

Guidelines for Developing a Conversational Sixty-Minute Highlights Mansion Tour Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens 2022-2023 Mansion Docent Training

The conversation develops in an orderly fashion. It contains the “big ideas” (think E-C-C 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 estate, collections, and Marjorie Post. (**New steps are noted in orange.**)

Follow these steps when developing a mansion tour.

1. Identify your audience.

- a. For training purposes, think about the audience as a group of typical Hillwood visitors:
 - i. Intelligent, curious adults with little to no knowledge of the tour’s subjects
- 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 or those in your training cohort!

2. NEW: Choose a tour path (either A, B, C, D or E).

- a. The tour path routes are listed at the end of this document in the addendum.
- b. You will present the tour path you choose for your qualifying tour.
- c. Please note that once you have qualified, you will be expected to deliver all the tour routes; your assigned tour route will vary from shift to shift. Helpful hints:
 - i. your introduction will want to be able to work with any room in which it is delivered;
 - ii. since the first room is different with each route, the transition into the first room may need to change depending upon the route;
 - iii. keep aware of where you are in the room sequence so you reference “already seen” or “yet to be seen” rooms/objects/topics appropriately;
 - iv. on the day you volunteer as a docent, you can ask your fellow docents if you can choose which tour route you do.

3. “Read” the ten rooms and their objects.

- a. Spend time exploring the ten rooms on the tour and particular objects you might use and making connections among them.
- b. Brainstorm what you see and what you know about the rooms and objects. Record the storm on paper.
- c. Remember the rooms on the tour are:
 - i. entry hall;
 - ii. pavilion;
 - iii. French drawing room;
 - iv. Russian porcelain room;
 - v. icon room;
 - vi. first floor library;
 - vii. dining room;
 - viii. kitchen and pantry;
 - ix. French porcelain room;
 - x. Post’s bedroom suite.
- d. Select no more than three objects you might use in each room and make connections among them.

- e. Sometimes a room can be treated as an object. For instance: the breakfast room during the dining room discussion; dressing room during Post's bedroom suite discussion; or the pantry during the kitchen discussion.
- f. **Helpful tip:** many have found it helpful to strategically plot which rooms work best to tell different parts of Post's narrative in the "collector" section. For example: the library is a good place to discuss Post's parents and their role in her life.

4. Review the framework, your "big idea."

- a. The big idea has already been identified for you. It is the overarching framework of estate, collection, and collector.
- b. The framework organizes each room.
- c. Your challenge is to weave this framework throughout your tour, emphasizing different aspects of it as appropriate.
- d. The framework should be identified as part of your advance organizer at the beginning of the tour.

5. **NEW:** 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. The three time periods at Hillwood are: 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 museum, the collector, and the objects 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 Highlight Mansion Tour."

6. Research objects and ideas thoroughly.

- a. Finalize your choice of no more than three objects for each room to focus on.
- b. What additional information do you have to know in order to enhance the visitors' explorations of the mansion? Be selective.
- c. Research should be informed by the style-function-production framework.
- d. Research should pull strongly from the training resources like the readings, 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 information.

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 E-C-C 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. NEW: 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 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:

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

Brief overview and housekeeping: We are going to explore ten rooms on our 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 garden tour following this tour? We will get you to your next destination in time.

Identifies theme and framework: Our founder Marjorie Post understood the theater of self-presentation as did the people behind the objects she collected. We'll look at the functions of rooms, their connection to Marjorie Post, and a few key objects from her collection to gain a better understanding of the art of self-presentation across the centuries."

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 mansion and the objects 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.
- 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" "As you can see, both of these features show us X."
 - ii. Hints at reason for the next stop on the tour..... "If you think this is X, let's see how it compares to Y in the next room."
 - iii. Includes visitor comments..... "You think of X when you think of Easter. Let's see how people in Faberge's time related to Easter."
 - iv. Can be an action or activity... "As we move to the next stop, watch out for X."
- e. Summarize main points as you go, as you need.

12. Develop an evaluative 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. The Summary:
 - i. bring visitors back to the original advance organizer and assist them in reflecting on what has taken place.
- b. A Question Probing for Take-aways:
 - 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. Use one of the following examples:
 - 1. "What new information (or one 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've looked at the function of the major rooms in the mansion, their connection to Marjorie Post, and discovered how the theater of self-presentation was employed by people in the past and Marjorie Post by examining a few key objects from the collection.

Thank you for visiting Hillwood! For those of you who wish to continue exploring here, a mobile audio tour is available, the sacred arts gallery and staff dining room are self-guided, and my fellow volunteers are on-station in the mansion. The special exhibition is wonderful, as are the gardens.

A question probing for take-aways: Before we depart, 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, Lisa, and Marisa.
- b. Follow the structure of the written lesson plan as distributed in the handout "A Model of the Structure of a Highlights Mansion Tour."
- c. A written lesson plan for a tour will include these components:
 - i. Audience description (for this purpose: typical Hillwood visitors)
 - ii. Objectives (As a result of participating in this lesson, visitors will be better able to:....)
 - iii. Tour route
 - iv. Theme
 - v. An advance organizer
 - vi. A sequence of rooms, including questions, transitions, and summaries within a room
 - vii. Transitions and summaries between rooms
 - viii. Evaluative conclusion, with a summary and take-away question

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 mansion, and plan where you will stand and where visitors will gather.
- d. If you wish to practice your tour on a small group of your friends, please reach out to Marisa to book that time---she can steer you to times that avoid pre-booked mansion 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.

Addendum: Mansion Tour Path Routes

Tour A

Entry Hall	5
Pavilion	6
French Drawing	6
Russian Porcelain	6
Icon Room	10
Downstairs Library	2
Dining Room	6
Kitchen/Pantry	5
French Porcelain	6
MMP Bedroom Suite	5
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Tour B

French Drawing	6
Russian Porcelain	6
Icon Room	10
Downstairs Library	2
Dining Room	6
Kitchen/Pantry	5
French Porcelain	6
MMP Bedroom Suite	5
Entry Hall	5
Pavilion	6
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Tour C

Icon Room	10
Downstairs Library	2
Dining Room	6
Kitchen/Pantry	5
French Porcelain	6
MMP Bedroom Suite	5
Entry Hall	5
Pavilion	6
French Drawing	6
Russian Porcelain	6
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Tour D

Dining Room	6
Kitchen/Pantry	5
French Porcelain	6
MMP Bedroom Suite	5
Entry Hall	5
Pavilion	6
French Drawing	6
Russian Porcelain	6
Icon Room	10
Downstairs Library	2
	57

Tour E

Kitchen/Pantry	5
French Porcelain	6
MMP Bedroom Suite	5
Entry Hall	5
Pavilion	6
French Drawing	6
Russian Porcelain	6
Icon Room	10
Downstairs Library	2
Dining Room	6
	57