal communication skills.

Exhibiting a professional image includes attention to the following:

Personal Grooming: Hair, teeth and nails should be clean and neat. Excessive colors and styles of hair and nails should be avoided.

Posture: Standing up straight projects an image of authority and inspires confidence in your knowledge and abilities.

Attire: Your attire should not distract the visitor from the information that you need to communicate. As you choose your attire, be aware of the following professional image standards:

- Clothes should be clean and neat at the beginning of the workday.
- Clothes should not be frayed, have holes or missing buttons.
- Clothes should be free of odors.
- Clothes should be clean and free of spots, stains, soil or any other foreign substance.
- Clothes should not be excessively tight or baggy.

Accessories: Your accessories, like your clothes, should not distract the visitor in any way. The following professional standards apply:

- *Tattoos* should be covered to the greatest extent possible.
- *Jewelry* should be conservative. Excessive numbers, large size, and bright or contrasting colors of jewelry may create an unprofessional appearance. In addition, supervisors and managers may have to limit jewelry wear for safety reasons.
- *Rings and Studs* associated with body piercing should be removed (where visible) to prevent interfering with visitors’ experience.
- *Sunglasses* that are dark enough to make it difficult or impossible to see your eyes should be worn in visitor contact situations only when absolutely necessary. Mirrored sunglasses should never be worn. Sunglasses rims should be in conservative colors such as gray, black, or brown; bright or neon colors should be avoided.

The Components of Professional Behavior

Displaying professional behavior includes being:

Courteous: Professionals are courteous (polite, well-mannered, patient, pleasant, attentive, and serious). They act naturally and genuinely, but professionally. They may try to be friendly and establish rapport with visitors by taking interest in some aspect of their lives, and by finding common understanding, to personalize the contact. They tailor their approach to the individual. This means putting the visitors' needs above your own needs, to the extent that it is reasonable to do so: halting your own activities or conversations with coworkers in order to serve the visitor first. Courteous employees go beyond the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," to practice the Platinum Rule: "Treat others not only as *you* want to be treated, but as *they* want to be treated." They try to provide service above and beyond what is necessary, and ask themselves whether or not there is any other information that they could provide that might help a visitor. This might mean asking the visitor whether or not their questions have been answered at the end of your contact. It also means inviting visitors to return, leaving a positive lasting impression.

Helpful: Professional employees are helpful. They make themselves accessible (available, barrier-free, visible, and well-positioned) and approachable (attentive, smiling, and welcoming—exhibiting body language that puts others at ease). They greet visitors promptly: within one minute of their arrival at the location. This means that, even if you are busy helping someone else, you should acknowledge visitors and let them know that you will be right with them. When dealing with lines of visitors at an information desk, balance efficiency with effectiveness and quality with quantity, keeping contacts short but effective. No matter how busy you are, remember that printed material may support but not be used as a substitute for conversation. Show your willingness to help in the first moments of the contact. Ask yourself, "How can I help this customer?" Be empathetic with visitors who seem out of their element, recalling one of your own experiences of a first visit to an unfamiliar place. Understand that for many visitors, the situation of visiting a park site is stressful. Empathize with the frustration that some visitors feel when what was supposed to be their leisure time doesn't go as smoothly as they planned.

Knowledgeable: Visitors expect you to be knowledgeable about every aspect of their experience. Employees who respect others will anticipate questions and get to know their park well. You should know the names of people and places associated with your site; contact information for common referrals; facilities and services available to the visitor; how to give clear, simple, accurate directions; how to describe the resources of the park and offer alternatives for visiting, rather than telling visitors what to do; all policies, procedures, and systems of your operation; how to use equipment properly; and current or updated information. Excellent employees continue to develop their professional skills in order to be as competent, effective, and efficient as possible. They are skilled enough for even complex situations. They know how to handle emergency and urgent situations, and are flexible enough to be able to prioritize contacts when more than one individual or group has immediate needs.

Neutral: As a public servant it is important to remain neutral in all situations. Your beliefs and attitudes should not interfere with the visitor's experience of the resource. You should avoid presenting personal opinions on politics, religion, or even local businesses, and should avoid talking about fellow staff or other visitors in public. To ensure a quality visitor experience, stick to the facts, admit it when you don't know something, and offer to help the visitor find out what they need to know.

Objective: Professional employees respect others enough to have an objective attitude toward all. They put their personal biases or baggage away (their beliefs, values, experiences, and prejudices) in order to provide equal treatment and fairness. You should avoid sharing personal perspectives, provide official rather than personal positions, and seek balance in all you say.

Patient: Professional interpreters remain patient with all visitors. While it may be the tenth time in an hour that you've heard the same question, it is this visitor's first time asking it. Staying focused on the visitor's experience and perspective will help you approach each contact with patience and compassion.

Safe: Some interactions escalate to involve real risk when there are verbal threats along with physical proximity. It is important to be able to recognize the signs of potentially dangerous interactions, to know how to distance yourself from an encounter safely, and to know when and how to request assistance from law enforcement personnel. When dealing with violent or potentially violent people, it is also useful to know "verbal judo." This involves using your presence and words to calm difficult people who may be under severe emotional stress or other influences, redirecting the behavior of these hostile people and diffusing potentially dangerous situations. To gain cooperation and compliance under stressful conditions, an interpreter needs the skills of persuasion and mediation. It is important to learn to respond to threatening people in your role as a representative of a larger entity, not to react as yourself. Other skills to develop for these interactions include articulation, delivery, creativity, flexibility, and even humor.

The Components of Effective Interpersonal Communication

Being adept at interpersonal communication includes knowledge of the following:

Body Language Skills: Physical distance from visitors should be based on their personal space, and be distant enough (generally over three feet) that the audience feels comfortable and not threatened. To communicate openness and interest, your body should angle or lean toward the audience. A person who remains still is likely paying attention to what is happening, while tapping or fidgeting may communicate impatience or boredom. Arms that are crossed often indicate an attitude of disapproval or opposition, and hands in pockets may communicate a negative attitude. Arms that are open (to the side of the body or behind the back) show a willingness to engage. A straight head position may indicate authority and seriousness, while friendliness or receptivity can be shown by tilting the head slightly to one side or the other. The use of touch may or may not be appropriate, depending on the situation.

Your facial expression can express much in an interaction, so interpreters should avoid having their faces covered by their hair, hat, or sunglasses whenever possible. Interpreters can communicate openness, confidence, and honesty with an open facial expression and solid eye contact. Focus on the visitor(s), rather than looking around. By keeping eye contact for around two-thirds of the time, you can demonstrate attentiveness without making other people feel self-conscious. Consider that too much eye contact may be seen as intense or aggressive, while too little may signal a lack of respect or interest in a conversation. Mouth movements can communicate as well. People often purse their lips or twist them to the side when they are thinking or holding back a negative comment. Upward turns in the corner of the mouth are often positive signs and downward turns or flat lines demonstrate negative behavior. Lips pressed together indicate tension and relaxed lips show comfort. A genuine smile may put others at ease, so if you feel at all like smiling, let your face help visitors loosen up.

Conflict Resolution: Occasionally, informal visitor contacts will involve a conflict between the interpreter and the visitor. Conflicts may be based on perceptual differences, value differences, divergent goals, or ineffective communication that leads to misunderstandings. Some people respond to conflict by avoiding it, while others may believe they need to make accommodations or compromises. Still others consider a conflict a competition to win. Rather than thinking of the conflict as a win/lose situation or as something to be avoided altogether, try thinking of a solution in which both parties win.

Quote	<p>Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --is the gift that comes from listening; --is asking questions rather than having all the answers; --allows differences to fade and similarities to come forth; --naturally acknowledges and appreciates the other person; --moves us from issue to vision; --creates movement from stalemate to resolution
	<p>Crum, T. F. (1987). <i>The Magic of Conflict: Turning a Life of Work into a Work of Art</i>. New York: Simon and Schuster.</p>

The type of conflict resolution that is most effective in meeting the needs of both sides is collaboration. Try solving a problem, rather than arguing with, blaming, directing, or persuading the other person. Apologize when appropriate and ask visitors what they would like you to do about their concerns. Use common sense to identify possible solutions, and take action to meet the visitors' needs when possible. If you can't solve a problem, connect the visitor with someone who can. Be responsive to complaints: listen to them and learn from them. Complaints may represent an opportunity to improve service for many visitors experiencing the same issue. Show concern for the visitor's problem and act quickly and promptly. Go that extra mile and provide more help than you have to, to make sure the visitor leaves completely satisfied.

Tip	Basic Steps to Conflict Resolution
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define the problem using good communication skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen Summarize Clarify 2. Identify the needs that are motivating the conflict. 3. Seek options that enable all parties to win. Brainstorm if needed. 4. Cooperate to solve the problem fairly.

A Compassionate Approach to Conflict Resolution

Compassionate communication can be a successful approach to conflict.

Compassionate communication involves expressing concerns about behavior, not about people and personalities. You assert your needs and explain the consequences of non-compliance, as well as the reasons for any regulations. Always request compliance before taking further action.

Unfortunately, even compassionate communicators will still sometimes encounter explosive situations. When visitors are irate, quality customer service requires you to maintain your equanimity and not become emotionally involved. You don't have to let someone else's problem become your problem. You can try to de-escalate the situation by patiently listening and expressing an understanding of the other's point of view, acknowledging that they are upset. Help them solve their problem or explain why it cannot be solved. If necessary, you may request that the other person calm down so that better communication can occur. If an issue arises that you cannot address, forward it on to your supervisor or other authority.

Listening Skills: Speaking is only half of communicating. Listening is vital in a conversation as well. Listening is essential to seeing the speaker's point of view, recognizing that each individual perceives things differently and that multiple points of view can provide a wider perspective on a situation. Good listeners listen carefully to hear and to understand, not only to respond. They do not jump to conclusions, and do not interrupt except when necessary. A good listener actively listens by reacting and acknowledging what was said. Techniques for active listening include using all senses to read the unspoken message or the question beneath the question; making eye contact and facing toward and concentrating on the speaker; occasionally nodding or repeating what was said; recognizing the speaker's feelings and concerns; and asking for clarification when necessary.

The Importance of Active Listening

Active listening is a technique which comes from the work of psychologist Carl Rogers. It is called "active" because the listener has a definite responsibility to do more than passively absorb the words which he or she hears. Listeners must actively try to grasp the facts and the feelings in what is being said, and they must try, by their listening, to help the speaker express meaning in the clearest way possible.



In a job setting, active listening should include the following behavior:

- 1 Creating a climate of acceptance. Some phrases which do so are: "Why do you suppose that is?" and, "How do you feel about that?"
- 2 Listening for the feelings which underlie the content of a message. Some phrases which can help you are, "That must have been difficult," or, "It sounds as though you're not at all pleased with that decision, " or, "You seem to feel that..."
- 3 Picking up on nonverbal as well as verbal cues. Some helpful phrases in this area are: "You really look angry," or, "I didn't know you were upset because you smiled and joked about it."
- 4 Testing for understanding. Some phrases which work include: "So, it's your position that...", or, "If I understand you, you believe..."

Four Ways to Listen Effectively

Listening takes effort. Give the speaker your full attention. Be patient: the average person speaks about 125 words per minute, but can listen to 400 words per minute. Put aside your own views and opinions for the time being.

- 1 Body language. Use your body to say "I'm listening." Up to 60% of communication is non-verbal.
 - Make frequent eye contact.
 - Keep your body oriented toward the speaker.
 - Nod your head.
 - Say "yeah; "uh huh," "I see," etc.
- 2 Ask questions: Ask *open-ended, non-confrontational* questions that invite the speaker to tell more about their concerns, expectations, and interests.
 - "Can you tell me more about...?"
 - "What did you mean when you said...?"
- 3 Paraphrase & Backtrack:
 - Restate what the speaker has said in your own words.
 - *Describe sympathetically*. Do not evaluate or judge.
 - Focus on the speaker.
 - Include both *facts* and *feelings*:
 - "So, you *believe strongly* that..."
 - "The way you see it ..."
 - "You were very unhappy *when*..."
 - "You felt quite angry with..."
 - "What I hear you saying is, you..."
 - When emotions are high, it sometimes helps to repeat key phrases or sentences exactly as the speaker has spoken them.

- 4 **Summarize:** Recapitulate the basic viewpoints of the speaker as you have heard them.
- This is an extended restatement of key points of information. The focus of the summary is on *issues* and *solvable* problems, not on personalities. Summarize sympathetically, don't judge, evaluate, or give solutions.
 - Ask the speaker if your summary is *accurate* AND *complete*.

NOTE: The *Importance of Active Listening* section of this document was largely derived from Susan Shearouse's *Frameworks for Agreement*, 1993.

Verbal Skills: Verbal skills include the ability to effectively use language and vocal techniques. An effective communicator chooses words that will be understood by a given audience. Vocabulary should be selected based on a variety of factors, including the audience's age, culture, educational background and experience with the subject at hand. When speaking with strangers, or with visitors for whom English is a second language, it may be useful to develop not only a more universal vocabulary, but a neutral accent. For most audiences it is best to avoid using complex, technical jargon and slang terms. Vocal techniques that aid in communication include articulated diction, moderate tempo with rhythmic variation for effect, modulation to emphasize certain words, moderate tone or pitch, and appropriate volume and vocal quality. There is no substitute for a positive tone of voice.

Reflect	Next time you run errands, take a moment to notice the image, behavior and communication skills of the person serving you. Whether ringing up your items at a convenience store, receiving your package at the post office, or serving you coffee at your favorite diner, the folks that serve you affect the quality of your experience and the impression you have about their business. Take a moment to jot down your impression of their customer service skills in your note pad. What did they do right? How did they miss the boat?
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Appendix B.3: Visitor Cues Tutorial

Welcome to the visitor cues tutorial. In this tutorial you will learn about the variety of ways visitors provide cues to their needs, how to read those cues and how to act based on the perceived visitor needs.

Objectives	<p>By the completion of this tutorial you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify ways visitors provide cues. • identify ways to read visitor cues. • identify some appropriate actions based on visitor cues.
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Overview of Visitor Cues

Reading the visitor appropriately is perhaps the most fundamental skill necessary for successful informal visitor contacts. How do you know how to respond to visitors until you know what they need? By learning how to identify, read and respond to visitor cues you will hold the key not only to quality customer service, but to meaningful experiences for the visitor.

So how do we know if a visitor merely wants directions to a destination, to gather information on an interesting topic or to explore the meaning of a site? Sometimes a direct question or comment will provide the answer, but often the cues are more subtle and can be harder to read. Reading visitors can be as complex as the individuals themselves. But we have lots of practice. In our everyday lives we constantly assess the needs of others.

Reflect	<p>Think about all the ways you try to read people during your daily interactions.</p> <p><i>Was the man behind you in line at the grocery store grimacing because of the long wait? Was he shifting from foot to foot because he needed a bathroom? Or did he want you to make space for him on the check-out counter because his pint of ice cream and gallon of milk were cold and heavy?</i></p>
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The ways in which visitors let us know their needs include verbal communication, body language, tone of voice, and direct actions.

Types of Visitor Cues

Verbal Communication

Having a sense of the audience provides the interpreter with a starting point for providing information. What are the audience's needs? This can be determined instantly when an audience member asks a simple question, but beware of reaching conclusions too quickly. While a visitor asking for directions to the bathroom is rarely

seeking something other than immediate orientation and relief, an individual may not always know exactly how to phrase the question they really want answered. “Where is Klikatat Point?” This could be answered simply with directions, but is that what the audience really wants? The person may be misinformed about what can be seen at Klikatat Point and needs to go to a different place to see what they want.

What if a visitor asks whether the park film is subtitled or not? Perhaps they merely want a yes or no answer so that they may plan accordingly or perhaps they want to discuss accessibility in the park, or other topics relating to their visit. How can you tell what their true need is? Other visitor cues can help.

Body Language

Body language can convey a surprising amount of information about visitor needs and wants. In fact, much of what you are trying to communicate may be relayed through your body language. Let’s take the example of the visitor asking about subtitles. How do you know how to respond? You might choose to merely answer the asked question, but would you be providing the best customer service? Body language can give you a clue.

If the visitor, for example, asks the question while turning away toward the movie theater, perhaps they merely want the quick answer before they engage in the movie. But what if they lean on the desk and smile at you while they ask the question? Is a yes or no answer all they want? What if they scowl and cross their arms? Are they looking for a simple answer or do they want to be engaged on another level? By reading the cues of body language you may begin to have a deeper sense of the visitor’s needs and, therefore, where to take the interaction.

But body language isn’t always easy to read. People who have their arms crossed may be closed to new information or they may simply be cold. When trying to read body language it is important to consider all of the factors that may be influencing the action. Looking for simultaneous body language cues can help. For example, someone who crosses their arms, points their foot toward the door and avoids eye contact is likely disinterested in further information. The following table contains a brief summary of some of the obvious body language cues.

Visitor Cues	Possible Translations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open posture • attempts to make the body look big • frowns, sneers • threatening arm movements 	<p>dominance, authority</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no eye contact • repetitive motions such as tapping toes or drumming fingers • slouching • leaning against a wall • yawning 	<p>disinterest or readiness to proceed</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crossed arms and/or legs • looking away 	<p>defending, hiding, cold, relaxing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sweating • sudden movements • minor twitches of muscles (especially around the mouth and eyes) • fidgeting • distracted speech patterns 	<p>avoiding detection, persuasion</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts to make the body look smaller • rigidity • covering sensitive parts of the body (chin down to cover neck, arms across chest) 	<p>safety, security</p>

Visitor Cues	Possible Translations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • steepled hands • stroking chin or other parts of face • intense gaze 	<p>deciding, judging, thinking</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arms open, palms up, legs open • looking around room • looking at speaker • relaxed posture 	<p>accepting, passive threat, aggression, supplicating, relaxing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • walking with exaggerated swing of arms • palms down • elbows out to appear wider • shakes hands with palm down • grabbing elbow and pulling in 	<p>authority, dominance</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pointing with foot, eyes or whole body leaning • gripping armrests to get up • gripped hands 	<p>desire to leave, if action is directed toward speaker this may be a desire to add to conversation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attempts to make the body look smaller • head down • motionless 	<p>safety, security, esteem</p>

Based on information from Straker, D. (2006). Using body language. *ChangingMinds.org*. Retrieved January 23, 2006, from http://changingminds.org/techniques/body/body_language.htm



Tone of Voice

Tone of voice can provide a sense of a visitor’s attitude and predisposition. Again, using the example of the visitor asking about subtitles, listening carefully to the pitch, tone, inflection and volume can give a sense of where to go with the contact. For example, if the visitor asks about subtitles in a high-pitched quizzical voice, you might assume that they are in a friendly, receptive mood. If they ask the same question in a deep, gruff, barking manner you might assume that they are upset and perhaps angry or defensive.

Actions

By watching the actions of your visitors, you may also gain clues to their needs. Careful observation may help you see when visitors have barriers to mobility, hearing, vision, language, learning or other issues. How you proceed may depend on those observed issues.

Additionally, you may encounter visitors violating safety regulations. Knowledge of the regulations and observation of those violations give you a unique perspective on the needs of the visitor. For example, perhaps you notice a visitor walking dangerously close to a wild bison. The visitor may feel a need to interact with the wildlife or to get that perfect photo, but you know that they also have a more immediate need for safety. How does this knowledge affect the actions you take?

Another example involves resource violations. What if you see visitors sitting on the delicate wall of a historic ruin? The visitors may feel they merely need a place to rest. You have a need to protect the resource. Do your needs clash with the needs of the visitor? Which needs are more important in this case? How do you proceed?

It is important to note that there can be a significant difference between an actual visitor need and what the interpreter feels the visitor should need. When a visitor is feeding wildlife, their needs may include such things as getting a better photograph, getting closer to wildlife, having fun, or wanting to “help” the animal survive. The interpreter’s need for the audience is more likely to center on education, information, compliance, or understanding. This is NOT the same thing as the visitor need.

Tip	Try to understand why a visitor is acting a certain way, acknowledge their need and then work to meet the agency’s need for that visitor.
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Reading and Acting on Visitor Cues

As stated above, reading visitors’ cues can be as complex as the visitors themselves. So while we do have a lot of experience reading people from our daily lives, it helps to practice our interaction skills. Read the scenarios below and determine what the visitors’ initial needs might be, based on the visitor cues. The answers to the multiple choice questions can be found at the end of the tutorial.

Scenario 1: A man walks into the visitor center carrying an arrowhead, and asks you “Do you know what Native American tribe might have made this?”

What are the *visitor’s* needs?

- A. Information on the park regulations prohibiting removal of plants, animals and objects
- B. Information on tribes crafting arrowheads
- C. A citation
- D. Directions to a souvenir shop

Identifying Visitor Cues

Reflect	What <i>visitor cues</i> informed your answer?
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The visitor asked a direct question that indicated his need for information on Native American tribes that might have made the arrowhead. His direct actions of holding an arrowhead that could have been found on park property might prompt your need for resource protection. But can we assume that the arrowhead was found on park grounds to be carried home by the visitor or are there other possible explanations?

Acting on Visitor Cues

So what do you do now? If you assume the visitor needs to know about tribes crafting arrowheads and you need to protect the resource, what options do you have open to you? Is it appropriate to call a Protection Ranger to write a citation? Is it appropriate to answer the visitor’s question and let him be on his way? Perhaps the most appropriate option at this point would be to answer his question and then find out where the visitor got the arrowhead and why. Maybe he bought it at a local shop and wants to give it to his son to help inspire an understanding of Native American history. Perhaps he dug it out of one of the park’s archeological sites and plans to sell it to his neighbor. Additional information is essential to informing you on how to proceed!

Scenario 2: You are a quarter mile from the visitor center, walking along a lakeside trail and encounter a couple sitting on a bench engaged in quiet conversation. They are holding hands and leaning towards each other. They don’t look up when you approach. What are the *visitors’* needs?

- A. To learn the names of the freshwater fish inhabiting the lake
- B. To be informed that the park closes in two hours
- C. To understand the significance of the park resources to Native American groups that long used the area
- D. To be left alone to enjoy the view and each other’s company

Identifying Visitor Cues

Reflect	What <i>visitor cues</i> informed your answer?
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The visitors' body language of holding hands and leaning together suggests an intimate moment, one that may be awkward to interrupt. Their direct actions of holding a quiet conversation, the muted and soft tone of voice and the failure to look at you when you approach suggest that they are not in need of help or contact.

Acting on Visitor Cues

So what do you do now? Should you sit down next to them on the bench and try to engage in conversation? Is it necessary to inform them of the closing time when they are within a quarter mile of the exit with two hours until closing? Neither approach would likely be appreciated and the latter may make them feel unwelcome. Perhaps the most appropriate response would be to keep walking, perhaps nod your head or offer a quiet "hello" that lets them know you are available should they decide they need something. Allowing them to enjoy their visit in solitude likely offers a greater opportunity to connect to the site than unwelcome banter from a clueless interpreter.

Scenario 3: An elderly visitor stops you on your way back to your office. He is smiling and slowly shaking his head. He lays his hand on your arm and says "I remember what this place was like 30 years ago. How long have you worked here?" What are the visitor's needs?

- A. To hear the history of your career leading up to that moment in time
- B. To know how long you have worked at the park
- C. To share his reminiscence and be validated for his knowledge of the site
- D. To be told that he shouldn't touch you

Identifying Visitor Cues

Reflect	What <i>visitor cues</i> informed your answer?
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The verbal cue of the direct question may suggest that the visitor wants to know how long you have worked at the site, but the body language of smiling and touching, combined with the verbal cue about having 30 year-old memories from the site suggest the visitor is interested in sharing.

Acting on Visitor Cues

What action should you take now? Since you have been asked a direct question, it might be perceived as rude not to tell the visitor how long you have worked at the site. But do you think he really wants to know all about you? Maybe not at this stage, the visitor seems to want to share his recollections. Thoughtful questioning may reveal the true visitor need or additional needs. Perhaps by asking "What do you remember from this site 30 years ago?" you may discover new things about your site – or you may discover that the visitor never was at this site, is recalling a different site and is actually lost. Careful questioning and listening, again, are essential in establishing a decision path for a contact.

Scenario 4: You observe two ladies standing in front of a large barricade marking off a portion of beach recently closed to protect nesting birds. They are holding beach chairs

and they seem agitated, one has a furrowed brow and the other is frowning. They seem to be arguing as they are talking animatedly to each other in loud, high-pitched voices. What are the *visitors'* needs?

- A. To be separated from each other so they don't start fighting
- B. To be given directions to another area of beach where they might set up their beach chairs
- C. To be told why that portion of the beach is closed
- D. To have you listen to and validate their frustrations

Identifying Visitor Cues

Reflect	What <i>visitor cues</i> informed your answer?
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The ladies' action of holding beach chairs in front of a closed beach sign, combined with their displeased facial expressions and argumentatively pitched tone of voice, give clues that they were upset at finding the beach closed.

Acting on Visitor Cues

What action should you take now? Since you don't really know what the ladies are upset about until you ask them, the next logical step would be to approach them and ask if you can help. They are probably upset that the beach is closed and may be looking for an explanation, may want to vent their frustrations, and/or may need directions to another beach. Or maybe they are arguing over who will drive home and don't need your assistance at all. Until you have asked careful questions, you don't know the visitors' true needs or where to take the interaction.

Answer Key

Scenario 1

- A. Perhaps you feel a need to inform the visitor of the park regulations, but does the visitor feel that need? Probably not at this time. Try again!
- B. Yes! The initial visitor needs are probably to get information on Native American groups that might have made the arrowhead. Although you have a need to protect the resource it is helpful to first understand where the visitor is coming from. Is the visitor intentionally violating park regulations or are they unaware? Does the violation put themselves or others in immediate danger? By observing the visitor's actions and responses we begin to understand their needs. So based on how the interaction continues, he may or may not need directions to a souvenir shop or a citation.
- C. Probably not. Although you have a need to protect the resource it is helpful to first understand where the visitor is coming from. Is the visitor intentionally violating park regulations or are they unaware? Does the violation put themselves or others in immediate danger? Try again!
- D. Maybe the visitor is looking for a souvenir, but maybe he is merely looking for information about an arrowhead he found and doesn't intend to keep, or maybe



he already bought it at a souvenir shop. But based on the visitor cues, this is probably not the visitor's initial need. Try again!

Scenario 2

- A. Probably not. Have the visitors asked for this information or shown an interest through their actions or body language? Try again!
- B. While you might be concerned about visitors leaving on time, it is unlikely that the visitors feel a need for that information at this time. Try again!
- C. Probably not. Have the visitors asked for this information or shown an interest through their actions or body language? Try again!
- D. Yes! The visitors probably need to be left alone to enjoy the view and each other's company.

Scenario 3

- A. Probably not. Although the visitor asked how long you had worked at the site he is probably not looking for in-depth information on you at this time. Try again!
- B. The visitor may truly want to know how long you have worked at the site, but based on visitor cues you may assume that he also wants to share his experiences at the park and be validated for them. Try again!
- C. Yes! The visitor may truly want to know how long you have worked at the site, but based on visitor cues you may assume that he also wants to share his experiences at the park and be validated for them.
- D. Although you may feel a need to tell the visitor not to touch you, based on the appropriateness of the action (and you certainly have that right!), the visitor likely does not feel a need for you to tell him not to touch you. Try again!

Scenario 4

- A. Although the interaction might escalate, the visitors probably don't perceive the need to be separated. Nor is that likely your decision. Try again!
- B. Yes! Based on the visitor cues it is likely the visitors might want to be told why that portion of the beach is closed, to have you listen to and validate their frustration at encountering a closed beach and to be given directions to another beach.
- C. Yes! Based on the visitor cues it is likely the visitors might want to be told why that portion of the beach is closed, to have you listen to and validate their frustration at encountering a closed beach and to be given directions to another beach.
- D. Yes! Based on the visitor cues it is likely the visitors might want to be told why that portion of the beach is closed, to have you listen to and validate their frustration at encountering a closed beach and to be given directions to another beach.

Appendix C: Seasonal Training Informal Visitor Contacts Evaluation

The training you received on informal visitor contacts 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.

Customer Service 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 understanding of best practices in customer service. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. Please comment on the strengths of the activity.

4. Please suggest ways to improve the activity.

Visitor Cues role play

1. I was able to effectively portray a visitor in the role play activity. (Please circle one if applicable.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. The activity increased my understanding of visitor cues. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree							strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	



Informal Visitor Contacts

3. The visitor cues portion of the training increased my skills in using visitor cues to direct informal visitor contacts. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I will apply the information received on visitor cues in my work. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. The body language translations table was useful. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Please comment on the strengths of the visitor cues activity.

7. Please suggest ways to improve the activity.

8. Please comment on the strengths of the body language translations table.

9. Please suggest ways to improve the body language translations table.

Know your site 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

Informal Visitor Contacts

2. I feel more prepared to conduct informal visitor contacts after completing this activity. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I had enough previous knowledge of the park to complete this activity. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I received enough support in the classroom to complete this activity. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Please comment on the strengths of the activity.

6. Please suggest ways to improve the activity.

Techniques 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 had enough previous knowledge of the park to complete this activity. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I received enough support in the classroom to complete this activity. (Please circle one.)

strongly disagree strongly agree
1 2 3 4 5 6 7



