

3. Identification signs

Even when signs are helpful in pointing patients in the right direction, it is often the case that the patient does not realize when the destination has been reached, due to lack of identification signs.

Other observations from this study are that the staff is ineffective in giving useful directions to patients and visitors, and that color coding is an ineffective wayfinding device if not used consistently.

Carpman suggests design elements to help visitors in wayfinding. For example, the layout of the building will have an effect on wayfinding. Another suggestion is that designers make use of landmarks which provide opportunities to display artwork and form attractive cues to patient and visitor location within the building.

“Factors that Enhance Effectiveness of Visitor Maps”

J. F. Talbot, R. Kaplan, R. E. Kuo, & S. Kaplan (1993)
Environment and Behavior, 25 (3), 743-760.

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Introduction

Wayfinding is an important aspect in a museum visit. The quality of the visitor experience can be altered dramatically based solely on the museum's use of effective wayfinding aids. This is why the museum should consider carefully the planning of useful visitor maps.

“Visitor maps are characteristically a rich source of information, but the very richness often gets in the way of communicating the basic intent of the map.” Museum staff may have no problems understanding these maps, but it is the visitor who finds these information-rich maps confusing. The authors suggest simplifying visitor maps to solve the problem. Three profound advantages result from simplification: (1) “One can take in more without being overwhelmed; (2) One can achieve a hierarchical perspective, or see the bigger picture; and (3) One can make transformations of the material, or manipulate it, to meet a variety of needs.”

This research took the theoretically grounded principles on handout maps and focused on the essential role of simplicity. Extensions to the theory were made:

- (1) Novice visitors are overwhelmed by large amounts of information. It is essential to minimize the amount of information and the degree of detail.
- (2) Minimize the amount of mental processing required to understand the map; immediate comprehension is important.

- (3) Handout maps need to facilitate comprehension of spatial relationships. Basic information should be the easiest to find.

The Studies

There were two phases to this study. Phase 1, Study 1 involved an entry survey and visitor use of one of three maps (upper floor only) which the visitor rated. In Phase 1, Study 2, the visitor picked one of three maps (same as Phase 1, Study 1) and was given specific map tasks (locating specific destinations or drawing a route to the parking lot on the handout map). In Phase 2, Study 1, visitors were given an entry survey and rated one of two maps (both floors of museum). In Phase 2, Study 2, visitors were given an exit survey and rated one of two maps (same as Phase 2, Study 1). Phase 1 included 148 visitors and 37 workers (security staff and information desk volunteers) and Phase 2 had over 500 visitor participants.

The five different maps that were used had some features in common. Shading was used to communicate that a common theme linked the works in adjacent galleries. Maps that were directly compared were of the same size and used identical labels to identify the collections. In addition, nonessential architectural details were omitted, office names were dropped and labels for areas were placed directly on those spaces rather than in a separate list on the side.

Results and Discussion

Reaction to the simplified maps was positive. Some participants commented that the lack of detail was an advantage. The results of the rating scales used in the survey (5-point scale, 5 = very much) revealed that participants rated the maps as being “interesting,” “understandable,” and “informative” (the mean range between each study 3.7 and 4.0) and as being not at all “confusing,” “overwhelming,” or “hard to follow” (means 1.5 - 1.7). Participants also rated that the test maps gave a good sense of where to find things in the museum and most places that were identified were easy to find (means between 4.1 and 4.4). Finding the stairs and the exit were the only two problems (both means 3.3). The performance tasks also supported the need for simplicity on maps and illustrated the confusion that can be caused by unnecessary detail.

The results of this study indicate the importance of simplicity in handout maps. Visitors who used the handout map indicated that their expectations of the museum visit were enhanced. Forty-one percent said they looked forward more to the visit; 45% felt more comfortable, and 50% said they felt more oriented after looking at the map. This data shows that effective handout maps allow visitors to experience fewer wayfinding difficulties resulting in more satisfying museum experiences.