

Pathways for Communicating about Objects on Guided Tours



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Abstract Guided tours offer special opportunities for lively and varied presentations that match the methods of interpretation to the characteristics of the participating visitors. Most tour guides rely on rather limited, unidirectional (guide-to-visitor) communication. Instead, this paper outlines six different pathways of communication that are possible among guide, visitors, and object. Each pathway offers several specific types of communicative acts. In addition, 35 guided tours in several different kinds of venue were examined to identify the pathways and types of acts that were used. The professional literature describes other types of acts, and more have been developed at the writer's home museum. All in all, the 58 different types of communicative acts described here present a wide range of opportunities for guides to communicate with visitors.



Introduction

It's well established that a museum or other cultural venue can substantially enhance a visitor's appreciation and learning by offering an experience attuned to the visitor's individual interests, learning style, type of intelligence, personal background, memories, emotions, and inclination for interactivity.¹ Acknowledging this insight, many museums have begun to design their exhibitions with the help of front end studies to offer different visitors various ways to relate to the displays.² The multiple modes of presentation can also make an exhibition livelier.

The guided tour is one type of visitor experience that has great potential for both a lively presentation and a match-up with different visitors' interests and individuality. The small size of the group and people's direct encounter with the guide provide the opportunity for the guide to know something about the visitors — their age range, nationality,

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ethnic or other identity, and something of their interests and backgrounds—and to adjust the tour accordingly. The same storyline can thus be presented in very different ways, according to the makeup of the group of visitors.

In spite of this potential, most guides appear not to take significant advantage of this option. Rather, most tours are pre-planned didactic presentations, delivered in more or less the same way each time they are given. Even in the case of a well-planned and well-executed themed tour with a good storyline, guides rarely make use of a diversity of presentation methods. For instance, presenting an object to a group—a key moment in any guided tour—usually involves the guide gathering the visitors around the object and simply explaining it to them. This pattern is generally repeated with each object on the tour. One can question, then, whether such tours are fully engaging their visitors in ways that touch them individually and deeply.

Conversations I have had with tour guides—including some who have been in the profession for years—lead me to conclude that many are simply unaware of a wider range of methods by which an object can be presented to visitors. These methods can change a standard presentation into one that is multi-dimensional, varied and engaging. The purpose of this paper is to offer a user-friendly catalogue of methods for object presentation by volunteer docents, professional tour guides, and guide trainers. I have collected some of these methods by observing and studying numerous guided tours; others by scanning the professional literature; and still others through my work in training guides at the Nature Park and Galleries, the “open-campus museum” of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. At this museum—which encompasses the entire science campus, rather than being housed in a building—guided tours and demonstrations are offered in 15 different subjects—some outdoors (including ecology, trees, plant evolution, and campus architecture) and others indoors (including natural history collections, University library collections, and research labs).

The unidirectional communication common in guided tours actually represents just one of six possible pathways of communication or information flow, which are described in the triangle in Figure 1. From each corner of the triangle (representing, respectively, the guide, the visitors, and the object) information can flow to the other two corners, as indicated by the pathways labeled A through F. Moreover, along each pathway, numerous types of communication acts can be identified. Some acts are especially suited to particular visitor characteristics. For instance, some are more cognitively based, while others are more subjective, imaginative, or aesthetic; some are more suited to children, others to adults; some offer a more relaxed experience while others present a challenge, and so on.

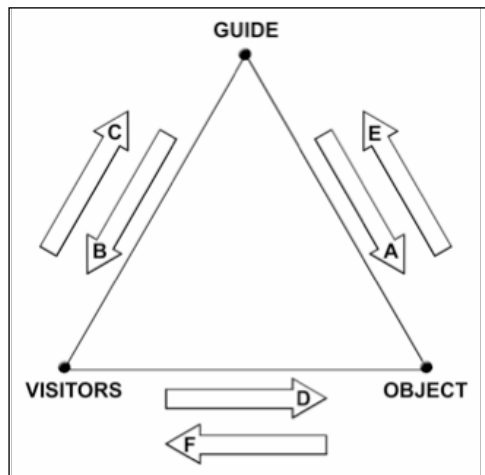


Figure 1. Six pathways of communication or information flow among the guide, the visitors, and the object.

A guide might use a combination of several acts, involving several different pathways, to present a given object to the visitors. For instance, the guide could initially hide the object (pathway A) in a large sack to encourage curiosity, while visitors guess what the object is (pathway D). The visitors could also be asked to touch the object (pathway D)—if permitted by the museum—while it is still in the sack, to appreciate its shape and texture, and to identify it. After exposing the object to view, the guide could explain to the visitors (pathway B) what it is and say something about it, then play a tape recording for the visitors (pathway B) of something relevant. Next, the visitors could examine the object with magnifying lenses (pathway D) provided by the guide, to search for some tiny structural element of interest, and the visitors could ask questions of the guide (pathway C). Finally, the guide would answer the visitors' questions (pathway B). In this case, eight acts and four pathways would be used, and as a result, the overall presentation would be multi-sensory, interactive, investigative, and informative—and probably highly engaging. For a different object on the tour, the guide may use a similar number of acts, many of them different from those listed above. This paper presents a total of 58 acts, providing numerous options from which to choose.

It is hoped that this inventory of possible acts will encourage guides and their trainers to expand the range of ways they bring the public into contact with objects of cultural significance, and in doing so, enliven their presentations and relate more directly with individual visitors. Of course, the present catalogue represents only a partial list of possible acts, and it is hoped that guides and trainers will add to it from their own experience.

Methods

I began this study by attending 35 guided tours in various types of venue in four countries, to create a catalogue of the pathways and communicative acts used by guides in presenting objects to visitors. This inventory provided baseline information about the range of acts generally employed in the field. (Although sampling more venues would clearly have broadened this baseline, I found that after 15-20 tours the samples had reached the point of diminishing returns.) The venues of the 35 tours are categorized in Table 1. More than half of these were prominent visitor sites, including several of the world's most-often visited places. All tours lasted from 45 to 90 minutes.

The next step was to inventory the professional literature for additional types of acts not observed in the 35 tours. I surveyed 15 books widely used in the training of guides and guide trainers.³ The books described additional acts that are known in the field of guiding, but apparently not in general use.

Finally, I added other communicative acts developed in both the university's masters degree course on guiding in the Nature Park and Galleries, and follow-up training of guides. The tour subjects included: an all-campus tour; trees; forest ecology and nature protection; the bird sculpture garden; behind the scenes at the natural history collections; the university research labs; specific National Library collections (ancient maps, and history of science); the geology gallery; and three different sit-down demonstrations covering mammalian skeletons, sea shells, and fish.⁴

Table 1. Summary of 35 guided tours studied for this paper.

Type of Venue	Number	Country ^a	Prominence ^b
Art museums	6	3 USA	2 high, 1 medium
		2 GB	2 high
		1 IL	1 high
Natural history museums	3	2 USA	2 high
		1 GB	1 high
History museums	2	1 USA	1 medium
		1 GB	1 low
Historic and government sites	5	5 USA	5 high
		1 USA	1 high
Cultural center Nature centers and natural sites	5	2 USA	2 low
		2 GB	2 medium
		1 IL	1 low
Archeological sites	2	1 IL	1 medium
		1 GR	1 high
University campuses	8	8 USA	4 high 4 medium
		2 USA	1 medium, 1 low
Urban neighborhoods	3	1 GB	1 medium

^a USA—United States; GB—Great Britain; IL—Israel; GR—Greece.

^b Prominence: “high” refers to venues with a major international reputation; “medium” refers to venues with a national reputation; “low” refers to venues little known outside their local area.

In this article, all acts obtained from the literature are given citations. Also, references with useful descriptions are cited for several of the acts observed among the 35 guided tours. Each of the acts developed at my home museum is followed by an explanation.

Results

The catalogue below is divided first according to pathway (A through F). Next, within each pathway, acts are categorized according to the source in which they were encountered:

- Observed Acts—those observed during at least one of the 35 guided tours.
- Acts from the Literature—those described in at least one of the 15 books cited above.
- NPG Acts—those developed at the Nature Park and Galleries museum.

It would have been possible to lump some of these acts together, and to split others into two or more separate acts. I have attempted to be as consistent as possible in terms of the breadth of a single act, though some range is inevitable. Also, some acts are naturally sequenced in a way that involves more than one pathway; however, for simplicity, they are presented here in a single pathway. For instance, the guide might ask the visitors a question, an act involving pathway B. Though the visitors might answer, which would involve pathway C, the act of answering would not be included in the catalogue.

Some of the acts described below are clearly more relevant to children, and others to adults. However, I do not subdivide the acts along an age axis, since this is only one of several possible axes. (Others would include, for instance, objective versus subjective orientation, the degree of relevance to people with various disabilities, and level of complexity.) Multiple subdivision, together with cross-listing, would make the catalogue cumbersome and difficult to use. Moreover, in our experience, some acts that seem initially to be suitable for one group can be just as effective with another, or can readily be made so. (For an example, see below: Pathway A, NPG act A4 and its explanation.) Thus, in order not to pre-judge specific acts as relevant just to one particular group, and to encourage the creative use of acts for different types of groups or individuals, I have categorized only in the two ways mentioned above: the pathway and the source of the act.

Pathway A — Guide to Object

Observed Acts:

- The guide points to the object, or to a part of it, with the hand, a pointing stick, a laser pointer, or if outdoors, with a mirror that reflects the sun onto a distant object, or by other means. Visitors should have no doubt about exactly which object is being discussed.
- If permitted by the museum, the guide touches or lifts and holds the object, turning it to show it from different angles (Ham 1992, 95).

Acts from the Literature:

- The guide “speaks” to the object through a puppet. This allows the use of a different voice from that of the guide. For instance, while the guide might praise a particular tree for its beauty and grandeur, the puppet might criticize it, as in: “I know you and these other pine trees all need to send out your pollen so you can reproduce, but did you ever think what that does to me? Because of you I sneeze three months every year. Achoo!” (Brochu and Merriman 2002, 68; Ham 1992, 168, 179; Regnier et al. 1994, 56.)
- The guide “becomes” the object. As an example, in one of our guided presentations on the subject of sharks, the guide picks up from the display table a real shark’s jaw. These jaws are fixed in an open position, teeth exposed. He places

these over his face, which is visible within, and framed by, the two rows of teeth. Then he “swims” across the floor (walks with a swishing motion) while explaining how the shark looks for prey. He approaches visitors and invites them to carefully touch his sharp teeth. (For adult visitors of a certain age, it might be relevant here for the guide to make reference to the song “Mack the Knife.”) Applying the jaws to his own face clarifies that these were once part of a whole organism (not just an isolated object), gives them a sense of life, and adds a bit of interactive drama, while information is being conveyed. This is a totally different experience for the visitor than if the guide had simply lifted the jaw and described it (Strauss 1996, 132; Ham 1992, 167.)

Acts from NPG summarized. (For a fuller explanation, see next paragraph below):

- The guide hides the object. (A1)
- The guide examines the object closely, as if for the first time. (A2)
- The guide carries out an experiment on the object. (A3)
- The guide speaks directly to the object. (A4)
- The guide kisses the object. (A5)
- The guide caresses the object. (A6)
- The guide provides an honored setting for the object, and places it there respectfully. (A7)
- The guide “frames” the object to reduce visual clutter. (A8)

Explanation of NPG acts, Pathway A:

A1. By keeping an object hidden in a bag or a carrying case—or out of sight around the corner of a building—while its remarkable qualities are described, a guide can enhance visitors’ curiosity and interest. This is especially true if, before revealing the object, the guide peeks at it occasionally, with facial expressions of special interest and even surprise. It’s a tease that works. Also, by judiciously planning the tour’s route, the guide can attempt to keep each highlighted object out of view until its turn to be presented, enhancing the surprise of discovery.

A2. By examining the object closely, the guide discovers (or fictitiously discovers, in a pre-planned way) something special, never before noted about the object. The guide then shares this discovery enthusiastically with the visitors, for instance: “Wow, I never before noticed how beautifully the sun glints off this sculpture at this hour of the morning. It reveals the surface texture as I have never seen it before. Come have a look from over here. I wonder if the sculptor intended this. What do you think?”

A3. Experiments are commonly carried out in science center demonstrations, but perhaps not in guided tours. For instance, to demonstrate that most of the rocks on our university campus are limestone (composed largely of the calcium carbonate from microscopic shells of marine organisms, indicating that this campus was once under the



Campus trees on the Discovery Tree Walk, a tour for children, introducing them to the game of “tree discovery.” Left to right: Jerusalem pine, pepper tree, white poplars.

sea), a guide applies a few drops of five-percent hydrochloric acid, and the result is a clearly visible and barely audible fizz of carbon dioxide, like that in a bottle of soda. As a control, applying the acid to a basalt rock, known not to be composed of shells, produces no fizz. This experiment takes only about 30 seconds, and is highly convincing.

A4. Not all objects can be spoken to. But a statue or portrait of, say, George Washington, can be addressed, as in: “You’re looking quite serious this morning, Mr. President. Is something momentous on your mind just now?” The way the guide speaks to the painted figure (for instance, addressing him as “Mr. President”) conveys a sense of how he regards the person, and by implication, the artwork itself. This act can introduce an account of what was actually happening at the moment that is depicted in the work of art, or the importance of the man himself.

A tree can also be addressed by the guide. For instance, to introduce the subject of tree growth, a guide could say, “How did you get so tall? We feed ourselves and our children very well, and yet look at us, way down here by your feet. What’s your secret?”

Some objects can be modified quite simply to make them easier to speak to. For instance, a pine cone can be spoken to, especially if held in the hand with a handkerchief thrown over as a shawl, and perhaps adding a few pine needles for hair, transforming it into the wrinkled face of an aged person. A guide could request, for instance: “Maybe you can tell us how you made seeds for new trees, and how you sent them off to find new places to grow.” A guide who may be uncomfortable with pine cones that speak might have the cone “whisper” in his or her ear, and then pass on what the cone “said” to the visitors (see Pathway E, NPG acts, explanation E1).

Finally, the guide can invite another guide to speak to the object, as in: “Now here

comes old Charley—he's a bit nuts; he goes around talking to the trees." This permits the guide to remain "objective" and lets this other person be silly. Of course this requires that a Charley (a second guide) be available.

In our experience, both children and adults enjoy this type of act. But many guides are uncomfortable using such childlike acts, especially with a partly or entirely adult audience. A solution to this is for the guide to introduce the act by saying something like: "Now here's a way you may be able to interest your children or grandchildren in trees, next time you're out walking with them and you find a pine cone." This little introduction not only can make the guide more comfortable speaking to a pine cone, but also can give the adult visitors the excuse they may need to be silly and enjoy the act. It also can enhance their motivation for absorbing the information provided by the guide, whose comment may have started them thinking about guiding their children and grandchildren, for which they will need to learn something about the subject.

A5. A guide might well conclude a good, informative conversation with the pine cone that has just played the role of an aged person, with a parting kiss to the wrinkled "face." This can leave a lasting impression that the cone, owing to its complexity and its importance, being worthy of a kiss, is also worthy of respect.

A6. How an object is held conveys information about how important the object is to the guide (and thus affects how visitors regard it). There are many ways to honor an object by holding it, and the word "caress" is meant as a catch-all. Most people, for instance, hold a baby differently than they hold a baseball, reflecting different feelings about these two "objects." Holding is a subject worthy of much thought. (This act of respectfully caressing an object is different from merely holding it up and turning it so that visitors can see it, as described in the observed act, above.)

A7. The guide can either put an object down casually on a cluttered table, or place



A wooden bridge built across the campus entrance pool becomes a symbolic walk across the Red Sea, complete with umbrellas to ward off spatters.

it carefully on an empty table on which he or she first lays a small, centrally positioned cloth, thereby turning the table into an “altar.” Outdoors, an object can be placed on a cloth carefully laid on the ground. The guide may then gently center the object, check its position, readjust, and slowly back away. These brief, wordless acts create a heightened sense of respect for, and importance of, the object.

A8. The guide can carry a collapsible frame and place it, erected, in front of an object—which thus becomes framed. Another possibility is to carry a blank white board and place it behind an object to highlight it. It is remarkable how these two simple actions cause the object to “pop out” visually from its surroundings, enhancing visitor attention.

Pathway B—Guide to Visitors

Observed Acts:

- Guide explains the object to the visitors. Usually carried out in a somewhat formal and didactic style, this act was by far the most commonly encountered, occupying perhaps 90 percent of the time of the 35 guided tours attended. It included several variations, such as describing the object, categorizing it, pointing out its beauty or importance, placing it in historical or other context, comparing and contrasting the object with other objects, and so on.⁵
- Guide tells the visitors a brief story or anecdote related to the object, or reads a poem about the object.⁶
- Guide asks the visitors a question. There are many categories of questions, each with its own underlying educational or communicative rationale.⁷
- Guide shows the visitors an explanatory prop related to the object—a picture, chart, map, three-dimensional model, and so on (Ham 1992, 95).
- Guide shows the visitors objects from every day life that somehow resemble the object on the tour, thus creating a link to the familiar (Ham 1992, 14; Regnier, et al. 1994, 16).
- Guide creates for the visitors a conceptual link between the tangible object and a larger, intangible concept (Beck and Cable 2002, 24; Brucho and Merriman 2002, 45).
- Guide praises visitor for his or her comments or actions.

Acts from the Literature:

- Guide invites the visitors to describe the object to a blind person. A real challenge to the visitors’ senses and integration, this act encourages appreciation of an object from a different perspective (National Docent Symposium Council 2001, 35).



An NPG guide leads a visiting high school group on a campus tour, stopping at the Henry Moore sculpture.

- Guide asks the visitors each to say one word that the object brings to mind. The set of responses can form a good group-based description of the object, upon which the guide can then expand. Suggesting that all the visitors' words be adjectives, or verbs, can help visitors to focus and look more thoughtfully (Brucho and Merriman 2002, 45; National Docent Symposium Council 2001, 44-45).
- Guide asks visitors to look at the object for one minute, then has them turn around and asks them questions about what they saw in the object. The exercise can be repeated a few times, each time asking them to focus on a different aspect—color, form, relationships, and so on (National Docent Symposium Council 2001, 45).
- Guide leads the visitors in a group discussion about the object or objects (Grinder and McCoy 1985, 60; Knudsen, et al. 2003, 111).
- Guide presents the visitors with a non-competitive game that helps them understand the object (Cornell 1989; Knudsen, et al. 2003, 89).
- Guide provides the visitors with a group challenge, or provides different sub-groups of visitors with different group challenges, to help them understand an object (Knudsen, et al. 2003, 100).
- Guide modifies choice of words, vocal quality and body language to create different dramatic effects (Strauss 1996, 127).
- Guide imitates a famous person, perhaps by donning a hat or jacket, or taking out a pipe to evoke, say, Darwin or van Gogh. The imitated person then gives his or

her interpretation of the object, as in: “Now here’s what van Gogh himself might tell us about his painting. He might say . . . oh, excuse me [guide puts on a straw hat and then proceeds] . . .” Alternatively, the imitated person can be an unknown individual who lived at a time and place relevant to the object: “Now here’s how the miner who found this gem might have reacted when he first saw it.” These approaches are often called “living history” (Cornell 1989, 109; Ham 1992, 163; National Docent Symposium Council 2001, 60; Regnier, et al. 1994, 46).

- Guide demonstrates to visitors how to carry out some process related to the object, such as churning butter—if the object is a churn, for instance. The visitors then try the action (Knudsen et al. 2003, 269).
- Guide invites visitors to sing along or dance to an old familiar song that forms part of the context of a historic object, or to act out something related to an object (Knudsen, et al. 2003, 298).

Acts from NPG: (For an explanation, see below.)

- Guide suggests that, as the visitors view each object on the tour, they consider which one is, to them, the most significant, or the most beautiful (or the most something else), and later share their opinion with all tour members. (B1)
- Guide suggests that the visitors be on the lookout for the next object of the tour, based on hints he or she provides. (B2)
- Guide presents the visitors with a situation of “cognitive dissonance” regarding an object, for instance: “I just said x is true of this object, and now I’m telling you that y is also true. But they can’t both be true. Can you visitors help me out of this dilemma?” (B3)
- Guide plays taped music related to the object, or taped bird calls or other animal sounds relevant to the place, or bits of speeches by famous or otherwise significant people about the particular object or others of its type. (B4)
- Guide invites all the children to run to a particular nearby place and bring something back that the guide “needs” in order to explain the current object. If this is a mixed family group with adults and children, the adults are intended to remain behind with the guide. If it is a school group, the teachers and accompanying adults can remind behind. (B5)

Explanation of NPG acts, Pathway B:

B1. This act is intended to empower each person to establish his or her own opinion regarding the different objects and their aesthetics.

B2. This act can enhance visitor involvement, curiosity, and anticipation, and make visitors more active participants in the tour.

B3. Visitors with strong interest and cognitive ability generally like this type of challenge.

B4. The music or natural sounds can create a peaceful and receptive mood for visitors to relate to an object. The taped speeches, especially if they derive from an earlier time, can be especially interesting to elder visitors, who might recall the original speeches.

B5. This act, best suited to outdoor venues, offers several advantages. First, children love to run, and empowering them to do so, and even to help the guide in the process, can be very positive. (Of course, the place they are invited to run should be nearby, entirely safe, and fully within view by their parents or teachers.) Second, seeing that their children are happy, the parents will be happy. Third, the invitation can have lots of educational content, as in: "Run to that olive tree—the short tree over there with the rounded top, and bring back, all of you together, just one leaf. Before you pick it, check that it's dark green on the top and whitish on the bottom, with no holes or cuts. You can all decide together which leaf to pick. Don't pick more than one leaf because that could hurt the tree. Please carry the leaf back carefully, because I need to compare that leaf to this one that I am now picking—see how carefully—from this carob tree." There are messages here about botany, making close observations, nature values, and teamwork, which the children may well absorb without realizing it. Fourth, the guide now has the adults' attention for a brief moment and thus can talk to them directly on their level. The parents will be half paying attention their children, but can also appreciate being spoken to in a strictly adult conversation.

Pathway C — Visitors to Guide

Observed Acts:

- Visitors come close to the guide and attend to what is being said.
- Visitors ask the guide questions about an object.
- Visitors share with the guide personal anecdotes or other stories that relate to the object or other objects like it: "I saw something about this recently on TV, and they were saying . . ."

Acts from the Literature: (none)

Acts from NPC: (none)

Pathway D — Visitors to Object

Observed Acts:

- Visitors look at the object as it is being described.
- Visitors examine the object through binoculars (for birds, natural scenes, and so on).

- Visitors listen to the objects: birds, bats (with a bat call detector), frogs, wind in the trees, or urban sounds; or visitors listen to the silence, especially in some reverential place such as a cemetery, a church, a grand vista (Knudsen, et al. 2003, 233; Pond 1993, 149).
- Visitors touch and hold the object, passing it around, if permitted (Ham 1992, 97).
- Visitors smell the object.
- Visitors photograph the object.

Acts from the Literature:

- Visitors look at the object from different angles, different eye heights, and different distances, providing a fuller perception (National Docent Symposium Council 2001, 59).
- Visitors taste the object. Some plant parts, such as leaves of spice plants, and of course fruits and nuts, can be tasted. We usually offer visitors a few “pine nuts” to nosh on while standing under and discussing the umbrella pine tree, the commercial source of these taste delights (National Docent Symposium Council 2001, 63).
- Visitors imagine (at the guide’s suggestion) that they own an object on the tour (or some object portrayed in a painting on the tour), and consider how they would feel about owning it, and what they would do with it (Doering 1999).
- Visitors catch or gather objects to be presented as part of the tour, such as pond critters, insects, snakes, seeds, cones. (Regnier, et al. 1994, 84).

Acts from NPG: (For an explanation, see below.)

- Visitors sketch objects, using sketching materials provided by the guide. (D1)
- Visitors look at the object through magnifying lens or microscope. (D2)
- Visitors compare different objects. (D3)
- Visitors measure or calculate something about the object. (D4)
- Visitors speak to the object. (D5)
- Visitors imitate the object. (D6)

Explanation of NPG acts, Pathway D:

D1. Sketching will appeal to relatively few visitors, but for these few it is an opportunity to deepen their involvement and to take home a very personal reminder of the tour. In our experience, visitors who sketch can simultaneously take part in other aspects of the tour, including listening, answering questions, and so on.

D2. An office magnifying glass, a “loupa” lens (approximately 10X magnification), or a variety of types of microscopes, even in an outdoor setting, can open up whole new dimensions for a visitor.

D3. Though it is quite common for a tour guide to compare different objects as part of the explanation, handing this role to the visitors empowers them to look more deeply and think more broadly.

D4. An example of a measurement with a calculation is: “If we were to spread out all the leaves of this tree on the ground with no spaces between them, to determine their sunlight-absorbing area, how much area would that be? How many “tree’s worth” of leaves could you spread on a football field?” This method is good for cognitively oriented visitors.

D5. As mentioned above, the guide can speak to a portrait of, say, George Washington or some other painted or sculpted individual. The guide can also invite the visitors to do the same. A visitor can look more closely at the painting, sculpture or other art work, can imagine the subject as being alive, and can achieve a more in-depth sense of the person portrayed. Visitors can also be encouraged to talk to trees, birds, other animals, and lots of other objects. Deciding what to say to a butterfly or an oak tree, for instance, can open up new types of perception. For the many visitors who will probably be embarrassed to speak aloud to objects, the guide can suggest they decide what to say, and then say it silently. He might add that he’s carrying a magic communication box, such that all their thoughts about the object are automatically transferred to, and understood by, the object, so even their silent speech will get through.

D6. Visitors, especially children, love to imitate animals, including their sounds, their movements, and their imagined facial expressions. Visitors can also imitate tree shapes (for instance, arms straight up with hands clasped for a narrow, pointed cypress, or arms and head drooping down for a weeping willow); works of art; and lots of other objects along a tour. Putting their body into play is highly engaging, appeals especially to those with body skills, and provides a physical reminder of what they have experienced. Some visitors may even break into a dance as a way of imitating an object.

Pathway E— Object to Guide

Observed Acts: (none)

Acts from the Literature: (none)

Acts from NPG: (For an explanation, see below.)

- Object “speaks” to the guide. (E1)
- Object “kisses” the guide. (E2)

Explanation of NPG acts, Pathway E:

E1. As mentioned above, many objects can “speak.” These include a pine cone, minimally dressed to become an aged face that “whispers” in the ear of the guide, who

then passes this message along to the visitors. George Washington's portrait, or anyone else portrayed in a work of art, can also whisper to the guide. So can a rock, or any inanimate object.

E2. The pine cone mentioned above, in the role as an aged person — or certain other personified objects — can kiss the guide on the cheek.

Pathway F — Object to Visitors

Observed Acts: (none)

Acts from the Literature: (none)

Acts from NPG: (For an explanation, see below.)

- An object reveals itself to visitors — after having previously been hidden, or in the dark, or otherwise out of view — or it reveals itself only by its sound or smell or touch, and not visually. (F1)
- Object "speaks" to the visitors. (F2)
- Object kisses the visitors, one by one. (F3)

Explanation of NPG acts, Pathway F:

F1. The surprise of sudden discovery, and the discovery by senses other than vision, can add to the intensity of the encounter.

F2. This is a variation on pathway E, NPG act E1. As mentioned, a pine cone minimally dressed to become an aged face, a portrait of George Washington, or anyone else in a work of art — or many other objects — can speak to visitors. One way of doing this is for the guide to take on the voice of the object, for instance by saying: "If this old tree could speak, what stories it could tell. It might say . . ." (Here the guide might change vocal quality to imitate a very old person, and so on.) Almost any object can be used in this way, but especially those that have a long history. A second way is for each visitor to imagine that the object is speaking directly to him or her, and if so, what it would say. Third, if the tour area is outfitted with audio-visual equipment, pressing a button or merely approaching an observation point can activate an audio presentation in which the object speaks to the visitors. A tree, for instance, could say, "I'm so glad you decided to rest in my shade; I like to be of service . . ." and proceed to explain something about itself or other objects visible from there. Alternatively (and more cheaply), a guide can carry a tape recorder with the tree's "voice" and turn this on when approaching the tree.

F3. The pine cone mentioned above, in the role as an aged person, or certain other personified objects with which the visitors have established a relationship, can offer kisses on the cheek, this time to the visitors — an experience likely to be long remembered, especially by children.

Discussion

Tour guiding (as it is generally practiced) tends to use a limited number of types of communication acts, and a highly didactic format. It seems unlikely that this type of presentation fully engages visitors or communicates with individual interests, learning styles, or other characteristics. However, a much wider range of communication options is available.

As summarized in Table 2, 18 different types of acts were observed among the 35 guided tours attended. Most of the observed types of act were actually employed only rarely. All the guides used communication pathway B extensively, and within that category the most common act—used perhaps 90 percent of the time—was simply explaining the object to the visitors. But as Table 2 shows, even the 18 different types of observed acts constituted less than a third (31 percent) of the total of 58 acts in the catalogue. There is indeed room for guides to considerably expand their range of acts used in tours.

Table 2 also indicates that pathway B encompasses more acts than any other pathway. Aside from the seven that I observed in guided tours, a further 10 are described in the literature, and five more were developed at NPG. This makes pathway B the richest of the six pathways in terms of diversity, with 22, or 38 percent, of all acts. However, 13 of these 22 acts are generally followed by an act on a different pathway. (For instance, after the guide asks the visitors a question, the visitors answer the question. Or the guide offers the group a challenge, which is followed by the group taking the challenge.) Yet these follow-up acts are not included in the catalogue or the table. This situation of calling for follow-up acts is much less prevalent among the acts of the other pathways. Thus, these 38 percent of acts in pathway B substantially over-represent the dominance of this pathway.

Pathway B represents the communication direction generally thought to be most relevant to guided tours—a guide should mostly talk to visitors—yet this pathway contains well under half of the acts in the catalogue. This suggests that guides might find a rich assortment of under-used types of acts in the other pathways—particularly pathways A and D, which together contain 49 percent of the types of acts.

Pathway A—the guide relating directly to the object—provides opportunities for guides to model how the visitors might relate to the object, for instance, by examining it closely, caressing it, and providing an honored setting for it, all suggesting honor to the object. Pathway D—visitors relating directly to the object—provides opportunities for the visitors to follow the guide's lead in honoring the object, for instance, by looking at it from different angles or with the aid of lenses or microscopes, sketching it, speaking to it, or imitating it, rather than merely glancing at the object.

In pathway D, the visitor is in direct association with the object, and is thus empowered to create his or her own relationship to it. Clearly, this is a worthy goal. Thus, guides might well be encouraged to devote more time to acts in pathway D, perhaps at the expense of those in pathway B.

Each object can be effectively presented to visitors via a creative mix of different types of acts involving different pathways, providing for a lively overall presentation. Each time the tour approaches a different object, the communication triangle is recreated, and a new set of communicative possibilities arises. The guide's choice of acts for

Table 2. Summary of the numbers of acts catalogued in this study. These are listed separately by pathway (A to F), and by source (those observed in 35 guided tours; those in the literature; those developed at NPG), as well as totals.

PATHWAY	A (Guide to Object)	B (Guide to Visitors)	C (Visitors to Guide)	D (Visitors to Object)	E (Object to Guide)	F (Object to Visitors)	A-F Totals %
Observed:							
Number of acts	2	7	3	6	0	0	18 31%
Literature:							
Number of acts	2	10	0	4	0	0	16 28%
NPG:							
Number of acts	8	5	0	6	2	3	24 41%
Totals:							
Number of acts	12	22	3	16	2	3	58
% of all	21%	38%	5%	28%	3%	5%	100%

each object will be dictated in part by the nature of the object and its setting, the characteristics of the audience, and the openness and creative capabilities of the guide. It is suggested that most or all of the 58 acts catalogued in this paper should be within a guide's repertoire, together with acts that the guide and others have developed (and will develop in the future), and that these be called upon when they are relevant to the specific situation.

In almost all the 35 guided tours observed for this study, the guides were highly knowledgeable about their subjects, spoke well, and were both confident and professional in their demeanor. They were clearly competent in unidirectional, didactic communication (although only about eight of the 35 offered themed tours with a proper story line). Interestingly, the audiences generally appeared to be reasonably satisfied with these tours: few visitors abandoned the tours early, most appeared reasonably attentive, and many made positive comments afterwards. Perhaps this apparent satisfaction is based in part on visitors' prior experience on guided tours, indicating to them that this is the kind of guiding that is to be expected.

Given this positive visitor response to basically unidirectional tour communication, it seems likely that tours using a much wider range of pathways and acts could achieve very high levels of audience satisfaction, as well as providing rich opportunities for visitors' personal meaning making, learning, and the creation of memorable experiences (Falk and Dierking 2000). This is not to suggest, of course, that a guide's explanation of objects to visitors should be eliminated from a tour. On the contrary, this may

be the single most informative act in the whole catalogue, and one that some visitors greatly appreciate. Rather, the suggestion is that it be accompanied by a rich panoply of additional acts.

One method that has been successful in enhancing interest in museum exhibitions is the incorporation of interactive elements—including touch-screen computers and mechano-electrical interactives—pioneered by science centers. I would suggest that the guided tour, by incorporating the available variety of acts, based on the communication triangle and its six pathways, is highly interactive by its very nature. As such, I believe that guided tours have a particularly bright future in the world of museums and other cultural venues.

The National Association for Interpretation trains guides and guide trainers in best guiding practices. Through the Web site, those interested can explore a variety of opportunities for enhancing their guiding, and their training of guides.

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Notes

1. See Doering (1999); Falk and Dierking (2000); Gardner (1983; 1993); Hein 1998.
2. See Diamond (1999); Dierking and Pollock (1998); Taylor (1991).
3. The literature consisted of Beck and Cable (2002); Brochu and Merriman (2002); Cornell (1989); Cunningham (2004); Grinder and McCoy (1985); Ham (1992); Knudsen, et al. (2003); Levy, et al. (2001); Lewis (1980); Mills (1920); National Docent Symposium Council (2001); Pond (1993); Regnier, et al. (1994); Strauss (1996); Tilden (1957).
4. Some of the acts developed in the Nature Park and Galleries have probably been used before in other venues, and I do not mean to claim them as inventions, but rather to bring them into wider use.
5. Many books offer ideas about explaining objects to visitors, but perhaps the most useful are: Beck and Cable (2002); Grinder and McCoy (1985); Ham (1992); Knudsen, et al. (2003); Levy, et al. (2001); Regnier, et al. (1994.)
6. See Cornell (1989, 109); Knudsen, et al. (2003, 301); National Docent Symposium Council (2001, 61); Pond (1993, 144); Regnier, et al. (1994, 51); Strauss (1996, 8).
7. See Grinder and McCoy (1985, 60, 72); Ham (1992, 148); National Docent Symposium Council (2001, 28, 50); Regnier, et al. (1994, 31).

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