

It's as easy as 1, 2, 3...



This good practice checklist will help you produce good quality, effective interpretation.

1. An interpretation plan is essential.

Without knowing why, what, who for, when, and how you should interpret, you'll be in a right muddle.

2. Know your visitors and do what's right for them.

Don't just interpret what you are interested in.

3. Make sure you relate to your audience,

and that they can connect with what you want to say.

4. Each piece of interpretation should communicate a single, clear message or idea.

This is the main 'theme' of your interpretation, and can hook your visitors into a more detailed story.

5. Don't interpret everything.



Some things are best left for people to discover or wonder at for themselves.

6. Get specialist help if you're not sure what you're doing.

Interpretation looks easy, but is difficult to do well.

7. Don't assume that your visitors know much about what you are interpreting,

but don't underestimate their intelligence either.

8. Dull and boring is bad.

Fun and provocative is good.

9. Be prepared to take risks -

your visitors are not cautious bureaucrats but normal people who will enjoy being excited, amused, challenged and entertained.

10. Stimulate all the senses.

What can your visitors see, hear, feel, smell and taste?



11. Be interactive.

Get your visitors doing things and playing games.

12. Don't preach.

You may want to change people's attitudes or behaviour, but it pays to be subtle and to let people think for themselves.

13. Layer your interpretation so that everyone gets the message,

regardless of how bothered they can be to read / watch / listen to or do the whole thing.

14. People like stories and puzzles,

even simple ones such as ‘how the anemone got its legs’.

15. Mix your media:

don't rely on ever more panels and leaflets.

16. A ‘book on the wall’ is a definite no-no.

Keep any text short and sharp.



17. Think about how accessible your interpretation is.

Can people get to it, and then can they understand it?

18. Good design is part of your message,

but bad design will obscure it. Don't be seduced into doing something that looks good but isn't easy to read.

19. Don't spend all your money on a nice-looking building only to run out of money when it comes to the interpretation inside.

Your real ‘product’ is the interpretation, not the building.

- 20. Do encourage your visitors to explore further.**
- 21. Link your site to a relevant facility such as your local museum.**
- 22. Do include responsibilities and budgets for maintaining the interpretation in your annual work programme.**
- 23. Do measure how well your interpretation is working.**

See the evaluation notes for guidance.

24. And finally,

once you've learned all the rules, be prepared to creatively 'bend' them. The most successful interpretation is often deliberately 'different'.

This page was adapted from an editorial article in the Interpret Scotland journal, issue 2, Autumn 2000. Cartoons by Feem.