

Competencies

of the museum guide in art and history museums

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Or:

Mark Schep, Carla van Boxtel & Julia Noordegraaf (2017). *Competencies of museum guides*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.

This list is the result of literature study, and of a consult amongst museum guides, educators and teacher trainers in the disciplines of history and art. These experts believe that these 45 competencies are required by guides in museums of art and history. Sixteen of the competencies are believed to be basic competencies of museum guides. These sixteen competencies are here made red.

The competencies are divided into four main areas:

Area 1

Handling the group within the museum environment

Museum guides are enthusiastic and flexible, are open, able to connect with the group and assess a group, are sensitive to the group dynamic and what the group wants, and can adapt in response to those needs. Museum guides take the lead, protect the objects and maintain an overview of the group.

Area 2

Communication skills

Museum guides are excellent communicators, both verbally and non-verbally. They can initiate and facilitate discussion. They speak clearly, listen closely, and can use the input of the group to enrich the dialogue.

Area 3

Knowledge and pedagogy

Museum guides possess a broad general historical, cultural and art historical knowledge, knowledge of the collection, and are acquainted with the education curriculum. They are able to use this knowledge flexibly to convey information about objects, tell stories, and respond to students' questions. Museum guides can encourage pupils to interact with objects in a meaningful way, and inspire them to observe objects closely.

Area 4

Professionalism

Museum guides are reliable and represent the museum. They can collaborate with colleagues and visiting teachers. Museum guides are able to reflect on their performance, are open to giving and receiving feedback, and actively work on developing their skills as a museum guide.

* In this text, the term 'museum guide' refers to both a man, and a woman.

For the sake of readability 'he'/'his' is used, which can also be construed as 'she'/'her'.



Area 1

Handling the group within the museum environment

- 1 Open attitude** The museum guide is relaxed, approachable, and has an open attitude towards the group and the diversity of persons and views within the group.
- 2 Making an immediate rapport** The museum guide is capable of establishing an immediate rapport with the group, is able to make the students feel at ease, and maintains this during the tour.
- 3 Assessing the group** The museum guide has knowledge about the target group and can make an estimation of the interest, expectations, and level of the group by asking questions and 'reading' their non-verbal communication.
- 4 Interest in the group** The museum guide takes the students seriously and shows interest in the ideas, questions, and backgrounds of the students.
- 5 Creating a safe environment** The museum guide is capable of creating a safe learning environment in which students can participate in an equal way and in which their input is dealt with in a respectful way.
- 6 Creating a positive and relaxed atmosphere** The museum guide is able to create a relaxed and positive atmosphere, for example, by using humor.
- 7 Enthusiastic and energetic** The museum guide is energetic and enthusiastic about the things he or she tells, and knows how to kindle enthusiasm in the students.
- 8 Sensitive to the group dynamics** The museum guide has a certain sensitivity for the group dynamic and is capable of adjusting his behavior to the situation.
- 9 Coping with resistance** The museum guide knows how to cope with resistance or inappropriate remarks and tries to use these remarks to enrich the dialogue.
- 10 Taking the lead** The museum guide takes the lead and is clear about the program, rules, and expectations towards the group, without putting himself above the group.
- 11 Protecting the objects** The museum guide is consciously aware of the safety of the objects and corrects possibly dangerous behavior of the students.
- 12 Time management** The museum guide is capable of using the time efficiently, and the tour has a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- 13 Awareness of the environment and positioning** The museum guide is flexible and capable of dealing with the busyness in the museum. The guide positions himself and the group in front of the object in a way such that all students can see the object without blocking the passage for other visitors.
- 14 Keeping an overview** The museum guide keeps an overview of the group, makes sure all students are following, and ensures the students do not bother other visitors.

Area 2

Communication skills

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| 15 | Clear talk The museum guide speaks clearly, audibly, and with an appropriate intonation. |
| 16 | Vocalization and expression The museum guide breathes quietly, speaks with a pleasant timbre, and is able to engage the students through his intonation, rhythm, timing, and mimics. The guide knows how to use his voice without damaging it. |
| 17 | Careful listening The museum guide listens carefully and sincerely and uses the input of the group to enrich the dialog. |
| 18 | Linguistic skills and use of language The museum guide is linguistically skilled, has an extensive general and specialized vocabulary, and adjusts his use of language to the level and perceptions of the students. |
| 19 | Conversation techniques The museum guide is skilled in starting and facilitating a conversation in different ways and is capable of encouraging participation of the students. |
| 20 | Non-verbal communication The museum guide gives clear non-verbal cues to the students, and the non-verbal communication (e.g., body language, mimics, posture) is in line with the verbal communication. |
| 21 | Awareness of one's own communication The museum guide is aware of his own posture, use of voice, and body language and is capable of adjusting this to the situation. |

Area 3

Knowledge and pedagogy

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- 22 Use of knowledge** The museum guide has general knowledge of culture, art history, and history and is capable of using this knowledge in a flexible way, tailored to different groups, to give meaning to objects, contextualize objects, make connections, and to answer questions.
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- 23 Use of curricular knowledge** The museum guide has knowledge about the curriculum and is capable of using this knowledge to connect the tour to the curriculum.
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- 24 Use of knowledge of the collection** The museum guide has knowledge about the collection and is capable of using this knowledge in a flexible way to give meaning to objects, contextualize objects, make connections, and to answer questions.
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- 25 Creating a common thread** The museum guide uses his knowledge to create a common thread in the tour.
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- 26 Stimulate an open attitude** The museum guide is capable of inspiring the students to have an open attitude towards new experiences.
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- 27 Explaining** The museum guide is capable of translating his knowledge to the level and perceptions of the target group and ensures everyone's understanding.
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- 28 Storytelling** The museum guide is capable of telling stories in relation to an object in an engaging way.
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- 29 Asking questions** The museum guide is capable of using questions to activate the knowledge of the students, to give room for different perspectives, and (depending on the goals) to prompt students to create associations, reason, think out loud, analyze, contextualize, interpret, reflect, and use their imagination.
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- 30 Stimulate students to carefully look** The museum guide is able to let students carefully look at an object and encourages them to actively make meaning of that object.
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- 31 Contextualizing objects** The museum guide finds a balance between looking at objects and contextualizing them.
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- 32 Using objects as a window** The museum guide can use an object as a window to a historical period or event.
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- 33 Using objects for critical analyses** The museum guide can use objects to critically analyze how art and history are represented and interpreted.
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- 34 Usage of learning activities** The museum guide uses learning activities and exercises that are fitted to a certain group, the moment, and the object and (in this way) provides for variation.
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- 35 Balance between interaction and explaining** The museum guide searches for a balance between explaining and interaction and ensures that there are enough opportunities for the students to experience art and history.
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Area 4

Professionalism

- 36 Cooperation with other guides** The museum guide consults with other guides about the route and takes other guides into account during the tour.
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- 37 Cooperation with security guards** The museum guide communicates (if necessary) with security guards and follows their instructions.
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- 38 Cooperation with teachers** The museum guide adjusts the program with the visiting teacher and gives the teacher an appropriate role during the tour.
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- 39 Reliability** The museum guide is reliable, loyal, punctual, sticks to the agreements made with the museum, and gives the tours in accordance with the designed program.
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- 40 Flexibility** The museum guide is flexible and has an open attitude towards change.
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- 41 Represent the museum** The museum guide is aware of his role as an ambassador of the museum and behaves accordingly.
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- 42 Reflecting on personal performance** The museum guide reflects on his own practices and is aware of his own strengths and areas for improvement.
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- 43 Giving and receiving feedback** The museum guide is open to feedback, uses this feedback to improve, and is willing to give feedback to other guides (and educators).
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- 44 Professional development** The museum guide uses the opportunities for professional development offered by the museum and is actively looking for ways to develop his competencies.
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- 45 Contribute to improving tours** The museum guide critically reflects on tours and uses this reflection and his knowledge of pedagogy to contribute to redesigning a program.
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