

A Guide to Field Trip Planning for Pre-service Teachers: From the Perspective of a Field Trip Destination

Introduction

Planning a field trip can be a cause for anxiety. In cases involving a destination that requires a reservation, you don't have to do *all* of the work. Most destinations have personnel who will work with you to maximize your chances for success. They have the flexibility to work with you as a partner to meet your instructional goals and objectives. Take advantage of them!

This guide was drafted by the education staff at the Falls of the Ohio State Park and reviewed by peers at other destination sites in the Louisville area. It lists different issues that are concerns to both educators and field trip destination personnel. Flip through each section and discover how you can avoid the pitfalls caused by the lack of preparedness.

1. Curriculum / instruction design - does the field trip fit?

A. What is the rationale for going out of your classroom?

This may seem self-evident, but before taking your students out of the classroom, make sure the destination is tied in to your current design for instruction. Discuss with an educator at the destination site your specific goals and objectives. That will enable them to gear any programs, activity sheets, etc. to best fit your needs. *What do you want your students to "get" out of their visit?*

B. Pre-visit and post-visit materials

Many field trip sites have materials designed to help your students familiarize themselves with a site. This includes museums, arts groups, theaters, etc. Take advantage of the lessons and activities that can prime your students to make the trip an opportunity to learn. When you schedule your visit, ask what material is available.

Post-visit material can extend the benefit of the trip after you are back in the classroom. Lessons and activities can reinforce what was introduced on the field trip.

2. Making a Reservation

A. Is a reservation necessary?

Museums, parks, theaters, historic sites, etc. all require school groups to plan their visit. Assume your destination requires a reservation. Call the site to inquire. You can also ask other teachers or the principal at your school.

B. Site orientations

Most sites will offer teacher orientations at no charge. This is your opportunity to learn the important *where* questions and double check the *who*, *what* and *how*:

Where are the rest rooms, activity areas (if any), lunch or picnic areas, gift shop (if relevant)?

Where do the buses drop off and pick up the students?

Who meets our group?

What should we do first or what schedule do we follow?

How long is our visit?

Are there any specific recommendations to make the trip run smoothly?

3. Transportation

A. Buses vs. cars

Schools have different systems to organize field trips on buses. Some use outside contractors. If you are using a bus that also does daily runs, double-check the driver's schedule. Many have to be back at school by a specific time. Although there can be unforeseen problems like a breakdown, most problems

involve confusion on when they are to pick up students at the school or return them afterwards. These problems can wreak havoc with a carefully planned field trip.

Cars are generally an issue with small group and private schools. While bus parking is usually free, cars might have to pay at some places. Additionally, it may be less practical to drop off students in a "convoy" of cars. Inquire when making a reservation.

B. Loading and unloading students

Many destinations have a specific place to drop off and pick up students. Sometimes they are not the same spot. If the information is not provided with a confirmation packet, don't be afraid to ask!

C. Crossing state lines

Inquire about crossing state lines for field trips, because some bus companies charge higher fees or there may be additional paperwork.

4. School paperwork

A. Permission slips

This is an issue for the teacher at the school and is not dealt with by the destination sites. Some sites may have liability release forms for special activities (i.e. a class volunteering to pick up trash for the Ohio River Sweep).

B. Children's health issues / medication on field trip

Are any students on medication or do they have allergies? Are the students going to be in an area where they can get a reaction (i.e. poison ivy / bee stings)? Eating lunch outside in the fall is the perfect opportunity to meet the pesky yellow jacket "up-close and personal." Review children's allergies and health concerns especially if the field trip is to an outdoor venue.

Field trips should not interrupt children's medicine schedule. Uncertain if a water fountain is available? Pack a small water bottle. Will a child need to eat a snack at a certain time? Where will they be? Inform the staff at your destination (preferably before you get there) if a diabetic child will need to eat something (which is typically a light mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack). Some teachers bring snacks such as crackers if lunch is going to be later than usual. If you find yourself in a "no food" gallery, when a student has a low blood sugar reaction, go to a designated place such as a bench. You can ask for the closest first aid station.

5. Payment

A. Know your fees

Fees for students, teachers and chaperons vary widely. To avoid confusion, be sure to have the fee schedule before finalizing your reservation. Some may require advance payment. Fees may change over the years, so make sure the information is up-to-date.

B. Check, credit card or cash?

The typical method of payment by schools is a check issued by the bookkeeper. Sometimes the check is drafted that morning, or a week in advance. Student absences are to be expected. How will you handle a change in number if the check is already written? Some places can accept payment with a credit card. Check when you make the reservation.

C. Billing

Some schools can only pay through an invoice or bill. Check with your destination when you make the reservation to see how they handle billing.

D. Free and reduced fees

Some destinations can offer free admission or reduced admission if the large majority of the students or on the free or reduced lunch program. Ask. Some organizations may have corporate sponsors to help cover these costs.

6. Chaperons

A. Purpose

Chaperons ease the teacher's burden by giving a parent / teacher's aide a smaller number of students with which to work. Chaperons are expected to monitor their student group while they are at the destination site. If there are activity sheets, chaperons may assist their students with them.

Most sites require supervision of students at *all times*, including inside a gift shop. Even high school students *must* have chaperons!

B. Admission policies

Most destination sites have a ratio of adults to students who are admitted for no charge or at a discount. When making a reservation, find out their policy and if there is an admissions discount.

C. Name tags

Name tags are a good idea for chaperons, especially with older students when in some instances it is difficult to tell them apart. If some chaperons decide to break away to smoke or have a conversation, the identification will make it easy for site staff to determine a chaperon versus a regular visitor.

7. Students with disabilities

The American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) stipulates access for handicapped visitors in any public building. This is not a problem in new buildings, but can be when visiting historical structures and the out-of-doors. It is very important that student handicaps are discussed with the staff at the destination site at the time your reservation is made.

A. Mobility

If you have students in wheelchairs or walkers, inquire about access. Are there automatic doors? Are restrooms easily accessible? Is there any place that the group will be going that someone in a wheelchair cannot easily go? If you are going to be outside, will a wheelchair be usable?

B. Hearing

If you have students that are hearing impaired, consider their needs. If you are doing a special program, do you have a sign language translator or do you need to get one? If you are seeing an AV program, is there closed caption available?

C. Vision

If you have visually impaired students, make sure the destination site is made aware when you make the reservation. Consider making requests for sitting close, having a program with audio description or other accommodations. Destination sites will work with you to plan your visit and programs.

8. Meals and trash

A. Picnics

Inquire to determine if picnic areas are available and need to be reserved (most of the time they do). It is important to stay on schedule, since there may be another group picnicking in the same area when you are through.

Yellow jackets may be a problem in the autumn. Students that are allergic to bees should not bring a sugar-sweetened beverage or other strongly scented foods that attract them. At the very least, they should watch what they eat and *keep their beverage covered* when not drinking!

B. Trash

Be sure that each student picks up their trash and deposits it in a proper receptacle. This is especially important on a windy day. If there are inadequate numbers of trash cans, please have students pack out their trash.

Some parks have a carry-in / carry-out policy. This means that there are no trash cans. Groups *must* carry their trash back to school. In these cases, it is best to bring a supply of trash bags and ties to use. Don't overfill the bags and make them too heavy to carry.

If there are receptacles for glass and aluminum containers, please use them. For safety, students should not bring any glass containers (bottles or jars) with their lunches.

There is often a tremendous amount of food wasted by students who throw it away unopened. Consider bringing a "Kentucky Harvest" box to put uneaten fruit, chips, etc. after lunch and give it away after the field trip.

C. Indoor facilities

Some sites have indoor areas designated for lunch. These are almost always reserved in advance. A fee may be charged to cover the cost of maintenance. The same rules apply as with a picnic area – without the wind and yellow jackets to worry about!

D. Restaurants

Most restaurants (including fast food) require a reservation if you are bringing 20 or more students. This will enable them to have the staff, food and seating for your group. It will also make it possible to have food served in a timely manner. Some may prefer an advanced order to have the food on-hand at a designated time. Be sure you are there on time!

E. Students with illness

Students with a variety of chronic illnesses may be participating in the experience. Some have unique needs that must be addressed. While confidentiality may be important, some information should be provided to the staff at the destination site. For an example, diabetic students have special needs. Make sure adequate snacks are available (fruit, granola bar, cookie, etc.) and that there is a designated location they can go to eat at the proper time. All teachers should have a basic understanding of the medical needs of their chronically ill students!

9. Inclement weather / Cancellations

A. Cancellation policies

Cancellation policies vary from place to place. Find out what it is when you make the reservation. Some places will charge a fee if cancellation procedures are not followed. Careful planning will minimize the need for cancellation. Check on dates for student conference and professional development, mandatory testing, holidays, and other events planned at the beginning of the school year. Have a copy of your school's schedule on hand when you make a reservation!

B. Snow days

Snowy conditions constitute a valid cancellation and your group should not be billed. Contact the destination to reschedule (if practical).

C. Rain, cold, blustery weather

If you are going to be outside, have plans for inclement weather. Make sure that your students are dressed appropriately. Bring large plastic trash bags to improvise as ponchos for children that do not have umbrellas or rain coats. Find out if there is an alternative area or activity where appropriate. What is the cancellation policy for inclement weather?

D. Severe storms

Heavy thunderstorms and the risk of tornadoes are possible March through the summer. Does the destination site have a tornado shelter? Ask about their severe weather emergency plans. Think about where you will be during your field trip and your options.

10. Clothes & shoes

A. Proper dress for the destination

Students (and adults) should dress appropriately for the destination. Are they going to be hiking in the woods, rock climbing or cave exploring? Are they going to be in cold or hot temperatures?

B. Footwear

Footwear is primarily a concern for hiking, especially in areas with rocks, debris, poison ivy or chiggers! Sandals offer no protection and can be dangerous since they are usually loosely fitted and may slip. Are blisters a concern? Choice of footwear can lead to a comfortable or a painful experience for students.

C. Umbrella or raincoat?

Umbrellas are good for short jaunts between the bus and a building. They are less effective for hikes because they can affect the balance of the user on an uneven walking surface. They are even worse if it is windy. Raincoats or ponchos are more effective for outdoor activities on a blustery day. Large trash bags make good emergency ponchos.

11. Scheduling your trip

Sometimes it is difficult to schedule a trip when the destination focus is best suited to your instruction. For instance, the best time to see the fossil beds is in the autumn, but you may not be covering fossils until the mid winter or spring when the fossil beds are under water. Does the site offer alternatives, such as indoor fossil labs? There may be a temporary exhibit that covers a theme that will be taught after the exhibit is gone.

A. How far in advance?

Some programs and places are notorious for filling up their schedule in advance. The Falls of the Ohio has a 10 week period in the autumn when more schools want to come than can be accommodated. September and October morning time slots are often filled before the end of the previous school year.

As a general rule, it is best to call to schedule your visit as early as possible. In many cases, that means calling six or eight months in advance. Scheduling a visit for the following year is not unusual. This tends to be important for short seasonal venues and for popular temporary exhibits. Make sure you tell the administrators about the trip. Occasionally teachers resign, retire, take extended sick leave, etc. and do not tell anyone about the trip. The confirmation packet arrives and no one looks at it. The destination calls the school and no one knows about the trip. Sounds strange, but this happens more often than you would like to believe!

May is a popular month for field trips tied in to the end of the school year. Schedule these field trips as early in the school year as possible.

B. Program schedules

Many museums, parks, theaters, etc. have program changes throughout the year. Request a program schedule as early as possible. Most provide scheduling guides that are geared for the school year.

C. Time zones and daylight savings time

Since the Eastern and Central Time Zone boundary lies about 60 to 100 miles south and west of Louisville, that might be a source of confusion for excursions to Mammoth Cave, etc. Schools and field trip destinations may not be in the same time zone!

12. Group Size

One of the decisions that must be made early in the plan is the determination of many how people are going? Will it be one class, a team or the entire grade? If more than one teacher is involved, who will be the lead teacher and how will the trip be coordinated? On occasion, an entire school visits a destination. Make sure they can handle those numbers when you first take to the site.

How many students and chaperons are you bringing? It is amazing how many teachers do not know! It slows down the process of getting the groups started at the site and can lead to delays that are both embarrassing and easily avoided.

13. Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy can rear its head in strange ways. For instance, at Indiana State Park & Reservoir properties, if you pay with a check, you must show your driver's license - even if it was drafted at the

school! There are, no doubt, other examples. Unfortunately, they are beyond the control of the receptionists and cashiers. Being prepared will save you frustration. When you make the reservation, ask if there are any details which you should be informed of. Such information is posted on educator guides or confirmation letters. Read them over carefully.

14. Activities for students

A. Why are they necessary?

Some places, like the Falls of the Ohio State Park, make sure that all students have an activity that keeps them constructively engaged during their visit. This is recommended especially when there are few interactive exhibits or the group doesn't have specific activities for them. Students will be more motivated if they know they can get extra credit or a grade for completing the activity sheet.

B. Activity sheets - pre-made or make my own?

Most places will encourage you to create your own, so that you can make it related directly to your lesson plan. However, if you do not have time to create your own, then avail yourself the opportunity to use one provided by the site.

15. Behavior

A. Site expectations for students

Student behavior is of importance for many reasons. Certainly foremost would be for their safety and that of the people around them. Misbehaving can also lead to damage of exhibits, equipment, facilities or natural resources. Respectful behavior is always the standard.

Methods to minimize problem behaviors include providing an activity for students to participate while in a museum (see 14.) and close supervision by a chaperon. More informed adults working with smaller groups of children reduce the chance for problems to arise. We have found that when the destination connects closely to the lesson plan, there is a less propensity for horseplay. Voice levels are expected to be lower inside a building, around animals, or when walking through areas where people work.

B. Site expectations for chaperons

The staff at museums, parks, theaters and other destination sites has expectations of the adults accompanying the students. They:

- * are responsible for their group of children
 - * should keep the students on task
 - * should be supportive of their group's efforts to learn
 - * discourage student horseplay to avoid accidents or injuries
 - * keep the group from spreading out too much
 - * should stay with their group at all time (not separate to smoke or eat, visit the gift shop, or socialize with other chaperons)
 - * as a courtesy to their students and others, should not chew gum if the students are not permitted to either
- Adults that do not follow the above expectations can lead to a memorable trip for the *wrong reasons!*

C. Site expectations for educators

In addition to the chaperon expectations, educators are expected to know more about the logistics (schedule, transportation and billing). Teachers are responsible for the discipline of their students. Do not expect a guide or program leader to handle behavior problems.

Teachers are responsible for the behavior of the chaperons, too. Please discuss site expectations with them. If you have any questions, consult the staff at your destination in advance. They will be happy to help!

D. What you should expect from a destination site

Destination sites should be expected to provide professionally run programs. Even a volunteer-led program should be of high caliber. Exhibits, theaters, programs, and facilities should match the information they provide you in the educator guides. Facilities may have problems arise from time to time that could lead to the closure of a room, elevator, or a broken exhibit during your visit. Usually these incidents last a

few hours or days. While you should not expect perfection, you should expect the staff to be friendly and accommodating when problems do arise.

15. Gift shop

A. Policies

Generally, most places with gift shop encourage their use. The gift shop provides much needed cash to fund operations in many institutions. Not all students will have money and there can be bad feelings between the "haves" and "have-nots." Find out the gift shop policy -

* How many students are permitted in the gift shop at one time?

* Is an adult required with the students?

The major concern in gift shops is shoplifting and accidents. Having an observant adult present can deter both. Remember to tell the students that there is a sales tax. Don't be surprised if someone comes up to you because they need a few cents.

B. Should we buy in advance?

Some gift shops will let you select items in advance and pay for them when you arrive. Generally, it is an inexpensive selection and all purchases are identical (i.e. pencil, fossil or mineral, stickers, etc.). Inquire if this method appeals to you.

C. Avoid at all cost?

Sometimes a gift shop just does not fit into your schedule. In such cases, it is important to let the students and chaperons know that the gift shop is "off limits." It is not unusual to have an adult leave their group and wander into the gift shop. Obviously, this presents a real problem to the staff. If the gift shop is not to be visited, let the chaperon know that he or she can visit after the group is gone (i.e. on their own time).

16. First aid kits

Should you bring a first aid kit? If you are going outdoors, you should bring one. That will offer the quickest response to a cut, abrasion or bee sting. Check with the destination site staff to find out how they handle first aid indoors.

Appendix 1 (sample)

Sites and their policies

Site	Reservation required?	Orientation offered?	Educator guide?	Picnic or Indoors	Gift Shop
Falls of the Ohio	Y	Y	Y	P	Y*
Planetarium	Y	N	Y	P	Y*
KY Derby Museum	Y	N	Y	N	Y*
Louisville Zoo	Y	PD		P	Y
Stage One	Y	N	Y	-	N

* With student restrictions

PD = Professional Development rather than orientation

- Not Available