

# Engaging with Different Types of Visitors

2026 Mansion Docent Training

This resource offers guidance for engaging with a variety of visitors docents may encounter on tours. The information below is informed by the experiences and insights of Hillwood's veteran mansion docents.

## Using the Tour Framework

As you read through this handout, keep in mind that the tour frameworks we use are designed to provide flexibility for you to adapt to visitors' interests, by incorporating moments for close-looking and conversation. These interactive moments will create meaningful connections for the visitors on your tour, whether they're first-time visitors or longtime members.

It's your tour, but it's the visitor's experience – they can choose what kind of visit works best for them.

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## The Derailer | Takes discussion in different direction, asks unrelated questions

Some visitors enjoy sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm, which can enrich the experience. The goal is to acknowledge their contribution while gently keeping the tour on track.

- "That's a great point – I'd love to hear more after the tour, but for now let's focus on..."
- "That's a really interesting question. We'll come back to that later in the tour."
- "We'll actually be covering that shortly."

These responses validate the visitor while helping maintain tour momentum and structure.

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## The Detailer | Wants specific details, interrupts for clarification or to ask questions

Detailed questions often reflect curiosity and engagement. You do not need to have every answer – what matters is connecting the question to the broader idea and keeping the experience moving. Even when you don't know something, the exchange is still meaningful, as it builds engagement and supports shared learning.

- When you don't know an answer:  
"I don't have the answer to that, but it's a great question. What it connects to here is the broader idea of..."
- If a visitor challenges information:  
"Thanks for raising a great question. What I'm sharing is based on [source/context], which shows that... I'm happy to talk more about it after the tour if you'd like."
- If a visitor shares unfamiliar information:  
"I haven't come across that before, but I'd be happy to look into it further after the tour."
- If a visitor offers a correction supported by reliable sources:  
"Thank you for sharing – that's helpful and adds to our understanding."
- For deeper interest:  
"If you'd like to explore that further, Hillwood's website and online collection database, the mobile audio tour, and public programs are great resources."

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### **The Dasher | Always rushing, looking at watch, anxious about time, leaves tour early**

Just as learners guide their own learning experiences, visitors shape their own visits. If someone leaves the tour early, it is usually not personal; they may simply have different priorities, schedules, or energy levels during their visit.

Set expectations to help support visitor understanding and confidence, and to ensure you can pace the experience effectively from the start.

- At the beginning of the tour, explain that the mansion tour is a 60-minute highlights experience featuring ten rooms. During your introduction, ask if any visitors have a café reservation or another scheduled activity afterward so you can reassure them that the tour will finish in time for their next commitment.
- Because tours are scheduled and advertised as one hour long, keep an eye on pacing. Concise, engaging presentations that meet the requirement of being 60 minutes long help visitors stay engaged and are considerate of other docents and tour visitors' experience.

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### **The Disengaged | Avoids eye contact or physical proximity, has side conversations**

Some visitors prefer to listen quietly rather than verbally participate. Tours are designed to include a balance of looking, listening, storytelling, and conversation so visitors can engage in ways that feel comfortable to them. A visitor who is quiet or perceived as being less visibly engaged may still be deeply interested in and enjoy the experience.

Occasionally, side conversations may occur as visitors process information together. If this becomes distracting or makes it difficult for others to hear, offer gentle guidance to maintain a comfortable group experience.

- For example:  
"Just a quick reminder: if we can keep side conversations to a minimum, it helps everyone hear the information and enjoy the experience. If you have questions or thoughts, please feel free to share them during the tour, or I'm also happy to chat once the tour ends."