

# Programs



*To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.*

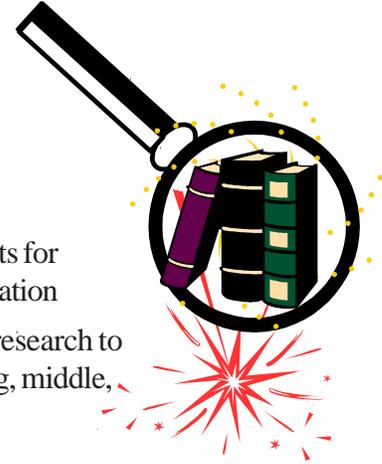
Albert Einstein



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# Programs



What is it? the foundation for all interpretive presentations

Why do we do it? establishes the underlying components for creating successful personal interpretation

How do we do it? combine a strong theme with good research to tell a complete story with a beginning, middle, and ending



*Thinking is more interesting than knowing, but less interesting than looking.*

Johann Wolfgang Goethe

## Introduction

Now that we have an understanding of what interpretation is, why we do it, and the basic communication process that serves as the foundation of all interpretation, we are ready to start creating our own programs. This module introduces the basic components of an interpretive program. Although there are many forms of personal interpretive programs including walks, talks, campfires, etc., there are basic building blocks of successful interpretive programs regardless of the delivery form. We will review these elements, including the theme, research, introduction, body, and conclusion, in this module. For each of these elements in a program, we will discuss its purposes and the various types and methods of implementation.

## Theme

### Definition

The primary element of an interpretive presentation is the theme. The theme is the one defining characteristic that separates all other communication forms from that of interpretation. Some presentations are simply laundry lists of facts and information; these are known as “show-and-tell” presentations. You walk visitors through the park and *show* them the plants (or flowers, or artifacts) and *tell* them some information about each one. This is not true interpretation. True interpretation is distinguished by the conveyance of a discernible message driven by an expressed need. As we discussed in Module 4-Planning, the theme is the message. It is the reason we are giving the program. It is identified through careful examination of the park’s significance, resources, management needs, and the visiting public. Once targeted messages have been identified through careful planning, a theme can be developed.

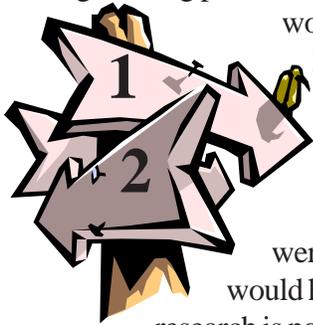


*At the completion of any interpretive presentation, the audience should be able to tell you what was said by summarizing it in one sentence. This sentence is the theme, the central or key idea of any presentation.*

William J. Lewis

## Meaning, direction, and structure

Themes outline the way interpreters connect visitors to the resource. They help us identify the message or “big picture.” A good theme should answer the question, “So what?” (Ham, 1992). In other words, why is this program worthy of visitors’ time and effort? The National Park Service approach to interpretation indicates that a great theme will link the tangibles in a park (the object, place, etc.) to the intangibles (the meanings, ideas, emotions, etc.) (Kohen and Sikoryak, 2000). The theme also helps guide our research, saving time and focusing our attention on the relevant pieces of information for the story. For example, if the presentation were on birds, think about how many books and sources of information you would have to wade through. If your theme were, “Birds take flight for life,” your research is now narrowed and certainly more manageable. The theme also provides the overarching organizational structure for the program. All main points, or subthemes, in the program should fit within and compliment the main message, or theme.



## Creation

Before we discuss how *you* can develop a theme, remember from Module 4-Planning that themes for the park or programs may already be identified in park planning documents. Be sure you have thoroughly completed the research phases of the planning process before you create program themes. Once you have identified the topic of the program and the target message based on planning, themes can be developed using a few easy steps.

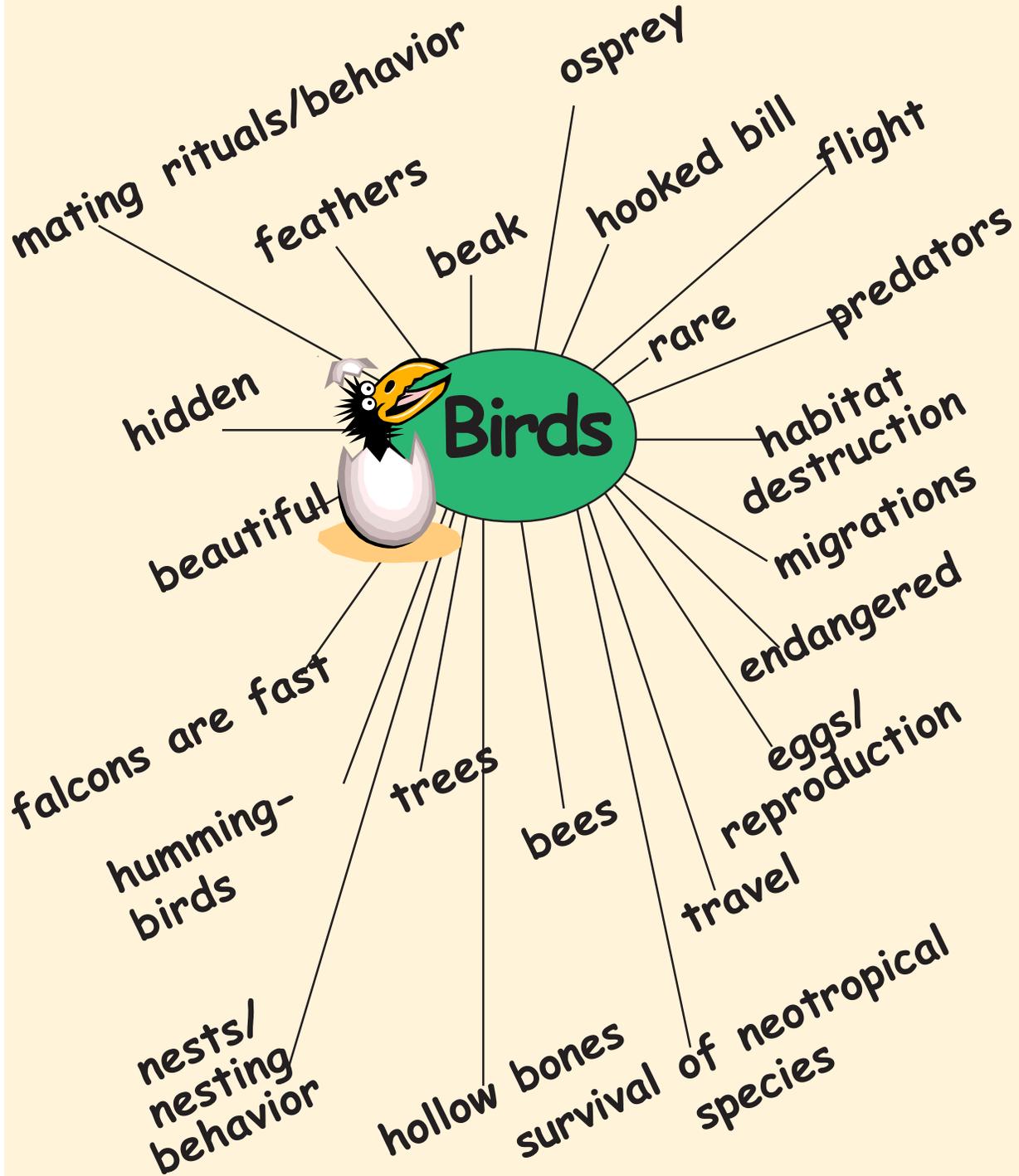
The first step for developing a theme is to brainstorm. Brainstorming is essentially free form thinking to generate ideas regarding a particular topic. It is used to promote creativity for finding different approaches for programs. Familiarity with a topic often breeds a lack of ability to see it creatively. Brainstorming works best when done with a group of people. The goal is to generate a large number of new ideas about a topic. Get started by writing the topic or subject in the center of a piece of paper, chalk board, etc., and then record all ideas and thoughts that are verbalized by participants (Figure 5.1). Hearing what others think often generates new and creative ideas.



Theme

### Bird brainstorm

Figure 5.1





## Brainstorming

- **Clearly identify the target topic or subject of the brainstorm.**
- **Establish group norms in the beginning.**
- **Record all responses so everyone can see.**
- **Have a manageable group size.** At least three and no more than 10 is recommended. In a large group, have two recorders.
- **Change the recorder so everyone gets a chance to participate in the brainstorm.**
- **Record *all* answers with no discussion.** Discussion and clarification comes later in the process. For now, the goal is simply the generation of new ideas.



After brainstorming, ideas need to be categorized and grouped. This is called mind mapping or clustering. It is a simple technique that can be used after brainstorming to link generated ideas into potential subcategories that can then be used to produce themes. Generated ideas can be placed in more than one category, so be sure to use different colored pens, or different shapes for grouping ideas (Figure 5.2). Once ideas are subgrouped, brainstorming can focus on a particular subgrouping of interest, which might develop into your theme. Notice how many potential messages (themes) about birds are starting to emerge from the example in Figure 5.2.

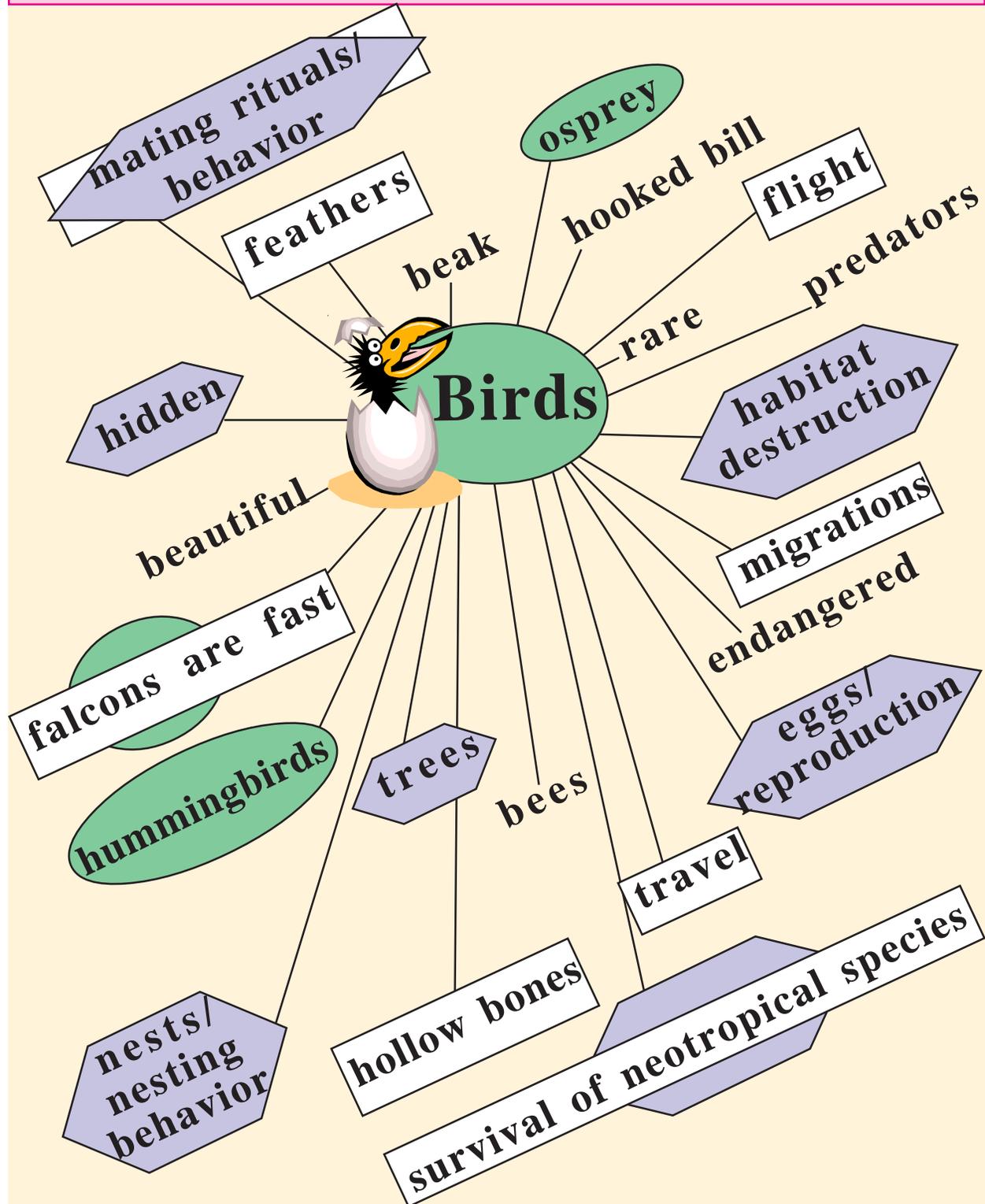


A chalkboard or flip chart can be used to record answers.



Focus the brainstorm

Figure 5.2



# Theme



After selecting a grouping of ideas to explore for developing a theme, use Sam Ham's three-sentence method to refine the theme. To test your theme, Ham recommends answering the following three key questions.

1. The first sentence simply states the topic of the presentation.

***“Generally, my presentation is about \_\_\_\_\_ (topic) \_\_\_\_\_.”***

For our example: *“Generally, my presentation is about birds.”*

2. After the brainstorming and mind mapping, you can more narrowly define your topic.

***“Specifically, I want to tell my audience about (more narrowly defined topic) \_\_\_\_\_.”***

For our example: *“Specifically, I want to tell my audience about why and how birds fly.”*

3. Once the topic is narrowed, the third sentence begins to create the message that you want the audience to carry away with them.

***“After hearing my presentation, I want my audience to understand that (theme) \_\_\_\_\_.”***

For our example: *“After hearing my presentation, I want my audience to understand that birds fly to survive.”*

The third sentence can be modified to fit the particular objective of the program. For example, we can have emotional, cognitive, or behavioral program objectives. If the program objective were to alter behavior, then it might be better to use the verb “do,” “support,” or “participate” etc., rather than “understand” as in the original version. The verb that works best will depend on the overall objective(s) guiding the program.

A good theme emerges using Ham's method, but not a great one...yet.

## A good theme



- **Is specific, simple, and short.**
- **Conveys a complete thought or message.**
- **Reveals the purpose for the presentation.**
- **Contains only one main message.**

For our example, “Birds fly to survive” is a good theme. It conveys a complete message, reveals the purpose and focus of the talk, and is short and simple.



## Theme



### A *great* theme

#### Not only

- Is specific, simple, and short.
- Conveys a complete thought or message.
- Reveals the purpose for the presentation.
- Contains only one main message.

#### But also

- Paints a picture.
- Uses active not passive language.
- Answers the question “*So what?*”
- Provokes and promotes attendance.
- Provides a positive message.

Expanding on our previous example, we arrive at “Birds take flight for life” as our theme. This conveys the same meaning but is more interestingly worded, paints a clearer picture, and promotes curiosity. This theme could be improved even more with additional brainstorming.

### Other theme examples

- Stars are recyclers of the universe.
- Solar power uses the sun to make your home run.
- Change the world we live in, one solution at a time.
- Humboldt Bay starts on your street.
- Fire forges every phase of life.
- Redwoods adapt to survive fire.
- The river tells the Yurok story.
- Find a new kind of gold in California State Parks.

Writing good themes is easy using the steps outlined above. Take your time and be creative. Writing great themes comes with practice and years of experience. The theme is the first step of creating a successful interpretive program and should be done with care and patience.



## Research

### Developing the theme

After the theme is created, it is time to continue your research. Remember, you conducted research in the planning stages. It was through that early research phase of the process that preliminary ideas were generated, helping you to brainstorm and create the target messages. Once you have created a theme through brainstorming, you are ready to conduct very specific research guided by the theme. This phase of the research process is used to develop and hone your theme, which will evolve and change as you learn more about your topic. Sometimes the research you uncover may alter the theme altogether; be flexible and allow your theme to reflect the research.

We conduct research to accurately understand and then convey information to the public. Interpreters are the interface between the resource and the public and have a responsibility to tell the “truth” of the thing, place, time, or event. There are many perspectives of historical events, and researchers often differ in their interpretations of science. It is the job of the interpreter to communicate as honestly as possible. Conducting good research is the only real method to ensure the reflection of accurate information.

#### Conducting good research

- **Review existing park information relevant to the theme** (may have been collected during the inventory phase of the planning process).
- **Visit the sites applicable to theme** (primary research).
- **Examine books, journals, reports, etc., to support theme development** (secondary research).
- **Keep notes that are organized by subtopic within the theme, with citation included.**



## Two approaches

As reviewed in detail in Module 4-Planning, there are two basic approaches used to conduct research—primary and secondary data collection. Conducting research that is guided by a theme is very similar. The sources for information are the same, but the techniques are a bit more refined. For example, in the planning stages primary data collection consisted of inventorying the site and assessing all the resources. Conducting primary research after a theme has been created involves very specific searches for examples demonstrating main points or ideas in the program.

Remember, one of the goals of interpretation is to link visitors to the resource. In order to accomplish this, primary research must be conducted. Where in the resource are the best places to demonstrate the phenomenon of your program? This information may be used differently, depending on how the program will be delivered to the public. For example, you may demonstrate the information in a walk by actually taking visitors there, or in a talk by using the location to direct visitors to go see it for themselves. You may also show it to them in a slide presentation. Regardless of the method used, the purpose of the primary research is to identify the places, sites, and objects in the park relevant to or appropriate for a particular theme. For our theme example, “*Birds take flight for life,*” we would use primary research to find places in the park that provide the best opportunities to see birds, and especially birds in flight.

Secondary research is used to provide a more in-depth understanding of the theme. It provides the background, substance, and information that will be used to develop your presentation. A good starting point for secondary research is to review the thematically relevant information collected during the resource inventory stage in the planning process. Review both the primary and secondary data that is appropriate for your theme. After the initial review of compiled data, the search continues for other information that supports and helps you develop your theme. Potential sources of information are the same as discussed on pages 4-5 in Module 4-Planning. Be sure to use information that is the most current, from a wide variety of sources (do not just use the Internet), and interesting. Research prepares you to tell a *great* story.

The research conducted in this stage should be written and kept in a file under the theme idea you are developing. Be sure to date all observations and note any special circumstances you observed. This information is helpful to change the program in the future and provide insight into its successes and failures.

***The work of the specialist, the historian, the naturalist, the archeologist, is fundamental, then. Without their research the interpreter cannot start.***

Freeman Tilden



### The story

The basic interpretive presentation is like telling a story to visitors. It has a beginning, a middle, and an ending. A good story has an introduction that sets the stage for the body or main part of the story and a conclusion that brings it full circle leaving the audience satisfied. Let us take a look at the process of creating the story. Sam Ham coined the 2-3-1 rule for the order in which the main parts of an interpretive presentation should be developed. According to Ham, if the introduction of the presentation is #1, the body is #2, and the conclusion is #3, the 2-3-1 rule indicates the order in which the presentation should be developed. How can you write an introduction for a presentation that you have not written yet? You cannot! Ham's approach to developing the body of the talk first, followed by the conclusion, and last the introduction is a logical approach and one that we recommend. Now that you have developed a theme and have completed much of your research, you are ready to begin developing your story.



Tell a good story with a beginning, middle, and ending.

### The middle

The main points are developed and delivered to the audience in the body (middle) of the presentation. Remember, there should be no more than five main points covered in the body of the presentation. The body is the heart of the talk, allowing the interpreter to relate information to visitors, inspiring them to want to learn more, and promoting management goals and objectives. Do not forget to incorporate RAPPOR and the other communication strategies reviewed in Module 3-Communication when developing the body of the talk.

There are two structures for developing the body of an interpretive presentation: theme/subthemes and narrative. Although both structures should have an overarching message, these categories will allow for ease of discussion. It should be noted that there are many permutations of these categories. This terminology simply allows us to distinguish between two styles of developing the body of a presentation.



## The middle

### Theme/subtheme

The theme/subtheme structure of a presentation is developed and supported by main points or subthemes. Most interpretive presentations are developed using this format. For theme/subtheme structure each main point has four elements (Ham, 1992). The first thing each main point should do is **focus attention** on the subtopic covered in that main point. “*Many bird species mate in flight.*” In this example, we are introducing mating behavior as the subtheme supporting the main theme that “*Birds take flight for life.*” The next element of each main point is to **describe or explain** the information. “*There are four species of birds in this park that mate in flight ...*” After presenting the information, each main point should have a **thematic connector** bringing the information back to the theme. “*Mating behavior is an example of how birds take flight for life and in this case, to create life.*” The final element of each main point should be a **transition** to the next main point (or conclusion). “*Now that we have discovered how successful mating depends on flight, let us look at the importance of migration for the life of many birds.*” Taken together, this approach to designing the body of the presentation follows a theme/subtheme structure. The program contains a central message (theme), which is developed through the creation of several subthemes (main points), which are all linked together with transition sentences.

### Theme/subtheme structure

#### Introduction

#### Body (middle)

##### 1<sup>st</sup> main point

- A. Focus attention
- B. Describe or explain the information
- C. Connect to theme
- D. Transition

##### 2<sup>nd</sup> main point

- A. Focus attention
- B. Describe or explain the information
- C. Connect to theme
- D. Transition

##### 3<sup>rd</sup> main point, etc.

#### Conclusion (ending)

adapted from Sam Ham



## Narrative

The second type of structure for developing the body of an interpretive presentation is more narrative in form; historical or living history presentations often follow this approach. The narrative structure also has a central message or theme, but it may not be so obviously stated as in the theme/subtheme structure. The narrative structure follows more of a fluid format. There may be dialogue, conversation, or narrator-style presentation of information. For example, the interpreter that comes out in character and relives a moment in history for the audience will probably not follow the outlined theme/subtheme structure. The presentation will flow more fluidly, like a conversation. There may not be discernible main points and transition sentences. However, this type of presentation can be very powerful and provoking. Susan Strauss talks about the “story way” of communicating and how it can be one of the most effective methods of interpreting science and history. “Storytelling is considered a literary art (even though it is oral and not written) because it shapes a narrative to create meaning or address a problem, a question, an imbalance, or a desire” (Strauss, 1996). This in essence is interpretation.

### Narrative structure

An example of a presentation about the role of flight in the survival of birds:

*I am the last of my kind still found in these hills. There used to be hundreds of us before the roads, the campgrounds, and all the trails. I looked for others for years before I finally gave up. I used to hear far off cries of others, but no more...the woods have been silent for some time now. We used to travel to this place together in great flocks...*



The above narrative presentation might go on to describe the reasons for migratory bird species population decreases, but told as a story through the eyes of an endangered bird. It clearly does not follow the structure outlined in the theme/subtheme format, but it is certainly a powerful interpretive method of presenting information.

There is no set formula that can be outlined for presenting interpretation using the narrative form because there are numerous methods of developing and presenting a story. It could have a moral, present a problem and resolve it after a climax, be an epic, leave the audience wondering what happens, or bring the information full circle. The narrative structure could be used to tell a person’s individual story, recall a historical event, follow the life cycle of an individual animal or plant, or trace the life of a drop of water through the park.



## The ending

### The ending

The final part of an interpretive presentation, regardless of whether it is a walk, talk, campfire, etc., is the conclusion. Following the 2-3-1 rule, the conclusion should be created after the body of the presentation has been designed. The conclusion is a summative message. It is the ending. The reason we give a conclusion is to give the audience a sense of completeness and an ending for the program. It also provides an opportunity to repeat the program's theme and subthemes. People are more likely to retain information that has been repeated throughout the presentation. Repeating the theme numerous times, and having it as the last thing visitors hear in the conclusion, maximizes retention. Another reason to "formally end" the presentation is to send a clear signal that the presentation is indeed over.

### Creating the conclusion

There are as many ways to end a presentation as there are presentation styles. Every interpreter has his or her own method of concluding a presentation. There are some things that every conclusion should contain and many more things that are appropriate for certain programs with specific program goals and particular presenter styles.

Every program should have a clear ending with "thank you for coming" being one of the parting statements. Ending presentations with, "that's about it," or "I'm done," although reflecting an ending, are not very powerful in helping to meet program objectives nor are they very professional. Every ending should somehow repeat the theme, thus increasing the potential that the message will be remembered. If it was important enough for you to design an entire presentation around, it is important enough to remind visitors.

The remaining suggestions for a conclusion are not necessary, but can be powerful and effective if used appropriately. Conclusions can repeat the main points or subthemes of the program. To increase retention of the submessages, asking for questions from the audience during the conclusion is popular. Conclusions can have a philosophical slant to them, leave an audience with a question to think about, or provide them with something to do. Bring information sources (books, etc.) for the audience to review and/or include them in your ending with announcements of upcoming events or other park programs.



#### Bye bye - in conclusion - *adios* - cat'cha later ...

##### *You should:*

- Repeat the theme
- Thank the audience for attending
- Provide a clear ending

##### *You can:*

- Repeat the subthemes
- Give a philosophical ending
- Leave the audience with a question
- Provide opportunities for action
- Show resources for more information
- Advertise future programs



### Conclusion

This is an example of a conclusion:

***“We have reached the end of our journey together today. Remember that birds take flight for life. Migrating, escaping from predators, and mating are just some of the critical roles flight plays in the survival of birds found in this park.***

***The next time you see a bird take flight, ask yourself if you think it is for life, love, or longing. I brought some books on the subject if anyone is interested. Let your imagination soar with some of these great resources on the birds of this park. Does anyone have any questions? If not, I would like to thank you all for coming and hope you have a great afternoon.”***

## The beginning

After you have designed the body and the conclusion of the presentation, you are now ready to create a powerful introduction to set the stage for the program. The introduction is critical, because it is in this early stage of the presentation that people make judgments. The introduction must grab and hold attention. It conveys to the audience that there is a reason for them to commit and stay for the duration of the presentation. The introduction serves three primary functions. It orients the audience, introduces the theme, and provides a cognitive map for the audience. A cognitive map is much like a spatial map. You can give directions to your home in two ways, spatially or cognitively. You could provide a spatial map showing the way visually, or you could simply tell the directions—a cognitive map. A cognitive map provides a mental picture or organizing structure for the direction of the presentation (Knopf, 1981). It should tell an audience why they are there, what they will get out of the presentation, and what they can expect. According to cognitive map theory, providing this initial organizing structure should facilitate comprehension and retention of the message (Knopf, 1981; Hammit, 1981).

## Creating the introduction

An introduction should include your theme, the main points to be covered in the talk, any orientation or information needed for the talk (e.g., you should wear shoes that can get wet), and an attention grabber. The introduction is your first impression with much of the audience; come out smiling. Although there are many other elements besides smiling that will help make a successful introduction, we will not review them here because they were covered in detail in Module 3-Communication. Remember, an effective introduction will include all of the elements of effective communication such as those in RAPPORT.



## The beginning

### Yo! - howdy - aloha - hi ya - hey

- **Introduce yourself** - Tell the audience your name, position in the park, and a little about yourself.
- **Welcome the visitors** - Be a good host.
- **Provide the theme** - Introduce the theme for the talk.
- **Give an attention grabber** - Provide a startling fact, visual aid, thought-provoking question, etc.
- **Introduce the main points for the talk** - This is part of the cognitive map for the talk.
- **Tell the audience why you are giving the talk** - People respond better if they know why. Be sure *you* know why you are doing it.
- **During the introduction provide information on** - Safety, security, physiological needs, route of the walk, bathroom breaks, and any difficulties or dangers encountered. The specifics of this information will vary greatly depending on the type of presentation.

### Be enthusiastic



### Introduction

**This is an example of an introduction.**

*Hi, my name is Carolyn. I've been a state park interpreter for the past 10 years, and I just love working in this park. I would like to welcome you all to San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area, a popular stop for waterfowl along the Pacific Flyway. How many of you think it would be great to fly? Would you be more likely to fly for love, life, or longing? Today we will travel down one of the park's trails and search for examples of how birds take flight for life. Many visitors wonder why the birds do not just stay here all year long. We will discover the primary reasons birds take flight to survive, including migrating, hunting for food, mating, and escaping from predators. We will uncover a fifth reason for flight together at the end of the talk.*

*It is an easy walk, covering about one-quarter mile on fairly level ground. The walk will end back here in about one hour. There is poison oak near this trail, and I will point it out to you when we approach it, so please keep together and let me lead. I have binoculars and field guides with me today if anyone would like to use them. Any questions before we start?*



### Putting it all together

In this module we reviewed the basic components of an interpretive program. We have seen that all good programs start with a theme. People forget facts, but they remember a good theme and the supporting subthemes. Brainstorming, familiarity with the site and visitor, and understanding management needs and objectives all combine to assist in creating appropriate themes. Themes also focus research efforts. Research allows us to connect visitors with the resource in as accurate and honest a manner as possible. After most of the research is completed, the interpretive story can be fashioned. There are two primary structures for developing the interpretive story. We can use both the narrative and theme/subtheme structures to weave our facts and information creatively into an informative, enjoyable, and interesting program. The actual development of the story should follow the 2-3-1 rule. The body of the presentation will have around five main points and should be developed first. After the body of the program is designed, a conclusion can be created that repeats the theme and provides a clear ending for the story told during the program. The last thing to be designed is the introduction. The introduction sets the direction for the program and can only be created after the presentation itself has been designed. These components form the basic interpretive presentation regardless of delivery method.



### What's ahead

Now that we have reviewed the communication process and the basic structure of an interpretive presentation, we can begin to create specific types of programs. The first we will discuss is the talk. This is the most basic form of an interpretive presentation. Everything else is simply a variation on this form.



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# Programs



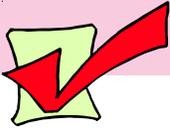


## Self assessment



Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in Module 5-Programs . The answers are not provided. Check your answers with your colleagues and as you read Module 5-Programs. Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

- 1) A show-and-tell presentation lacks:
  - a) Information
  - b) Illustrations and visual aids
  - c) Good research
  - d) A theme
  
- 2) Which of the following is not a primary reason to use a theme?
  - a) Directs research
  - b) Identifies the main message
  - c) Guides the organizational structure
  - d) They are easy to create
  
- 3) The first step for writing a theme is:
  - a) Mind mapping
  - b) Brainstorming
  - c) Research
  - d) Observation
  
- 4) Mind mapping is:
  - a) Creating new ideas
  - b) Grouping ideas together
  - c) Silently brainstorming
  - d) Drawing a visual picture of ideas
  
- 5) Which of the following is not a recommended practice for brainstorming?
  - a) Establish group norms early
  - b) Discuss all answers
  - c) Clearly identify topic
  - d) Record answers so all can see



## Self assessment



- 6) An interpretive presentation should be developed in the following order:
  - a) Beginning, middle, end
  - b) Middle, beginning, end
  - c) Middle, end, beginning
  - d) End, middle, beginning
  
- 7) Name at least three qualities of a great theme.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 8) A good target for the number of main points in a presentation is:
  - a) 3
  - b) 5
  - c) 7
  - d) 9
  
- 9) There are discernible main points in a narrative program structure.
  - a) True
  - b) False
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 10) Circle all of the following that are part of an introduction.
  - a) Cognitive map
  - b) Attention grabber
  - c) Theme
  - d) Transitions

**Now that you have completed the self assessment questions, review the material in Module 5-Programs to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.**



## Workbook learning activities



To help you review and apply the material covered in Module 5-Programs, a selection of review questions and/or activities is provided. Again, no answers are included. Use the material from the module, outside sources, and your colleagues to help you complete the activities and answer the questions. There may be more than one right answer. Use the questions and activities to generate discussion about the material. Be prepared to discuss, perform, or demonstrate your answers in class.

- 1) With at least two other classmates, choose a topic, brainstorm, mind map, and write a theme. Write your theme below and be prepared to go over it in class.

- 2) Take the following themes and make them better without changing the meaning.

Redwoods have adapted to survive fire.

The Yurok story can be told in the river.

Tide pool life struggles to live on the edge.

Pioneers traveled west.

Many non-native species cause damage in the park.

The bay is home to many different animals.

Dams prevent salmon from swimming upstream to spawn.

The discovery of gold increased California's population.

The desert comes alive with life at night.



## Workbook learning activities



3) When do you think a narrative structure would be preferable to a theme/subtheme structure?

4) What do you think is the most important part of an introduction? Why?



## Take it to your park



Answer each question with the information specific to your park. You will have to conduct some research in order to answer each question. Use the answers as a guide for beginning your career in California State Parks.

### Programs

Park name \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) Based on the research you started in the previous modules, select one topic that should be interpreted in your park. Go through the appropriate steps and generate at least two possible themes for that topic.

- 2) Choose one theme from above, and create an outline for a program.

