

Effectively Using Site Visits

Some Preliminary Questions for Faculty:

When in the arc of the semester will the site visit take place: beginning, middle, or end?

Will that timeline benefit the overall objectives of the visit?

Will the site visit introduce a concept? Help frame a project? Provide a capstone?

Does the visit teach a specific lesson, or open up a field for student research?

What kind of guidance do my students need?

What kind of preparatory work needs to be done before the visit? What concepts do my students need to know in advance?

Will I be there when my students make the trip?

Will the visit be done in a large group (the entire class), in smaller groups (2-4), or individually?

Will the visit take place during class time? Outside of class? Both?

Have I completed the necessary paperwork, including collecting signed permission slips for students under 18 years old (particularly important for first-year courses!)

What kinds of writing assignments help facilitate place-based learning?

Some Low-stakes Assignments:

Ask students to write a paragraph in response to important questions:

Before the Site Visit:

What aspects of the site visit are you most curious about? Why? What questions do you have about the subject matter of the trip?

What do you expect to gain from this experience? How will the trip relate to our course goals? Be specific.

What opportunities for interaction with [specific subject matter] do you anticipate the trip will offer?

During the Site Visit:

What stands out to you during the experience? Take notes, and submit them typed and in full sentences at the start of our next class.

Use the distributed question sheet to keep track of information from the site visit. You [or your group] must submit a completed sheet by the start of our next class.

After the Site Visit:

Did the field trip engage your interest as you anticipated? What answers did you find for the questions you had?

What about the trip helped you learn about [course topic]? What do you now understand about [key concept from your course]? What didn't work? Why?

How did the site visit help to improve your understanding of [key concepts] or the larger goals of the course? If it did not, why do you think that was the case?

If you were to design a virtual tour of the subject of this field trip, what would you change or expand to improve the learning you gained from this experience?

Resources for Virtual Site Visits:

Ranging from simple photo tours to extremely detailed, interactive, multimedia tours, virtual site visits offer the benefits in terms of time and cost, and there are some that can provide more detailed experiences than would be available in person.

A Small Sample:

The Tenement Museum Virtual Tour and Audio Tour:
http://www.tenement.org/Virtual_Tour/index_virtual.html

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History: <http://www.mnh.si.edu/panoramas/#>

MoMA Van Gogh exhibit that lets you zoom in much more than you could in person:
<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2008/vangoghnight/>

The Nine Planets offers photos and information, although no tour per se:
<http://seds.org/more/links/nine-planets-redirect/> or <http://nineplanets.org/>

PBS's "A Walk Around Brooklyn" offers an interactive map of Brooklyn history by old towns: <http://www.thirteen.org/brooklyn/i-movie.html>

Google Maps allows for many possibilities particularly in the satellite view, and especially when you drag the little orange man to the spot on the map you want to see at street level: <http://maps.google.com/>

A somewhat helpful checklist to help you evaluate the use of a virtual tour:
<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/evaltour.html>

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