

**Paving the Way for STEM in History Museums
Writing About Science for a History Museum Audience (When You're Not a Scientist)**

INTERPRETIVE TECHNIQUES: THEMES VS TOPICS

What is a theme?

Every interpretive presentation (whether exhibition, program, or project) should be guided by a theme or themes which represent the main message the presentation is trying to communicate.

Themes:

- Are the most important points you are trying to express to your audience through your presentation.
- Are complete ideas that express a message or point of view (answer the "so what?" question)
- Connect tangibles and intangibles within your interpretation
- Help to keep your audience (and you!) on track throughout your interpretation.
- By the end of their experience, your audience should be able to reiterate your theme and provide you with a few supporting details.

Why bother to develop a theme?

- Connect to more people.
- Help them learn more.
- Have greater impact.

How is a theme different from a topic?

Topics are broad, general categories while themes are focused, specific, and interesting.

Topics:

- Are broad, general categories
- Are generally not complete sentences
- Could be the title of an encyclopedia entry
- Do not help to build limits into your presentation



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Examples:

Topic: Relationships between American Indians and Europeans

Theme: Though claimed by European nations, control over the land we now call Texas remained in the hands of American Indians through the beginning of the 19th century.

Topic: Historic houses

Theme: Architecture styles influence lifestyles.

Topic: Early American Government

Theme: George Washington could have been king of America but chose not to be.

Topic: Early Roads

Theme: Many travel routes across Texas have remained the same for thousands of years and illustrate the stories of interactions between diverse peoples.

