

**Guidelines for Developing a Conversational Sixty-Minute Garden Highlights Tour  
2019 Garden Docent Training  
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens**

The conversation develops in an orderly fashion. It contains the “big ideas” (meaning the design-features-Marjorie Post/museum today framework), a theme, objectives, and a sequence of events. All of these components have to be built on what you know about the audience for whom it is being designed and what you know about the gardens.

Highlighted steps below are those that are new.

**Follow these steps when developing a garden tour.**

**1. Identify your audience.**

- a. For training purposes, think about the audience as a group of typical Hillwood visitors: intelligent, curious adults with little to no knowledge of the tour’s subjects, i.e. enthusiastic novices.
- b. Review the “Learners and Learning” handout and “The Visitors’” Bill of Rights” to think about the audiences’ needs.
- c. Remember that the average visitor is not like you, who have been trained for these many months!

**2. Choose a tour path (either A, B, or C).**

- a. Each tour route visits the same eight rooms, but in a different order (to avoid over-crowding spaces). Tour C is accessible: flat surfaces, no stairs/steps.
- b. Maximum number of tours at one time is three. Each docent typically guides between 1-20 visitors on a tour.
- c. The tour path routes, with room timing, are listed at the end of this document in the addendum. The times include travel from one room to the next, as well as an introduction and conclusion.
- d. You will present the tour path of your choice for your qualifying tour.
- e. Please note that once docents-in-training have qualified, they will be expected to deliver all the tour routes; their assigned tour route will vary from shift to shift. Helpful hints:
  - i. the introduction will always be the same, as all tours start in the motor court;
  - ii. the transitions between rooms will change depending upon the route, as the rooms fall in different orders depending upon the tours;
  - iii. keep aware of the room sequence so references like “already seen” or “yet to be seen” are accurate;
  - iv. docents can ask their fellow docents if they can choose which tour route they present;
  - v. docents presenting Tour Path A have additional duties, as described in the Docent Guidelines document, reviewed and practiced at the Tour Logistics class.

### 3. **“Read” the eight rooms and its features.**

- a. Remember the rooms on the tour are: motor court; cutting garden, Lunar Lawn, French parterre, rose garden, Friendship Walk/Overlook, putting green, and Japanese-style garden.
- b. Spend time on your own or with a colleague **exploring** the eight rooms on the tour and particular features you might use and making connections among them.
- c. **Pay attention** to what your senses pick-up, especially what you hear, smell and feel.
- d. **Brainstorm** what you see and what you know about the rooms and its features. Record the storm on paper.
- e. **Select** the few features in each room you might use and make connections among them.

### 4. **Focus on the BIG IDEA of the rooms, which is the framework.**

- a. The big idea has already been identified for you. It is the overarching framework of design, features, and Post/museum today.
- b. The framework organizes the discussion in each room.
- c. Your challenge is to present the framework as a meaningful focus that engages the visitors’ interests and curiosity. It derives from your own experiences and interests in the room you have chosen. Focus on the big idea in a way that stimulates you and your visitors to think and make connections.
- d. The framework should be identified as part of your advance organizer at the beginning of the tour.

### 5. **Create a theme.**

- a. The theme enhances the framework in a new, fun, exciting, original way. Themes are able to cut across time periods and remove ideas from their usual contexts.
  - i. Remember there are three time periods at Hillwood: when the object was originally used/made; Post’s time; and our time.
- b. It is a meaningful focus that engages the visitors’ interest and curiosity—a topic they can follow and understand.
- c. It derives from your own experiences and interests in the gardens, Post, and the features you have explored.
- d. Focus on an idea that stimulates you and your visitors to reflect on this place.
- e. Keep a list of successful ideas to share and use. For inspiration, review the handout “A Brainstorm of Themes for a Garden Tour.”

### 6. **Research features and ideas thoroughly.**

- a. Finalize your choice of features for each room to focus on.
- b. What additional information do you have to know in order to enhance the visitors’ explorations of the gardens? Be selective.
- c. Research should be informed by the design-features-Post/museum today framework.
- d. Research should pull strongly from the training resources like the readings, audio tour scripts, lectures, handouts, and class notes. (Remember: Wikipedia is not a definitive source. 😊)

- e. A good practice to get into is to footnote and/or source your written lesson plans; this will make it easier to keep facts accurate and help when you modify your lesson plan in the future.
- f. Remember you cannot share all you know. Be selective; be pithy; distill information. Visitors do not want to be overwhelmed with data.

**7. Write down your objectives.**

- a. Remember, objectives are clear statements of the outcomes you expect for your visitors—what you want them to be able to do or “take away” as a result of their visit.
- b. They spring from the big idea, the design-features-Post/museum today framework, and theme.
- c. Begin with this phrase: “As a result of participating in this tour, visitors will be better able to.....”
- d. Begin the objective statements using action verbs from the following selection: identify, discuss, describe, explain, state, list, and define.

**8. Study the general outline and timing of the path the tour will take.**

- a. At Hillwood, there are routes already identified for you. Become familiar with these and consider the times allotted per room, noting where you will stop and for how long.

**9. Develop and write down an introduction, also called an advance organizer.**

This is the introduction to the tour. The advance organizer helps your group feel comfortable and gives them a sense of what will be happening. It sets a conversational tone and also provides an opportunity to challenge them to think and/or arouse their curiosity. Mini-advance organizers are also helpful in individual rooms or throughout the tour.

- a. It has these parts:
  - i. It finds out what your visitors already know about Hillwood.
    - 1. Have any of you been here before?
    - 2. What brought you here today?
    - 3. Who has seen the orientation film?
  - ii. It gives a brief overview of what they will be doing. It includes finding out any “housekeeping” by asking, “Who has another tour to attend or a café reservation?”
  - iii. It identifies the theme and framework of your conversation. A helpful hint: refer to your objectives and restate them in a way that flows.
- b. Here is an example:

*i. Finding out what your visitors already know:* “Welcome to Hillwood. My name is XX, and I am a volunteer docent who leads garden tours. Have any of you been here before?”

*ii. Brief overview and housekeeping:* We are going to explore eight rooms on our 60-minute highlights tour, and I hope we have an enjoyable conversation, asking and answering questions, as we go along. Does anyone have a café reservation or mansion tour following this tour? We will get you to your next destination in time.

*iii. Identifies theme and framework:* These gardens were the culmination of our founder Marjorie Post's deep experience living on estates like Hillwood. We'll explore the designs and key features of the garden rooms, as well as their connection to Marjorie Post and the museum today."

10. **Identify the key questions you will use.** The questions serve as guideposts in the conversation. The sequence of questions moves the conversation as it travels around the rooms and the features you have selected.
  - a. Start with the "hook" question, typically placed somewhere in the advance organizer. It really needs to grab the group's attention, arouse their curiosity, or challenge them to think.
  - b. Brainstorm what you think the answers to the questions might be.
  - c. Continue to distill the information you wish to convey, as needed.
  
11. **Write transitions and summaries.** Yes, write them down.
  - a. Use transitions to link each section of a sequenced experience to the next. As Gartenhaus writes, transitions are "ways to unify."
  - b. They:
    - i. generate anticipation for what will be seen or heard next;
    - ii. invite visitor involvement (mental and sensory);
    - iii. create a bridge or connection between ideas;
    - iv. provide direction or focus during group movement;
    - v. allow visitors to apply their own experiences and knowledge;
    - vi. create a foundation for new information.
  - c. Transitions are short (only one or two sentences), and can use questions, provocative statements, summaries, and analogies.
  - d. Examples include:
    - i. Relates to the "big idea" ..... "Let's look at another feature that shows how this was a room designed for large parties."
    - ii. Hints at reason for the next stop on the tour..... "These natural elements are complemented by man-made ones. Let's look at those now."
    - iii. Includes visitor comments....."Many of you said you've been to a surprise party. Post's friends did something similar. Let's go see that room."
    - iv. Can be an action or activity..... "As we move to the next room, continue to watch out for more statues of chubby children, or putti."
  - e. Summarize main points as you go, as you need.
  
12. **Develop a solid conclusion with two parts: a summary and a question probing for take-aways.** A conclusion completes the lesson's structure and creates a solid framework. As Gartenhaus writes, conclusions provide "culmination."
  - a. First, summarize succinctly the experience, referencing the objectives:
    - i. bring visitors back to the original advance organizer and assist them in reflecting on what has taken place.
  - b. Second, ask a question that probes for what visitors take-away from your tour.
    - i. Include a broad question that lets you know if you have met the objectives that you established for yourself at the outset of the lesson.

Evaluating the experience provides you with information that can help you decide what to keep and what to change for future groups.

- ii. You can begin by stating you are interested to know what resonated with the group. Example: "I'd love to hear how this tour was for you, as it helps me keep my tours interesting."
- iii. Use one of the following examples:
  1. "What important idea from our tour do you leave with?"
  2. "What do you take away from this tour?"
  3. "What will you remember from this tour?"
  4. "What was your favorite moment of this tour?"
  5. "What did you enjoy most about the tour?"
  6. "What did you find most memorable about this tour?"
  7. "What will you take away from the tour that you'd like to tell a friend?"
- c. Here is an example:

*Summary:* "This brings us to the end of our tour. In our time together, we have looked at the design and key features of the gardens, and their connection to Marjorie Post and the museum today. We have seen how these gardens really were the culmination of our founder Marjorie Post's deep experience living on estates like Hillwood.

Thank you for visiting Hillwood! For those of you who wish to continue exploring here, there is so much more to engage you! Audio guides of both mansion and gardens are available as an app or on a device (found in the visitor center), the special exhibition is wonderful, as is a walk through the greenhouse. I'm happy to direct you to where you go next.

*A question probing for take-aways:* Before we part ways, I'd love to hear how this tour was for you, as it helps me know keep my tour fresh: what is one idea will you take away from our discussion?"

### 13. Write a lesson plan for your tour.

- a. This written lesson plan will be submitted to Audra and Lisa.
- b. Follow the structure of the written lesson plan in the handout "Template for a Written Lesson Plan for a Garden Tour."
- c. A written lesson plan for a tour will include these components:
  - i. Audience description (for this purpose: enthusiastic novices)
  - ii. Objectives (As a result of participating in this lesson, visitors will be better able to:....)
  - iii. Tour route
  - iv. Theme
  - v. An introduction, aka advance organizer
  - vi. A sequence of rooms, including questions, transitions, and summaries within a room
  - vii. Transitions between rooms, and summaries within rooms, as needed
  - viii. Conclusion, with a summary and take-away question

- d. When writing the lesson plan, construct your Japanese-style garden room thusly: orient the group to the garden at the Vista Terrace, and then walk with them down the steps (with the handrail) to the bottom of the garden (by the gate), discuss, and lead them back up.
  - i. On actual tours, some groups may be comprised of both individuals who do not want to go down into the garden and some who do want to walk the steps/paths down into the garden. In this case, orient the group together at the Vista Terrace, and then encourage those who want to venture down to do so and to return at a specified time. For those who venture into the garden, docents can give those folks an “assignment” to direct their exploration (example: “See if you can see how the waterfall flows down the mini-mountainside to the calm water at the bottom.”) The docent then stays with those who stay at the top, and continues to discuss the garden.
  - ii. On actual tours, if a group is unified in desiring to stay at the Vista Terrace (and not walk the steps down into the garden), docents can lead the entire garden talk from the Vista Terrace.

**14. Practice, practice, practice.**

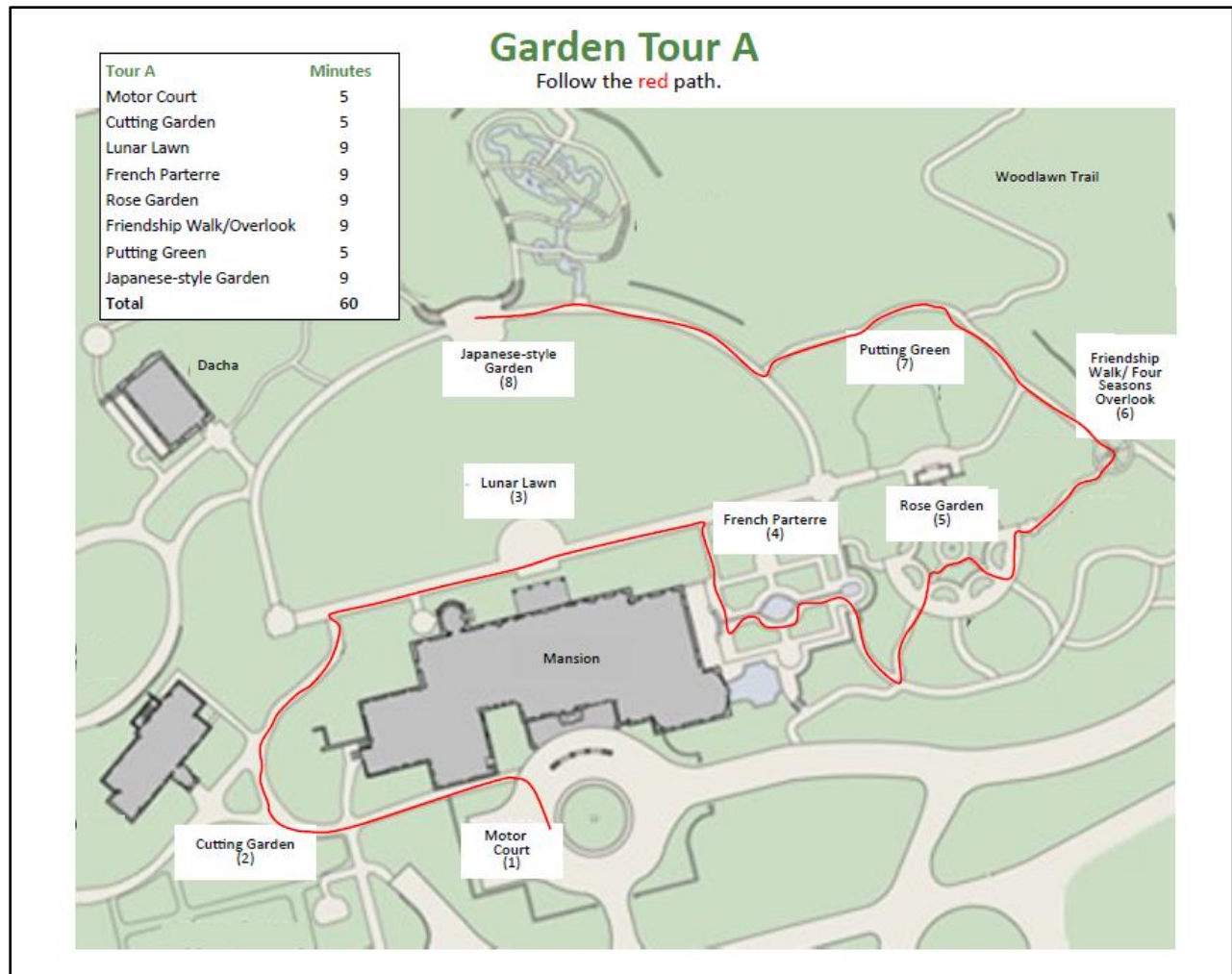
- a. Time the lesson so that it does not exceed the sixty-minute time requirement.
- b. Practice out loud multiple times.
- c. Spend time in the gardens, and plan where you will stand and where visitors will gather.
- d. If you wish to practice your tour on a group of your friends, please reach out to Lisa to book that time---she can steer you to times that avoid pre-booked garden activities.

**15. After the lesson plan is delivered, assess how it went.**

- a. Use the Self-Assessment Worksheet. Determine how those assessments influence your next delivery of your tour lesson plan, and make those adjustments.

**16. After delivering a successful qualifying tour, Lisa will work with you to incorporate you into the monthly schedule.**

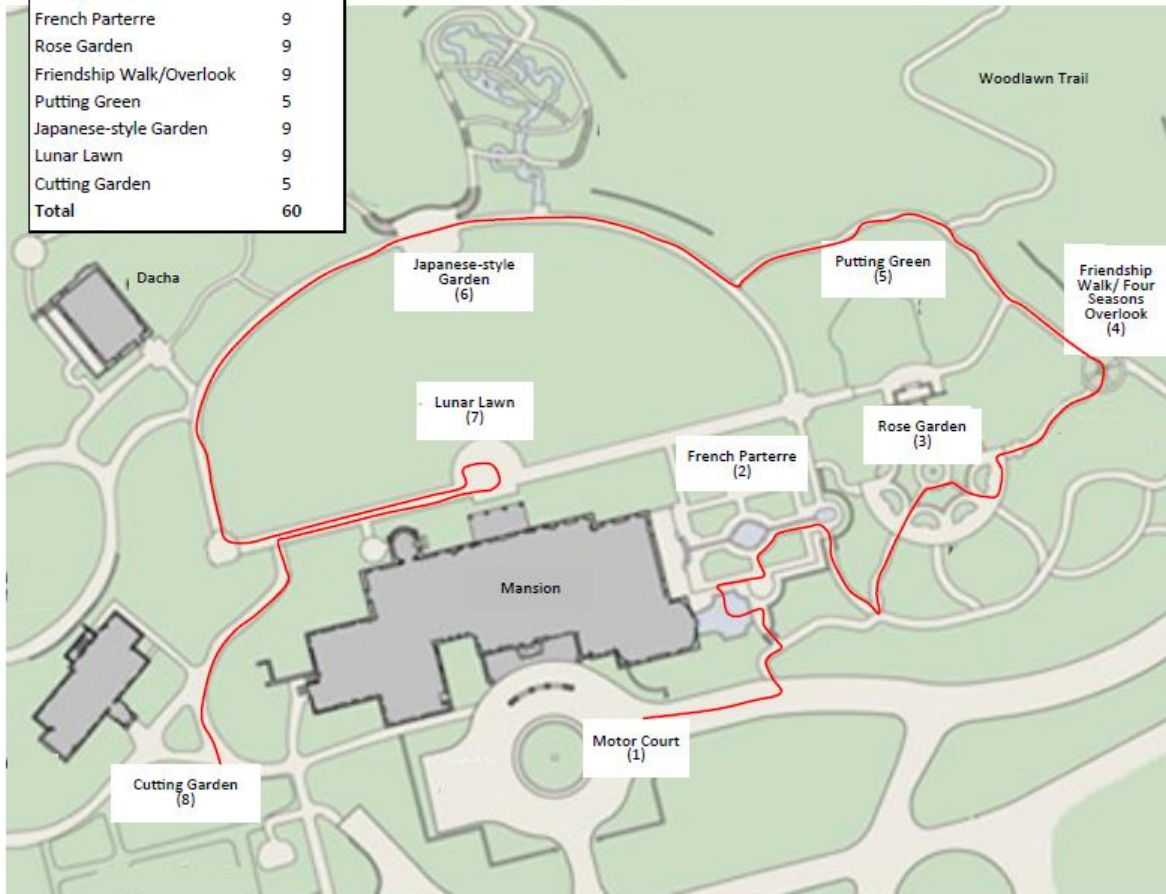
## Addendum: Garden Tour Route Maps and Allotted Room Times



## Garden Tour B

Follow the red path.

| Tour B                   | Minutes |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Motor Court              | 5       |
| French Parterre          | 9       |
| Rose Garden              | 9       |
| Friendship Walk/Overlook | 9       |
| Putting Green            | 5       |
| Japanese-style Garden    | 9       |
| Lunar Lawn               | 9       |
| Cutting Garden           | 5       |
| Total                    | 60      |





## Garden Tour C—ADA Route

Follow the red path.

| Tour C—ADA               | Minutes |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Motor Court              | 5       |
| Rose Garden              | 9       |
| Friendship Walk/Overlook | 9       |
| Putting Green            | 5       |
| French Parterre          | 9       |
| Lunar Lawn               | 9       |
| Japanese-style Garden    | 9       |
| Cutting Garden           | 5       |
| Total                    | 60      |

