

# Designing Your Tour

## Checkout Tours

During your training, you will be required to lead successful checkout tours of some areas of the collection. Checkout tours are tours given to IPE department staff to demonstrate proficiency in touring techniques and subject matter. The following section is designed to help you plan your checkout and future tours.

## Tour Objective and Means

For every tour, develop an objective based on the tour subject, your audience, and any special requests, if applicable. You will accomplish the objective by using a relevant theme, a diverse selection of object types and materials, thought-provoking open-ended questions, and a succinct conclusion. Include the rich history and cultural context that led to the creation of the objects. Tours are one hour in length (unless otherwise specified) and generally include 6 to 8 objects.

## Selecting a Theme

The first step in designing a tour is selecting a theme. It is best to choose the theme *before* you select your objects to insure coherence and flow.

Think of a tour as a good book. Each page of the book addresses something different, but individually they mean little to a reader. However, once the pages are bound together in order, the result is a story or text that flows logically and makes points key to our understanding of the topic addressed. A theme will help your visitors see and understand the art objects in relation to a central idea, rather than as just a random sampling.

## Purpose of Themes

A theme does many things, including:

- establishes the focus of a tour and helps you make important decisions about how to structure your tour, what art works to include, what information to incorporate about your objects, and what questions to ask.
- provides visitors of all ages with a context for organizing the information discussed on the tour and for constructing meaning. The theme clarifies for visitors what the tour is about.
- allows you and the visitor to evaluate the relevance of what is being said during the tour. If discussions get too tangential, you can use your theme to direct the discussion back on track.
- serves as the “big idea” through which visitors can recall and even organize their memories of facts and experiences after the tour.

### **What Makes a Theme Effective?**

Themes must be broad enough to allow you some choice of art works and approaches, but narrow enough to present visitors with clear and helpful parameters for learning. For example, “Treasures of Mia” tells what you will show, whereas, “What makes a work a treasure?” provides a basis for discussion and helps visitors to understand what they can expect to learn.

### **Selecting Objects**

Once you have developed your theme, you are ready to select 6 to 8 objects (plus 1 or 2 alternates) that illustrate key points related to your theme. Choose objects that:

- represent many areas of the museum or relevant gallery spaces so visitors get a sense of the size and scope of the museum or particular collection(s) you are touring
- depict the diversity of materials, cultures and functions of art objects in the area(s) you are touring
- are organized in a logical order (for the most direct route possible)
- are age-appropriate
- are placed/displayed in a manner that lends itself to viewing by a tour group (not too high or too far away)
- come from a variety of historical periods (where appropriate)
- are of interest to you and appealing to museum visitors (always consider your audience!)

### **Transitions Between Objects**

Transitions are 1- to 2-sentence “bridges” between each of the objects on your tour. They help link objects and ideas for visitors and indicate to your tour group that it is time to move to another object. Transitions should not be complicated! They are used to clarify, emphasize, and/or embellish ideas. Use them to reinforce your theme and to pique your audience’s curiosity about what interesting or exciting art work awaits them.

#### **Sample Transitions**

From Costa, *Portrait of a Cardinal in his Study* to El Greco, *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*

We have seen how the subject, colors, and composition of this painting exemplify Renaissance art principles of order, balance, and proportion. Let’s move forward about fifty years to see a painting that illustrates a radically different style!

From Nazca *Fish Vessel* (Peru) to *Saint Isidore* (Bolivia)

The Nazca people’s concern for ample supplies of food and water was not unique. In the next painting, we will see another expression of concern for the natural environment and its importance for survival.

From *Nio Guardians* (Japan) to *Amida Nyorai* (Japan)

We’ve seen the guardians of a Buddhist temple; now let’s look at an example of what they might have been protecting.

From *Portrait of Prince Duo Lo* (China) to *Wu Reception Hall* (China)

Now let's go visit the room in a Chinese house where a birthday celebration for a prince might take place.

From *Headrest* (Ethiopia) to *Mende Sande Society Mask* (Sierra Leone)

Let's go take a look at an elaborate object from another culture that also values complex hairstyles as an important element of personal adornment.

## **Developing an Introduction**

It is often helpful to develop the introduction *after* you have put together the rest of your tour. Use the introduction to set the tone: welcome visitors warmly, introduce yourself and the museum, and clearly state the theme, or purpose, of the tour. Ask a question or two to get the group talking and to learn a bit about them. "Who's been here before?" is a good way to introduce the interactive nature of the tour. At this time, also let visitors know what is expected of them, for example, the rules of the museum and your desire to have a conversation with them about the art. With children, it is often a good idea to ask them to tell you the rules.

## **Developing a Conclusion**

The conclusion pulls together the main ideas of your tour. With young people, you might ask them what their favorite objects were and why. You can also use the conclusion to recall some of the objects seen, discuss what learning has taken place, and encourage visitors to return to the museum with friends and family. Remind the group how to use any skills they have learned on the tour (for example, compare and contrast, or open-ended questioning) and encourage them to try these skills on their own the next time they visit Mia or any museum.

## **Tour Planning Worksheet**

To assist you in planning and organizing your tour we recommend that you use the Tour Planning Worksheet found on the following pages.

# Tour Planning Worksheet

**AUDIENCE:** (Who is this tour for?)

**SUBJECT/THEME:**

**THEME STATEMENT:** (In 1-2 sentences, expand upon the basic theme/title to describe what will be taught/learned on your tour.)

**OBJECTS:** (Choose 6-8, plus 2 alternates. Select objects of various types, materials, and historical periods from throughout the museum or relevant galleries. Don't worry about order yet.)

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**SOURCES OF INFORMATION:** (What sources will you consult to prepare for the tour?  
Choose from your textbook, class notes, Tour Office study files, and specific books and articles.  
Have at least 1-2 reliable sources for each object.)

**ORGANIZATION:** (Order your 6-8 objects into a logical tour route, both spatially and  
thematically. Keep in mind the overall theme and think about connections between objects that  
will facilitate transitions.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate #2 \_\_\_\_\_

**TOUR DEVELOPMENT:** (Use this section to outline the key points of the body of your tour and to map out your transitions between objects.)

**Object #1** (List basic label information: artist, title, date, country.)

**Questions and Activities:** (Develop at least three open-ended questions for this object.)

**Key points:** (List the main points that you plan to make when talking about this object.)

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*Transition:* (1-2 sentences that make a smooth transition between one object and the next, allowing your audience to make connections and follow the tour more easily.)

Copy this page for each object to be used on your tour.

Object #

Questions and Activities

Key points:

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*Transition:*

**INTRODUCTION:** Now that you have organized the body of your tour, you are ready to go back and write the introduction. Provide a warm welcome to visitors, introduce yourself, give a general introduction to the museum, and discuss museum rules. Then clearly state the theme and goals of the tour and give a short preview of what will be learned/discussed.

**CONCLUSION:** Use your conclusion to summarize the key points of your tour/theme and recall a few of the objects seen. Also give your audience ideas for future learning, identify any new skills the group may have learned on the tour that can be applied in other learning situations/museum experiences, and encourage them to return for further exploration.



## Post-Tour Self-Evaluation Questions

We recommend that you evaluate each tour immediately after doing it. Sharing your experiences with your fellow docents on the tour is always a good means of assessment. The following questions are offered as a means of self-evaluation. Remember, we often learn more from our mistakes than our successes!

### Tour Format

1. What was the **theme** of my tour? Was it appropriate for the **subject** and interesting to the visitors?
2. Did my **introduction** convey the theme to my group?
3. Did the theme guide me in selecting what information to present about each object? Was I able to comfortably follow the theme during the entire tour? If no, why not?
4. Did my **transitions** reinforce the thematic ideas and help to make connections between objects?
5. Did I **refer back** to objects I had shown earlier on the tour to reinforce ideas?
6. Did I select a **tour route** which flowed smoothly?
7. Did I pull together the ideas in a **summary** at the end?

### Tour Techniques

8. What did I do to actively **involve** the group?
9. Did I use **inquiry**? When using inquiry, did I allow enough time for their responses? Did I ask **follow-up** questions to encourage discussion?
10. Did I use any **props or activities** to involve my group?
11. Was I really **listening** to the visitors' responses and incorporating them into the tour or was I concentrating on what I was going to say next?
12. What things did I do to vary the **pace** of my tour?
  - Did I **approach** different works in different ways?
  - Did I **sit** my group down at any point?
  - Did I use any **visual aids**?
13. Was I **flexible** enough in my expectations and presentations to adjust the tour to the level or interest of the group?

14. Did I **speak** too rapidly or too slowly?
15. Did I allow some time for **looking in silence**, for visitors to digest what had just been pointed out?
16. Did I point out any works in passing that the group might want to come back and view at leisure some time?

### **Tour Content**

17. Were the objects I chose appropriate for my subject and theme?
  - Did I use too many or too few objects?
  - Did I clearly relate what I was saying to what was present in the work of art?
  - Were the objects I chose appropriate for this age group?
18. Was my information accurate and thorough enough? Did I try to present too many ideas?
19. Did I check the pronunciation of terms and names I was unsure of?
20. Did I try to make connections between the works of art and my visitors' lives or the world they live in?

### **General**

21. What were the greatest strengths of my tour?
22. What do I want to improve upon the next time I give this tour?

*Adapted from Evaluation Questions written by the New Orleans Museum of Art Guides Program Staff.*