

A photograph of a wooden boardwalk or path winding through a forest. The path is made of light-colored wooden planks and is bordered by a rope railing. The forest is dense with trees, many of which have bright green leaves, suggesting a spring or early summer setting. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the path.

# **Interpretive Messaging: Ensuring Your Publications, Waysides, Kiosks and Exhibits are Effective**

**Tom Mullin**

**Interpretive Pathways**

**2026 Connecticut**

**Land Conservation Conference**

A person with their back to the camera, wearing a white t-shirt with a graphic of a lighthouse and the text 'dolphin fleet' and 'PROVINCIAL'. They are standing on a boat, looking out over a body of water towards a coastal town with a prominent lighthouse. The entire image has a green color overlay.

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# WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

- ▶ Interpretive Messaging What is it and where can it be found
- ▶ Methods of Delivery
- ▶ Publications
- ▶ Waysides and Kiosk...What are you hoping from this workshop
- ▶ Fabrication and Installation. Options, Pros and Cons
- ▶ ADA -Basics of Compliance with ADA Standards
- ▶ Nationwide resources for learning more about design, fabrication and ADA issues

# Interpretation-What is it

**Freeman Tilden:** “An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”

**Dr. Sam Ham:** “Interpretation is an approach to communication...it involves translating the technical language of a natural science or related field into terms and ideas that people who aren't scientists can readily understand.”

**NAI:** “Interpretation is a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.”

**NPS:** “Interpretation facilitates a connection between the interests of the visitor and the meanings of the resource.” Expanding on this, the NPS said that interpretation is: 1) successful as a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings/significance inherent in the resource; and 2) appropriate for the audience, and provides clear focus for their connection with the resources by demonstrating the cohesive development of a relevant idea or ideas, rather than relying primarily on a recital of a chronological narrative or series of facts.

# Methods of Delivery

- ▶ A wide variety of methods of telling you story  
Ideally, in person but not always possible.
  
- ▶ **Three messages to share**
  - Active vs Passive Voice in all your interpretive writing
  - Strive for TORE...is a crucial element
  - Interpretive writing is different than “essay writing”

## ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE VOICE

In a sentence written in the active voice, the subject of sentence performs the action. In a sentence written in the passive voice the subject receives the action

**Active:** The candidate believes that Congress must place a ceiling on the budget.

**Passive:** It is believed by the candidate that a ceiling must be placed on the budget by Congress.

**Active:** Researchers earlier showed that high stress can cause heart attacks.

**Passive:** It was earlier demonstrated that heart attacks can be caused by high stress.

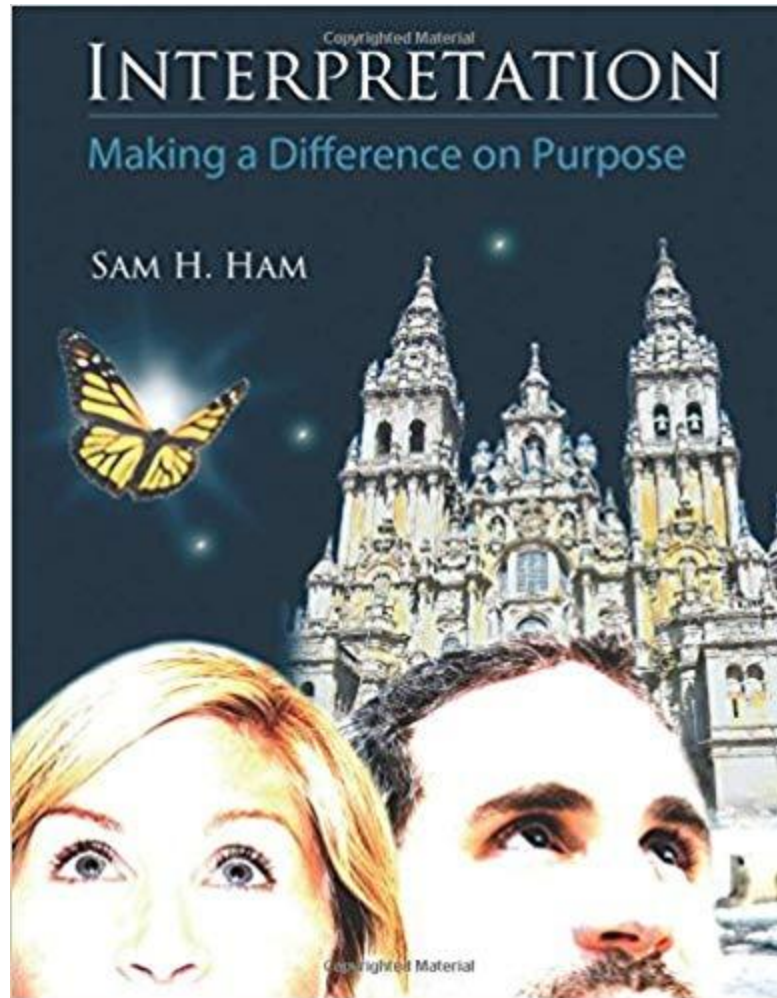
**Active:** The dog bit the man.

**Passive:** The man was bitten by the dog.

INTERPRETIVE  
*writing*

Alan Leftridge





# Interpretive Publications

## A quick assessment guide

- ▶ A quick method of reviewing a interpretive publication is to use the TORE principles set out by Sam Ham in his book

*“Interpretation, making a difference on purpose”*

**T** Is the publication thematic

1-7 Score

**O** How well organized is the publication

1 -7 Score

**R** How relevant is it to the intended audience

1 -7 Score

**E** Is it entertaining and/or enjoyable

1 -7 Score

# Exhibits, Waysides and Kiosks

## Definitions and Jargon



- ▶ Exhibits
- ▶ Waysides
- ▶ Kiosks
- ▶ Fabrication
- ▶ Installation

# FUNDAMENTALS OF DESIGN

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

To ensure a smooth and efficient process of developing effective exhibits, there are a few questions you should consider from the start:

What are your interpretive objectives for the specific site or sites? What is the essence of the message or story that you want to convey?

Who will be working on the project and what is everyone's specific role? How do you reach consensus to satisfy both local and international audiences?

What visitors do you expect? Are there any special considerations that should be made for children, families, international visitors, and those with disabilities? To what extent should the exhibit address Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility guidelines?

What other information exists about your story, including publications, audiovisual shows, films, and audio cassettes? How will your exhibit relate to other media?

# Fundamentals of Design

Do you need any sign permits?

What are your budget constraints?

What is your timetable? When do you want to break ground or install

# SO WHAT IS THE COST?

**Project Budget** The total fabrication cost for a standard 24" x 36" horizontal wayside exhibit is approximately \$1000.

For each exhibit, plan on investing approximately \$300 for coordination and \$300 for research and development.

Volunteers can reduce a project's coordination and development costs.

Remember, costs will decrease as the number of exhibits increase.





## Interpretation: Telling the Story Principles of Successful Interpretation



- 1) **Interpretation is provocation**, not just information. Illustrate with analogies, quotes, metaphors, and examples. Use text that encourages visitor interaction: • "Look for the..." • "Touch the..." • "Can you hear the...?" • "See if you can find the..." • "Imagine the..." • "Smell the..."
- 2) The best interpretation is **succinct**. Use short sentences. Concentrate on one subject. Don't worry about including all of the details. Visitors usually ignore long, complex messages. Avoid creating a "textbook on a stick."
- 3) Individual exhibits should complement each other by presenting a unified theme. This helps advance a project's organizational structure and provides visitors with a better understanding of the site's significance. "Interpretation is an information service, a guiding service, an educational service... an inspirational service. Interpretation aims at giving people new understanding, new insights, new enthusiasm, and new interests." -

4) Help visitors relate the exhibit's topic to their own lives. Use familiar terms and personal language. Use everyday objects and events to illustrate the past, such as: “In 1889, horses were as common as automobiles are today.”

5) Use photos, maps, and images to illustrate your point. Use stimulating and revealing graphics—avoid duplicating what can be seen.

6) Reveal message conclusions through unique or unusual viewpoints.

7) Accuracy is essential. Make sure your facts are correct—mistakes on interpretive exhibits live for a very long time!

8) Have fun. Be creative. Learn a little Be funny. Humor is a okay..don't have to be serious all the time

## VISITORS REMEMBER.....

- ▶ 10% of what they hear;
- ▶ 30% of what they read;
- ▶ 50% of what they see;
- ▶ 90% of what they do—if an exhibit encourages interaction and stimulates thought, it fulfills its purpose by reaching almost all site visitors.

# BOTTOM LINE TO REMEMBER

Effective exhibits/wayside/kiosk exhibits contain fewer than 300 words and feature no more than four to five graphic images.

You have fewer than 30 seconds to capture their attention and to get your message across..Be concise!

# DESIGN BASICS

[http://www.lcbp.org/wayside/Manual/Lo\\_Res\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.lcbp.org/wayside/Manual/Lo_Res_Manual.pdf)

# Fabrication...

- ▶ Brainstorm session
- ▶ What are your ideas and what have you seen

# COSTS...BALLPARK FIGURES

- |               |               |          |       |
|---------------|---------------|----------|-------|
| ▶ Panel Size  | 1/8 inch      | 1/2 inch | 1     |
| ▶ 2x17 inches | \$70 -        | \$150 -  | \$180 |
| ▶ 18 x 24     | \$130 - \$250 | \$180 -  | \$290 |
| ▶ 24 x 36     | \$250 - \$400 | \$340 -  | \$470 |
| ▶ 24 x 42     | \$310 - \$450 | \$420 -  | \$530 |
| ▶ 36 x 48     | \$490 - \$660 | \$670 -  | \$810 |
- ▶ Prices may vary. Costs do not include packaging, shipping, and other proof set ups. Plan on adding \$50-\$100 per exhibit for these additional services, depending on size of order. Lead-time: 30-45 days for most contractors.
- ESTIMATED PANEL COSTS

# Base and Frame Fabrication

The Classic Frame..seen throughout the NPS System and other locations...state, local and historic sites/museums

	Panel Base	w/o frame	w/ frame
▶	12x17 inches	\$150 - \$385	\$190 - \$470
▶	24x18	\$170 - \$385	\$350 - \$470
▶	24x36	\$310 - \$385	\$450 - \$470
▶	24x42	\$330 - \$530	\$460 - \$620
▶	36x48 Upright	N/A	\$490 - \$730
▶	36x48 Double Upright	N/A	\$910 - \$1,450

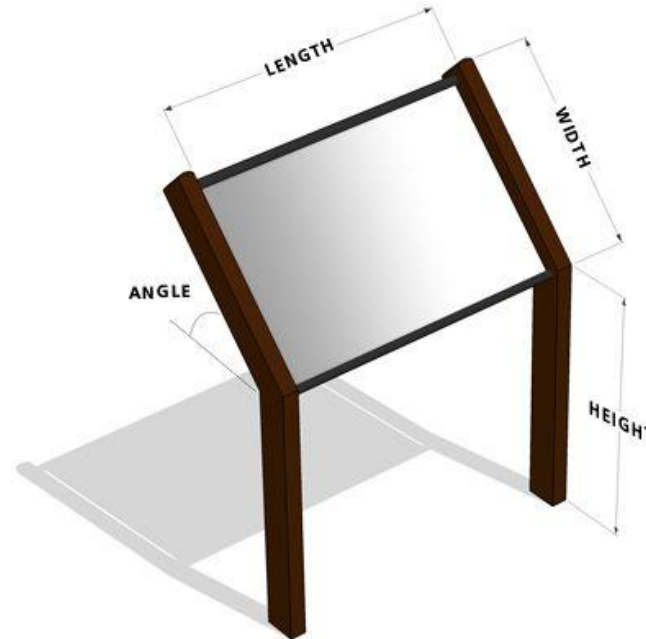
- ▶ Prices may vary. Shipping may be included, depending on the company. Lead time: 40-45 days for most contractors.

# DESIGN AND FABRICATION SOURCES

- ▶ The National Association for Interpretation  
*Green Pages*
- ▶ *Loads of ideas and resources with AASLA,  
AAM and other organizations*

# AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

- ▶ Factors to consider
  - ▶ Height
  - ▶ Surface
  - ▶ Visibility
  - ▶ Text size
  - ▶ Surface
  - ▶ Glare
- 
- ▶ NPS ADA Guidelines
  - ▶ <https://www.nps.gov/hfc/accessibility/>



# ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- ▶ Consider your audience
- ▶ Access to the site  
(American Trails has loads of great information regarding ADA compliance)
- ▶ Mass Recent Study on Accessable Trails
- ▶ Case Studies and examples

A photograph of three women in polo shirts and shorts standing by a pool. The woman in the center is kneeling and holding a white sign with two butterfly drawings. The woman on the left is standing and looking at something in her hands. The woman on the right is standing and holding a white box. The background shows a wooden fence and some foliage.

# Q & A

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