



Mistakes that are Easy to Avoid

Conducting an interpretive program is an art—and a science. A good program depends on preparation and planning. Here are six mistakes to avoid.

1. **Exceeding allotted time:** Putting together a good interpretive program takes a lot of time and research. Most of us find that we have too much for any given program (which is better than not having enough). But it is unfair to an audience to ignore the clock and continue past your allotted time. The best strategy is to think ahead while planning your interpretive program about what components/sections can be dropped if you find you're running out of time. Keep in mind though—you don't ever want to delete your conclusion!
2. **Not rehearsing ahead of time:** Practice giving your program and using your visual aids and props ahead of time. Think about how and when you'll use them, how they're going to stand alone (or be held), etc. Practicing out loud (in your living room, in front of your kids or pets, etc.) will give you a better understanding of how the presentation sounds. Ask yourself: Does the flow of information make sense? Do you understand the message(s)? Are there better "words" you could use? Often as you're rehearsing, you realize there are things you need to clarify more, or research more, before your presentation. It also gives you an idea of how long it really takes to cover the information you plan to share. The best strategy is to practice, practice, practice! That way your presentation will run smoothly.
3. **Ignoring audience interests:** Be flexible! If you find that participants want to spend more time looking at wildflowers than you planned, compromise—acknowledge their interest and look at a few more wildflowers. Your expectations and your audiences' expectations can be different. If you're knowledgeable on the topic they're interested in, be willing to talk about it. You'll be able to present the "unused" material at another program.
4. **Forgetting to check the space** (park, trail, room, etc.): Be sure to visit our site ahead of time so you are not surprised when you get there. Visiting a room helps you know how the technology is set up. Visiting a park or trail helps you understand what has changed since the last time you visited. Trees can fall on trails, wildflowers may not be in bloom as you expected, animal tracks may have disappeared, bird nests could be gone. You may also discover things you hadn't planned on including in your program that could be a nice addition! Arriving ahead of time to re-check the site is also a good idea in the event there are last-minute changes.
5. **Faking the answer(s):** If you're unsure of the answer or uncertain how current your response is, it's best to admit it. It's fine to say "I don't know," and ask if anyone does know the answer. If you make up something you're not sure of, you will lose your credibility. None of us knows all the answers! If no one else in your group has a reliable answer to the question, then leave it as a question/challenge for you and participants to investigate later.
6. **Looking at notes instead of the audience:** Feel free to use notes, but use them sparingly. Your notes should be an outline to your program, not a script. Remember, you want to engage your audience, not lecture to them.