

Trouble-shooting on writing themes

Chances are, when you get started on theme-writing, that you'll get stuck. Here are some of the common 'road blocks' and some suggestions for getting the process moving so you can develop high-impact themes.

“There's so much to tell”

This happens when we know a lot about the subject matter and it all seems equally important.

Try imagining you're in a helicopter hovering above all the information – what does it all add up to? Now you've got a bigger picture, what seems most important to reveal to the audience?

or

Ask yourself what you'd say if you were with a friend in a café or pub and you wanted them to really understand what it most means.

Remember, it's not about communicating all there is to tell about the subject matter. The end game is to have a positive effect on visitors – to change or influence the way visitors experience your tour or attraction, and especially to get them thinking about it for themselves.

Once you've got your theme or themes, then it's so much easier to know what information to leave in and what can be left out. It then becomes a process of selecting information that the audience most needs to know to 'get' the theme.

“Too many themes”

You've been practising theme-writing and now you've got a lot of themes and don't know what to do with them.

1. The first step is to group them – which ones are alike or are expressing ideas that are similar or connected?
2. The next step is to check which themes 'roll up'. Is there a group of themes that come together to make a super-theme – a group that combines to convey a bigger idea?

3. Then check to see which themes are too global or generic – they’ve lost their connection to the sense of place or the audience. See if they can be grounded in the specifics of the experience.

4. Now you’ll have a more focused set of themes.

It’s good to play with your preliminary themes to get a feel for where you need to pitch them for your audience.

“I can’t seem to express the idea”

This is a challenging one! Often we have a strong sense of what’s significant or meaningful about an experience or site or story but can’t articulate it.

It’s useful in this situation to write a basic theme and then keep questioning it.

Ask yourself, in regard to the basic theme, questions like:

“... and this means what?”

or

“... so why would a visitor care about that?”.
