

## CTAC Docent Tour Tips

**Docent Tour Goals:** The primary goals of the docent tour are to: offer opportunities for enriching and enjoyable experiences with art, and to inspire lifelong engagement with art.

**Docents:** The docent program is intended to provide you with the structure, content, and strategies that you need to guide successful tours. You are encouraged to engage your own experience, interests, and observations in your tours. In other words, we hope that our training and materials will help build your confidence as a docent guide, and that you will bring your own creative and responsive “spin” to your tours.

### **Tips for leading successful docent tours.**

Begin with a hearty welcome and introductions- introduce yourself, and greet the group

1. Start with basic etiquette in the galleries. You might suggest that we comport ourselves differently in different kinds of spaces/places... maybe give some examples. In the galleries, you are invited to look and imagine how things would feel, but without touching. (Maybe ask them to imagine how the fur of a dog feels, and then imagine how a bowl of Jello feels...) We can imagine how things feel without touching. Please don't touch the art!
2. Let the group know that this is their tour, and that you are interested in what they think about the art, and that you will be asking them questions. Let them know that each and everyone's opinion/thoughts about the art is important, even if each and every student does not have the opportunity to share their thoughts with the group. We will all learn from one another, because there is so much to talk about!
3. Remind your visitors that their opinions matter. It's their tour. Some visitors feel pressured to understand or like everything they see. It's good to empower the visitors by reminding them that it's Ok to find a work wonderful, cool, weird or downright ugly. Art is not always beautiful and admirable and straightforward. Encourage visitors to explore the reasons for their own responses to works of art.
4. People are storytelling creatures. Invite members of your group to give a new title to a work in the exhibit, and then to follow up with a story about the work. This can really loosen a group up, and help them engage, creatively and personally, with the works in an exhibit
5. Encourage visitors to ask questions, and stop you, if you walk by something that they are curious about. They might ask you questions that you can't answer. That's OKAY! Some of the best questions can be answered with more questions!
6. Additional information about a work can often offer visitors a different point of view. One important goal of art experience is to cultivate the visitor's capacity to see and understand the world from different viewpoints. You might want to identify a couple of

works in the exhibit that offered you a new perspective, either from sustained attention to it, or from additional information, such as the artist's biography, or the technical processes or materials from which it was made. You could invite your visitors to talk about a work that offered them a new perspective.

7. A little humor can help you connect with your group, and also help create an environment of openness and ease. It's always good to model your own curiosity for the visitors. The best docents are still engaged in discovery and learning as they lead tours and engage visitors.

8. One way of encouraging close looking/ seeing is to ask your guests study a work, in silence, for 2 minutes. Ask them to memorize as much as they can about the work: the size, the shapes, the colors, the materials, the textures, the imagery ECT. – then, ask the group to pivot away, so that their backs are to the work. Invite a couple of visitors, one at a time, to describe the work in as much detail as possible. You could develop variations on this memory/description game. It's good to do this early in the tour, as it encourages careful study of the works on the rest of the tour.

9. Another way to encourage analytical and sustained viewing is to invite your visitors to speculate about the process involved in creating a particular work of art. "What did the artist start with? How did she or he proceed? What were the steps in creating this work of art?" "If you were going to make a sculpture like this, how would you do it?" In the case of photograph, you might ask your visitors to imagine where the photographer was when she/he made the photograph. "Was she sitting in a chair looking up or standing on a mountain looking down? Was she very close to her subject, or very far? Ect. Where specifically was the photographer and how did he get there? Students can learn about point of view by exploring these questions.

10. After the student tours, you will lead the students into the VA Room for a hands on project. It's always good to let the students know when you approach the end of the tour. Revisiting and reviewing the themes, vocabulary, and discussions that you had on the tour is a good way to reinforce their exposure to new idea, and thus, their learning. It will also help them bring some of those ideas into the studio, where they will have the opportunity to explore through another modality.

11. You can continue to revisit these themes and ideas in the studio.

12. Share your strategies, insights and tips with the docent group so that we can continue to develop this list for the benefit of the entire group.