



The Interpretive
Analysis Model

DAVID L. LARSEN

1. IDENTIFY TANGIBLE RESOURCE OR RESOURCES.

2. IDENTIFY INTANGIBLE MEANINGS.

3. IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTIONS TO RESOURCE MEANINGS AND THE INTERPRETIVE METHODS USED TO DEVELOP THEM.

4. IDENTIFY WHICH OPPORTUNITIES FAVOR EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS AND WHICH FAVOR INTELLECTUAL CONNECTIONS TO RESOURCE MEANINGS.

5. IDENTIFY THE COHESIVE DEVELOPMENT OF A RELEVANT IDEA OR IDEAS.

6. CONSIDER THE EFFECT OF THE PRODUCT AS A WHOLE.

7. COMPARE YOUR ANALYSIS WITH THE ANALYSIS OF OTHERS.

8. IDENTIFY WAYS TO IMPROVE THE PRODUCT OR SERVICE.

The Analysis Model

- The Analysis Model helps identify the most critical interpretive elements of an interpretive product or service – tangible/intangible links, opportunities for intellectual and emotional connections to the meanings of the resource, and a cohesively developed idea or ideas.
- The Analysis Model provides a strategy for positive assessment – it allows interpreters to identify elements of success in any interpretive effort.

- The Analysis Model can be used for self-evaluation, for understanding the structure and effectiveness of other professional work, and as a tool for coaching and development.
- The Analysis Model does not address the important elements of accuracy, presentation, technique, style, and delivery. Those elements are assessed in other ways.
- The Analysis Model provides a tool for understanding – but it is not the only valuable approach for examining interpretive work, accurate information and skillful delivery.

1. IDENTIFY TANGIBLE RESOURCE OR RESOURCES.

What places, objects, people, or events, are being interpreted? What is the interpretive product or service trying to help the audience care more about? Which tangible resource acts as the icon?

Often the tangible resource is physical – but a tangible can also be a person or event from the past.

Societies choose to preserve some historic people and events (both human events and natural events) just as they choose to preserve some objects and places. Remembering is an act of preservation. Interpretive products that use a person or an event from the past as a tangible icon attempt to preserve the memory of that person or event.

There are likely a number of tangible resources the interpretive product or service is trying to provoke the audience to care more about. However, there is probably a single and specific tangible that is being used as the icon. The icon is the portal that links to, and illuminates, other tangible resources and meanings.

2. IDENTIFY INTANGIBLE MEANINGS.



What intangible meanings are present? List the ones you recognize. These meanings, connected to the tangible resource, are its tangible/intangible links. Which intangibles, if any, are universal concepts?

A list of meanings identifies many of the tangible/intangible links that were included in the product. Tangible/intangible links are the foundational elements of any interpretive product. All other interpretive elements are built from them.

There are no right answers – but there are thoughtful ones. When audiences are asked to list meanings they take from an interpretive product, no two are exactly alike. However, audience members who think about and try to recognize as many meanings as possible, create lists that have a significant amount of overlap. The commonality provides a foundation for a conversation about the content and effect of the product as well as greater understanding and appreciation.

Thinking about and listing all potential tangible/intangible links is the first, and perhaps, most important step in conducting a positive assessment of the product. An analysis that recognizes elements that are present helps avoid bias toward style, allowing for improvement that builds upon what is already working.

3. IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTIONS TO RESOURCE MEANINGS AND THE INTERPRETIVE METHODS USED TO DEVELOP THEM.



Links are developed into opportunities for the audience to make connections to the meanings of the resource. Which of the tangible/intangible links are developed into such opportunities? Identify the specific methods the interpreter used to develop each opportunity.

Tangible/intangible links developed into opportunities facilitate connections between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the audience.

There are many ways a tangible/intangible link can be developed into an opportunity for an emotional or intellectual connection to the meanings of the resource. Some methods an interpretive product might use include: stories, explanations, examples, presentation of evidence, quotes, analogies, comparisons – i.e. past vs. present – illustrations, sequences of questions, demonstrations, activities, and discussions.

Opportunities for connections to meanings usually require an investment of the time within the interpretive product. An interpretive product usually has many more links than fully developed opportunities for connections to meanings. Undeveloped links might be called “glimmers” of opportunities for connections.

Individual audience members might connect to any link because of personal relevance and perspective. But an opportunity represents a link that the interpreter significantly and intentionally elaborates upon thus making it available to most of the audience.

Opportunities for connections to meanings may or may not contain universal concepts.

But if a universal concept is obvious in a product, it is probably part of a link developed into and opportunity for connection.

4. IDENTIFY WHICH OPPORTUNITIES FAVOR EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS AND WHICH FAVOR INTELLECTUAL CONNECTIONS TO RESOURCE MEANINGS.

Which opportunities do you think the product intends to inspire or provoke – feelings like awe, wonder, sympathy, curiosity, amazement, empathy, regret, grief, or anger? Which intend to provoke insight, discovery, revelation, or understanding of context, relationships, and cause and effect?

Each opportunity for a connection to the meaning of the resource should specifically be meant to be an emotional or an intellectual opportunity, or both. However, the connections that audiences make, may or may not coincide with the product's intent.

People react differently to opportunities for both emotional and intellectual connections to resource meanings. Some will try to understand feelings intellectually, others will get feelings from an intellectual understanding. Many people will do both. The way people connect is not a problem. The purpose of analyzing an interpretive product is to understand how a product might better facilitate connections.

What is the intent behind the opportunity – how is it used to affect the audience? This is not an attempt to guess the thoughts of the interpreter who created the product, but to identify the way opportunities for connection to meaning operate in the product. The content of an opportunity, the method used to develop and present it, and its place in the

order of presentation indicate a purpose – whether the interpreter was aware of the specific choices or not.

An opportunity for connection to meaning has an emotional and/or intellectual effect. Stories, music, presentation of evidence, comparison, and all other delivery techniques and the resource meanings they convey provide evidence for the functional intent of the opportunity. Does the product rely on a given opportunity to provoke the audience to feel differently or to gain greater understanding? Or both?

To be relevant to as many in the audience as possible, interpretive products must provide opportunities for emotional and intellectual connections to the meanings of the resource. However, it is the effect of the product as a whole that is the measure of its success. Did the product, as a whole, help the audience feel and think differently about the resource?

5. IDENTIFY THE COHESIVE DEVELOPMENT OF A RELEVANT IDEA OR IDEAS.

Does the product have a focus? Is the focus a meaningful idea or ideas, or is it a topic or chronology? If an idea or ideas, have the opportunities for connections to meanings been arranged to cohesively develop that idea or ideas. State each idea you see in a single sentence. Do any include a universal concept?

Does the product develop an idea? Does it say something meaningful about the resource? Is the idea relevant to the audience?

If the product used an interpretive theme in a skillful way, the ideas received by the audience will likely reflect all or parts of that theme. Stating the idea or ideas might take some time –

especially if the product is lengthy or is expressing sophisticated and/or complicated ideas. If the idea or ideas received from the product as a whole can be easily stated in a single sentence, they were probably developed in a cohesive way. And, if the sentences that express those ideas contain a universal concept, there are probably significant opportunities for connections to the resource.

This is not an attempt to identify the product's interpretive theme statement. The product can successfully provide opportunities for connections without the audience parroting the theme statement that helped create it.

How did the arrangement of opportunities contribute to the development of the product's central idea? Like a joke or story told the right way, the order of opportunities can be very important. Some parts can't be left out, and some parts can be overly embellished. The opportunity for emotional connection often depends on intellectual understanding that was provided earlier. In order to get the joke, or for the story to make sense, the audience must first be told a secret, learn something, and be given insight – otherwise the punch line falls flat.

Audience members will each pick up different ideas. But they will share many perceptions, understandings, and feelings. The perceptions, understandings, and feelings they have in common can provide the foundation for discussion about the product, an exploration of differences, a greater understanding of the way the product works, and the degree to which it is successful.

Check written ideas against the product to see if they fit.

6. CONSIDER THE EFFECT OF THE PRODUCT AS A WHOLE.

As a whole, is the interpretive product successful as a catalyst? Does it create opportunities for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections to the meanings and significance of the resource? Is the product appropriate for the audience? Does it provide a clear focus for their connection with the resource by demonstrating the cohesive development of a relevant idea or ideas? Or does it rely primarily on a recital of a chronological story or a series of related facts?

Consider the interpretive product as a whole. What is its effect? Is it saying anything meaningful – not merely in the beginning, middle or end – but as an understandable and logical whole? Is a meaningful and relevant idea or ideas its main focus? What opportunities for connections to the meanings of the resource does it provide?

Separate glimmers (undeveloped tangible/intangible links) from fully developed opportunities for connections. Undeveloped links can help a program if they work with opportunities for connections, and are part of the cohesive development of a relevant idea or ideas. Otherwise, glimmers are haphazard and work only if the audience works to “fill in the blanks.”

Undeveloped links are like branches of the tree, while opportunities for connection to meanings are the trunk. Identify how a tangible/intangible link is developed into an opportunity for connection in order to distinguish opportunities from glimmers.

A successful interpretive product does not have to meet a pre-determined quota of emotional and intellectual opportunities. Products might provide many opportunities for

intellectual connections – leading to one powerful opportunity for an emotional connection that appeals to a universal concept. Other products may balance opportunities more evenly. Again, consider the effect of the product as a whole to help the audience connect to meanings and care more about the resource.

Is the program sequenced, arranged, and organized with opportunities for connections that clearly say something meaningful about the resource? It's not enough for the product to state something at the beginning and repeat it at the end.

Most interpretive products can improve in this area. Style can influence sequence and emphasis. Ask yourself, does the product as a whole have focus and present an idea? Does the product intentionally lead the way or does it ask the audience to do the work and create their own story from the links and opportunities provided?

7. COMPARE YOUR ANALYSIS WITH THE ANALYSIS OF OTHERS.

It's always valuable for professionals to analyze, assess, and evaluate their own work as well as the work of others. The process helps with an awareness of craft as well as the development of skills and understanding. Analysis is even more valuable if it is shared and discussed with colleagues.

Because audiences have different life experiences, values, cultures, and backgrounds, they will be biased for or against specific styles. Thus the meanings they connect with in a resource are tremendously diverse. It is difficult for any one person to analyze and assess an interpretive product comprehensively. While it is helpful for an individual to try to identify all the elements of success present in a product, the addition of a second point of view expands understanding and identifies audience

differences. More perspectives continue to add depth.

Audience members who are not professional interpreters may provide even greater insight into the effects of an interpretive product. In informal and appropriate conversations, they can be asked questions such as: "What did you think when the exhibit said...? What did it mean to you when I told the story about...? What point do you think the tour was trying to make?" This exercise in formative evaluation can help reinforce success as well as call attention to areas that can be improved.

8. IDENTIFY WAYS TO IMPROVE THE PRODUCT OR SERVICE.

Does the interpretive product or service need more opportunities for emotional and/or intellectual connections? Are there links that should be developed into opportunities? Should the opportunities be reordered or adjusted? Do the opportunities complement a specific relevant idea? Does it totally lack the cohesive development of a relevant idea?

All interpretive products can be improved.

Build on the successful interpretive elements that already exist in the product. Are there glimmers that can be developed into opportunities for connection? Would the addition of one more new opportunity make a difference? How might it be developed – with a story, explanation, or illustration? Does the product need the cohesion of a central idea? Do any of the existing opportunities for connections suggest a possible interpretive theme that might restructure the product? To make the development of the central idea more cohesive, do existing opportunities for connections and tangible/intangible links simply need editing and rearranging?

"KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF
IS THE MOTHER OF ALL
KNOWLEDGE. SO IT IS
INCUMBENT ON ME TO
KNOW MY SELF, TO KNOW
IT COMPLETELY, TO KNOW
ITS MINUTIAE, ITS
CHARACTERISTICS, ITS
SUBTLETIES, AND ITS VERY
ATOMS."

— KAHILIL GIBRON

©2003 Eastern National. Eastern National provides quality educational products and services to America's national parks and other public trusts.

For additional copies of this publication please contact the America's National Parks warehouse at (877) NAT-PARK.

ISBN 1-59091-019-2

