

# Wilderness Education Techniques

## Media-Based Educational Techniques

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Commercial Periodicals	A consistent message is provided to a large number of people, including many who never stop at visitor centers or agency offices. The messages also will reach many people when they are planning their trips, a time when they are particularly receptive. Issues can be covered in depth.	The message may miss most visitors, including the target audiences. There is no opportunity for discussion—questions and answers. Messages may not leave a lasting impression—and may be forgotten or ignored.
Agency Periodicals	The primary advantage is mass distribution at relatively low cost. Moreover, the location and timing of distribution can be controlled to increase efficiency. Periodicals can be included in any package of materials sent to potential or previous visitors. Issues can be covered in depth.	As with commercial periodicals, the target audience may be missed. Messages may not leave lasting impressions. In some cases, this technique may require equipment and a facility for production.
Brochures	Consistent information can be provided, at a relatively low cost, before, during, or after a trip. Brochures can be mass distributed or targeted to specific user groups and locations. Visitors can take brochures with them. They are easily referred to and can provide thorough and detailed information.	Many visitors will not read brochures or will ignore their advice. Brochures may end up as trailside litter. If the subject matter is misunderstood, there is no way to get additional information. The significance of certain information can be lost if the brochure is too cluttered, or if the visitor picks up too many different brochures.
Maps	Many visitors want to have maps. They keep them. Therefore, they can read messages before, during, or after trips. When maps are carried into the wilderness, they can reinforce messages presented before the trip. They can be distributed at relatively low cost.	Many visitors cannot read maps. Others are only interested in the information on trails and topographic features. Space is limited on the front of the map. Messages on the back can easily be ignored. Some visitors are producing their own maps through websites and map software.
Posters	Posters provide consistent	Posters can convey only a few

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	<p>information in a simple and attractive format. They are easy to distribute, relatively inexpensive, and can be used at a variety of locations. Generic posters developed at central offices can be distributed to many different areas.</p>	<p>messages. Attempts to get too many messages on one poster, or to display many different posters, are counterproductive. Posters may not be read by most visitors. Visitors cannot take them along. Consequently, the messages can be quickly forgotten. The messages may be overly simplistic.</p>
Signs	<p>The visitor receives simple messages, often at the exact location where that message is most important. Messages can reinforce regulations or provide general information. They are relatively inexpensive.</p>	<p>The obtrusiveness of signs is a major disadvantage in wilderness. They are particularly inappropriate in the wilderness interior. Their limited space and impersonality are also disadvantages. Signs provide no opportunity for questions or additional information. Finally, signs require periodic maintenance and are subject to vandalism.</p>
Guidebooks	<p>Many wilderness visitors want a guidebook. They keep them and can refer to them when planning their trips.</p>	<p>Guidebooks can detract from the discoveries that are a part of the wilderness experience. They may increase use, and they are likely to alter the distribution of visitor use in ways that may be harmful. The book's messages about low-impact recreation may be ignored by visitors interested primarily in route information.</p>
Displays At Trailheads	<p>Consistent, easily updated information can be made available at low cost. Messages are presented before the visitor enters the wilderness.</p>	<p>In some cases, the information comes too late for the visitor to modify behavior (for example, to bring a stove rather than rely on a fire). Visitors ready to "hit the trail" may not take the time to read the display. Visitors leave the messages behind once they leave the trailhead. Messages are often impersonal, overly simplified, and likely to be ignored or forgotten. There is no way for visitors to ask questions that might explain confusing messages.</p>

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Displays At Agency Offices	Consistent, easily updated information can be provided at low cost. Visitors may take the time to read the information if encouraged to do so by personnel or an attractive display. There may be opportunities for visitors to ask questions if they are confused or would like additional information. Messages are presented before the visitor enters the wilderness.	All visitors may not visit an agency office. In some cases, the information comes too late for the visitor to modify behavior. As with other displays, too much information may be presented. Visitors may simply overlook all but the specific information they are seeking.
Videos/DVD	Videos are attractive, entertaining, and familiar. They can be mass produced and distributed widely at relatively low cost. Complex ideas can be communicated. Confusing sections can be replayed. Information can be communicated before trips, when visitors have time to absorb messages and change their behavior.	Videos may not reach most visitors and may miss target audiences. Visitors heading into the backcountry are unlikely to take the time to view a video. Videos are expensive to modify for different areas and can quickly become outdated.
Web Site	Consistent information can be provided, at low cost, at any time. Allows for spontaneity and information can be provided to anyone, anywhere. Information can be changed and updated quickly. Access to the web is quickly becoming as ubiquitous as the telephone.	Must have a computer with internet connection to access information. Some users don't seek information by using the web.

## Personnel-Based Techniques

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Personnel At Agency Offices	Office employees are already working, so new employees don't have to be hired. Salary costs are not increased. In some places, office employees present messages personally to many visitors, allowing for questions and answers.	Many visitors do not stop at agency offices. Those who do visit may not be the types of visitors causing most of the problems. Office employees may be too busy with their other responsibilities to spend time educating visitors. Unfamiliarity with the wilderness

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Personnel At Trailheads	<p>Personal education allows the opportunity for discussion and questions. Personnel can become highly skilled because their primary function is contact with wilderness visitors. Messages can be targeted to different users, based on the employee's intuition and skill. Contact occurs outside the wilderness, but in a wildland environment. Visitors are left to enjoy the wilderness once the initial contact has been made.</p>	<p>can reduce credibility. Unless employees are trained, they may provide poor information. Visitors may be contacted too late to change certain behaviors. Many visitors may be missed if a few personnel must cover many trailheads. Visitors who begin trips early or late in the day may be missed. Costs can be high, and personnel can sit idly during slow periods.</p>
Personnel At Campgrounds	<p>Campground visitors are often receptive to contacts by campground hosts. Interpretive programs may be scheduled regularly. Personnel should be available early and late in the day, to contact visitors missed by other information centers.</p>	<p>Few campground visitors enter the backcountry. Most wilderness visitors do not use developed campgrounds. Education is likely to be only a minor part of someone's job operating a campground.</p>
Personnel At Public Meetings	<p>Audiences can be targeted, at least at certain types of public meetings. Persons attending meetings are usually particularly interested in the topic. One employee can speak to a number of potential visitors at once. Questions can be answered. Visual aids can be used to emphasize points. Written materials can be handed out so the messages can be reinforced later.</p>	<p>Only a small portion of visitors can be contacted in this manner. Practices to reduce the impact of wilderness recreation will only be a peripheral issue at many meetings.</p>
Personnel At School Programs	<p>Large numbers of people can be reached. Young people can be educated when they are still forming opinions. Topics can be covered in depth. Questions can be answered. Subsequent school programs can reinforce the message.</p>	<p>Many students who attend the programs may never enter wilderness. Many other students who later visit wilderness may never be contacted.</p>
Personnel In The Backcountry	<p>Backcountry personnel are highly knowledgeable and</p>	<p>Because recreationists are highly dispersed, many visitors</p>

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	<p>credible. They may be perceived as role models. They have frequent opportunities for demonstrations. Specific examples of inappropriate behavior and their effects can be pointed out. Backcountry personnel can answer questions. Visitors often have time to talk with them.</p>	<p>will not be contacted. Costs per contact are high, if education is the employee's primary job. Some visitors feel contact with agency representatives is intrusive in the backcountry.</p>
Interpreters	<p>Interpreters are highly skilled. Communication is very personal and often highly meaningful to the visitor. Interpreters are usually credible. Visitors are usually interested in the contact and receptive to the message. There is opportunity for questions and answers. Topics can be covered in detail.</p>	<p>Most wilderness visitors will not attend interpretive events, so most visitors are missed. Interpreters are generally more experienced with the general public than with wilderness visitors. They are usually more knowledgeable about natural and cultural history than about techniques for low-impact wilderness recreation.</p>
Outfitters	<p>Outfitters are knowledgeable and credible. They may be perceived as role models. They have frequent opportunities for demonstrations. Specific examples of inappropriate behavior and the effects can be pointed out. Outfitters can answer questions. Clients often have time to talk with them.</p>	<p>Outfitters will generally only be able to communicate and interact with their clients. Messages may not be consistent.</p>
Volunteers	<p>Volunteers bring personal interest and passion to education efforts. Volunteers may be experts or enthusiastic peers, and can function in a variety of settings and situations.</p>	<p>Volunteers require leadership and direction, the costs of which are almost always underestimated.</p>

Reference

Wilderness Visitor Education: Information About Alternative Techniques  
 Joseph E. Doucette & David N. Cole  
 Forest Service General Technical Report INT-295, 1993