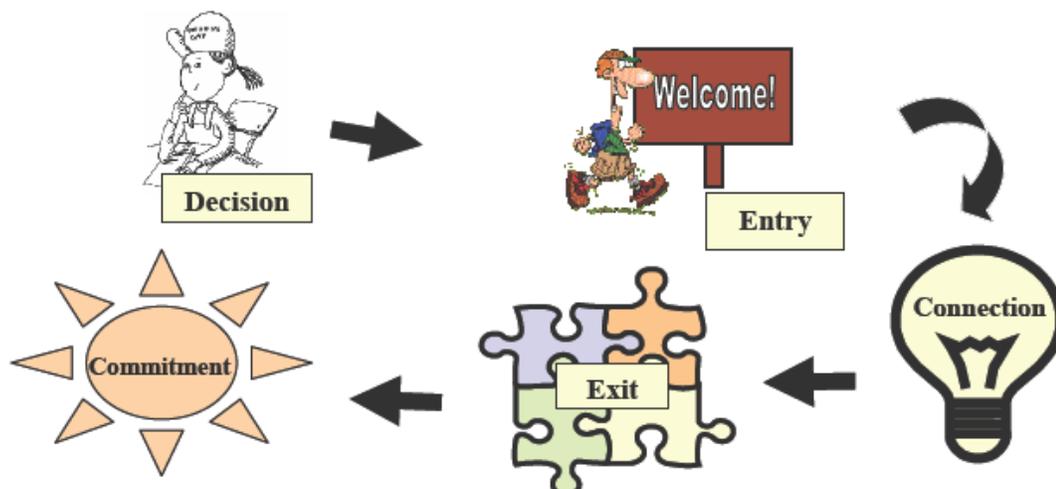


# THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE MODEL



## THE DECISION

The visitor experience begins before the visitor reaches the site with the decision to visit. The visitor has learned of the site through word of mouth or promotional material and decides to visit. What the visitor comes in to contact with before they reach the site can set the tone for the entire visitor experience. Making sure the visitor can easily locate and access the site is essential.

*Items that may affect the decision phase include:*

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Marketing and promotions | Directional signage |
| Web site                 | Operating hours     |
| Clear directions         | Past experience     |

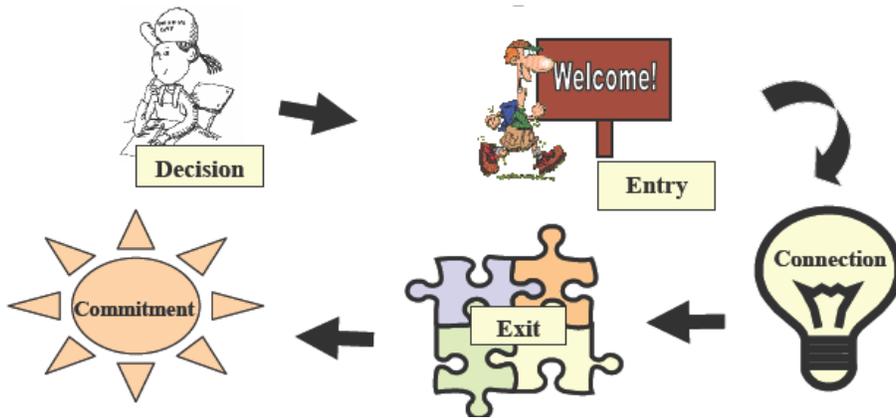
## THE ENTRY

Once the visitor reaches the site, the entry phase begins. It includes everything the visitor comes in contact with before entering the interpretive component of the site. Upon entry, visitors need to feel safe, welcomed and oriented. Entry prepares the visitor to receive the interpretive message.

*Items that may affect the entry phase include:*

- |                                   |                     |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Parking                           | Accessibility       |
| Ticket booth                      | Safety and security |
| Admission                         | Restrooms           |
| Welcome, greeting and hospitality |                     |





## THE CONNECTION

The connection phase usually takes up the majority of the visit. It includes participation in a variety of interpretive media including viewing exhibits and waysides, walking trails or participating in programs. Ideally, the interpretive message will be delivered in many ways, exposing the visitor to the main theme or idea of the site.

*Items that may affect the connection phase include:*

- |                                  |                            |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Presenting an interpretive theme | Trails                     |
| Visitor flow                     | Programs and presentations |
| Exhibits and waysides            | Engaging the senses        |

## THE EXIT

The exit phase allows the visitor to decompress from the visitor experience. It may include a visit to the gift shop or concession area or perhaps a comfortable place to sit and rest before departure. Planning for a comfortable exit area gives the visitor time to reflect on his or her visit.

*Items that may affect the exit include:*

- |                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Time for reflection | Concession area    |
| Gift shop           | Benches with shade |

## THE COMMITMENT

A positive experience and effective interpretation makes a difference. Together, they can help people become better stewards of natural and cultural resources.

*Items that may affect the commitment phase include:*

- |                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Membership               | Change in behavior |
| Action                   | Provocation        |
| How to make a difference |                    |

# CENTRAL THEME: THE PRINCIPLE TAKE-AWAY MESSAGE

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## CENTRAL THEME

- The guiding principle behind all interpretation at a site.
- What you would like visitors to walk away with in their hearts and minds.
- It is a focusing content element that determines what content “fits” in the exhibit as well as what does not fit in the exhibit.

**A good exhibit/sign is one that communicates the central theme in a matter of seconds to every visitor. The key to making sure every visitor understands the theme is to put it the one place everyone looks—the title!**

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A CENTRAL THEME

A central theme is a single complete sentence, less than 18 words.

A central theme has both tangibles and intangibles.

*Tangible:* is a physical attribute of the topic or idea.

*Intangible:* is a sentiment of feeling.

A central theme has a point of view.

<b>TOPIC TITLES</b>	<b>THEME TITLES: TITLE THAT MAKES REFERENCE TO THEME IN EXHIBIT</b>
Agriculture	Agriculture touches everyone... even you! Our lives depend on agriculture.
The Changing Forest	This Forest is Changing
Soil Erosion	We are Losing Our Soil
Preventing Soil Erosion	You Can Save Your Soil



# COPYWRITING STANDARDS

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## WORD COUNT

**Best:** 50 words per panel

**Good:** 100 words per panel and 70 words per single text block

**Acceptable:** 200 words per panel and 70 words per single text block

Less is more. Panels with less than 50 words are FAR more likely to be read by visitors. Break text into smaller chunks to make the text blocks less intimidating.

- Use short sentences and short paragraphs.
- Use bullet points instead of paragraphs whenever possible.
- Break up paragraphs into photo captions or image call-outs whenever possible.
- Most adults read at the rate of 250-300 words per minute.
- Readers prefer short sentences 18-20 words.
- The average visitor will spend 45 seconds in front of an exhibit.
- Be personal. Research shows that readers like personal words such as you, me, I, we, he, she, they, mine, yours, ours, his, people's names and words that identify people by gender. For example—"Have you ever ridden on a tractor?" "I am an Old Time County Lane. Now I have been officially vacated and closed. (I never liked automobiles anyway.) I invite you to walk—as folks have walked for generations - and be friendly with my trees, my flowers and my wild creatures." Forest Preserve in Illinois cited by Tilden
- Use of humor is okay.
- Use quotes, they are powerful sometimes first-hand quotes of your topic matter. "Each year we had a school play and hung curtains one-third of the way out from the blackboard. All the grades would participate, it was great fun!" Bill Troy, 1952 Graduate of the Flannery School.
- Poetry that is theme based. Poetry is an effective way to promote an idea or sentiment. Iowa poet James Hearst often wrote about farm life.



## READING LEVEL

Writing at a 3rd to 5th grade reading and comprehension level ensures text will reach the widest audience. This is our default unless the target audience requires a different level. Writing style should be simple and straight-forward. Explain or eliminate technical jargon and specialized vocabulary.



Surfaces that don't absorb water  
Birds that hunt during the day  
When elk mate



Impermeable surfaces  
Diurnal raptors  
During rut

## LEVELS OF INTERPRETATION

Break text into three levels: A title, a summary sentence, and main body text.

### Example:

Theme Title	—————>	Iowa Farmers: Feeding the World
Theme Sentence	—————>	Thanks to the hard work of Iowa farmers, people around the world are able to enjoy food grown in the Heartland.
Main body text	—————>	Iowa is ranked first in the nation for corn, soybean, hog and egg production. These products are shipped throughout the United States and to other countries, where they help feed both people and livestock.

## COPYWRITING QUICK TIPS

### 1) Eliminate unnecessary adverbs and adjectives that just add to your word count.



He hurried down the hall.  
Look at this speck of dust!



He hurried quickly down the hall.  
Look at this tiny speck of dust!

### 2) Use personal pronouns (you, we, our) and familiar terms (write like you'd speak, not like you're writing a scholarly paper) to relate to the visitor.



We all live in a watershed.  
Dogs do a lot of important jobs for us.



All people live in a watershed.  
Cannies are important working species in the United States.

### 3) Serial Commas: Always use them unless the client specifically requests otherwise.



Lions, tigers, and bears.



Lions, tigers and bears.

### 4) Pick strong, evocative action verbs (plunge, glow, scrape)



I run.  
He bolted.



I am a runner.  
He went quickly.

### 5) Avoid passive voice. Set your grammar check options in Word to tag it automatically.



A man broke the glass.



The glass was broken by a man.

### 6) Capitalize words designating political divisions of the world, geographic regions, and generally accepted names for the areas.



-Upper Midwest  
-Middle East  
-Texas sage  
-Chihuahuan raven



-upper midwest  
-middle east  
-texas sage  
-chihuahuan raven

### 7) Do not capitalize descriptive words that indicate direction only.



-south of town  
-east wing  
-western Minnesota  
-northern cold front



-South of town  
-East wing  
-Western Minnesota  
-Northern cold front

### 8) Eliminate clichés.



-All in a day's work.  
-Between a rock and a hard place.  
-Dead as a doornail.

# GRAPHIC STANDARDS

## TYPE SIZE

Although type size is typically referred to by point size, you must measure in inches to make sure it meets minimum size requirements.



Generally title needs to be one inch for every three feet of viewing distance. (72 pt. type in most instances)



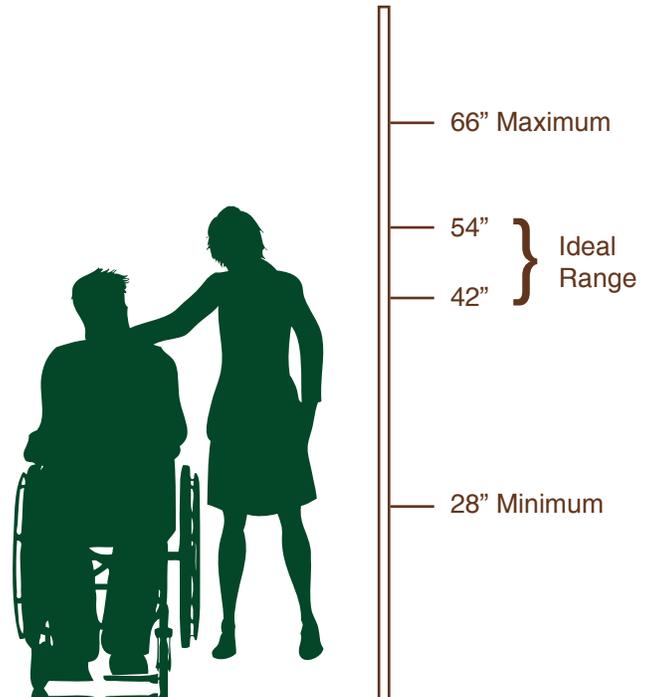
Minimum type size is approximately 1/4" (18 pt. type in most instances)



Standard graphic panel copy size: 24-36 pt.  
Standard artifact label copy size: 18-24 pt.



Large headlines and titles can fall outside of ADA range.



## CONTRAST

Objects mounted in front of a solid, contrasting (color) background are most easily perceived. A 70% contrast between foreground and background is recommended.



## PARAGRAPH FORMATTING

**Right justify should be avoided whenever possible.**



Left justify is so easy to read! It is very legible. Left justify means text or page formatting that aligns text along the left side of a page. This layout has a ragged right edge and a straight left edge.



Right justify is difficult to read. You should avoid using it in graphic panels. Right justify means text or page formatting that aligns text along the right side of a page. This layout has a ragged left edge and a straight right edge.

**Eliminate one, two, and three letter words if they interrupt the rag.**

Format the letter spacing or modify the copywriting.



Avoid letting one, two, and three letter words end your lines if they stick out of the rag. Also, avoid letting a single word in a sentence start/end your lines. Begin new sentences on new lines rather than breaking them by only one word. Also remove widows or two-word widows. The goal is to have a smooth rag and keep text easy for visitors to read. Try slight adjustments with the width of your paragraph, tweaking your letter spacing slightly, and/or re-wording some of the sentences (make sure you consult an interpreter first.) Do not use hyphens to break lines or words.



Avoid letting one, two, and three letter words end your lines if they stick out of the rag. Also avoid letting a one-word sentence start/end your lines. Begin new sentences on new lines rather than breaking them by only one word. Also remove widows or two-word widows. The goal is to have a smooth rag and keep text easy for visitors to read. Try slight adjustments with the width of your paragraph, tweaking your letter spacing slightly, and/or re-wording some of the sentences (make sure you consult an interpreter first). Do not use hyphens to break lines or words. Make sure to get rid of widows.

**Use only one space between sentences, not two.**



Using only one space between sentences helps legibility for visitors. It minimizes the white “gaps” within a block of copy. Double check the word document you are working from to make sure it does not contain double spaces between sentences. This creates a polished look.



Using two spaces between sentences decreases legibility. It creates white “gaps” within a block of copy. Double check the word document you are working from to make sure it does not contain double spaces between sentences. Using double spaces between sentences makes copy blocks look messy. Can you spot the difference between the copy on the left and this copy?

**A recommended leading formula: type size x 1.5 = leading.**

Leading is the space between lines of text.



To increase legibility, increase leading (or line spacing), This makes it easier for visitors to read copy on graphics and helps avoid overlapping ascenders or descenders in letterforms. This paragraph uses the recommended formula.



To increase legibility, increase leading (or line spacing), This makes it easier for visitors to read copy on graphics and helps avoid overlapping ascenders or descenders in letterforms. This paragraph uses the default setting.

# SOURCES

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Brochu, L. (2003). *Interpretive Planning: The 5-M Model for Successful Planning Projects*. Fort Collins, CO: Interp Press.

Ham, S. H. (1992). *Environmental Interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.

*Interpretive Master Planning: The Essential Planning Guide for Interpretive Centers, Parks, Self-Guided Trails, Historic Sites, Zoos, Exhibits & Programs*  
by John A. Veverka

Taylor Studios, Inc. (2001). *Copywriting Standards*. 1320 Harmon Dr. Rantoul, IL 61866. <http://www.taylorstudios.com>.