

Making



Objects

Speak

CREATING A GOOD AUDIO TOUR

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The Basics

Audience: College undergraduates in survey/introductory-level humanities courses

Length: The recorded tour should not exceed 45 minutes. The actual walking length, allowing for pauses and note-taking, may be 60-90 minutes.

First Steps:

1. Plan on repeated visits to the museum or site yourself. Imagine you are a student who has never been there before and may feel lost or intimidated. Familiarize yourself with the exhibits/ sites you plan to use, and make a tentative list of appropriate objects/buildings.
2. With the objects/buildings in the museum/site in mind, think of a central idea/theme in your chosen literary texts or historical period. This should be something that students will understand in a deeper, more sophisticated way after looking at objects/sites. You will write a more focused and engaging tour if you keep in mind why you wish to convey this material to the student as a tour, rather than say a reading or lecture. Objects serve as both metaphors and evidence for larger patterns, trends, and forces. In objects, we can see the "fingerprints" of a culture. Accordingly, the tours work best when they use slow looking to draw students' attention to details that they might have overlooked and then explain those details as part of a larger story. When a tour employs the mere fact of an object's existence to tell a story, it's not particularly interesting or exciting. But when the tour grabs you and says "Let me tell you about what's so fascinating about this detail. Look closely with me," it adds real value to the experience.
3. Read about "slow looking" in *The Intelligent Eye: Learning to Think by Looking at Art* by David Perkins (Getty, 1994), available on line in JJ Library Ereserve: Go to the JJ Ereserve site, type in Carbonell and NEH HUM. The password is MOS (for "Making Objects Speak").
4. Choose objects/buildings that might illuminate themes in your course. Also choose those on permanent display since temporary exhibits will not be around after your podcast has been recorded. Carefully copy down identifying info for future reference (for objects, **museum label** numbers, titles, dates, provenance; for sites, exact addresses and compass orientation). Rather than choose ALL the possible objects/sites that could illustrate your

theme, zero in on no more than 7-8. These should be on an easy-to-follow route. Remember that you will be giving verbal directions, so the path you ask students to follow should be relatively simple.

5. Immerse yourself in the study of your chosen objects/sites. Make use of a museum's library resources both on site and on line. After reading about your objects/site, go back to the museum/site and spend time just looking at them: What do you want students to notice? Why? How will looking at this object/site help them better understand the history of literature they are studying?
6. Make a final selection of objects/buildings, keeping in mind that the recorded tour shouldn't exceed 45 minutes. Do you want/need the 7-8 originally chosen? In what order should students look at them for maximum visual and intellectual effect? That is, will your tour be organized thematically? Chronologically? Should one object/building precede another because it helps students understand the other?
7. Now you are ready to define your learning objectives. Write down 3-7 learning objectives for your tour; these will not only help you craft your tour, but also be important to our outside evaluator, who will want to see them. Some will be knowledge-based (What do you want students to know?), others, performance-based (What do you want them to do?)

Drafting the Audio Tour Script:

8. Give your podcast a title, and in a few sentences, announce this title, the overall purpose of the tour, and its venue. Explain briefly what listeners will be doing on the tour and why. Then give students clear, simple directions for orienting themselves in a museum or neighborhood, and prepare them for any entrance fee or bag search they may encounter. Tell them to take a pad and pen for notes. Carefully consider how long the actual tour will take: time for gaining access to the museum (fees, searches, bag checks); time for getting their bearings; getting lost, etc.; time for sketching and writing. Give students this info in an **ancillary** handout ahead of time so they can be prepared.
9. Assume limited knowledge on the students' part of the culture your tour explores, knowledge equivalent to what they would know by the 4th week of your course.
10. Write up each object/building or set of related objects/buildings as one track on your tour, and give each track a brief identifying title. Precede each discussion with clear, simple directions for finding the object/building, including names of galleries and cases. Track 1 would be your intro, and the last track you're summing up. In this way, students who wish to return to the discussion of a specific object/location can do so readily by navigating through the tracks. If you plan to have a map created for your tour--and the grant earmarks funds for graphic design--you could indicate the tracks on that map
11. Write in an informal, conversational style, NOT in lecture mode. Use simple words that all your students will understand, except for terms essential to your tour. These more difficult, technical terms can be listed and handed out to students before they take the tour. Do not imitate Philippe de Montebello. Rather, talk to your students as if you were explaining something in a class discussion.
12. Beware of the tendency to say ALL you've learned about an object or building. Rather, present enough info to help students see something for themselves. Then ask many open-ended questions that force listeners to look closely at an object or to step back and look at the whole. (See chapters in *The Intelligent Eye* for the kinds of questions that provoke close, thoughtful looking.)

13. More on questions: Avoid questions with "right" or "wrong" answers (e.g. what material is this statue made from?); questions that presuppose too much knowledge (e.g. in what ways does this Greek statue show the influence of Egyptian sculpture?); and vague questions that might simply elicit a shrug (e.g. how does this painting make you feel?).
14. Ask some pointed questions that get students to look closely or make connections between objects, e.g., "How many different geometric designs can you find?" or "What differences do you see between this portrait and the ones in Track 2?" To get students to look closely, ask other questions that you then answer a bit later, e.g., "What is the statue holding in its left hand?" Finally, ask questions that require students to express their reactions to an object, e.g., "Which of these objects would you like to own for your own home?" or "What activities might you enjoy doing in this space?"
15. As **embedded learning activities**, ask students to take notes in response to some of the questions you are asking, sketch something in their notebooks, or take note of objects they might use for a later paper. Active looking is aided by putting pen to paper.
16. Consider inserting in your tour short quotations from relevant texts (e.g., the Homer quotes in the Greek tour). These could be recorded by a different person to add variety to the audio tour.
17. Think about such **ancillaries** as paper topics, class presentations, group projects, or exams you might ask students to do as a result of your tour. These **ancillary** activities will occur to you as you write and think about the objects/site. They can be presented to students before they take the tour as added incentive for careful looking and note-taking.
18. Your script should be no longer than 10-12 single-spaced pages as a first draft with hopes that it can be cut to 8-9 pages after others have read it and actually tried the tour. A 10-12-page tour will take students over an hour to complete. After 45 minutes of close looking, their eyes start to glaze over.

Bells and Whistles:

1. After completing a draft that others can read and try out, consider what bits of music or other sound effects you might include behind your voice, not for the entire tour but here and there as appropriate to the object or building being observed. Music is also a good way to cover a moment of silence while students look and respond to questions you've just asked them. Two minutes or 10% of a whole piece of music, whichever is smaller, can be used free without getting permission. So from a four-minute song, you could use only 24 seconds. But there is some money in our budget for permissions, so if you want music that is longer than these limits, propose it.
2. Create **ancillary** activities that can be done online or at the museum or site but not as part of the podcast.
3. Write a **wisdom paper** once the podcast has been completed and recorded. More on this and the other **ancillary** activities in future.

Glossary:

ancillary: any learning activity or enrichment resource related to the audio tour but not inside the tour itself. Some are activities for students, such as paper assignments, time-lines, and online assignments, while others are materials provided by the instructor, such as an

annotated bibliography, image library and relevant websites, maps and glossaries.
embedded learning activity: active learning prompts to be done by the student during the tour, such as recording visual evidence and sketching in a notebook

museum label: a small identifying card containing the accession number [the identifying number assigned to the object by the museum] and some or all of the following: maker [if known], geographical location, date, materials, source of bequest. Objects may also have more expansive informational labels containing a curator's take on salient details.

wisdom paper: a brief essay (500 words) discussing a practical aspect of tour creation that the tour creator encountered and learned from; practical advice to other would-be creators. This will not be due until the tours are complete, but you may want to keep it in mind as you create your tour.