

Assignment: Assessing accessibility in the museum

HIST 7970: Museum studies practicum, Fall 2019

Dr. Elijah Gaddis

Due: October 16, 4:00 p.m. as a digital file on Canvas

Overview/rationale: In our second museum visit assessment, we're going to focus on issues of access and accessibility. Most museums are theoretically intended for a broad range of the general public. We'll examine that assumption by looking at ways in which the museum accounts for accessibility in terms of its content, building, and other measures. We'll be examining both how accessibility is designed into the experience of the museum, and how successfully it actually works.

As before, you may choose any museum you'd like for this study. A list of local museums is in our syllabus. You should plan to spend some considerable portion of time at the museum. This assignment is due October 16 but you may turn it in earlier than that.

The space of the museum: exterior

1. The date, time, and place. Include the month, day of the week, time arrived, and time left.
2. The weather.
3. The physical setting
4. Note parking lots and spaces: are there clearly marked handicap accessible spots? Are they near to sidewalk with curb cuts? Do they appear to have a clear and legible path to an entrance?
5. Are there ramps, elevators, or other means of helping transport people with limited mobility from the parking lot into the museum?
6. Is there clear signage directing people into the museum? Is it functional for people with limited literacy? Is the signage clear and not obstructed?
7. Are sidewalks or other paths to the entrance clear of debris or other obstacles?

The space of the museum:interior

1. Navigation

- a. Is the entrance clearly marked? It is free of obstacles that might impede movement?
- b. Is there clear signage indicating the exhibits, activities, or other offerings of the museum? Are they legible from the seated level of a wheelchair? To someone with limited or no vision? To someone with limited literacy?
- c. Are there employees who might assist with physical navigation or instructions?

2. Exhibits

- a. Do exhibit spaces have clear paths of entrance and egress?
- b. Are exhibits designed with differently abled people in mind? Are there tactile elements? Are narratives communicable through something other than text? Are texts/objects visible from seated level?
- c. Do these exhibits communicate knowledge (written or otherwise) at a level someone without a college education could understand? (The standard for writing is anywhere from 4th-8th grades.) Is the text big enough to read from several feet away?
- d. Does the exhibit have clearly communicated themes and ideas? Can you easily pinpoint three big take aways?

Reflection

Now you should reflect on your visit overall. The above notes and comments should be largely in the moment and extemporaneous. This section should be carefully considered and polished. My suggestion is to write this section immediately after your visit as a freewrite, then come back and polish your prose and insights. There's no minimum word count or word limit, but I expect that these will be at least a couple pages.