

# "Not Working" Sign Study

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THIS IS NOT A DEFINITIVE FINAL REPORT

FORMATIVE evaluation studies like this one often:

- **are conducted quickly**, which may mean
  - small sample sizes
  - expedited analyses
  - brief reports
  
- **look at an earlier version** of the exhibit/program, which may mean
  - a focus on problems and solutions, rather than successes
  - a change in form or title of the final exhibit/program

# “Not Working” Sign Study

## Joshua Gutwill

### Methods

- Age  $\geq$  6 years old
- Cued visitors to participate in an interview — individuals only
- Asked visitors to read four versions of the “Not Working” sign and choose the one they liked the most. The versions of the signs were:

Sorry, not available today. It will be working again soon.

Sorry, not available today. Our technicians are working on the problem.

Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest. It will be working again soon.

Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest. Our technicians are working on the problem.

- The ordering of the signs was randomized

### Summary of results

- Visitors had no statistically significant preference for one sign over the others. There was a non-significant preference for “Not available today” over “Needed a rest.”
- Men and women showed no significant differences in their preferences.
- Adults and children (under 18) showed no significant differences in their preferences.

### Detailed Results

Table 1 shows the demographics of the visitors interviewed.

**Table 1. Demographics of visitors interviewed.**

Type of visitor	Number of visitors
Males	73
Females	87
Adults	109
Children	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>

Table 2 shows the visitors’ preferences.

**Table 2. Visitors' preferences for the Not Working sign text.**

<b>Text of sign</b>	<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Percent Visitors</b>
Sorry, not available today. It will be working again soon.	50	30%
Sorry, not available today. Our technicians are working on the problem.	43	27%
Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest. It will be working again soon.	35	22%
Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest. Our technicians are working on the problem.	34	21%

A Chi-square test finds that this distribution is **not** significantly different from a random distribution in which an equal number of visitors prefer each sign version ( $\chi^2 = 0.24$ ,  $p = .97$ ). In other words, this distribution is no different than chance, suggesting that visitors have no real preference for any one of the signs.

A Chi-square test also finds no statistically significant differences in the preferences of men and women ( $\chi^2 = 0.88$ ,  $p = .99$ ) nor in the preferences of adults and children ( $\chi^2 = 0.03$ ,  $p = .99$ ). Children included visitors under 18 years of age. See tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3. Visitors' preferences for the Not Working sign text by gender.**

<b>Text of sign</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Sorry, not available today. It will be working again soon.	20 (28%)	26 (3%)
Sorry, not available today. Our technicians are working on the problem.	21 (29%)	22 (26%)
Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest. It will be working again soon.	17 (24%)	18 (21%)
Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest. Our technicians are working on the problem.	14 (19%)	20 (23%)

**Table 4. Visitors' preferences for the Not Working sign text by age.**

<b>Text of sign</b>	<b>Adults</b>	<b>Children (under 18)</b>
Sorry, not available today. It will be working again soon.	35 (32%)	15 (28%)
Sorry, not available today. Our technicians are working on the problem.	29 (27%)	14 (26%)
Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest. It will be working again soon.	17 (16%)	18 (34%)
Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest. Our technicians are working on the problem.	28 (26%)	6 (11%)

## Staff responses

We sent an email to the Exhibits Listserve, explaining this study. Seven (7) staff responded to the phrasings of the sign text in the study..

**Table 5. Staff responses to proposed phrasings**

Phrase	Staff Liked	Staff Disliked
Needed a Rest	0	7
It will be working again soon.	0	4
Our Technicians...	2	3

The reasons that staff gave for why they did not like a particular phrasing were:

### Sorry, this exhibit needed a rest

Personification, too Disneylike  
 Ignores work we do to fix them.  
 Anthropomorphic, juvenile & corny  
 Too weird, our exhibits don't need a rest, seems like we're afraid to admit that it's broken  
 A bit on the cutesy side  
 Belongs in a children's museum  
 Too euphemistic

### It will be working again soon

Dishonest - may not be  
 Dishonest  
 Dishonest - May not be working soon.  
 Dishonest

### Our technicians are working on the problem

Dishonest - we're shorthanded  
 Dishonest - may not be  
 We don't hire technicians, we are all the Exploratorium

The reasons staff gave for liking a particular phrasing:

### Our technicians are working on the problem

Doesn't promise a timeline, which may be false  
 Not great, but best one up there

## Acknowledgements

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