

Best Practices for Field Days E-Tips for Environmental Educators

Summer 2009

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**Welcome** to this edition of the EE E-Tip for Field Days - the quarterly source for practical tips to raise the impact of field day programs. We want to hear your suggestions for improving this resource. Send your ideas to [Nate Meyer](#).

## EE E-TIP: Use transitions to link concepts and build meaning

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In the last EE E-Tip we mentioned that although field day presentations vary widely depending on theme, situation, and the personal style of the presenter, **the best presentations** have in common a clear connection of the activities to the overall field day theme and topics presented at the other field day stations. Making those connections can be tricky, but using **advance organizers**, as recommended in an earlier EE E-Tip, to clearly set the stage for connecting the presentation at hand to the field day's theme is a good start.

There is another essential tool for connecting ideas on a field day. **Transitions** [<http://www.ncsu.edu/project/actionagenda/pages/revisecourse/files/451%20consult%20transitions.doc>] serve two critical functions: they support advance organizers and conclusions in reiterating the relationship between the session and the field day's theme and other stations, and they bind together multiple points within the individual session. That's some heavy lifting for a few humble sentences!

The brain is always searching for ways to connect scraps of information (CITATION?). If you don't bind them together carefully, the brain will either forget them or continue trying to make sense of them instead of listening to next point. Students need structure to process and remember your information (Ham 1992, Regnier, Gross & Zimmerman 1994). An effective transition helps the listener keep track of what you have said and get prepared for where you are going. Avoid assuming the connections between topics are obvious or self-evident. In a mostly verbal setting like a field day, it can be very difficult to follow a speaker from one point to the next.

At points in your presentation when you are changing from one topic to the next, consider these techniques for **building bridges** [<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/02/>] between the topics:

- Summarize the meaning of the preceding points and preview the coming points.
- Revisit your title, objectives, or a key word between activities to reiterate their relationship to the task at hand
- Show HOW the piece relates to the whole – as part of a timeline, a geographical relationship, shared properties, joint contributors to a phenomenon, etc.
- Ask and reask a question at various points to illustrate how participants' knowledge on a topic is building.
- Pause! A good solid pause (10 seconds) clearly indicates that something is changing.
- Consider delivering your presentation from a different side of the room or angle for part of the session.
- Be specific and direct about the connection between topics. If you poll the students for guesses about the connections between the points or activities, be sure to summarize their points with your unequivocal statement of your view of the relatedness between the points.

Sometimes, a simple word or phrase can serve as a transition to **alert listeners** [http://westsidetoastmasters.com/article_reference/bridge_the_gap-speech_transitions_2005-07.html] to a change in direction. "However..." "On the other hand..." and "Meanwhile..." signal that a new idea is coming. In this case, think of transitions as signposts you find along a hiking trail. When you arrive at a junction in the trail, you want to know with confidence what direction you will go next. A verbal signpost will tell listeners, "We've been walking down this road, next we'll go this direction." **David Garvin**

[<http://www.hbs.edu/teachingandlearningcenter/in-practice/transitions.html>], from the Harvard Business School, recommends that transitions not be too abrupt so as to be jarring, or overly smooth so learners miss it altogether. Two to three sentences is enough to establish the link.

You might need to **work on your transitions** [<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/transitions.html>] if you sense that your presentation is choppy, if people ask questions about material you finished discussing several minutes ago, or you have several discrete activities within your field day presentation. A variety of **connective devices** [<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/speaking/infomod/pop13c.cfm>] can help you express the logical relationship between your ideas.

Transitions are rooted in your own understanding of the connectedness of the sections of the presentation. You must be clear in your mind how the ideas relate before you can explain this to others. If you have trouble discerning how parts of a presentation connect, maybe they don't and you should leave something out. Consider sketching out a visual depiction of the relationship between your ideas using a **concept map** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concept_map] to help clarify how the pieces fit together.

When you provide solid transitions within your field day session, your presentation will flow smoothly and feel more unified. Transitions not only reinforce the relationship between the session's activities and the field day theme, but also support the session's objectives by reminding participants how the pieces fit together. Special attention to these details of your field day presentation makes the heavy lifting become pretty lightweight.

For more information on using effective teaching methods for field day presentations, review the Use Experiential Teaching Methods section of the *Best Practices for Field Days: A Program Planning Guidebook for Organizers, Presenters, Teachers and Volunteers* - pages 61 to 73. Curriculum copies, workshop and other information are available online at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/FieldDays>.

Use the new *Best Practices for Field Days Events Calendar* to promote your field days and festivals, connect with presenters and volunteers. Learn more about the calendar and get started at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/FieldDays/Calendar/>.

Learn more about evaluating field days and water festivals with the *Best Practices for Field Days Observation Assessment Tool* online at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/FieldDays/evaltool.html>.

To learn more about the Best Practices for Field Days, read our short article in the online *Journal of Extension* <http://www.joe.org/joe/2004october/tt4.shtml>.

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References:

- Ham, S. (1992). *Environmental Interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small budgets*. Golden, CO: North American Press.
- Regnier, K., Gross, M. & Zimmerman, R. (1994) *The Interpreter's guidebook: Techniques for Programs and Presentations*. 3rd ed. University of Wisconsin Stevens Point: UW-SP Foundation Press, Inc.