

Programme

The Principles of Interpretation

Details

Tuesday, 17 February – 24 March 13.00-16.30 Online.

Overview

This six-week online course will give you the foundations for creating meaningful interpretation, as well as the tools you need to produce your interpretation plan and strategy. Using real-life case studies and examples, the course will support you in putting learning into practice in a way that is relevant and engaging for your audiences.

Over the course of six weeks, participants will gain an understanding of a broad range of current thinking and critical approaches to interpretation and learn new methods of developing an interpretation strategy. Each week will focus on a different area of

interpretation, using real life case studies. Together we will cover understanding interpretation; audience research and evaluation; interpretation for permanent galleries vs temporary exhibitions; interpretation for families; inclusion and diversity; and digital interpretation.

Your course leader

Polly Richards is an independent interpretation and master planning consultant with over 20 years of experience in the sector. Since going freelance in 2018 she has worked with museums and heritage sites in the UK including the Birmingham Museums Trust, The National Gallery, The National Trust, Royal Museums Greenwich, Salisbury Cathedral, and Science Museum.

Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.

17 February 2026

Week 1 – Introduction: Understanding Interpretation

13.00 Welcome and Introduction

13.15 The Basics of Interpretation (Part 1) Bryony Shepherd, Head of Interpretation, V&A

This introductory session will look at how you write an interpretation plan, taking into consideration the following:

- Context
- Audiences
- Aims
- Narrative journey and hierarchy of messages
- Methods of delivery

14.00 Break

14.15 The Basics of Interpretation (Part 2) Bryony Shepherd, Head of Interpretation, V&A

15.00 Break

15.15 Interactive Group Task

Put your learning into practice. In this session we will unpack a real-life case study and breakout into smaller groups to work collaboratively on a task.

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Week 2 – Audience Research and Evaluation

13.00 Pre- record- Knowing Your Audience (Part 1) Marie Hobson, Senior Manager, Audience Insight and Research, V&A

This session will explore the ways we think and learn about our audiences and their needs.

14.00 Break

14.15 Case Study: Raphael Bryony Shepherd, Head of Interpretation, V&A

15.00 Break

15.15 Audience Task

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Week 3 – Access for all

13.00 Access for All Polly Richards, Course Leader

What does it mean to make objects, galleries, and spaces accessible? We will look at best practice approaches to physical and intellectual requirements.

13.45 Break

14.00 Design and Disability Exhibition at the V&A

15.00 Break

15.15 Interactive Task

10 March 2026

Week 4 – Diversity and Inclusion

13.00 Representing Diversity and Being Inclusive Vandana Patel, Senior Audience & Interpretation Lead, Museum of London

14.00 Break

14.15 Interpretation at V&A Storehouse

15.00 Break

15.15 Inclusive voices

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Week 5 – Interpretation for Families

13.00 Introduction to Interpretation for Families Bryony Shepherd, Head of Interpretation, V&A

13.45 Break

14.00 Pre Record - Interpretation for Families: Young V&A Sophie Sage, Content Manager and Interpretation Producer, V&A

What do we need to consider when interpreting for families? What are their needs and how do we meet these in inspiring and practical ways?

14.45 Young V&A: Q&A Bryony Shepherd, Head of Interpretation, V&A

15.00 Case Study: Family Exhibitions

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Week 6 – Digital Interpretation

13.00 Digital Interpretation Bryony Shepherd, Head of Interpretation, V&A

What do we mean by digital interpretation? How should we apply it? What are the practicalities, the challenges and ultimately, the rewards of its application? In this session we will look at the following digital interpretative methods:

- Close engagement vs immersivity
- AV vs interactivity
- BYOD vs fixed
- AR vs VR
- QR codes – the good and the bad!

14.15 Break

14.30 Case Study - Secret Seekers

15.30 Reflection and Evaluation