

Thematic Interpretation

Making a difference on purpose!

Learning Outcomes

At the completion, you'll be able to ...

- explain the "T" in the EROT model of interpretive communication
- explain what thematic interpretation is and why it makes sense to practice it
- give examples of themes and know how to write your own

Learning Outcomes (cont.)

And, you'll be able to ...

- think thematically
- generate ideas for new or enhanced thematic interpretive programs
- develop thematic tours and other presentations
- tell another person what you learned

Interpretation Has Four Essential Qualities (Ham-Weiler EROT Model)

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



Ham-Weiler 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

Communicating Themes Has a Purpose!

- People remember themes; they forget isolated facts. You're a walking, lifelong accumulation of learned themes!
- Having a theme helps YOU prepare.
- Thinking thematically unleashes your creativity!

Communicating Themes Has a Purpose!

- Themes are beliefs; beliefs are the building blocks of attitudes and behaviour.
- Having an interesting theme almost guarantees an interesting presentation.

So why is it important to be *thematic*?

- If you want to make a difference / want people to internalize and remember what you said.
- People forget isolated facts, they remember themes.
- It makes your preparation easier / more focused.
- It makes the visitor's job easier.
- If you want to influence behaviour: themes are beliefs, and beliefs are the building blocks of attitudes and behavior. By communicating themes, you are planting seeds (beliefs) that can ultimately influence (reinforce or change) how people think, feel and behave.

A Theme is a Message

- It's the moral to the story.
- It's 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 full stop.

An Alternative— 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, REALLY* important for this audience to understand that _____."
(theme)

Anyone Can Write an Interesting Theme

- 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 be very useful, specially when you’re walking.”

Anyone Can Write an Interesting Theme

- Connect with things of intangible **symbolic** importance.

“How rivers are born is fascinating.”

“The birth of a river is as fascinating and mysterious as the birth of a human.”

Anyone Can Write an Interesting Theme

- 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.”

Anyone Can Write an Interesting Theme

- Incorporate a **metaphor**.

“Chuck Berry did a lot to advance rock ‘n roll.”

“Chuck Berry was the *architect* of rock ‘n roll.”

Anyone Can Write an Interesting Theme

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

“This desert landscape **was created** by harsh winds and drought.”

“Harsh winds and drought **created** this desert landscape.”

Anyone Can Write an Interesting Theme

- Try to **avoid** the verb “**to be**.”

“This building **is** a hundred years old.”

“These walls **tell** a hundred-year story.”

Ways to Make Your Guided Activities *Thematic*

- Think themes, not topics.
- Think full-sentences, not parts of sentences.
- Think “big deal” – what message you *really* want your visitors to take home that day.
- 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

Practised as **TORE**:

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

Theme Writing Exercise

- 1 Improve each of the following theme statements:
 - “Wildlife around here face a lot of dangers.”
 - “Marsupials are a diverse group of animals.”
 - “South Australian birds are fascinating.”
- 2 Write your own topic and three themes related to it.
- 3 Select one theme above and develop 4 or fewer sub-themes that support it.

Summary of Module

We hope you've learned that ...

- **Practicing thematic interpretation is important. Theme ≠ topic!**
- **Interpretation has its most profound impact on visitors when a compelling theme is left in the visitor's mind. This is the purpose of interpretation.**
- **Thematic interpretation is not just entertaining fact-giving. It is “meaning making” in an ERO way!**

Summary of Module

And that ...

- **Starting with a strong global theme and interesting sub-themes almost guarantees an interesting presentation.**
- **It's easy to write a boring theme. But writing a strong theme takes time and practice. Still, anyone can do it with a little practice.**
- **The group can put magic in the message! Involve others in your thematic thinking.**

Summary of Module

And finally, that ...

- **The best themes are those that emanate from your passion and take advantage of your personal knowledge and style.**
- **In thematic interpretation, “success” = TORE. Once you have a strong theme, you're ready to create (adding the O, R, and E).**
- **Interpreters who want to make a difference in how people think, feel and behave with respect to heritage, practice thematic interpretation.**