

Interpretation is a way of communicating that translates technical concepts of natural science into terms and ideas that are easily and readily understood by nonscientists.

The formal definition is: *Interpretation is a communication process, designed to reveal meanings and relationships of our natural heritage, through involvement with landscapes, sites and objects.*

Interpretation is the transfer of ideas and relationships, rather than isolated facts and figures. Of course interpreters use factual information. These facts are used to illustrate points and clarify meanings. The meanings and messages are what we are trying to communicate - not just the facts.

Usually the goal of a teacher is to communicate facts alone. Interpreters use facts as a tool to help our audiences understand or appreciate what we're trying to explain. Carefully selected facts may be instructive, supportive, illustrative but they are never the ends themselves. The interpretive message answers "Well, what about it?" or "Why should I care?" questions that arise subconsciously or consciously in the minds of the audience.

INTERPRETATION IS:

1) ENJOYABLE

Some Master Naturalist presentations serve as entertainment for some groups' monthly meeting, or as a welcome break from the regu-

lar classroom routine. The audience may or may not be particularly interested in natural areas, but that doesn't really matter. If your presentation is pleasurable and entertaining they will pay attention.

To make information pleasurable and entertaining:

- Use two-way communication - talk and listen to your audience.
- Use humor, music, props, etc.
- Use active, not passive verbs.

2) RELEVANT

Make the information meaningful and personal to the audience. Meaningful information has context. The interpreter must make the connection to something the audience already *knows* about, and then, also must link it to something they *care* about.

Information becomes meaningful when it is connected to our inner circle of highly personal matters (ourselves, our families, our health, our quality of life, our values, principles, beliefs, convictions). That's when our audience's attention is captured and held. This is a very powerful tendency.

To make information relevant:

- Use self referencing - Get the audience to think about themselves and their own experiences as you give them new information.
- Use labeling - This is classifying or labeling people. Labels can be positive, negative, or neutral. **BE CAREFUL!** Sometimes you can offend people unintentionally

even with positive and neutral labels:

Positive label: "Those of us who understand how wetlands function..."

Negative label: "If you don't care about prairies, then you probably don't care about..."

Neutral label: "Coloradoans"

3) ORGANIZED

Interpretive presentations are organized and easy to follow. Your audience will not exert much effort trying to follow what you're saying. Make it easy for them. Keep main ideas to five or less and select them based on the main theme (see below). Be sure you have a definite beginning (introduction), middle (body), and ending (conclusion).

4) THEMATIC

Every interpretive presentation has a theme or message. A theme is not a topic. A topic is the subject matter; the theme is the message about the topic. There are many themes about the same topic, each with a different story to tell. Information with a theme is more meaningful and easier to follow than information with no theme.



AGE- APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten
 (3-5 years)

- Pretend games and fantasy
- Very short attention spans
- Simple, one-step, directions

1st/2nd Grade (6-7 years)

- Matching and Counting
- Classification
- Imagination

3rd/4th Grade (8-9 years)

- Simple cause and effect
- Structured investigations
- Connecting specifics to general principles.
- Practicing reading and writing.

5th/6th grade (10-11 years)

- Facts versus opinions
- Comparing sites, collecting data
- Science content
- Thoughts into words

Middle/High School (12-17 years)

- Strong social sense
- Advanced content
- Relate content to real life
- Clear rules and boundaries

LEARNING STYLES

1. AUDITORY – hear and read words

2. VISUAL – see graphics and pictures; write words and draw pictures

3. KINESTHETIC – touch and movement

CONCRETE LEARNERS –

“What’s the purpose of this presentation?” Need to know why. What’s the purpose? Address this first (reveal your theme which tells them why this is important).

REFLECTIVE LEARNERS –

“What are the facts?” Need the facts. Give them lots of accurate information. Do your homework and make sure you know your subject matter.

ABSTRACT LEARNERS –

“How does it work?” Try it out - do something active. Plan a hands-on activity. Let them discover something.

ACTIVE LEARNERS – “What

if ...?” Allow them to express themselves. This can be part of the above activity or something new.

THEME cont.

A theme is not the same as the topic. Once you choose the theme, you know exactly what information you need to get the message across. This forms the basis of your talk. If you have only a topic (“birds”; “insects”; “mammals”), there’s virtually no limit to the number of themes. Presentations without themes are usually chock full of factual information, but are scattered and hard to follow. Presentations with a theme are going somewhere.

With a theme, it’s easy to organize the facts and supportive details for an effective presentation. After your talk, if a member of the audience is asked “What was that presentation about?”, their answer should be your theme.

In all your presentations and talks take an interpretive approach.

Every good theme:

1. is a short simple sentence.
2. contains one specific idea.
3. reveals the purpose of your presentation.
4. is not necessarily the title of your presentation.

