

Ways to Say “Don’t Touch”

To insure the safety of the works of art, all visitors are asked to maintain a one-foot distance from the objects on view in the museum.

This rule applies not only to adult visitors and school groups, but to docents, guides and staff members as well. While it is the primary responsibility of the security staff to enforce museum rules, each one of us assists in this process by informing the visitors on our tours of the rules, further reminding them of the rules when necessary, and by setting a good example with our own actions.

Explain that visitors must also refrain from touching the display cases, frames, bases, etc.

If leaned on, tapped on, or pushed, many display cases (and the objects in them!) will move.

Always explain the “No Touching” rule to visitors before a tour, regardless of age.

It is far more considerate to explain a rule before visitors have made a mistake than having to tell them after they have done it.

How do you say “Don’t Touch”?

Be polite. Be brief. Be clear. Don’t lecture or moralize about rules. You may want to let visitors know that they are allowed to touch art objects on visits to the Institute’s interactive Art Carts.

For school children:

Introduce the idea of “touching with our eyes” to students who are old enough to know what you mean. Encourage them to imagine how things feel—rough, soft, cool, scratchy, etc.

With groups of younger students, who find it irresistible to touch the objects, suggest that they clasp their hands behind their backs so they won’t “forget.”

Provide things that children and adults *can* touch, like the props that are available in the Tour Office. You can also take advantage of the materials in the building itself—marble, brass, painted surfaces—to help the visitors experience how something feels.

There is no need to go into *long* explanations of why touching is not allowed in the museum. Many visitors in your groups will have been to the museum before. Others will have reviewed the rules in their classroom or even watched one of our pre-tour videos, which gave the rules. **Ask them to tell you the rules.** They are likely to respond with: “Don’t touch. Don’t run. Stay together. Don’t be noisy.”

Docent Program Handbook

Touring Techniques

If your group is composed of mostly first-time visitors, you may wish to offer a brief explanation of why it is important not to touch. Depending upon the age of your group, you might consider the following approaches:

1. Ask them what happens when someone presses their hands against a windowpane. (We leave finger prints.) Why is that? (There is moisture and oil in our skin.) Have them feel their own fingertips. Briefly explain the oils in our skin can damage the art.
2. Ask the visitors if they can think of something that they have in their homes that is worn because of use. (The arm of a chair or a stuffed animal, perhaps.) Explain that surfaces break down when they are constantly touched. Have the visitors imagine how many people go through the museum each day. What would happen to the art if everyone touched it?
3. Discuss why we have museums. (To preserve objects that are important to us.) Ask the visitors not to touch the art, because we want to preserve the art so future generations will be able to enjoy it someday.

Occasionally you may see a visitor (who is not on a tour) touching objects in the gallery. If there is a guard in the vicinity, alert him or her to this problem. If you feel comfortable in doing so (or if you feel the art may be in immediate danger), you may politely ask the person not to touch the objects.