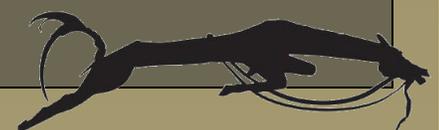


3. Recommendations for Developing Interpretive Signs



According to Amanda Adams with LOKI Interpretive Group, interpretive signs serve a variety of functions for communities, such as:

1. Interpretive signs illuminate the power of place. Clear educational messages and content inform the public of each site's historic significance.
2. Interpretive panels do more than provide just dates and facts. They also inspire a feeling of stewardship in site visitors, strengthening awareness of cultural and natural resources.
3. Thoughtful and well designed signage programs demonstrate community pride in local heritage.
4. Interpretive signage is self-sufficient: it provides a high-quality interpretive experience without the requirements of staff or facilities to maintain.
5. They are a consistent message available to many visitors at one time, can be viewed at the visitors' convenience, and are available 24 hours a day.
6. Interpretive signage enhances visitor perceptions of a site, city, or region. By drawing attention to an area's unique history and identity, tourists better appreciate the story of a new place. Captivating interpretive signs and exhibits can become destinations in their own right.



They are not ideal in every situation however. They are vulnerable to damage by weather, wildlife, and vandalism. They are also non-personal and may draw attention to a fragile resource that could be damaged by visitors.

Before researching, drafting the text, or designing a sign, the need for the interpretive sign must be determined. Answer the following questions:

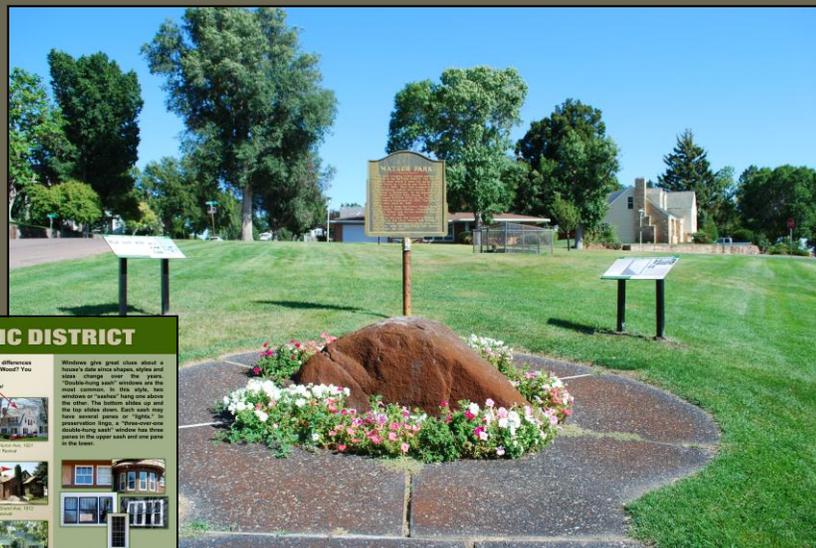
- Is there something that needs explaining?
- Will something be missed without interpretation?
- Is a sign the appropriate form of interpretation?
- Will the sign help prevent damage to the site?
- Will enough visitors see the sign to make it cost effective?
- Who is the target audience of the sign?
- Will the signs damage the site?

There are three different types of interpretive signs. Ask yourself if you want your sign to inform, educate, or entertain the audience. What are your objectives?

- What do you want the audience to know and learn?
- What do you want the audience to do?
- How do you want the audience to feel?

Example: Pierre Hill Historic District sign located in Mater Park in Pierre, SD.

- Learn: Different styles of architecture are identified by different features.
- Do: Tour the Pierre Hill Residential Historic District to see the different architectural styles represented.
- Feel: All architectural styles, whether they are considered high style or not, play an important role in history and the development of neighborhoods.



PIERRE HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Stroll through the Pierre Hill Historic District for a lesson in 19th-1920s architecture. Notice the differences between houses – are the windows tall and narrow or short and wide? Do they have shutters? You can guess the construction date by knowing a bit about architectural styles.

Architectural Style	Dates	Features
Queen Anne	c. 1880 to 1910	Pointing hip gables, decorative brackets, shingles, gabled porches, wrap-around porches.
Artisan	c. 1880 to 1900	Roof line, low pitched gabled roof, gable ends, and simple horizontal stripes on the siding.
Craftsman & Prairie	c. 1900 to 1920	Roof line or eaves and low gable roofs, the pitched roof including the porch and entrance is typical of the Craftsman houses.
Tudor Revival	c. 1910 to 1920	Large chimneys and the English cottages with steep roofs, half-timbering, large windows and small porches.
Colonial Revival	c. 1910 to 1920	Colonial Revival style has captured a lot of attention, with gable porches, decorative columns and a pedimented roof.
Mix and Match	c. 1910 to 1920	Colonial Revival style has captured a lot of attention, with gable porches, decorative columns and a pedimented roof.
Traditional	c. 1910 to 1920	Colonial Revival style has captured a lot of attention, with gable porches, decorative columns and a pedimented roof.

Windows give great clues about a house's date since shapes, styles and sizes change over the years. Shutters, awnings, porches and windows or "bushes" hang out above the roof. The bottom sashes are and the top sashes down. Each sash may have several panes or "lights." In reproduction styles, a reproduction double-hung sash window has three panes in the upper sash and one pane in the lower.

Decorative Shutters: Shutters are used to protect windows from weather and to add to the appearance of a house. They are usually made of wood or metal and are attached to the window frame.

Large porches: Large porches are a common feature of many houses in the district. They are often used for entertaining and are a great place to enjoy the outdoors.

Decorative columns: Decorative columns are used to support porches and are a common feature of many houses in the district. They are often made of wood or metal and are attached to the porch structure.

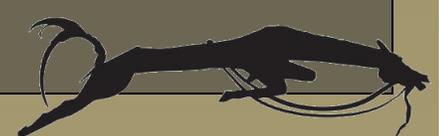
Shingles: Shingles are used to cover the roofs of houses and are a common feature of many houses in the district. They are often made of wood or metal and are attached to the roof structure.

Pointing hip gables: Pointing hip gables are a common feature of many houses in the district. They are often made of wood or metal and are attached to the roof structure.

Developed by the South Dakota Birth Historical Society & Pioneer Analysis group and the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern Railroad Communities. Images courtesy of the South Dakota State Historical Society and the National Archives.

SOUTH DAKOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

DM&E



Interpretive signs differ from historical markers. Historical markers are more informative rather than interpretive. For more information about historical markers, please see the historical marker program at <http://history.sd.gov/Preservation/OtherServices/HistoricalMarkers.aspx>

Some additional areas to consider are below.

Text:

- Must be an appropriate reading level--usually between a 7th and 9th grade level.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs. Keep text blocks short.
- Avoid using jargon or technical terms.
- Use upper and lower case text, not just uppercase.
- Should be vivid language using active verbs.
- Do not overload the reader with information.

Design and layout:

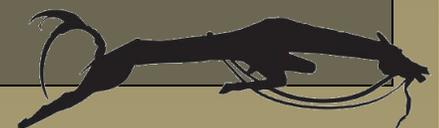
- Do not crowd text and graphics.
- Avoid distractions such as busy backgrounds, illegible type, too dark or bright colors, etc.
- Use colors and images that attract audience.
- Limit colors to dominate, subordinate, and accent colors.
- Use type styles and sizes that are easy to read. Do not use more than three different types.
- Serif fonts can be easier to read, especially in longer text blocks.
- Mount at appropriate height and angle for comfortable viewing. Keep in mind those with disabilities.

Location:

- Answer the following questions to determine the best location for a sign.

- What is the relationship between the sign and the subject it is interpreting?
- What is the potential for vandalism?
- How accessible is the sign, particularly for those with disabilities?
- Where is the location that gets the most traffic?
- Who will maintain the sign?
- Would the property owner be willing to place the sign at the desired location?

When analyzing the sign, ask yourself these questions throughout the development process:



- Do the titles, subtitles, and artwork support the main points of the text?
- Is the text arranged in small sections of 40 to 75 words? Shorter text blocks are easier to follow and do not lose the readers interest.
- Is there good contrast between the text and the background? Is there little distraction/clutter in the background?
- Is there a natural movement from the main title and art to the main text? Is there a clear hierarchy of importance?
- Is there blank space? There should be enough to allow the eyes to rest but not too much that there is “dead space”.
- Is the layout clean and simple? Simplicity is usually better for interpretive signs.
- Does the sign compliment the environment in which it is located?
- Does the sign achieve its intended interpretive objective for the intended audience?

Interpretive signs are a great medium that can reach a wide audience with minimal effort.

