

HOW TO PLAN AND LAYER AN INTERPRETIVE STORY

Step one – what's your **topic**?

Step two – what do you want to say about it? This **story** is one 'frame' amongst many possibilities.

Step three – what **format** are you planning to present the information in? A standard exhibition with groups of objects, theme panels and captions? A digital interactive? An art installation? Each has different ways of presenting information and grouping it into manageable pieces.

Step four – what's your **editing principle**? A good deal of the 'full story' should end up on the cutting room floor. Your editing principle is how you decide which elements those are.

Step five – what are your **concrete examples**? These can be objects, testimonies, images – anything that is a real-world example of the ideas in your story. If they are related to your topic but not your story, don't include them. All of them must earn their place.

Step five – how are you going to group information into '**sets**'? These may be your themes, in a classic exhibition, your 'pages' on a digital piece or your chapters in a film or animation. They are as important as the story itself – they say something vital about how you see your story. Make sure they make sense as a whole – that a visitor can understand how they are related at first glance and not worry about what they've not grasped.

Step six – you now have your outline story structure. Next you must layer the content in it.

The most important content is the '**headline**' – depending on the format this could be the introduction panel in a traditional exhibition, or the entry point of a digital interactive experience.

The next layer expands on this and gives it **context**. It may be your theme panels; it may be groups of objects.

The next layer provides **evidence** – this is normally your objects, but could be testimonies or images or visitor contributions.

Step seven – next you need to ensure that your layers are varied. Check that you have **balance**.

Are some layers text?

Are some elements visual?

Are there opportunities for hands-on experiences or strategic thinking?

Is there sound?

And so on.

Step eight – the **red pen**. Step back and look at what you have planned as a complete piece. Does it add up to a pleasing whole? Is anything sitting there unconnected to the rest purely because you love it? Delete it.

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Step nine – now vary the **pace**. What elements can you bring forward and highlight, what can you push back and make quieter? Are there some key objects or vital stories? Quotes? A piece of art? A question? Where can you bury some detailed information for people to enjoy finding? Where are your quiet, reflective moments? Where is it busy and content-rich?

Step ten – **enrich** the experience. Is it too one-note? Where can you bring in the unexpected? Is it a very dry subject? Why not take a poetic approach to scriptwriting. Is it a very traditional subject? Why not bring in some different voices. This is a vital stage in creating a truly memorable interpretive piece.

Step eleven – remember that for each individual item in your overall plan, when you go onto develop it with an AV developer, an exhibition designer, a scriptwriter, an artist, you should apply the same principles.