

# TORE

## An Approach to Thematic Interpretation

Based on the TORE™ model

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## Learning Outcomes (cont.)

When we're done, you'll be able to ...

- explain the TORE™ model of interpretive communication
- explain the importance of a thematic approach in developing interpretive programs and products
- express stronger themes

## What is “interpretation?”

- Aimed at revealing meanings and relationships, *not facts as an end in themselves*
- It is not instruction in the academic sense
- Aimed at provoking audiences to think

## Interpretation Has Four Essential Qualities

1. Interpretation is *enjoyable*.
2. Interpretation is *relevant*.  
-- *meaningful*  
-- *personal*
3. Interpretation is *organized*.
4. Interpretation is *thematic*.

## EROT Model of Interpretive Communication

- Based on two centuries of research
- When all four qualities are in place, “successful” communication is almost guaranteed
- “Success” means that visitors *pay attention* and *get the point* (theme)

**Think Thematically**

**Theme ≠ Topic**

## Think in Terms of Themes, Not Topics

### Examples of Topics

- Birds
- Colorado's forests
- Wildlife
- Bighorn Sheep
- Mountain Plover
- Rocky Mountains
- History of Estes Park
- People who live in Estes Park
- Colorado wines
- Wine making
- Behavioral quirks of toads

## Think in Terms of Themes, Not Topics

### Examples of Themes for the Topic "Birds"

1. Birds are a fascinating group of animals because of their special adaptations for flight.
2. Native birds everywhere are in a fight for their lives.
3. Shore birds have solved problems that other birds were never faced with.
4. Eagles and falcons help humans.
5. The vulture fulfills the role of "garbage collector," which is an extremely important, though under appreciated, ecological function.
6. Studying how birds fly led to the invention of early airplanes.
7. Because they're rarely seen, nocturnal birds are the subject of many superstitions and potentially threatening misconceptions.

## Communicating Themes Has a Purpose!

- Themes can provoke people to think, even if they forget isolated facts.
- Having a theme helps YOU prepare.

## Communicating Themes Has a Purpose!

- Themes are beliefs; beliefs are the building blocks of attitudes and behavior.
- Having a strong and compelling theme almost guarantees an interesting presentation.

## So Why Is it Important to Be *Thematic*?

- If you want to make a difference in what people think and feel with respect to a place.
- People will forget isolated facts, but they'll remember aspects of a strong theme.
- It makes your preparation easier / more focused.
- It makes your audience's job easier.
- By communicating strong themes, you're planting seeds (beliefs) that can ultimately influence how people think, feel and behave with respect to the things you're interpreting for them.

## A Theme is a Message

- It is the moral to the story.
- It is the "big picture."
- It answers the question "So what?"
- It answers the question "Big deal?"

## Themes are Whole Ideas

- They are expressed in complete declarative sentences.
- Complete sentences have a subject and verb.
- A complete declarative sentence ends with a period or exclamation mark.

## Write STRONG themes— Think BIG DEAL

Complete the following sentence in as many ways as you can:

“When it comes to my topic, I think it is *really, really* important for this audience to understand that \_\_\_\_\_.”  
(theme)

## ACTIVITY 1 Expressing Themes

Using the “Big Deal” model, write two or more themes for a topic of your choice.

## ACTIVITY 2 Recognizing and Analyzing Strong Themes

From the list provided, find the themes you like most and explain why they resonate for you.

## Edit Your Theme Until It’s Strong!

- Make them **personal**
    - \* Build in the personal word “you”
    - \* Link to things your audience *cares* about
- “Six different kinds of snakes live here.”
- “Six different kinds of snakes live here, and knowing which is which could save your life.”

## Edit Your Theme Until It’s Strong!

- Connect with things of intangible **symbolic** importance.
- “Native American history is interesting.”
- “Native American history tells a story of a people who are still struggling to avert the loss of their ancient culture and language upon which much of their identity depends.”

## Edit Your Theme Until It's Strong!

- Incorporate an **analogy**.

"The plumbing system of an active volcano contains both heat and gas pressure."

"To understand what goes on in an active volcano's plumbing system, you need only think of a pressure cooker and an agitated bottle of champagne."

## Edit Your Theme Until It's Strong!

- Incorporate a **metaphor**.

"Chuck Berry did a lot to advance rock and roll."

"Chuck Berry was the **architect** of rock and roll."

## Edit Your Theme Until It's Strong!

- Try to build the **active voice** into **verbs**.

"This landscape **was sculpted** by harsh winds and torrential rain."

"Harsh winds and torrential rain **sculpted** this landscape."

## Edit Your Theme Until It's Strong!

- Try to **avoid** the verb "**to be**."

"This building **is** hundreds of years old."

"This building **tells** a story hundreds of years long."

## ACTIVITY 3 Strengthening Themes

Edit the draft themes provided so that each of them is stronger.

## Ways to Make Interpretation *Thematic*

- Think full-sentences, not parts of sentences.
- Think "big deal" – what message you *really* want your visitors to take home.
- Apply E & R to make your themes more powerful.
  - **make them personal**
  - **connect them things of symbolic importance**
  - **use an analogy or metaphor**
  - **use verbs in active voice & avoid "to be"**

## Applying the EROT Model

Practiced as **TORE**:

- Your *theme* comes first
- Now *organize* into 4 or fewer sub-themes
- Now make it *relevant* and *enjoyable* for your audience

## Workshop Summary

I hope you've seen that...

- Interpretation is simply an approach to communicating.
- It is aimed at provoking people to have their *own* thoughts, not just “teaching” them our facts.
- Thematic interpretation lies at the heart of what you are trying to accomplish.

## Workshop Summary

And that...

- At its best, interpretation is enjoyable, relevant, organized and thematic (EROT).
- Theme ≠ topic
- Always start with a *strong* theme!
- It's easy to write a boring theme. But writing a strong theme takes time and practice. Still, the impact is well worth the effort.

## Workshop Summary

And finally that...

- EROT is applied as TORE™ (themes and organization always come first!).
- Once you have a strong theme, you're ready to apply the O, R and E.
- In interpretation, TORE practically guarantees success, as long as your theme is loaded with Vitamin R.