



INTERPRETIVE PLANNING - TOOL #4

Region 2 Interpretive Media Design Guidelines

The following are some basic guidelines for the preparation and design of interpretive media:

Guidelines Applicable to All Media

Accessibility

- For specific guidelines on accessibility, see the Smithsonian Institution Accessibility Program, edited to conform to Forest Service Guidelines (<http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/accessibility/smithsonian.htm>).
- Also, refer to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act (ADA/ABA) Accessibility Guidelines (www.access-board.gov).

Color and Contrast

- Use contrasting colors for text and background for ease of reading. Use the following websites to check your colors for those visually impaired or color blind.
 - <http://www.vischeck.com/>
 - http://www.lighthouse.org/color_contrast.htm

Corporate Image

- Incorporate Forest name, shield, FS Mission – Caring for the Land and Serving People and perhaps a forest “look” – i.e. representative pine branch that appears on all signs, brochures, etc. (See samples of such signs on website - <http://fsweb.blackhills.r2.fs.fed.us/r2dc/index.htm>.)

Guidelines for Interpretive Panels

(Note – many of these guidelines are applicable to brochures as well.)

Captions

Captions for graphics can be used to meet learning objectives and capture the theme; some visitors look only at graphics so the graphic and its caption should be a learning opportunity on its own.

Layout/Design

In general, signs should contain 1/3 graphics, 1/3 text, and 1/3 blank space.

Margins

Margins on text should be flush on the left side and ragged on the right.



Mounting Height

A mounting height of 24 to 30 inches with a 30 to 45 degree angle toward the viewers will be accessible to most visitors. The front edge height of low profile exhibits should be 32”.

Site Compatibility

Make sure the sign is compatible with the site, the Built Environment Image Guide (BEIG) and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classification as far as color, size, frame, etc. It should enhance the site, not detract from it.

Simplicity

The main body of text should be no more than two paragraphs of three or four short sentences. Keep text to no more than 150 words (up to 250 words maximum if using captions and smaller fonts for secondary text or captions).

Text

The text should be written with the “3-30-3” rule in mind. You have 3 seconds to hook the visitor, 30 seconds if they are hooked, and 3 minutes if they are very interested. A sign should be designed and written so that it contains three levels of text with each level conveying a feeling of the theme, thus providing all visitors with an interpretive opportunity regardless of how long they stay. For example, a short title at the top of a sign might be the only text some visitors read, so it is important the learning objectives for the site be met to some degree even at the 3-second timeframe.

Titles

The titles of a sign or brochure should be a statement of a theme. For example, “Salvaging Blowdown – A **T**reemendous Renewable Resource” sets the stage for talking about how trees are a renewable resource.

Typeface

Use a sans, slab, or simple serif typeface, upper and lower case, with a minimum 18-point type size on signs. Titles: 72 – 60 point, Subtitles: 48 – 40 point, Body Text – 24 point, Captions: 18 point. (These sizes are suggested for the visually impaired by the National Park Service.)



Design Resources

Creating Environmental Publications: A Guide to Writing and Designing for Interpreters and Environmental Educators. Zehr, Jeffery, Michael Gross and Ron Zimmerman. James Heintzman, consulting ed. Interpreter's Handbook Series. Stevens Point, WI: UW-SP Foundation Press, Inc. 1994.

Exhibit Labels – An Interpretive Approach, by Beverly Serrell, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California. 1996.

Graphic Standards for Landscape Architects, Austin, Dunbar, Hulverson, and Todd; Von Norstrand Reinhold Co., New York.

Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources, by Douglas M. Knudson, Ted T. Cable, and Larry Beck, Venture Publishing, Inc., State College, PA. (814) 234-4561.

Interpretation for the 21st Century – Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture, by Larry Beck and Ted Cable, Sagamore Publishing, Champaign, IL.

Plae, Inc. *Universal Access to Outdoor Recreation – A Design Guide.* Berkeley, California: MIG Communications, 1993.

Scenic Byways – A Design Guide for Roadside Improvements, Yamada, Ostergaard, Jilbert, Brunswick, USDA Forest Service, San Dimas Technology and Development Center. July 2002.

Sign, Trails, and Wayside Exhibits Connecting People and Places, by Suzanne Trapp, Michael Gross and Ron Zimmerman, College of Natural Resources, UWSP, Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715) 346-2076.

Smithsonian Guidelines For Accessible Exhibition Design
<http://www.si.edu/opa/accessibility/exdesign/contents.htm>

The Interpreter's Handbook, by Russell K. Grater, Southwest Parks and Monuments Association.