

## Writing for NPS Unigrd Brochures

### Scope of Work

With the fewer personal services now offered to visitors to National Park Service (NPS) areas, the official Unigrd visitor information brochure becomes ever more important for creating a management presence for the NPS in parks. The Unigrd brochure intends to give park visitors both *interpretation* of the park's features and their significance and *information* about how best to enjoy their visit with respect for the park and its features and for the NPS mission to preserve and protect them. The Unigrd brochure helps parks encourage public support of national parks and the NPS mission.

### Evaluation and Style Guide

The writing for Unigrd brochures—exclusive of driving directions and descriptions of visitor services, facilities, activities, safety, and park management concerns—will be evaluated based on the description of interpretation and interpretive writing below. Driving directions and descriptions of visitor services, etc. will be evaluated as expository writing that must be clear and concise. All writing will adhere to the HFC Editorial Style Guide 2007.pdf, available at [www . . .](http://www.nps.gov/learn/) *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition*, is used as an extension of the HFC Editorial Style Guide—i.e., it is authoritative for spelling and for whether a word should be one word, two words, or hyphenated.

### Interpretation and Interpretive Writing

Interpretive writing has grown out of the seminal work on interpretation by Freeman Tilden in *Interpreting Our Heritage* and more recently the workbook and CD *Meaningful Interpretation: How To Connect Hearts and Minds to Places, Objects, and Other Resources*, edited by David L. Larsen and published by Eastern National. Tilden developed and established interpretation as an art. “Interpretation is revelation based upon information,” he wrote, and “The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.” Tilden’s perspective remains important. Larsen’s work articulates a philosophy of interpretation and offers a common terminology, standards, and mechanics, techniques, and schematics to help realize Tilden’s art. Familiarity with these books benefits anyone intent on writing NPS Unigrd brochures—or other media—for visitors to national park areas.

Basic information about *interpretation*, as practiced by the NPS, is available at <http://www.nps.gov/learn/> . More detailed information is available at: <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/theprogram.htm> , with information about online course modules for Media Specialists, which includes Module 230 (Interpretive Writing). Anyone may undertake this training. It is by no means restricted to NPS or other federal employees.

Interpretive writing integrates the best methods of effective writing with the principles and techniques of interpretation. Effective interpretive writing draws from sound scholarship, respects multiple perspectives, and uses creative techniques to engage the reader.

Interpretive writing is goal driven: it wants to move the reader toward understanding and—ideally—toward an active feeling of stewardship for the particular park and by extension for the National Park System and national park idea. Interpretive writing assumes good, professional writing that is appropriate to the content and the audience. Beyond good professional writing, interpretive writing strives to connect the reader intellectually and emotionally with the meanings inherent in these places and their features.

Interpretive writing usually takes off from something tangible—an artifact, animal, or described event—and then links it with an intangible quality of the tangible phenomenon to create an interpretive theme statement. The tangible may include facts, information, evidence, physical features, explanations, illustrations, comparisons, contrasts, etc. The intangible may include concepts, ideas, feelings, meanings, relationships, processes, etc.

The interpretive theme statement expresses something inherently meaningful about the place, feature, or event presented. This theme is then used to develop cohesively the relevant ideas that support it. Those relevant ideas are then introduced by tangibles that are then linked to intangibles, to elevate the reader in stair-step fashion to a more meaningful connection and a stronger feeling of stewardship.

Writing a Unigrid brochure requires finding the effective entry into the theme or themes addressed by the layout presentation of the material. Ideally—this is NPS Publications staff practice—the designer, cartographer, and writer/editor team collaborates to develop the layout presentation with major input from the park staff. This maximizes the synergy between words and images and helps the team decide what to show and what to tell. This also helps the designer, cartographer, and writer/editor commit to the Unigrid brochure's overall theme or big idea. Collaboration internally and with the park is a necessity.

Unigrid writing heeds the best of writing for the Web. It strives for the energy to engage the reader immediately and the economy to grab and hold attention amid today's information glut. Energy issues from precise active verbs mostly used in basic, English syntax: subject-verb-object. Edit out function words and phrases—they dawdle, they stifle energy, and they bankrupt economy. Wherever possible, rely on words of Anglo-Saxon origin: they are shorter and more concrete than words derived from Latin or Greek. Read the writing aloud to test its rhetoric on your ear. That's as close as you approach hearing how the reader may hear your writing.

*A last word*, from Annie Dillard: “The work's unity is more important than anything else about it. Those digressions that were so much fun to write must go.”