



Communication Skills
Visitor Services Volunteers (VSV) Training
March 2024

Our role as “Hillwood ambassadors” is to continue Marjorie Post’s legacy of graciousness and create a welcoming environment for all who visit Hillwood. Offered below are a few customer service and communication reminders when engaging with visitors.

- Be Welcoming** Set the tone with a smile, relaxed posture, and an air of confidence in your ability to assist our visitors.
- Inclusive Comments** Build on visitor comments, ask “What are you looking forward to seeing today?,” etc.
- Project Your Voice** Enunciate, make sure you can be heard (ask if they can hear you, if you worry they cannot), and adjust volume as necessary.
- Positive Body Language** Consider your facial expressions, eye contact, posture, gestures. Be aware of keeping your body facing towards the visitors rather than facing away.
- Descriptive Language** Use words that generate mental pictures, use specifics, watch slang.
- Transform Unfamiliar Words** Into familiar words—explain or define jargon, proper names, foreign words, or art terms.
- Sentence Structure** Practice using complete, reasonably brief sentences that make their point precisely.
- “I don’t know.”** Should be a comfortable answer to a question. You can suggest, or offer to find out, where to get the answer, or you can connect the question to something you do know that relates to the visitor’s inquiry.
- Answer the Unspoken Questions** “Why was that just said?” and “how does that apply to me?”
- Don’t Overwhelm** Avoid information overload.
- Say What We Mean** Watch for frequent use of “um,” “like,” “you know,” “er”; phrases like “I think,” “I’ve been told,” or “sort of” make it appear the speaker is uncertain about facts.
- Be Kind To Yourself** Remember, practice and time are the best teachers! It is natural and expected to take a little time to find your rhythm with your visitor orientations.

Adapted from: *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides* by Alison L. Grinder and E. Sue McCoy, and *The Interpreters Training Manual for Museums* by Mary Kay Cunningham

Looking for help?

Our doors are always open, and we want to hear about your volunteer experiences. Please direct your questions or feedback to volunteers@hillwoodmuseum.org.