

APPENDIX C: CONDUCTING A POSITIVE ASSESSMENT

As a coach, you will have your own personal style for empowering interpreters to facilitate opportunities for visitors to understand the relevance and significance of the resources at your site. However, to be an effective coach your style should be based on conducting a positive assessment. A positive assessment focuses on what is present in an interpretive product or service rather than searching for what is missing. Of course, as a coach you will need to address areas that need improvement, but by taking a positive approach, you will be much more effective.

Good interpretive coaches search for ways to improve an interpretive product or service by building upon what is already there. This is very similar to the way that good parents and teachers find ways to praise positive behavior in order to discourage negative behavior, rather than focusing on the negative behavior.

Think about how you felt in school when you received a graded paper covered with red pen marks pointing out all the weaknesses of your work. An interpretive coaching session should not feel like this. An interpretive coach searches for the elements of effective interpretation, recognizes the creative autonomy of the interpreter, and helps improve the interpretive product by building on the successful elements of the product or service.

Listed below are essential strategies for conducting a positive assessment.

- **Focus on what is there, not what is missing.** Focus on the elements of what makes the interpretive product effective and what the presentation includes, not what is missing. This keeps the interaction positive and forward-thinking. All interpretive efforts have potential elements of success upon which to build.
- **Discuss the interpretive program and not the interpreter.** Focus your conversation on the service or product, and not the interpreter. For example, you might say, "The transition between the first and second stop could be more effective, if..." rather than, "Your transition between your first and second stop could be more effective if you...." The distinction between the two styles is subtle and takes practice, but it is important for opening a dialogue on ways to improve the interpretation. By focusing on the service or product, the conversation is less personally threatening.
- **Be provisional instead of directive.** Use phrases like "Consider trying..." "What do you think would happen if..." or "That idea might be even more powerful if..." The interpreter knows the intent of the product better than anyone else. Using provisional language honors the creative autonomy of the interpreter, and provisional suggestions can help strengthen a particular component of an interpretive effort, while allowing the interpreter's personal communication style to remain intact.



APPENDIX D: PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Providing feedback is an essential part of coaching. Feedback that comes from a positive assessment goes beyond improving the interpretive program or product. It builds the skills and abilities of the interpreters by engaging them in a dialogue that enhances their understanding of how to facilitate interpretive opportunities.

Built on a positive assessment and incorporating provisional language, your feedback should also contain the following:

- **Concrete examples** – Give specifics as to what worked and why, and what might be made more effective. Be sure to include possible ideas on how to strengthen the product. It is also important to know when to limit your feedback. At times, too much advice might be detrimental to the interpreter's self-esteem. For products that still need considerable work, try to focus on two or three of the most important coaching points. Make suggestions based on the seeds of success that are already present, rather than presenting a laundry list of mistakes.
- **Suggestions for improvement** – Even outstanding programs can improve. Recognize excellence while encouraging continued refinement and improvement. Varying techniques, including elements that could reach an additional audience or incorporating current events to enhance the personal relevance are improvements that can often be made.



Positive Assessment and Provisional Language

As a coach you will have your own personal style for empowering interpreters to help visitors discover the relevance and significance of the resources at your site. However, to be an effective coach your style should be based on conducting a positive assessment. Listed below are essential strategies for conducting a positive assessment.

Positive

Focus on what is there, not what is missing.

This keeps the interaction positive and forward thinking. All interpretive efforts have potential elements of success upon which to build.

Encourage the interpreter to share what s/he thinks

Again, no one knows the spirit and intent of the product as well as the interpreter. It is still important to ask directed questions that encourage the interpreter to share specific, concrete elements regarding interpretive efforts. For example, in a positive manner ask questions such as, "What do you like about the program?" and "What do you think could be made stronger?"

Recognize and acknowledge improvement.

Be specific about where you see improvement, whether it is improvement in a specific program component or overall improvement in performance. Everyone needs to know they are progressing to remain motivated about improving their skills.

Specific

Give specifics as to what worked and why, and what might be made more effective. Be sure to include possible ideas on how to strengthen the product. It is also important to know when to limit feedback. At times, too much advice might be detrimental to self-esteem. For products that still need considerable work, try to focus on two or three of the most important coaching points. Make suggestions based on the seeds of success that are already present, rather than presenting a laundry list of mistakes.

Provisional

When providing suggestions for improvement, you can strengthen your coaching relationship by using provisional language. A coach should not insist that an interpreter do it his way with language like, "You should do this..." or "I would do this..." Nor should they be blunt or black and white, "Your theme is ineffective."

The word "provisional" means temporary or conditional, pending confirmation or validation. By making suggestions provisional (might, could, possibly, consider...) you are assuming your student could have a valid reason for making a particular choice – reasons of which you are unaware. By giving your student the benefit of the doubt, you show respect and foster a collegial relationship of trust that invites discussion. Use phrases like "Consider trying...", "What do you think would happen if...", or "That idea might be even more powerful if..." The interpreter knows the intent of the product better than anyone. Such suggestions to strengthen a particular component of an interpretive effort, while permitting the interpreter's communication style to define what is most pertinent.

When the interpreter's work is effective, give them **specific positive** examples of their success. It is NOT necessary to use provisional language when the interpreter got it right! You don't need to say, "It appears that you did fine work here." You can tell them, "You did fine work here."

NPS Interpretive Development Program

When the interpreter's work isn't fully successful, give them **specific provisional** suggestions for improvement.

There are some times when directive language is appropriate. However, for the most part, people appreciate being treated with a little more respect and autonomy.

	Characteristics	Best When
Directive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritative • Instructive • Judging • Coach is imparter of knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is limited time for training. • There is only one right way to do something. • The coach has extensive knowledge or expertise that must be communicated. • Outcomes are regulated by law. • The trainee prefers to be told what to do.
Provisional (Non-directive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative • Counseling • Guiding • Coach is catalyst in learning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are multiple ways to demonstrate competency. • The learner's commitment to the quality of the product is critical.

Useful Provisional Phrases and Words

Could you consider...?
 Have you thought of...?
 This might work even better if...
 Sometimes visitors respond to...
 Perhaps try...
 Have you considered...?
 You might consider...
 Is there a way to...?
 Perhaps it might be even more effective if...
 It appears that...
 It seems...
 You might try...
 Can you think of a way to...?
 Consider trying...,
 What do you think would happen if...
 That idea might be even more powerful if...
 Your program might be even more effective if..."

