Touring Walk-ins and the General Public

- Docents Tailor-Made for a Walk-In Audience
- Touring the Public — "Come One, Come All"
- Revamping, Researching, and Reciting Focus Tours
- The Impact of Learning Styles
- Don't Depend on the Kindness of Strangers
Effective teaching is a challenge regardless of the circumstances. Working with walk-in visitors, however, may be among the more formidable of educational responsibilities. While certain assumptions can be made about a fourth grade class coming to your institution in conjunction with its social studies curriculum, such presumptions cannot be applied to walk-in visitors.

Walk-in visitors rarely share similar backgrounds and characteristics. Often, they do not have the same reasons for coming to your institution, nor do they share the same hopes and expectations for the experience. Playing to the diversity of this audience requires knowledge, flexibility, competence, self-confidence, and accommodation. And while these ingredients are important in all teaching situations, rarely are they needed in such abundance as when working with the variety of people who might comprise a walk-in tour group.

Getting to Know You

Arrive at your greeting station early, as the group assembles, and use the time before your tour begins to engage in an informal conversation with visitors. “Where are you from?” “Have you been here before?” “What have you heard about our institution that brought you here today?” These questions, and others like them, are useful for gathering information about the diverse people who will be sharing a common guided experience.

Take the impressions and information you gather from this casual conversation and weave them into your tour introduction. Your introduction should explain your institution’s mission and let visitors know how their expectations relate to the collection and touring experience.

“Welcome to our Historical Society’s Living Coffee Farm, an historic site that has preserved a way of life that flourished in the early 20th century and a form of agriculture that continues to have a direct bearing on the character and development of our area. Though you will not be hearing about, or sampling, different types of coffee, you will be learning about the Japanese immigrants who pioneered these coffee farms, their experience as immigrants to this new and strange world, and you will see how their coffee crop was harvested and prepared for market.

“I have any of you spoken with family members who immigrated to the United States from another country? Where did they come from, and what did they remember most about their experience?”

Adopting a conversational and interactive tone with your visitors not only gives them the tour’s overview, it will acquaint them with the give-and-take of an active learning tour — where questions are asked and ideas and answers are discussed among the participants.

Knowing How to Deal with Those You Are Dealing With

Groups, and individuals within groups, differ from one another. While you continue to initiate your tour, take notice of those who seem outgoing as well as those who seem reticent. Survey the range of individual learning styles before you.

Understanding the differences in individual learning styles will assist you when gauging your audience’s needs. It will help you pose appropriate questions, take advantage of various responses, and provide you with routes toward enfranchising others who learn or respond to things differently. Remember, as the teacher, it is your responsibility to enfranchise all members of your group and to accommodate the various ways they acquire, process, and respond to new information.

What about accessibility? Is it a concern? Have you received training in methods for teaching and touring people having visual or auditory challenges? If not, request such training from those who supervise public programs at your institution! Do you know how to make your tour accessible for all age groups? How should you approach touring a group that consists of grandparents, single adults, and youngsters? (Try talking with the adults, but asking your questions to the youngsters.) If you have not received training on age-grading your tours and methods for enfranchising all types of audiences, you have a right to expect it from the institution you serve.

It is difficult to be an effective teacher if you do not receive extensive training. Though subject matter content should be considered an essential part of being a good teacher, it cannot be considered the only part. Equally important are those skills and attributes that make for effective teaching, such things as educational techniques, methods of controlling communication, ways of age-grading...
"Come One, Come All"

information, the uses of inquiry and questioning strategies, issues of accessibility, and methods for the development and implementation of lesson plans.

Establishing Expectations

Keep in mind that walk-in tours are usually provided as a convenience to visitors. Unless your institution requires all visitors to move through the site with guides, visitors should be informed early on of the itinerary for your tour. And, if a visitor’s expectations are not going to be met during a tour, let him know so that he can make a choice about how to proceed.

Perhaps, during your informal conversations with visitors, you discover that most of your group arrived expecting to see an overview of the permanent collection, but one couple hoped to see a special exhibition. Assuming there is not enough time to accomplish both, you should let the couple know that you will not be taking them into the special exhibition area.

“Our tour today will survey many of the highlights of our permanent art collection, which ranges from early Egyptian pieces to contemporary works by regional artists. If you only have time to visit our special exhibition of Dutch landscapes, however, you may wish to head directly for the second floor, where that exhibition is located.”

Coming and Going

Unlike students taking a guided tour with their class, walk-in visitors are under no obligation to remain with a tour from its beginning until its ending. Some visitors will join while the tour is in progress; other visitors will leave before the tour has ended. Both coming and going should not fluster the docent.

This phenomenon should be expected when touring walk-in visitors.

Nevertheless, it takes great confidence to continue teaching as visitors drift away from your tour. Don’t take their going personally. Everything from an impending doctor’s appointment to an expiring parking meter can be the reason for breaking away from a tour. Likewise, don’t be overly flattered by those who might link up with your tour while it is in progress.

Most museum visitors are looking for routes toward greater understanding, and your talk might just be what they want at that moment. All docents, regardless of their tour’s “body count,” should receive extensive evaluating to learn how they might improve and gain even greater effectiveness.

Knowing Your Limits

Should you tour the interior of a Victorian home, but not the formal garden behind the house, let visitors know. “During our 45-minute tour, we will be covering the interior of this 1880’s home. From several rooms on the second floor, you will get a wonderful view of the garden in back; however we will not be able to tour it together. Should you wish to focus on the garden, there is tour specifically of the garden that begins at 2:00 p.m.”

Knowing your limits does not mean being inflexible. Quite naturally, you should be adaptive while touring, responding to visitors’ interests, questions, and concerns. However, you cannot be all things

Continued on next page.
to all people, and you must know what areas of the collection are within, and what areas are beyond, your purview.

Going with the Flow

The temptation when touring walk-ins is to provide a set experience, and to expect visitors to adapt to the format, tone, and tenor of the tour that is being offered. That form of “recipe” teaching can work, but it rarely excels.

In many ways, a parallel can be drawn between teaching and cooking. While recipes are important guides, the test of a cook is how she handles the situation when all the ingredients are not present, or when there is a need to change or an opportunity to improve. The same is true of teaching. The measure of an effective educator is how she handles situations when she departs from the standard recipe.

It is essential that a good cook know how to make substitutions. The same is true of an effective docent. A good cook tailors the meal to the tastes and needs of her guests. The same is true of an effective docent. And, a good cook understands which elements in the mix add to or subtract from the experience. Again, the same is true of the effective docent.

---

Alan Gartenhaus
Publishing Editor

Signage at an institutional entrance, such as this one at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., lets visitors know when and where to meet for guided tours of the facility and its collections.

Previous Issues of The Docent Educator are available.

To receive a complete list of our ten years of previous issues, send an e-mail request to arg-de@aloha.net, or a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

The Docent Educator
P.O. Box 2080
Kamuela, HI 96743-2080
Nine Steps to Better Public Tours

1. Assess the group through casual conversation prior to touring. Get a sense of what they hope to see and why they are taking your tour.

2. Don't memorize a talk. Know the subject matter and speak about it.

3. Allow your own personality to show. It will make you feel more relaxed and allow you to communicate more effectively.

4. Project your voice so everyone can hear you. Don't strain or shout as that makes your voice shift to a higher register and makes it less understandable.

5. Involve your audience through conversation and questioning. Simply listening becomes tedious and tiresome fairly quickly.

6. Before moving, tell your group where you are going next. People may become distracted or need to make a detour, but want to re-join the group.

7. Since new visitors may join your tour while it is in progress, don't presume continuity when teaching. Make each stop "self-referential," in other words — don't refer to previously viewed items without providing an informative explanation.

8. Wait for your group to fully assemble before you begin speaking at the next stop.

9. Try to make certain everyone has an opportunity to see and hear.

minds in motion workshops
Participatory workshops for docents and staff held, on-site, at your institution, using your collection!

- Interactive Teaching - a general introduction to inquiry learning and participatory teaching techniques. Alan Gartenhaus, instructor.

- Questioning Strategies - an examination of open-ended questioning, language use, and ways to respond to visitors. Alan Gartenhaus, instructor.

- Creative Thinking - provoking visitors’ interest, participation, imagination, and expansive thinking. Alan Gartenhaus, instructor.

- Get Real! Using Objects to Teach Across the Curriculum - a co-operative in-service event for your area’s classroom teachers. Jackie Littleton, leader.

- Little Ones - successful touring techniques and teaching methods for pre- and primary-school visitors. Jackie Littleton, instructor.

For further information e-mail, call, or write The Docent Educator.
Teaching with “Style”

The Impact of Learning Styles

As is well known, the root meaning of the word “docent” is “teacher.” For that reason much of the attention currently being focused on learning styles in other educational settings has great applicability to the museum environment as well. Because every visit to a museum of any kind should be a learning experience, it is helpful for docents to consider the learning styles of visitors when planning and conducting tours.

Many approaches to learning styles are available for adaptation to the museum setting. Bernice McCarthy’s Format System was featured at the 1987 Docent Symposium in Toledo. I had an opportunity to explain the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator at the symposium in Denver. Without going into great detail, I’d like to discuss briefly how an acknowledgment of differences in learning styles can lead to more satisfaction for both visitors and docents, especially when the goals of a tour involve inquiry teaching.

A concept critical to this endeavor is that “differences are gifts to be cherished, not deficits to be corrected.” This means that a wide variety of types of questions will need to be included in each tour (regardless of the age of the visitors) and a wide variety in the nature and number of responses should be expected and welcomed. Because most of us teach the way we would like to be taught, the danger is that tours will be conducted to meet the needs and desires of “conceptual clones” of the docent.

Four sets of significant differences are examined briefly here and then applied to the museum setting. Each is a component of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which is itself an outgrowth of Carl Jung’s theory of personality. Although there are currently no publications that directly focus on the MBTI in museums, two general references that are very helpful are Gordon Lawrence’s People Types and Tiger Stripes (Gainesville FL: Center for Application of Psychological Type, 1982) and David Kiersey’s and Marilyn Bates’ Please Understand Me (DelMar, CA: Prometheus, 1984). Both are easily ordered if they are not already on the shelves.

Introverts and Extroverts

The first of four differences in learning style (and hence in visitor behavior in a museum) has to do with where information is processed, or how an individual figures things out and tries to make sense of things. Here, the essential difference is between extroverts who process information orally, by talking about it, and introverts who process information internally, by thinking about it.

What this difference means is that, when a docent asks a question on a tour, the extrovert (estimated to be about 75% of the general population) will be willing to tackle it immediately because they find it natural to “think out loud.” Extroverts use conversation as a way of conveying their thoughts as those thoughts form and develop. Therefore, they are often a boon on tours because they are willing to respond to a docent’s questions immediately. On the other hand, docents need to be careful not to judge introverts by what they say when they begin to speak, but rather by their concluding thoughts, which represent their having “thought through” the question.

Introverts, of course, are just the opposite. They prefer to think a response through in their minds before they venture to say anything out loud. This means that there can be a pause (which may seem an eternity to the docent) before an introvert responds to a question. However, the pause doesn’t imply an unwillingness to respond or indicate a judgement being passed on the question asked (or the docent asking it).

Although introverts are seldom the first to answer questions, they are interested in answering them. If the docent asks, “Are there any other ideas about this question?” after the discussion seems to have concluded, there are likely to be contributions from introverts that would otherwise be missed.

Sensors and Intuitors

The second significant difference in learning styles has to do with how individuals notice things. Here the differences seem to be between those who notice things based on the input from their five senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching) and those who call upon their “sixth sense.” Members of the former group (about 75% of the population) are sometimes called...
sensors, while individuals in the latter group are sometimes referred to as intuitors.

Clearly, there is a case that can be made for the use of all six senses on a museum visit, but the difference between sensors and intuitors helps to explain why visitors react differently to different questions. Sensors enjoy the questions that ask them to notice detail, identify colors and shapes, compare and contrast the specifics of two artifacts. Intuitors, on the other hand, sometimes find the preceding questions too confining. They would prefer to focus on larger themes and enjoy addressing questions that have to do with the mood of an art work or the quality of life in a particular historical period. They are also among the more enthusiastic participants in brainstorming sessions, whether in zoos, botanical gardens, or museums.

**Thinkers and Feelers**

Whatever the setting, visitors on tours are often asked to make judgements about what they observe and experience. Individuals tend to respond to these requests for evaluation from one of two perspectives. Some, a group called thinkers in MBTI terminology, tend to objectively, logically, and analytically make such judgements using facts and data. Others, called feelers in MBTI parlance, call on their values, convictions, and beliefs when making judgements; they take a more subjective, people-oriented approach.

Thinkers and feelers are evenly divided among the total population. Differences between them make for very interesting conversations when visitors in museums are asked to determine which work, artifact, or device best exemplifies the spirit of an artist, or a time period, or a scientific concept.

**Thinkers** generally select some criterion to make their decision and then systematically evaluate individual items against that criterion. Feelers, on the other hand, often consult their own personal preferences or consider the impact an item has on the lives of individuals (including the artist and the visitor himself/herself), or look for items that are reflective of values important to the individual visitor. Of course, asking members of a tour which item (painting, plant, animal, artifact, etc.) they will highlight when they tell others about their visit to the museum, zoo, or botanical garden results in, not only a wide variety of responses, but widely divergent reasons for the choices as well.

**Judgers and Perceivers**

Although people give many reasons for making their decisions, not everyone is equally inclined to make judgements. In fact, the propensity to evaluate or not is the basis of the fourth set of significant differences according to the MBTI. Here the distinction is between those who automatically evaluate what they observe and experience (the judgers) and those who just as automatically delay making judgements because they keep noticing additional information that could impact upon their decision (the perceivers).

This means that judgers, about 50% of the general population, are very responsive to a docent’s request for evaluations of works, or artists, or influences, or utility. The perceivers’ tendency to remain open to incoming information means that they are fairly willing to tackle unfamiliar materials or ideas, while judgers sometimes make up their mind a bit too quickly about, or against, challenging items or concepts. In this case, judgers can sometimes be asked an informational, rather than evaluative, question. For instance, instead of asking whether a museum visitor likes a particular piece, one might ask, “How do you know this piece was done in the twentieth century?”

The difference between the two questions just described is a good illustration of how knowledge of museum visitors’ learning styles can help a docent enhance the quality of learning experience these visitors have in the museum. The Myers-Briggs Indicator is just one approach to learning styles. The important thing is not which approach to learning styles is used, nor is extensive formal training in any particular perspective on learning styles necessary; what is critical is an understanding of the extent to which attention to learning styles can influence the quality of a visitor’s experience.

---

Sister Eileen Rice, OP, was the Program Director of Teacher Education for Siena Heights College, in Adrian, MI. Sr. Eileen was a well-known and respected lecturer to the museum education community. She is fondly remembered by museum staff and volunteers, alike. This article, which first appeared in the Autumn 1992 issue of The Docent Educator, has been republished in this issue because of its useful content and its concise expression on this important topic.
An Important Lesson

The October 6, 2000, edition of The Wall Street Journal chronicles how a museum, with all the resources any institution might wish for, has steadily lost its audience. "How the Getty Lost Its Buzz" describes the J. Paul Getty Art Museum as "scholarly and removed" and as "a theme park run by librarians."

In spite of its massive endowment (ten times that of the Art Institute of Chicago, for instance) and its attempt to overpower art education with its "Discipline-Based Art Education" initiative, the Getty has failed to attract visitors after its initial opening hoopla.

In addition to logistical problems, which included parking fiascos, battles with neighbors, and lines for the restrooms, the Getty seems to have neglected the dynamic role that education serves. The author of the article, Alexandra Peers, refers to the Getty's attempts to enfranchise audiences as "accidental education." Director Deborah Gribbon is quoted as saying that the Getty will attempt to increase its public draw by "acquisitions that will deepen the Getty's art and its celebrated photography collection, plus much more community outreach."

But, she follows this statement by declaring that she is wary about trying to be all things to all people. "Museums are not for everybody," she is quoted as saying.

This unfortunate state of affairs seems a rather scathing indictment of an institution that attempted to muscle its way into the museum education field with its money and prestige. Quite obviously, education is more than money and influence; it takes hard work and a real commitment to helping others gain access and develop interest.

Kinder Gardens

Most inner-city kids have seen few vegetable gardens, but not so the third and fourth-graders who tend the Youth Garden at the National Arboretum in Washington, DC. Three decades ago, the arboretum got together with the city's parks and recreation department to create a special children's area in a corner of its 447-acre park. These days, a free garden program introduces some 300 youngsters a year to the wonders of growing their own food.

Students cultivate tomatoes and collards, basil and onions, and learn why grasshoppers sing and potatoes have eyes. They spend their mornings laying out and planting small plots, and, come August, they celebrate with costumes, skits, and contests at the annual Harvest Day festival. The vegetables they don't take home they deliver to a community soup kitchen, where they help prepare them and serve them up.

The Youth Garden is open to the public. To learn more about the Youth Garden at the National Arboretum, call (202) 544-8733.

The Women's Museum Opens

The Women's Museum, An Institute for the Future, opened in Dallas, Texas, a few months ago with lots of hoopla. Patti LaBelle sang and Donna Capone played a round of golf with each foursome during a benefit golf tournament. The Dallas State Fair whirled on around the 1910 coliseum that houses the state-of-the-art museum in Fair Park. Now that the glitz is gone, the museum gets down to the serious business of fulfilling its promise to "chronicle the lives of American women in a way never seen before."

Designed to be interactive, the museum has already become a place where visitors' call to each other to "come see this" as they discover Jane Addams' Nobel Peace Prize or one of Edith Head's Oscars. They sing along, clap their hands, or even dance together in a room where music of performers as varied as Tracy Chapman, Ella Fitzgerald, Selena, and Mahalia Jackson is available at the touch of a finger on a computer screen. Their laughter echoes throughout the building from the "Funny Women" exhibit where Carol Burnett, Totie Fields, and Lucille Ball are among comedians commenting humorously on "women's condition." Youngsters use a "Career Scoreboard" to explore careers where they are invited to add their own "story" or comment in other ways on the museum.

The Ronya Koznetsky Institute for the Future is the educational center of The Women's Museum. While the facility is impressive (2,773 square feet with a 30-station
The British Museum Enhances its Public Spaces

The fabled British Museum, which The Docent Educator is pleased to count among its European subscribers, is renowned as the home of spectacular antiquities, such as the Rosetta Stone and the Elgin Marbles. But it's almost equally well-known as an attraction that is overloaded with visitors.

Designed almost two centuries ago to accommodate an annual flow of perhaps 100,000 visitors, the imposing neoclassical structure now plays host to almost 6 million people each year! The corridors can be so crowded that getting from one end to another can resemble rush hour.

But, late last year, the museum formally opened the “Great Court,” a handsome redevelopment of the museum's 2-acre central courtyard that promises to make the facility far more visitor friendly, and includes sculptures, shops, and restaurants.

More Guggenheims

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum won the right, and the financial backing of New York City, to build a new, curvilinear outpost on the East River in lower Manhattan.

The new 40-story museum will be twice as large as the Guggenheim's museum in Bilboa, Spain, and 10 times the size of the museum's upper east side headquarters designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The new museum, like the Bilboa building, will be designed by Los Angeles architect Frank O. Gehry.

Already under construction is the two-story Guggenheim Museum at the Venetian on the Las Vegas strip, which features a retractable skylight adorned with a replica of Micheangelo’s “Last Judgment.”

The 2001 National Docent Symposium

The next National Docent Symposium is scheduled for October 2001, in San Antonio, TX. To learn more about the symposium and to obtain registration materials, contact the education department at:

The McNay Art Museum
P.O. Box 6069
San Antonio, TX 78209.

The museum's phone number is: (210) 824-5368.
Creating A Custom Fit

“Look at the size of that group out there!” exclaims one docent-in-training.

As the class studies inside the lecture hall, they can see through the large glass windows that eighty people have just walked in on a Saturday morning to take the Historic Skyscrapers tour at 10:00 a.m. The class, somewhat panicked, is experiencing first hand the popularity of architectural tours in Chicago. The Chicago Architecture Foundation (CAF) is dedicated to advancing public interest and education in architecture and related design. Approximately 400 docents volunteer their time to conduct some 65 differently themed tours — from skyscrapers to cemeteries. In 2000, about 150,000 have taken an architectural tour. Roughly two-thirds of the tourists are non-Chicago area residents; one-third of these out-of-towners are international. Our program is solely based on walk-in audience participation, and we have a tour and docent training program to foster it.

The Tour Program

Since our business is based on a drop-in audience, we have a dedicated team of staff members who make sure that marketing, scheduling, and ticket sales run smoothly. We estimate how many docents to schedule per tour, based on previous attendance, time of year, weather, media coverage, and city events.

✓ Marketing — The tour department produces an extensive catalogue each year, which outlines the schedule for each of our 65 tours. This catalog is sent to CAF members, hotel concierges, and highway tourist information offices, to name a few. Plenty of catalogues are stacked at the entrances of our two Shop & Tour Centers, as well. Our extensive website, www.architecture.org, also provides great advertising to those interested in our tour program. In fact, this medium is very convenient for the out-of-town tourist.

Our marketing department takes advantage of two important advertising opportunities. The first is to offer coupons when we advertise in directories for conventions or museum magazines. We offer coupon specials that pique the interest of the tourist such as “buy one tour ($10), get the second for half price ($5).” The second opportunity the marketing department uses is that of good media relations. Using a public relations resource, CAF gets articles about its tour programs in major newspapers such as The New York Times, or The Chicago Tribune.

The staff and docents certainly feel the beneficial impact of media relations, in the form of doubled attendance! CAF considers media coverage an essential part of its marketing efforts. (It is powerful for docent recruitment, also!) Staff and docents must be prepared to accommodate two - or fifty - tourists on any particular tour. This is where the art and experience of scheduling comes in handy.

✓ Scheduling docents — A staff member is devoted to matching tours and docents. This tour coordinator is responsible for making sure that enough docents are scheduled for the tours and bases these numbers on the season and day of the week. Ideally, a docent will work with a group of fifteen tourists. During the winter months, we will only schedule two docents for the downtown walking tours, with the hope that each docent will take out four or five people each. During the summer months, we will schedule four docents per tour, knowing that fifteen to twenty tourists will be in each group. The hardest months to plan for are those months that the weather is iffy in Chicago – such as October/November and March/April. (One day it may be seventy and sunny, then next will be thirty degrees and snowing.) The tour department will listen to weather reports and keep their eye open for citywide conventions (like the National Trust for Historic Preservation conference) that may unexpectedly attract a bigger than average audience.

The Docent Training Program

✓ The interview — Docents-in-training know from the beginning that they will be touring for the general public. This is the attraction for most applicants. During the interview we discuss how CAF docents have the opportunity to meet people from different countries and from all walks of life. Although they can plan their presentations, we teach from experience that no two tours are ever the same, and that flexibility is key to being a CAF docent. We screen candidates’ projection and presentation style during the interview by asking candidates to come prepared for one minute of public speaking. Not knowing whether a docent will have two or fifty people on a tour, we only chose docents who
a Walk-in Audience

Visitors crowd around a Chicago Architecture Foundation docent as they stand in front of Frank Lloyd Wright's "Robie House," during a Chicago Architectural Foundation 'Highlights by Bus' tour.

have the capacity to project their voices and engage their audiences.

✓ Tour observation — Tour observation is a powerful tool to educate docents about the tours. To begin, docents must observe the two tours they are expected to learn before they even come to the interview. This ensures that they know what the job of a CAF docent entails. Upon acceptance into the program, they are required to attend two more additional observation tours prior to the first day of class.

Now they have observed how four docents have handled diverse audience members. Before the docent's first year is over, they must observe five more tours, and write their reactions regarding what they learned from the experiences (i.e. content learned and presentations styles viewed).

✓ A general education — It is our goal that docents-in-training are prepared for general architectural questions through a broad education about Chicago's commercial buildings. Like many docent programs, we have no canned script that docents are handed. Docents are given the route and the required buildings (with some room for flexibility) and they are asked to write their own tours. The weekly homework assignments are structured to allow the student to spend time learning about each building, so that they will design their own discussions. They are given a general education on concepts such as Chicago history, the birth of the skyscraper, and construction techniques. The payoff

Continued on next page.
for such a lengthy (10-weeks) and in-depth docent education program comes when new docents confidently engage enormously diverse tour groups.

✓ Tour situations — What about those things that we fear the most while working with a general audience? For instance, what does a docent do with that one tourist who is a know-it-all, or dominates the tour with questions? How does a docent accommodate the tour if someone is a slow walker, or uses a wheelchair? What about a tourist who gets pick-pocketed? Has a heart attack? Breaks an ankle? These are all very real and valid concerns. We have found it essential to spend time in training to creatively discuss these possible occurrences. Some effective ways are through role-playing or team decision-making exercises. Let the docents decide together how they would handle any given situation.

✓ Presentation techniques — As much as CAF docents are prepared with a general education, engaging the audience and knowing how to handle situations is a challenge all docents must face. We all know working with tour groups that some days are better than others! Each docent training class receives a two-hour workshop with a talented, experienced docent - who also happens to be a theater major. The objective is to give them the skills they need to engage and read their audiences, as well as how to be understood and heard on the street.

✓ Get to know your audience from the beginning: Each docent must begin by establishing good rapport with the tourists. Starting the tour by introducing yourself and asking everyone where they are from is key to getting to know your audience. Aside from bonding the group to one another, the docent will get a sense of the level of interest, any language barriers, and any buildings or sites that might have relevance to that person's home town (such as pointing out our Miro and Picasso sculptures to those from Spain, or pointing out the second Prudential Building — Loeb, Schlossman, and Hackl, 1990, inspired by the Art Deco Chrysler Building — to those from New York.)

“Add a personal touch: One big reason that the tourists have decided to take a guided walking tour of Chicago (rather than following a guidebook or audiotape) is that the docent offers a chance to interact with a Chicagoan. Docents are encouraged to bring their own experiences of living in Chicago on the tours. “I remember when this building was built…” or “For those of you on the tour from Cleveland, Daniel Burnham designed your city plan, too.”

✓ Pulling in your audience and making eye contact: It is essential that docents make eye contact with everyone in the group. This means that the docent will have to be mindful of those that are caught in the back of a group of fifty people! Immediately pulling in the audience as close as possible will ensure that everyone can see the building and hear the presentation. Without constantly monitoring with eye contact, a docent has no idea of how to read the audience. Some positive signs include asking a lot of questions or exclaiming “ah-ha”. It may be time to move on if they are looking at their watches, yawning, or have that glazed-over look in their eyes. As mentioned before, each diverse audience will find certain aspects of the tour more intriguing than others.

✓ Can they understand you?: The biggest challenge of working with walk-in audiences, and taking them on the busy streets of Chicago for a two-hour walking tour? Communication! In fact, a docent’s lack of communication ability is the number one reason tourists write complaint letters. Part of reading the audience is knowing whether they comprehend the material or not.
Like many docent programs, The Chicago Architecture Foundation has no canned scripts. Docents are given the route and the required buildings (with some room for flexibility) and expected to develop their own tours.

Several factors might contribute to the problem. For many visitors from other countries, English is a secondary language. This is what the docent will assess when they get to know the audience in the beginning of the tour. The docent will want to make sure to annunciate words and speak slowly. (Beware: Nerves may make a docent speak quickly!) When working with diverse drop-in audiences, a docent must be mindful to define any jargon, and not assume that everyone knows what is being said: “Note those spandrels” may not make as much sense as, “Note the dark recessed panels below the windows - we call them spandrels”.

Finally, if they can’t hear you, the tour is a lost cause. Docents must be trained, especially with outdoor city tours, how to use the acoustics available to them on the street. Butting a large group against the side of a building, while facing them, will create an acoustical wall that ensures that everyone will hear the discussion. Stand the same group in the middle of the sidewalk, and the docent’s voice will get lost in a vacuum of space. Additionally, a docent, like a singer, must learn how to save the vocal cords and use the diaphragm to project as loudly and deeply as possible. (Docents in our training classes are taught to warm up their voices before a tour!) An effective docent will make it very clear from the beginning that if he/she cannot be heard or understood, the tourist must let him/her know. This should be monitored at different points throughout the tour.

The best advice that we can give anyone interested in working with diverse drop-in audiences is to have a plan, but be flexible!

Barbara Hrbek is the volunteer coordinator for The Chicago Architecture Foundation, located in Chicago, IL. Ms. Hrbek has contributed several previous articles to The Docent Educator, the most recent of which was “The Ultimate Volunteer Responsibility — Developing Tour Programs” (Vol. 9, No. 3).
Revamping, Researching, and Preparing Gallery Talks

Once-a-week walk-in tours at the Wichita Art Museum in Wichita, Kansas, have evolved into weekly Sunday Gallery Talks attracting visitors with specific interests, as well as the general public. Originally, the subject of these focus tours was whatever the docent "on duty" wanted to speak about on any given day.

Revamping

When we changed the name of the tours, we also gave them a more defined purpose in hopes of attracting people who had specific areas of interest. Specific topics made the tours easier to advertise and more likely to receive notice in our local newspaper's calendar of events. The weekly format also provided us with greater regularity and recognition for the program.

Over the past year, our topics have included a walk-through of newly-installed exhibitions; highlights of a single work of art; thematic tours such as "beach scenes" for a summer Sunday and "prosperity" for Thanksgiving; and artistic styles such as 19th Century landscapes and abstract expressionism.

In an effort to reach new audiences and to tackle unique subjects, we invite people in the community to participate as "guest docents." For instance, the zoo's curator of education enlivened an exhibition of 19th Century woodcarving of eagles with a talk about the living bird. A high school art teacher has agreed to discuss student art during the annual high school art competition.

Researching

In selecting topics for Sunday Gallery Talks, I try to keep in mind the various interests, knowledge, and comfort zones of our docents. Most docents are interested in a number of specialized topics and are willing to tackle a new challenge. Before they became docents, each member of our group was required to research, write about, and present one object in the Museum's collection. Many of these projects have been turned into Sunday Gallery Talks.

I encourage docents to become the "resident expert" on a subject and provide them with direction. Our librarian is extremely helpful in assisting with their research. Possible topics are listed on a sign-up sheet. More than one docent can sign up for a topic, allowing greater flexibility when finalizing the calendar. Docents put their names beside the topics they are interested in presenting and indicate the dates they are available.

Reciting

The following guide is intended to help docents prepare for their Sunday Gallery Talks:

**Checklist for Preparing Gallery Talks**

- Brainstorm topics.
- Provide a sign-up sheet for docents on which they can indicate their interest and availability.
- Outline a "How to Prepare for Your Gallery Talk" handout for the docents.
- Inform your public relations officer about the talks for press releases, newsletters, and the Web site.
- Put a sheet in your volunteer book where docents can record the number of people who came to the talk.
- Have signage made for display on the day of the talk.
Reciting Focus Tours

Sample Guide to Help Docents Preparing Gallery Talks

Your Sunday Gallery Talk begins promptly at 1:30 p.m. at the 2nd floor welcome desk. The security staff should put out a sign announcing its availability.

The topic is purposely narrow. You are supposed to delve into your subject. Hopefully, you picked a subject that is particularly interesting to you — or one about which you are just plain curious. Take this opportunity to learn more. Become the resident expert on your subject. Make an appointment with the Museum's librarian. She is more than happy to help you.

Gallery Talks last 25-30 minutes. Most, if not all, participants are adults. As with any tour, you should welcome your guests and explain your topic:

"I'm so glad to see you all here today. Our topic is Greek and Roman influences in American art."

It will behoove you to find out why visitors are interested in the topic. Wouldn't it be nice to know ahead of time if someone on your Greek and Roman tour is a Classics professor?! Use their knowledge to add to your tour.

Visitors, even savvy ones, really need help becoming oriented in the Museum. They will want to know what they are going to see. Briefly outline the tour for them:

"We're going to go to the 3rd floor galleries and look at several artworks created in the 19th Century at the peak of Neoclassicism. We'll be spending time in our Americans Abroad gallery, which contains paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts by Americans who went to Europe to study and/or live. I hope you will consider this an informal tour and feel free to interject your knowledge where appropriate. The tour will last 25-30 minutes."

Have a mental list of three or four objectives you want to accomplish. These are things you want to be sure visitors know when they leave the Museum. These are usually simple, but salient, points:

- Classical art is defined as ... Therefore, Neoclassicism is ...
- 18th Century archeological digs in Pompeii and Herculaneum increased interest in Classical art (by artists, writers, historians, etc.)
- In America, artists could study plaster copies of these ancient sculptures by 1802 or 1803.
- Artists and architects have long copied ancient statuary in the white marble format. Originally, however, such sculptures were painted polychrome to mimic nature's colors.

End your tour on time, but feel free to stay and chat with interested visitors. Be sure to tell them next week's Sunday Gallery Talk topic and invite them back.

Keep track of how many people come to your talk and record it in the volunteer sign-in book.

Continued on next page.
It is important that drop-in tours have regularity and focus. Advertising the specific topics through press releases, our members' newsletter, and the Web site has helped our program to grow. Even so, we might have as few as one person or as many as 20 people show up, with an average of about eight per tour. We even have a couple of regulars. Docents don't just give these tours, they're some of our best customers! They love to hear what the expert-du-jour has to say.

Alyson B. Stansfield has been the director of education at the Wichita Art Museum, where she works with approximately 50 "wonderful" docents, since 1998. Prior to this, she served as curator of education at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma (1995-98) and curator at the Oklahoma City Art Museum (1991-95).

---

### It Works for Me ...

Sharing successful techniques, thoughts, and ideas.

One method that I've found to help me "lead by discovery" in the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, NY, is an exercise that I call "What If?"

The students are given some basic information at the beginning of the tour to acquaint them with the history of glassmaking and the various processes necessary to make certain types of glass. They learn something about the tools used in this process. Then, I allow them time to look independently at the museum's collection of Contemporary Art Glass. After about ten minutes, I call the group back together and give them a challenge.

"Pretend for a moment that you are a glass artist. Select a piece of glass in this gallery and prepare to tell the group:

- Why you made it
- How you made it
- What tools or manufacturing process you used
- What you would call it
- Who you would make it for
- Who you would give it to

I then select two boys and two girls and send them off to make their selections. I sometimes have them work in pairs to give more timid individuals the courage to explain their thoughts to peers. Students not selected to make presentations act as the panel of judges, and a prize, usually a postcard from the museum gift shop, is offered for the most innovative discussion.

With a little coaxing from me, we go through the list of things I had suggested they discover, explaining and discussing with the group. I am always amazed at the retention of information, the ability to organize an impromptu presentation, and the inventiveness of the students.

This type of exercise seems to stimulate a more personal level of interest in the collection, and it empowers the children to expand their ability to see a collection in a new light. It gives them permission to draw their own conclusions from basic information they've been given and to formulate their own personal perspective. It validates their ability to make choices and determinations on a more mature, "adult" level.

*Mary Peterson, docent*
Corning Museum of Glass
Corning, New York
Don't Depend on the Kindness of Strangers

I do a lot of traveling, both for business and pleasure. Wherever I go, museums and similar institutions are always on my list of “must visit” places. Consequently, I am frequently a “walk-in” visitor. I’ve enjoyed docent-led tours, demonstrations and mini-programs on specific aspects of a museum’s collection, and individual interactions and conversations with “gallery guides” whose job it is to interact and converse with walk-in visitors. I don’t do deliberate critiques unless I have been invited to do so, but I can’t help noticing when a docent presents a really exciting (or less than thrilling) tour of her facility, or when some other aspect of walk-in programming works (or doesn’t). Here are some of the things I’ve learned.

✓ Most walk-in visitors want to have a good museum experience. Unlike some children in some school groups, walk-in visitors come to your institution because we want to. Oh, maybe some of us came in to get out of the rain or because we had an hour to kill before we had to get to the airport, but most of us actually came on purpose. If we choose to join your docent-led tour, we really want to learn something we think we can’t get on our own. When we gravitate to your “cart” or experience station, it’s because we think you have something interesting to impart.

✓ Because most walk-in visitors want to have a good museum experience, we want you to learn enough about us to custom design the tour. We will wait politely for you to establish rapport with the group, even when you ask each of us the same three questions. “Where are you from?” “Have you visited our museum before?” “Is there something in particular you’d like to see?” On one such tour, a docent asked our group if we would like a general tour or a tour of the current special exhibition on Swedish porcelain. We agreed that since our time was limited and we were all unfamiliar with the museum, we would prefer a brief general tour so we could select portions of the collection to revisit on our own.

The docent then proceeded to take us directly to the Swedish porcelain, explaining as she went that she had just completed a training session and really wanted to tell us what she’d learned. Even then, we tagged along quietly, assuming correctly that 30 minutes of Swedish porcelain wouldn’t kill us even though we had been asked, and had chosen, to see other things.

✓ We will forgive you if you don’t know all the answers to our questions, particularly if you don’t pretend to know more than you do. I admire the honesty of a docent stationed at a cart in a science museum I visited even though I wished she had known more about her station. The cart contained models of various types of joints. I asked a question about the hip joint, since mine was beginning to give me a little trouble, and she replied, “I’m sorry, I only know what I’ve just told you. This isn’t my regular cart.” She quickly diverted my attention to an area for which she was better prepared, and, while my question wasn’t answered, I didn’t go away with misinformation either.

✓ We will try to answer your questions. Even when a question is poorly stated, we will struggle to make it okay for you. I witnessed the following exchange that was the ultimate in visitor assistance:

Docent: “I’m thinking of three things that come from the rainforest that I’m sure you’ve used today. Can you tell me what they are?”
Audience: “Water?”
Docent: “No.”
Audience: “Medicine?”
Docent: “Well, yes, but that’s not one of the things I’m thinking of.”
Audience: “Air?”
Docent: “Yes. Well, actually oxygen. Forty percent of the Earth’s oxygen is produced in the rainforest. Did any of you have a cup of coffee today? Well, a lot of foods come from the rainforest. The other thing I was thinking of was our shoes. Rubber also comes from the rainforest.”

We sighed a collective sigh of relief, relieved to learn the three things she had identified as coming from the rainforest, and pleased to come to the end of the guessing game.

In all my years of taking walk-in tours, I’ve only witnessed one occasion when a docent’s audience “turned” on her. And, in this case, it wasn’t really her fault. As we entered a gallery of African art, the docent began her introduction to the collection. “During the time that most of these exquisite artifacts were being produced, Africa was still known to most Europeans as the ‘Dark Continent’.”

“What a stupid thing to say,” exploded one of the group members.

As the docent struggled to regain her composure and attempted to explain the legitimate context of her statement, the woman stormed away from the group dragging her
rather embarrassed teen-aged companion with her.

Unfortunately, the docent was never quite able to recover from this attack. Even though the rest of us tried to appear unruffled, we couldn’t help. She soon ended our tour with a feeble, “I hope you’ve enjoyed your time with us, and that you enjoy your visit to our city,” and abandoned us in the middle of a gallery.

There’s something else I’ve learned, however. \* Really successful docents don’t depend on the kindness of strangers. They quickly establish rapport, learning as much as they can about their group and using that information to “tailor-make” each tour. They master the content of their tours, reviewing and renewing constantly so they will be ready for (almost) any question. They use an inquiry approach to touring that allows their walk-in visitors to offer their impressions and experiences and makes any tour a shared adventure.

One of the most effective “rapport-building” sessions I experienced took place in the garden of one of Savannah’s historic homes. The ticket salesperson informed me that a tour would begin in about 10 minutes, pointed out the restrooms and gift shop, and directed me, when I was ready, to wait in the garden where the tour would begin. Having no need of the other two offerings, I went straight to the garden where I was surprised to find the docent already present. She was casually “dead-heading” some miniature roses and chatting with a couple who was waiting for the tour. She welcomed me, introduced herself and the other couple, and drew me into their conversation. As others joined us, she repeated the process. By the time our “tour” began, we all knew that we were first-time visitors; most of us were conversant with Savannah history from our own reading and the other tours we had taken; we were more interested in the home’s history than in its furnishings; and one of the men was a carpenter. We all benefited from this last piece of information, especially since restoration was underway on the home, and the docent deferred to his special knowledge whenever appropriate.

If visitors gravitate to your “cart” or experience station, as they have to this one at the John G. Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, IL, it is because they believe and expect that you will have something interesting to impart.

Being willing to learn from the group is one of those “flexibility” skills so important to an effective docent, but, again, you shouldn’t depend on your audience’s knowledge. After all, walk-in visitors have joined your group because we think you’re the expert! We don’t want to hear a lecture that includes everything you’ve ever learned about the subject, but we do want you to be able to answer our questions. How can you prepare for this when you have no idea what our questions will be?

One way to prepare is to continue to learn after your “basic training” as a docent is concluded. At least once a month, review the notes and handouts your docent training generated. At least once every three months review the galleries, re-reading label copy and textual material supplied by the museum for the general public. At least once during each touring season, read a book, magazine, or Internet data relevant to the collection you tour. Whenever a question arises that you can’t answer, take the questioner’s name and
I'm privileged to work with a nature trail tour guide who keeps the rest of us on our toes. She is never content to let a question float off into space without an ultimate answer. When one of our guest instructors contradicted information we had previously learned about a vine that is prevalent in the forest we tour, she tracked down a source (with pictures) that confirmed our original information and shared it with the rest of us. Her rationale for the extra work: "I tour about 60 kids a week. If I give each one erroneous information, I've misled almost 1,000 kids during our 16 weeks of touring. That's not fair."

Accurate facts are an important part of a walk-in visit, but when facts give way to truly open-ended questions, docents and visitors alike conclude their tour having shared an adventure. When questions are designed to tap into our store of knowledge or, more importantly, our experiences and opinions, walk-in visitors can feel a sense of ownership of the tour. For example, look at entirely different kinds of questions about a rainforest tour.

**Docent:** I hope you've had time to explore all three levels of our rainforest, but we'll concentrate on the part we can see from here. I'd like you to help me think of some words and phrases that describe what the rainforest looks like.

**Audience:** Multiple answers such as "green," "thick," "leafy," "full of birds," etc. that the docent can validate and build upon.

("Yes, and it's those wonderful green leaves that help remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.")

**Docent:** Great! Now, let's come up with some different words and phrases that describe other aspects of the rainforest -- maybe the way it feels, or smells, or the way it sounds.

**Audience:** Multiple answers such as "wet," "hot," "bird calls," "fecund," etc. that the docent can use to turn her walk-in visitors from passive viewers into active participants. ("Yes, wet and hot do describe most rainforests, but there are some rainforests, such as one in Washington State, that are actually wet and cool.")

**Docent:** Those are all really good ways to describe a rainforest. There's another word that describes many of the Earth's rainforests -- endangered.

In this case, the docent is able to convey factual information without boring us with a lecture, or "pretending" to involve us by asking questions that require factual answers.

Docents who build rapport with their walk-in visitors, prepare to answer our unexpected questions, and involve us with questions we can all answer will soon find they don't need to depend on the kindness of strangers. We won't be strangers anymore!

Jackie Littleton
Associate Editor

---

The Docent Educator
The Quarterly Journal for Dedicated Educators

One Year (4 Quarterly Issues) — $30.00 *

Name ____________________________________________________________

Address _________________________________________________________

City/State/Zip/Country _____________________________________________

Institution/Affiliation _____________________________________________

New Subscriber [ ] Renewal [ ]

* For subscribers outside the U.S. — Additional postage surcharge required: Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean—add $5.00 Elsewhere — add $10.00 Total payment must be received in U.S. dollars.

The Docent Educator Spring 2001
Attention art museum staff and volunteers... announcing a new book capturing the inquiry teaching techniques and questioning strategies presented by Alan Gartenhaus in workshops for art museums around the country!

Questioning Art
an inquiry approach to teaching art appreciation
by Alan Gartenhaus

presents methods that will engage museum visitors in thoughtful dialogue with artwork applied to full-color reproductions of diverse works from the collection of the Wichita Art Museum.

To reserve copies of this limited-edition text
at the special, pre-published price of $39.95 plus $5 shipping
(plus $9 USD for shipping if sent to an address outside the US).
send check or money order for a late-Spring delivery to:

The Docent Educator
P.O. Box 2080
Kamuela, HI 96743-2080
Attention: “Questioning Art”

If purchasing after June 1, 2001, please send $49.95 plus shipping.

Next issue:  Education and Entertainment

minds in motion
The Docent Educator
Post Office Box 2080
Kamuela, HI 96743-2080

First Class Mail

First-Class Mail
U.S. Postage
PAID
Kamuela, HI
Permit No. 117

Printed on recycled paper.

The last issue of your current subscription is printed at the bottom of your mailing label. If you are moving, don't forget to send us your change of address.
Digitization of *The Docent Educator* was generously sponsored by museum educators from around the globe through their support of Museum-Ed’s 2014 Kickstarter campaign:

**Full Series Supporters:**

- J. Marshall Adams
- Marianna Adams
- Christina Alderman
- Anonymous
- Autry National Center Education Department
- Bayou Bend Docent Organization
- Birmingham Museum of Art
- Mary Ann Bloom
- Brooklyn Museum
- Berclee Cameron
- Carnegie Museum of Art
- Jennifer Chowning
- Susan Chum
- Edith Copenhaver
- The Corning Museum of Glass, Rakow Research Library
- Karen L. Daly
- Herminia Din
- Robin Dowden
- Julia Forbes
- Robin Gabriel
- Courtney Gerber
- Golden History Museums, Golden, CO
- Kimberly Hanson
- Phyllis Hecht
- Anne Henderson
- Victoria Hughes
- Kathleen F. G. Hutton
- Indianapolis Museum of Art Docents
- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
- Johns Hopkins University Museum Studies
- Carole Krucoff
- Judith Landau
- Jean Linsner
- Beth Maloney
- Laura Mann
- Melinda Mayer
- Museum Education Roundtable
- Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
- Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland
- Museum Partners Consulting, LLC
- Diana Musslewhite
- Elisabeth Nevins, seed/ed consulting
- Ayumu Ota
- Lauren Patton
- Sandbox Studios
- Roger Sayre
- Susie Severson
- SFMOMA Research Library
- Arthur Smith
- Ellen Soares, Peabody Essex Museum
- The Softtalk Apple Project and
- FactMiners.org Developers Community
- Marcos Stafne
- Nicole Stutzman Forbes
- University of Michigan Library
- Katherine Yount

**Volume Ten Supporters:**

- Alice Novak
- Poudre Wilderness Volunteers

**Volume Ten, No. 3 Supporter:**

- Richard Urban