



Inklings

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

March 2003 Volume 3, Issue 1

Current/Recent Project List

Interpretation

- Interpretive Sign Design, Portage Park and Recreation, Portage, IN
- Interpretive Management Plan, St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation, South Bend, IN
- Interpretive Brochure Design, Spring Mill State Park, Mitchell, IN
- Trail Sign Plan and Design, W. Lafayette Park and Recreation W. Lafayette, IN
- Interpretive Panel Design, Town of Hamilton, Hamilton, IN
- Interpretive Panel Design, Miller Showers Park, Bloomington Park and Recreation, Bloomington, IN

GPS/GIS

- *GPS/GIS Coverage of Trails and Boundaries, Bloomington Park and Recreation, Bloomington, IN*
- *GPS/GIS Coverage of Trail System, W. Lafayette Park and Recreation, W. Lafayette, IN*

Brevity: The Key to Interpretive Writing

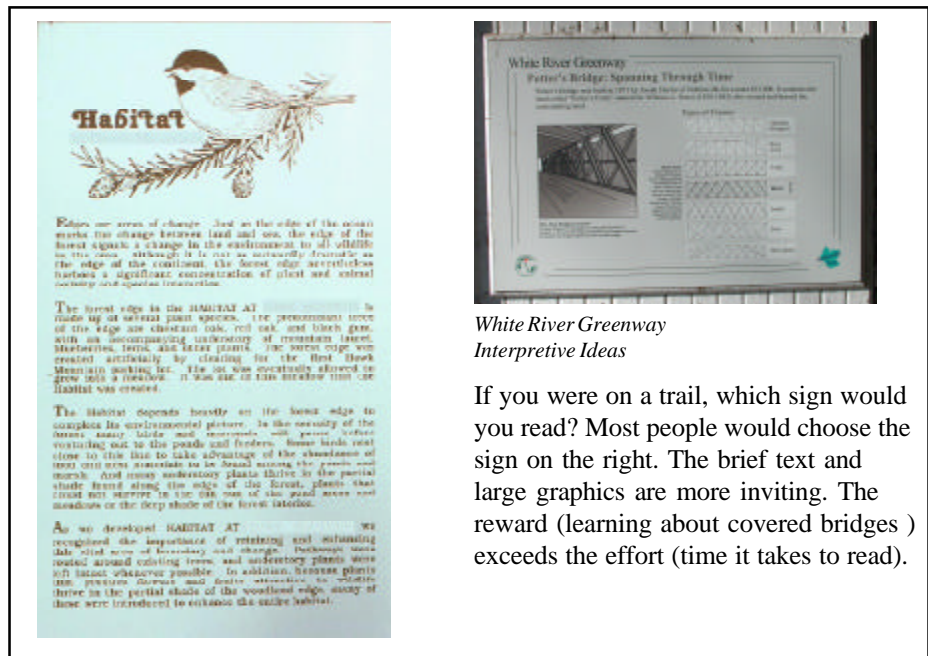
Writing for interpretive media (signs, brochures, exhibits) is like writing haiku, in which the writer beautifully conveys a message using few words. In interpretive writing, the goal is the same.

Writing *less* is much harder than writing *more*. It involves finding one perfect word to replace five. It means making choices about what the reader needs to know.

In interpretive writing your audience is voluntary. They may be trying to hike a particular trail before nightfall. They may have young children along. If the effort required to read your label exceeds the reward, your label will go unread. Generally after 150 words readership drops. (This article is 106 words long at this point) That's not many words.

There are several techniques that can help you keep your text brief:

- Start with objectives. What do people need to know? Writing text based on objectives keeps your text focused on your message. You are less likely to digress.
 - Use a graphic. A picture (diagram, chart) is worth a thousand words. As you write your text visualize the graphics that you'll use. People are much more attracted to a diagram of a mill wheel than a written description of one.
 - Break apart your text. A large block of text is much more intimidating than several short captions. National Geographic uses this technique. When we open a National Geographic we find ourselves reading all of the captions.
 - For more information . . . There is a tendency to want to say everything about a subject on a label. The purpose of interpretation is to spark an interest, not present a
- (continued page 2)



White River Greenway Interpretive Ideas

If you were on a trail, which sign would you read? Most people would choose the sign on the right. The brief text and large graphics are more inviting. The reward (learning about covered bridges) exceeds the effort (time it takes to read).



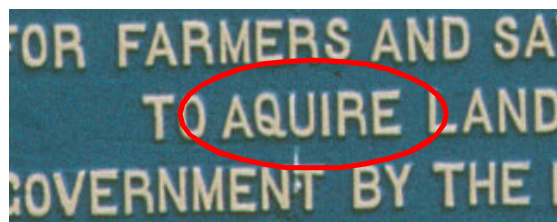
Inklings
Interpretive Ideas
P.O. Box 355
Okemos, MI 48805-0355
517/347-0861
schools@voyager.net
Lise Schools, Owner

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dissertation. For those whose interest is aroused, provide an avenue for them to pursue it further. This could be a brochure rack in an interpretive center or contact information on a sign.

We can only succeed if we communicate our messages. Brevity is crucial to achieving that goal.

--L. Schools



This typo appears on a bronze plaque. In spite of advances in computer software, it is still easy to make errors.

Have someone else read your text.

Let your text sit for a few days and then read it for errors.

After editing, check for new errors.