

Glossary of Visitor Studies Terms

Adjective checklist. Paper-and-pencil method in which the visitor is asked to check descriptive adjectives that apply to an exhibit, program, or institution.

Advance organizers. Conceptual information given to visitors to assist in pre-organizing their experience; may include overviews, outlines, simplified maps, etc. (See Screven, 1986).

Applicability gap. The failure to get into practice ideas that are generated by research and development. (See Loomis, 1988).

Attracting power. The ability of an exhibit to attract the attention of visitors. Usually measured as the percentage of visitors who stop to look at an exhibit.

Audience research. Study of actual and potential audiences of an institution through the use of a variety of methods. See Hood (1986) for a description of methods (survey, focus group, etc.).

Behavioral mapping. An observational method which uses a drawn-to-scale map to record sequences of behaviors that occur in each area of a facility. (See Bechtel, Marans, & Michelson, 1987).

Circulation path. The route actually taken by visitors through an exhibit or facility. (See Melton, 1935).

Cognitive map. A mental representation of an environment. Visitors may be asked to draw a map of the floorplan in order to determine their state of orientation or disorientation in the setting.

Conceptual orientation. Understanding the theme or subject matter of an exhibit or exhibit area. Also called "thematic" orientation. (See Griggs, 1984).

Convergent validity. Degree to which a behavioral measurement correlates with similar measures of the same concept. For example, visitors' estimation of time should correlate with the actual time they spend in an exhibit.

Demographics. The factual characteristics of the audience being studied (e.g., gender, age, socio-economic status, and residence).

Developmental evaluation. Evaluation that is conducted during pre-installation of the exhibit or during the construction phase of exhibition.

Direct observation. A behavioral measurement technique in which visitors' behavior is counted or placed in categories rather than asking individuals to self-report their behavior.

Discriminant validity. Degree to which a measurement technique produces results that discriminate between different settings or programs.

Ecological validity. Degree to which measurement devices such as surveys are related to the real environment they are supposed to represent.

Exit gradient. Concept used by Melton (1935) to explain the fact that visitors spend less time at exhibits the closer they are to an exit. Melton assumed that exits attract visitors and the strength of attraction is directly related to distance from the exit.

Field experiment. Experimental study in a real-life situation.

Feasibility study. A study to determine if a project should be undertaken. It attempts to predict such factors as visitor reactions and cost-effectiveness.

Focus group method. A method from marketing research in which a small group of consumers participates in in-depth interview focused on a particular topic or product.

Focused observation. Direct observation of visitors' behavior at a particular site or exhibit; used when intensive study of one exhibit is desired.

Formative evaluation. Evaluation whose major purpose is to improve the functioning of the exhibit. (See McNamara, 1988; Screven, 1988).

Front-end evaluation. Evaluation undertaken before an exhibit is installed or project developed; used to help establish goals and objectives of the project. (See Loomis, et al., 1988).

Goal-free evaluation. Evaluation that is shaped from the information collected; attempts to not impose evaluators' goals and objectives before the start of the evaluation. (See Wolf, 1980).

Goal-referenced evaluation. Evaluation undertaken to assess whether or not specified objectives are being met. See Screven (1975) for detailed discussion.

Holding power. A measure of time spent viewing an exhibit. Often used as a ratio of average viewing time by uncued visitors as a fraction of average viewing time of visitors who are cued (asked to study all aspects of the exhibit). See Shettel (1968).

Importance-performance analysis. A marketing research technique in which both a rating and a weighting are placed on a graph or grid to determine degree of consumer satisfaction and the importance of the factor being evaluated. (See Mullins & Spetich, 1987).

Interview. A self-report method in which visitors are verbally asked questions instead of paper-and-pencil administration.

Laboratory experiment. Experimental study conducted in a carefully controlled setting.

Landmark. A prominent feature of the environment that is easily used by visitors to find their way through a complex environment. Lynch (See Bitgood, 1987) divided environmental features into: landmarks, paths, intersections, districts, and boundaries.

Landscape immersion. Term used by Coe (1986) to describe zoo exhibitions that provide the illusion of "naturalism" to the point that visitors are perceptually immersed in the environment.

Market research. A study of consumer reactions to products and services. Attempts to answer such questions as: "Whom are we serving?" "What new audiences do we want to develop?" "How do we reach new audiences?" (See Loomis, 1987 - Chapter 4).

Mock-up. An inexpensive simulation of an exhibit or object often used during formative evaluation in order to determine its effectiveness before a final exhibit is completed.

Naturalistic evaluation. Type of goal-free, qualitative evaluation advocated by Robert Wolf (1980).

Orientation. General term that includes conceptual orientation, wayfinding, and circulation.

Post-design evaluation. Evaluation of installed exhibits. See "summative evaluation."

Post-occupancy evaluation (POE). Term used in architectural literature to mean evaluation of a building after the facility is in use. Similar to "post-design" or "summative" evaluation.

Pre-design evaluation. Another name for front-end evaluation. Takes place before the project begins.

Prototype. Another term for mock-up or model of an exhibit; often used during formative evaluation.

Psychographics. Lifestyle dimensions of individuals or groups of persons such as attitudes, values, opinions, expectations and satisfactions of visitors (See Hood, 1988).

Quasi-experimental design. Experimental study in which it is not possible to control the assignment of individuals to experimental conditions (see Cook & Campbell, 1979).

Questionnaire. Paper-and-pencil survey.

Rating scale. Survey device in which respondents are asked to judge some object, program, or other type of experience along some dimension (e.g., Excellent, Good, Neutral, Fair, Poor).

Reactivity. Situation in which some aspect of the procedure in a study influences the person under study. For example, people view exhibits longer if they know they are being observed in a study.

Reliability. Consistency or stability of behavioral measurements. Any of several types of reliability may be important: interobserver reliability, test-retest reliability, split-half reliability, alternate form, etc.

Simulation. Study that attempts to create the important conditions of a real environment in order to study people's reactions. It assumes that people respond similarly to the real situation and the simulated situation.

Survey. Self-report method that includes questionnaires, interviews, and rating scales.

Summative evaluation. Evaluation of the extent to which a project is successful, usually in terms of goals and objectives.

Tracking. Direct observation of visitor behavior throughout an exhibit area or facility. It gives a more complete picture of the visitors' behavior than does focused observation as they move through the facility.

Validity. Term which refers to the accuracy of the conclusions about measurements and results. For example, does the measurement system really measure what you think it does?