
Milwaukee Public Museum

Ancient Worlds Gallery
Front-End and Formative Evaluation

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Audience research and planning for the mission-driven world.

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Who are we?



Slover Linett is a Chicago-based research firm for cultural institutions. We help museums and arts organizations understand their audiences so they can ...

connect to more people

and connect to them more deeply.

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Overview of presentation

1. Visitor studies: a quick sketch
2. Front-end evaluation for the Ancient Worlds Gallery
3. Formative evaluation for the Ancient Worlds Gallery

Top 3 reasons a museum shouldn't do visitor studies research

1. To use visitors to resolve an institutional stalemate
2. To gather some positive quotes from visitors to use in marketing materials
3. To have visitors dictate the direction of a program, an exhibition, or the museum

Top 3 reasons a museum should do visitor studies research

1. To include the visitor voice as one of the inputs into institutional decision-making, thereby improving the “end product”
2. To keep efforts focused on the intended “end user”
3. To be accountable to funders, colleagues, and visitors

Standard and not-so-standard visitor studies practices

■ Front-end

- What do visitors know about a topic (and what misconceptions do they have)?
- What about a topic interests visitors?
- What are their needs and desires around a topic?

■ Formative

- How do visitors respond to a concept?
- How do visitors respond to a prototype of a program or product?
- How do visitors use a prototype?

■ Remedial

- How are visitors using an exhibition, and is that as intended?
- In the exhibition context, how are visitors using a product?
- What's working and what's not working?

■ Summative

- Now that the intervention is in its final state, what's the impact?
- Are the objectives being met?

Standard and not-so-standard visitor studies practices (cont.)

■ Exploratory

- Setting aside any predetermined objectives, what is the experience going on here?

■ Developmental

- What is the experience of this evolving and innovative program/product/environment?
- How are visitors and other stakeholders responding to change?
- How can change best be managed in this context?

■ Non-visitor studies

- How do non-visitors/potential visitors perceive the museum?
- What are the barriers to attending?
- What do they do instead?
- What do they need to hear or experience in order to become engaged?

FRONT-END EVALUATION

exhibition concepts & themes

- *Interviews with visitors*
- *Focus groups with seniors and teachers*

FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Phases I & II

3 digital interactives

- *Interviews and observations with visitors*

FRONT-END EVALUATION

exhibition concepts & themes

- *Interviews with visitors*
- *Focus groups with seniors and teachers*

Front-End Evaluation: Research Questions

- 1) How do adult visitors, teachers, and seniors describe their **knowledge** about ancient civilizations, and what do they cite to be the **sources of that knowledge**?
- 2) What **civilizations** do adult visitors, teachers, and seniors include in their understanding of ancient worlds?
- 3) How do adult visitors, teachers, and seniors respond to **dynamic** conceptions of history, where history is understood to be comprised of a series of changing interpretations, as opposed to a **static conception of history**?
- 4) To what extent, and in what ways, do adult visitors, teachers, and seniors **understand the six themes** as they are currently articulated?
- 5) What about the six themes is most **interesting** and perceived to be of **personal relevance** to adult visitors, teachers, and seniors, and are some themes of more interest than others?
- 6) What associations do adult visitors, teachers, and seniors have with three potential **exhibition titles**, and which do they believe fits best after learning about possible themes?

Front-End Evaluation: Methods & Participants

76 adult visitors participated over December 1 – 4, 2011:

50 in-depth interviews

- Random sampling strategy for intercepting visitors
- 54% had seen Cleopatra or had purchased tickets to it

2 focus groups with teachers

- Elementary, middle, and high school teachers; public and private
- Varying degrees of relationships with the Museum
- Diversity of subjects with curriculum connections to ancient civilizations

2 focus groups with active seniors

- From urban and suburban interfaith senior centers
- Age range = 62 – 81

Front-End Evaluation: Key Findings & Recommendations

When visitors, teachers, and seniors think of ancient civilizations, they think of:

- Egypt & Rome
- Mesoamerican and South American civilizations (including Maya, Aztec, and Inca)
- Greece
- Asia

Many teachers – and some visitors – expressed concern that some civilizations, such as Asia and North, Central, and South American, are often neglected

- *I think it's really important to ... make sure there are places for ancient Chinese culture and ancient African cultures other than in Egypt, and ancient North and South American cultures.*

Recommendation: Incorporate information about other civilizations throughout the globe during equivalent time periods and direct visitors to other related galleries in the Museum (or specific objects, such as the replica of the Rosetta Stone). The Interactive Timeline is an ideal place for the inclusion of this information.

Front-End Evaluation: Key Findings & Recommendations

CHOICE A:	Agree with A much more	Agree with A somewhat more	Have slight preference for A	Have slight preference for B	Agree with B somewhat more	Agree with B much more	CHOICE B:
History is comprised of unchanging factual events.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	History is comprised of a series of changing interpretations of events.

A large majority of respondents agreed with a more dynamic conception of history

Qualitative analysis of an open-ended follow-up question revealed that 58% have a truly “dynamic” conception of history, with a clear acknowledgement of the role of human interpretation in the understanding of past

- *Everything is always a reconstruction ... Even your own memories are being reconstructed.*
- But visitors who, for example, simply credited new discoveries as the catalyst for changing histories were not considered to have shared a “dynamic” understanding of history

Recommendation: People were VERY interested in discussing this question; find ways to allow visitors to consider and discuss questions of multiple ways to view history, as they will likely be very energized by this.

Front-End Evaluation: Key Findings & Recommendations

Visitors are interested in – and have a high self-reported knowledge about – communication and community, and are less interested in and knowledgeable about conflict and commerce

KNOWLEDGE	THEME	INTEREST
highest	Communication	high
high	Community	high
low	Construction	highest
high	Communion	lower
low	Conflict	lowest
lowest	Commerce	low

Recommendation: Be aware of the greater challenge in engaging visitors with the theme of commerce, which visitors had the hardest time imagining / articulating. Capitalize on the desire to know more about construction.

Front-End Evaluation: Key Findings & Recommendations

Visitors, seniors, and teachers expressed strong desire for the Museum to help them make connections to their own (and their students') present-day lives

They are interested in how the ongoing legacy of ancient civilizations impacts them today. Some participants gave examples of such connections, including architecture in Milwaukee, and modern day governmental structures and documents.

They also made comparison between ancient and contemporary developments in communication.

- *With my students, because they're always going, "Why are we studying something 10,000 years ago?" try to show them the connection between each of these kingdoms, empires, et cetera and today in their everyday life because otherwise it doesn't make any sense to them.*

Recommendation: Highlight such connections within the exhibition itself and/or through programming.

FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Phases I & II

3 digital interactives

- *Interviews and observations with visitors*

Formative Evaluation: Methods & Participants

67 social groups participated in semi-structured interviews including cued observations and think-alouds

Phase I

- April 21 – 23, 2012
- 30 social groups
- 59 adults
- 14 children under 18

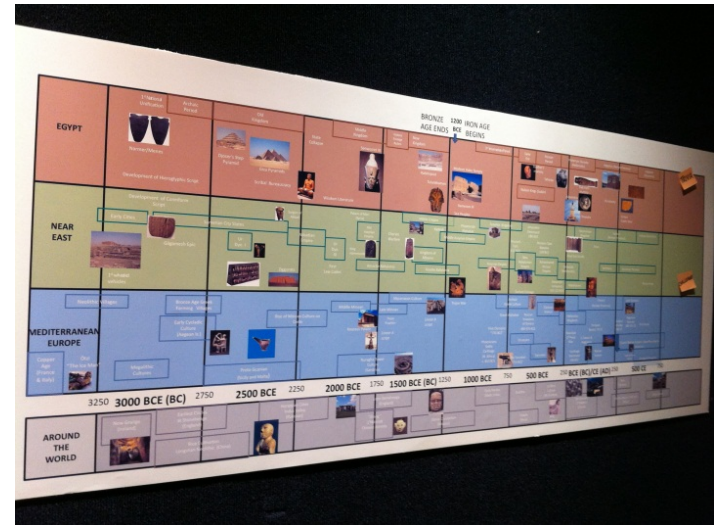
Phase II

- November 2 – 4, 2012
- 37 social groups
- 70 adults
- 31 children under 18

Formative Evaluation: The Interactives & Their Goals

Interactive Timeline

- Visitors grasp the overall development of major cultural trends of the geographic and chronological span covered by the exhibition.
- Visitors learn what was taking place with cultures in other parts of the world simultaneous to the cultures and empires represented in the exhibition.
- Visitors will be able to navigate the timeline to follow their own interests and gain knowledge they seek without being overwhelmed by space dedicated to information that does not interest them.



Formative Evaluation: The Interactives & Their Goals

Maps of Empires Video

- Visitors understand that the political boundaries in the ancient Mediterranean world were fluid and constantly shifting, and that the story is much more complex than simply the Kingdom of Egypt and the Roman Empire.



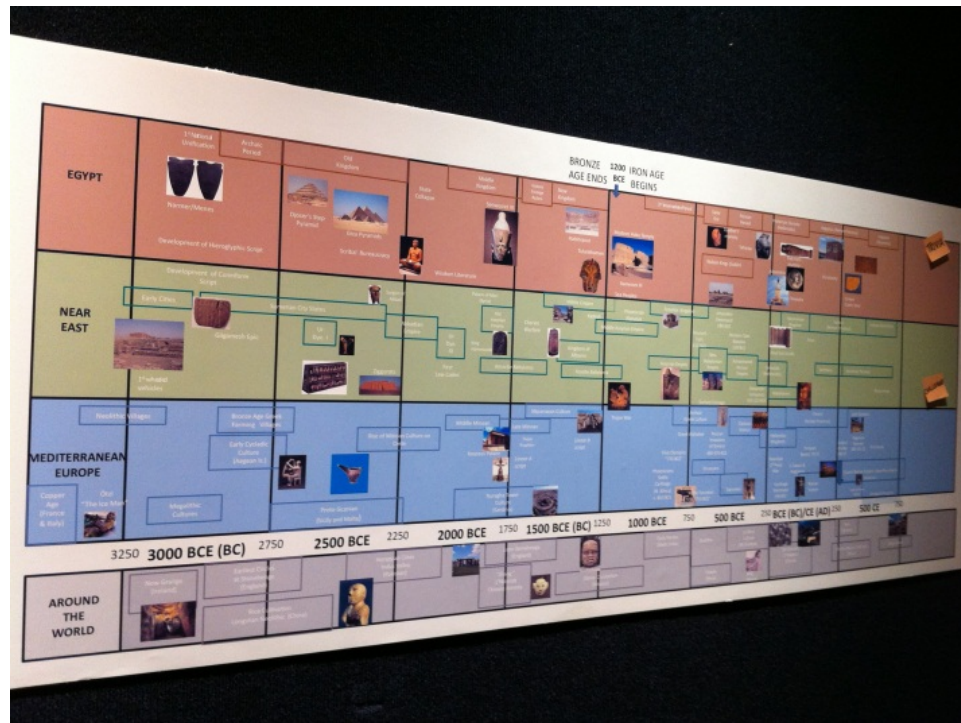
Formative Evaluation: The Interactives & Their Goals

Temple Fly-Through Video & Interactive

- Visitors gain a sense of the enormity and complexity of the temple's scale and recognize that the model is only one small part of a larger whole.
- Visitors will be able to navigate the interactive element to follow their own interests and gain knowledge (such as a room's purpose or why columns looked a certain way).



Formative Evaluation – Interactive Timeline: Key Findings & Recommendations



Formative Evaluation – Interactive Timeline: Key Findings & Recommendations

Combine the game and informational versions, allowing visitors to move between the two

In Phase I, visitors responded to two versions of the Timeline

- *The game interests me more; it's more interactive. But I want to dig deeper.*
- *I like the [game version]; it's a test. Use the other version to find out about it, and then do this one as a test.*

Visitors wanted to be able to be able to get the game answer and/or exit the game at any time

- *Have an "I give up" option, or double-tap to get the answer. Have an option so that you don't have to play it.*

Recommendation: For Phase II, the team developed a concept design that combined the two.

Formative Evaluation – Interactive Timeline: Key Findings & Recommendations

Design it for adults

Museum visitors (those interviewed at the MPM and museum visitors generally) tend to think of anything interactive as being “for kids”

- *Kids would like the game; they like iPads.*
- *I need to know it's not for kids.*

Recommendation: Choose adult-friendly and sophisticated designs for this interactive, as well as the others. Kids will automatically engage in something interactive, but adults need subtle visual cues to serve as invitations.

Formative Evaluation – Interactive Timeline: Key Findings & Recommendations

Enable visitors to filter content based on personal interests

Visitors felt overwhelmed by the amount of information on the timeline and the combination of both images and text

- *There's a lot on here. With the pictures and writing it's too much to see. I'd have it more organized and less like a collage.*

Without being specifically asked about it, visitors were eager to share with the researcher and others in their group which kinds of information most interested them

- *I want in-depth information on what interests me specifically. I like weapons and warfare. She likes mythology.*

Recommendation:

- Filter by one of the 4 geographic regions (still seeing the full span of time)
- Filter by one of the 500-year time periods (still seeing all 4 geographic regions)
- Filter by one of the exhibition themes (possibly for the entire timeline)

Formative Evaluation – Maps of Empires Video: Key Findings & Recommendations



Formative Evaluation – Maps of Empires Video: Key Findings & Recommendations

Either loop the video or increase interactivity

In Phase I, visitors either ...

1) wanted more detail and information about what they were seeing, often suggesting ideas for making it more interactive

- *Some I'm not familiar with. I want to know their times. Who crowded out who? Did they overlap, merge, or develop on their own? Was it all war all the time?*

... OR ...

2) passively watched the video while apparently absorbing the larger message without too much frustration

- *I saw things I learned in history class in a new way. I'm not remembering facts – just a better comprehension; a full feel. It's deeper learning because you forget facts. You're visually learning that there was constant fluctuation.*

Recommendation: Either create it as a looping video, acknowledging that visitors will not recognize many of the names of empires shown but will absorb the larger message about the shifting nature of empires, or create ways visitors can learn more through increased interactive options.

Formative Evaluation – Maps of Empires Video: Key Findings & Recommendations

Include greater detail and more accuracy than the online “Maps of War” example, without losing the sense of movement and expansion

The team decided to create a looping video, increase representation of lesser-known empires, and eliminate misleading patterns of expansion

When shown the “Maps of War” example and a PowerPoint prototype, visitors appreciated the accuracy and representativeness of the PowerPoint version, and many expressed a desire for some kind of compromise so that the movement and visualization of expansion was not lost

- *I like [the PowerPoint version]. Empires don't just disappear and it shows all that is going on, not just one empire. The Hittites are still there.*
- *I like the expanding one but make it more accurate. Moving gives the impression it's happening over time.*

Recommendation: If an approach more like fading is necessary to show accuracy, come as close to the kind of gradual movement and expansion depicted in Maps of War as possible.

Formative Evaluation – Temple Fly-Through Video & Interactive: Key Findings & Recommendations



Formative Evaluation – Temple Fly-Through Video & Interactive: Key Findings & Recommendations

Add informational hot spots and visual references to construction in the interactive

Many visitors suggested adding people (or construction materials) to the interactive version, both for the sense of scale and life this would add, but also to communicate that it is under construction, which most did not understand

- *I want to see people doing stuff. Artists painting or have materials laying around.*
- *You need little guys working in the video, too, or it looks unfinished. And it's a totally empty building.*

Many visitors wanted their questions answered by accessing a hot spots

- *How are you supposed to get your information – purely visually? I want to see a glowy thing on an image I can click and then for it to tell me what the hieroglyphics say.*
- *I want text on the screen, so you can walk up and it says, "This was the throne room."*

Recommendation: Add references to construction within the interactive that are consistent with those in the model in order to reiterate that the digital model depicts a moment when the temple was under construction. Some of these references or figures – in addition to existing features such as hieroglyphs, columns, etc – could contain hot spots so visitors could pursue their existing curiosity.

Formative Evaluation – Temple Fly-Through Video & Interactive: Key Findings & Recommendations

Add an online social media component for visitors to upload their tourist photos of places included in the exhibition

A visitor shared photos on his phone from his own visit to the temple of Medinet Habu

- Showing his girlfriend the amount of color that could be seen today on the temple columns
- He also showed her photos of him standing before pyramids and other structures shown on the timeline mock-up, with very similar vantage points

During front-end interviews, a number of visitors spontaneously shared their personal stories of travel to modern sites and ruins from ancient civilizations

- Traveling was one of the sources of knowledge they cited for their prior knowledge of these ancient civilizations and the six exhibition themes
- And several visitors who had never been able to travel to these parts of the world, shared their aspirations to one day do so

Recommendation: Capitalize on the natural instinct for visitors to 1) imagine what these locations look like now, and 2) to share first-hand accounts and photos related to these locations and monuments. Use an online social media platform, such as the MPM's Facebook page or a Flickr or Instagram group, to allow visitors to share their travel photos to sites within the ancient civilizations and comment upon them. Direct exhibition visitors to the site, and site visitors to the exhibition.

Final Thoughts and Q&A
