

**Communication Skills for Docents**  
**Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens**  
**2026 Mansion Docent Training**

- **Be welcoming** – Set the tone with a smile, relaxed posture, and an air of confidence in your ability to lead.
  - If there is time before the tour begins, gather information from your group (their interests, expectations, experiences) and build anticipation by alluding to tour highlights.
- **Inclusive comments** – Build on visitor comments, refer to visitors' hometown, etc., during the presentation. Validate and praise visitor responses, observations, and questions.
- **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.
- **Body language** – Yours and theirs; consider facial expressions, eye contact, posture, gestures.
  - Be aware of keeping your body facing towards your visitors rather than facing toward the object and be aware of tight spaces or getting/pointing too close to objects
- **Language** – Use words that generate mental pictures, use specifics, and 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?"
- **Compare and contrast** – By comparing and contrasting, visitors refine perceptual skills that will help them analyze the different elements of the objects.
- **Choose objects based on their ease of viewing** – Think about the location and size of the object.
- **Avoid information overload** – "Brevity is the soul of whit." Remember: there is a lot to explore at Hillwood and we don't want to hold our visitors hostage on a tour.
- **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.

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