

Astronaut Assistant

Brief Summary

The Astronaut on the Surface of Mars Show is designed to transport Museum guests into the future. They are visitors at the Mars Visitor Center at Candor Chasma Base Station in the year 2044. During the show, they have an opportunity to talk with one of the astronauts on the Lowell II Mission that is stationed at Candor Chasma on Mars. The astronaut is out on the surface to perform mission related tasks, but is happy to chat with visitors during this process as well as explain what they are doing. This conversation between the astronaut and guests at the Mars Visitor Center is facilitated by the Astronaut Assistant, a volunteer who is knowledgeable about Mars as well as the Lowell II mission.

How to Become an Astronaut Assistant

1. Talk to your Guide Captain and/or Volunteer Engagement Specialist to let them know you are interested in becoming an Astronaut Assistant.
2. If they feel you are a good candidate for this role, they will connect you with one of the Museum Programs floor staff or educators to begin your training.
NOTE: One must be trained and certified by the floor staff to do this show. This cannot be cross trained by a peer Galaxy Guide or Guide Captain.
3. Read the Mission Backstory (on the Portal) and this document thoroughly before beginning your training.
4. Have fun! If you have further questions, talk to your Guide Captain, Volunteer Engagement Specialist, or Museum Programs floor staff and educators.

Your Role as the Astronaut Assistant

The Astronaut Assistant plays a vital role in the Astronaut on the Surface of Mars Show. You are not just the holder of the microphone! At the beginning of the show, you set the stage for the interaction with the astronaut and what visitors can expect. This step is crucial to let folks know that we are pretending to be in the future and they are guests at the Mars Visitor Center where they are about to talk with an astronaut on the second manned mission to the Martian surface.

During the show, you are a partner to the astronaut on the other side of the glass and help create a connection with the crowd. You also:

- Voice the audience's emotions, reactions, or questions
- Create conversations with the visitors, not just relay their questions
- Create the appropriate tone and mood for the show depending on whether you have a large or small crowd

- Involve kids AND adults. Adult visitors can get as much out of the show as do the kids. Act as though it is interesting for all visitors and it will be
- Engage all members of the audience. Remember the visitors watching from the top level, and not just those in front
- Maintain control of the microphone. DO NOT just give the microphone to a visitor
- Ask questions of the astronaut
- Bringing props into the conversation

Before the Show Begins

- Check in with the astronaut and the astronaut buddy (i.e. the two staff) in the base station area behind the diorama
- Find out what vignette the astronaut will be doing
- Let them know your level of content and comfort
- Get a microphone—there's two mics that can be used: a headset (marked Experiment Bar) and a handheld mic (marked Mars Diorama). You don't have to use both obviously, but it can come in handy if you're on the headset and you use the handheld mic with visitors. Be sure to turn the mics on to check battery level before you go down to the Diorama—nothing worse than running out of battery power halfway through a show.

Introducing and Concluding the Show

We are now scripting the beginning and end of the Astronaut on the Surface Show for the Astronaut, Buddy, and Astronaut Assistant. Please see the “Astronaut Chatter” document on the Portal for this script. We expect all staff and volunteers to follow this script for every Astronaut on the Surface Show.

Questions and Answers

“Hey Astronaut, Are you REALLY on Mars?”

We get this type of question from visitors all of the time. Why? Here are some reasons:

- A little kid doesn't quite “get” the whole diorama/imaginary astronaut on Mars concept
- A visitor wants to “trick” the astronaut (this is actually quite rare)
- A visitor asks a questions that relates to a current mission or other current situation, thereby making it difficult to answer in character

What's the best way to answer it?

Our philosophy is this: We are first and foremost a scientific and educational institution, and so we are obliged to tell the truth. And the truth is that the “Astronaut” is NOT really on Mars, he or she is just pretending to be.

In order to be faithful to the truth, and, at the same time, not spoil all of the magic of seeing an astronaut, we have come up with the following scenario: The astronaut

assistant on the visitor side of the glass (that's you) should answer the question (even if it was directed toward the "astronaut") and allow the "astronaut" to stay in character by not having to respond. Just say, "I can take care of answering that, Gemstone." and then answer the person's question truthfully, help them understand the diorama/astronaut setup, etc.

If you forget to respond, the "astronaut" may chime in with, "Hey George, why don't you take that question?"

One way to answer is to say, in a confidential way, "She's not on Mars, but IMAGINE that she is." Or "Remember we are using our imagination to pretend that we are on Mars in the year 2044"

What types of questions are good to ask the astronaut?

There are two broad categories of questions "Mars Content" and "Life as an Astronaut" both are equally valid. As the assistant you can ask questions that aren't being asked by the visitors. For example, if the visitors are asking "What's the air made of on Mars? And "Why is Mars red?" Then you can ask "What do you miss about Earth?" or "What were you thinking the first time you stood on the surface of Mars?" or "What type of training did you go through?" Since each astronaut has prepared a personal history you can ask questions about where they grew up to what made them want to be an astronaut, etc. On the other hand, if the visitors are asking "What do you eat?" You can then ask, "Why is Mars so cold? Etc.

What if visitors aren't asking questions?

If the visitors are not asking questions (it happens) engage the astronaut yourself. Ask questions both personal (How's the food?) or scientific (What's the temperature?). As the visitors watch you engage they will become more comfortable and curious themselves and more likely to ask a question.

What do I do when visitors leave part way through the show?

Remember that the vignettes, the experiments the astronauts perform, were not designed as "shows." We have always fully anticipated that visitors could join the presentation, and leave the presentation, at any time. The astronaut would be out there with work to do, and would stop to talk with visitors during that time in an informal way. So, if visitors leave while the astronaut is still out there, that's OK. It's your job to help make that a smooth transition. To do this, you might welcome new visitors and say to the astronaut, "A bunch of folks have just joined us – would you mind filling us in on what you're doing?" To the departing visitors, you could say, "Thanks so much for stopping by!" or "Enjoy the rest of your time in Space Odyssey!"

Also, if a bunch of visitors leave, and just a couple remain, try changing modes from "talking to the audience" to "having a conversation."

On the other side of that idea, if you have only a couple of visitors there and you sense that they feel "stuck," it's up to you to let them know that it is OK to leave. For example, you might say, "the astronaut will be out here for a while longer – you're welcome to explore the rest of Space Odyssey."

How should we refer to the astronauts?

At the beginning of the show, the astronaut will introduce themselves with their title as well as a “call sign” (see Astronaut Chatter document for more information on call signs). Most astronauts use a title of “Mission Specialist” or “Commander” or other similar military title – please listen to how they are introduced, and use that title (some MGG’s are prone to calling *everyone* Commander). Most astronauts will let the visitors and you know that you are welcome to call them by their call sign as well. *An example of a title and call sign: Mission Specialist Jennifer Moss Logan, call sign “J. MoLo.”*

What are all these acronyms the astronauts are using?

Commonly used phrases and acronyms, along with explanations for each of them, can be found in the Astronaut Chatter document. The Astronaut will use some jargon relating to the mission, their task on the surface, or scientific jargon. This is done to create an air of authenticity to the program, but should not be done so much that it is confusing for you or visitors. Please ask the astronaut to explain, such as “Gemstone, why do you call that instrument PAM?”