



# The *Las Vegas Tourist Guides Guild*

## Tour Guiding and Interpretation

The vanguard book on Interpretation is: **“Interpreting Our Heritage,” by Freeman Tilden**  
[http://www.amazon.com/Interpreting-Our-Heritage-Freeman-Tilden/dp/0807858676/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_1](http://www.amazon.com/Interpreting-Our-Heritage-Freeman-Tilden/dp/0807858676/ref=pd_sim_b_1)

Below in italics is from <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/FoundationsCurriculum.pdf>, which is a very detailed 24-page overview of Interpretation. Every tour guide should read it.

*It is in Interpreting Our Heritage that Tilden outlines his enduring principles of interpretation:*

- 1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.*
- 2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.*
- 3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.*
- 4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.*
- 5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.*
- 6. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best, it will require a separate program. (Freeman Tilden, 1957)*

Much of the writings on Interpretation (like Tillman’s book) and use of the word originates from the NPS (National Park Service). See also:

[http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online\\_books/mackintosh2/interp\\_interp.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/mackintosh2/interp_interp.htm)

More from <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/FoundationsCurriculum.pdf>:

*Credit for using the word interpretation to describe the work of exhibit designers, docents, and naturalists goes to John Muir who penned in his Yosemite notebook: “I’ll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I’ll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can. (John Muir, 1896)*

***Another term for interpreters could be visitor experience specialists. They provide orientation, information and inspiration in the right amounts and at the right times so that visitors will have more enjoyable, meaningful and complete experiences.***



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*Sam Ham directs the Center for International Training and Outreach at the University of Idaho's College of Natural Resources, where he is a professor in the Department of Resource Recreation and Tourism. His book *Environmental Interpretation* (1992) contained 4 qualities that distinguish interpretation from other communication. These qualities have become central to the profession of interpretation.*

1. *Interpretation is pleasurable.*
2. *Interpretation is relevant.*
3. *Interpretation is organized.*
4. *Interpretation has a theme.*

A more recent book, believed by many to be the top modern book on Interpretation is: **"The Gifts of Interpretation: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture,"** by Larry Beck. (This is the updated and revised version of Beck's 1998 book, "Interpretation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.")

[http://www.amazon.com/The-Gifts-Interpretation-Principles-Interpreting/dp/1571676368/ref=dp\\_ob\\_title\\_bk](http://www.amazon.com/The-Gifts-Interpretation-Principles-Interpreting/dp/1571676368/ref=dp_ob_title_bk)

Below also from <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/FoundationsCurriculum.pdf>:

*Larry Beck and Ted Cable authored the book "**Interpretation for the 21st Century**" (1998) to provide direction in the field at the turn of the millennium. As professors that teach coursework in interpretation they have written extensively in the fields of natural resource management and interpretation. Building upon the work of Enos Mills and Freeman Tilden, they developed Fifteen Principles of Interpretation:*

1. *To spark an interest, interpreters must relate the subject to the lives of visitors.*
2. *The purpose of interpretation goes beyond providing information to reveal deeper meaning and truth.*
3. *The interpretive presentation – as a work of art – should be designed as a story that informs, entertains, and enlightens.*
4. *The purpose of the interpretive story is to inspire and to provoke people to broaden their horizons.*
5. *Interpretation should present a complete theme or thesis and address the whole person.*
6. *Interpretation for children, teenagers, and seniors – when these comprise uniform groups – should follow fundamentally different approaches.*
7. *Every place has a history. Interpreters can bring the past alive to make the present more enjoyable and the future more meaningful.*
8. *High technology can reveal the world in exciting new ways. However, incorporating this technology into the interpretive program must be done with foresight and care.*
9. *Interpreters must concern themselves with the quantity and quality (selection and accuracy) of information presented. Focused, well-researched interpretation will be more powerful than a longer discourse.*



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Beck and Cable's Fifteen Principles of Interpretation, continued:

10. *Before applying the arts in interpretation, the interpreter must be familiar with basic communication techniques. Quality interpretation depends on the interpreter's knowledge and skills, which should be developed continually.*
11. *Interpretive writing should address what readers would like to know, with the authority of wisdom and the humility and care that comes with it.*
12. *The overall interpretive program must be capable of attracting support – financial, volunteer, political, administrative – whatever support is needed for the program to flourish.*
13. *Interpretation should instill in people the ability, and the desire to sense the beauty in their surroundings – to provide spiritual uplift and to encourage resource preservation.*
14. *Interpreters can promote optimal experiences through intentional and thoughtful program and facility design.*
15. *Passion is the essential ingredient for powerful and effective interpretation – passion for the resource and for those people who come to be inspired by the same.*

This book sounds phenomenal: “**Interpretation-Making a Difference on Purpose,**” by [Sam H. Ham](http://www.amazon.com/Interpretation-Making-Difference-Purpose-Sam-Ham/dp/1555917429/ref=pd_sim_b_5)  
[http://www.amazon.com/Interpretation-Making-Difference-Purpose-Sam-Ham/dp/1555917429/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_5](http://www.amazon.com/Interpretation-Making-Difference-Purpose-Sam-Ham/dp/1555917429/ref=pd_sim_b_5)

Another highly rated book is: “**Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources,**” [Douglas M. Knudson](http://www.amazon.com/Interpretation-Cultural-Natural-Resources-Douglas/dp/1892132397/ref=pd_sim_b_1)  
[http://www.amazon.com/Interpretation-Cultural-Natural-Resources-Douglas/dp/1892132397/ref=pd\\_sim\\_b\\_1](http://www.amazon.com/Interpretation-Cultural-Natural-Resources-Douglas/dp/1892132397/ref=pd_sim_b_1)

Also, while focused primarily on museum docent guides, there are some helpful tour guide tips in the book “**The Good Guide, A Sourcebook,**” by **Grinder and McCoy**  
<http://www.amazon.com/The-Good-Guide-Sourcebook-Interpreters/dp/0932541003>