



UMC GUIDE RECREATION PARKS & LEISURE

University of Missouri-Columbia Extension Division

Methods of Interpretation

Interpretive Recordings

BY GLENN WEAVER

Department of Recreation and Park Administration

Recordings are a versatile medium suitable for a variety of interpretive settings. A recording can be the "star" of a performance, the supporting "actor," or the background setting. Every sound is a possible addition to an interpretive presentation. It may be carried by record, cassette tape, reel-to-reel tape, or other mechanical means.

Recordings are often used in museums to relay information about history, geological formations, and other scientific material. Recordings may also interpret a special display or natural phenomena. Sound tapes are sometimes substituted for written scripts on a self-guided nature trail, for either hiking or automotive. There are many possible uses.

HAVE YOU TRIED THESE USES?

Use a recording to attract attention at a slide talk or campfire presentation: Use sounds to establish a receptive mood in your audience, to create interest, or to prepare them for what is to follow.

Use a recording to ask a question: "What do these sounds have in common? What sound is missing? Which sound is out of place?" Or simply, "What are these sounds?"

Use a recording as a transition from one point to another in the interpretive talk.

Interpret the sounds of a park to an audience through the use of a recording.

Duplicate an experience for the audience. Record and play the sounds of a scene shown on a slide.

Use recordings at a museum or nature center: An interpretive description of an exhibit played over loud speaker or hand-held phones can contain more script than a sign or label and can be understood by readers and nonreaders alike. Individual messages for each exhibit played over phones will not disturb visitors at other exhibits.

Recorded sounds help create an atmosphere of reality in an exhibit and increase the impact on the viewer.

Persons viewing a display will probably have to spend more time reading labels than they do studying the objects. A recorded message can increase the visual impact of the display by freeing the visitor from the task of reading several descriptions.

DETERMINE THEME

As with any interpretive program, *the first step in planning is to determine the theme and the audience for the particular presentation*—within the context of the theme for the entire site. The *message* to be interpreted is the most important element; the recording assists in that interpretation. Try to stimulate the imaginations of the audience. A recording may be the interpretive tool that provokes and challenges the audience or establishes a framework to help the listener comprehend the total concept.

WRITING THE NARRATION

A script for a recording is not written like a script to be read. Listeners can't stop the recording and ponder a word or concept. They must be able to understand the meaning of the message as it is heard. Keep words and sentences short and simple. One and one-half to three minutes is considered the maximum amount of time for an audio station.

Think about what you as interpreter would tell an audience if you were present at the exhibit or trail. But remember, if you were present, observers could interrupt and ask questions when something is unclear. Anticipate what the audience will want to hear and try to answer the questions they might ask.

Remember, you are the interpreter, not the instructor. Let visitors draw their own conclusions. Your job is to ask the right question, to form the image that touches or inspires the listener. Don't preach and don't over-interpret.

The tone should be positive and friendly, but not condescending.

Give whatever directions are needed to move the listener on to the next exhibit or trail marker.

PRACTICE!

Practice reading the script. Record practice sessions and listen to how you sound. Make changes in the script to correct unclear wording or non-conversational phrases. After you are satisfied, enlist a critic to listen to the tape without a written script. Ask the listener to tell you what he or she heard: Does it match your purpose? What things weren't understood? Which parts of the talk were the best? Again—revise the draft accordingly.

SOUND EFFECTS

Background sounds can also be added to the narration to set a mood and create additional interest.

What sounds could be recorded? Any sound made by man or nature:

- Buzzing of insects ● calls of wild animals, birds
- thunder ● wind ● rain ● water flowing in a stream or falling over a cliff.
- Speeches of politicians, past and present ● dramatizations of historical events, plays ● conversations ● voices singing ● instrumental music.
- Sounds of machines: cars, trains, planes, factories, farm implements.
- Sounds of stillness, happiness, sadness, excitement, frustration, hostility, tenderness, fright, pandemonium.
- Foreign sounds, familiar sounds, sounds simple or complex.

The interpreter or interpretive staff can record and use many of these sounds. Carry a recorder as you

travel around the park site. Listen for opportunities and record what you hear.

Commercially produced tapes and records greatly increase the kinds of experiences you can create. The professional's expertise and sophisticated equipment combine to create a high quality product that the amateur would find difficult to duplicate. Consult a catalogue of recordings (see Resources) to find one to suit your program.

A FEW CAUTIONS

Any machine can fail to operate—and probably will when needed the most. Make sure that equipment is checked frequently and have standby equipment ready.

The audio equipment needed for recordings is more expensive than signs and printed brochures. So someone must supervise its use, especially when recorders are checked out to trail users. Vandalism is also a potential problem.

Equipment failure will not help an agency's public image. People get very disgusted when they lift a phone to hear a message at an exhibit and hear nothing. "Out of Order" signs do little to promote a program. Keep extra units on hand that can be quickly installed.

RESOURCES

Audiovisual Instruction (periodical)

Educational Screen and Audiovisual Guide (periodical)

Educational Media (periodical)

Index to Educational Audio Tapes. University of Southern California, University Park, Los Angeles, CA.

National Center for Audio Tapes Catalog (with annual supplements). National Center for Audio Tapes, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO.