

Learning With and From Each Other and Yourself
Assessment and Hillwood's Docent Program
2024 Garden Docent Training
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens

Vision

Hillwood docents will engage visitors in a dialogue about objects and their narratives. This dialogue is organized around an interpretive framework and is informed by an understanding of the collections and best practices for bringing that information to visitors.

The end to these means? The best possible visitor experience. The means to this end? Continuing education and assessment.

Assessment

is the colloquial process through which staff and docents share their expertise and talents and provide one another with feedback, support, and assistance for the purpose of refining present skills, learning new skills, and/or addressing and resolving tour-related challenges. The purpose of assessment is to help each docent give the best possible tour and to ensure quality and professionalism in the docent program.

Assessment need not be seen as personal criticism. It is critical to "the good of the cause"—the best possible visitor experience.

The Assessment Mindset

The following preconditions are critical to the assessment process:

- The perception of "good, but growing"—we can always improve on what we do.
- Trust—confidence in the fact that feedback will be objective and constructive, and will be provided using a "keeps" and "changes" model.
- Caring—a climate that conveys the sense that we care for and want to help one another.

Benefits of Assessment

Assessment yields many positive outcomes including:

- a better understanding of teaching,
- improved teaching performance,
- proficiency in knowledge of collection-related information,
- appropriate application of knowledge to tour format,
- improved reflection and self-analysis,
- improved sense of professional skill,
- renewal and recognition of skills,
- increased sense of effectiveness,
- increased collaboration/collegiality,
- increased visitor learning and/or "experience," and
- a strengthening of docent program as a whole.

Adapted from docent materials produced by the Toledo Museum of Art, the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery/Freer Gallery of Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.