Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens
The 'Style-Function-Production" Framework
2026 Mansion Docent Training

What is an "interpretative framework"?
Interpretation = an educational activity that aims to *reveal meanings and relationships* rather than simply to communicate factual information. (Tilden, 1977)

Framework = a network or outline that can be used to organize information, perceptions and experiences.

Why do we use a framework?
Cognition, or the mental activities of thinking, understanding, learning and remembering, is a process of forming logical structures for comprehending and analyzing experiences. (Piaget)

Information that fits into a system of organization is better understood, learned and retained. (Ausubel, 1968; Anserdon and Bower, 1983; Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977)

The talks by the collections and interpretation staff about Hillwood's collections and founder are resources, not models for tours. Using an interpretative framework gives you a structure for organizing and remembering information from these talks. In turn, interpretive frameworks are the structures of your object and room lessons and your tour, so that visitors have a way to organize the experience.

Style-Function-Production Framework
This framework is designed to organize object-specific information.
Each section of the framework answers certain questions.

Style
What can you say about the color, line, shape, materials, and texture of the object?
What does this object's appearance reveal about the people who owned and used it?
What do you see that makes you say that?

Function
What purpose did it serve? Literally? Symbolically?
How might you use this object?
Who might have used this object?
What do you see that makes you say that?

Production
What can you tell about the people who made it just by looking at it?
How was it made? (skills, materials, systems of production)
What do you think the designer/maker was trying to say through this object?
What do you see that makes you say that?