Museums are about learning, indeed, 2/3 of museum-goers explicitly say that museums are places where “learning should be the primary purpose.”

But while learning is a broad mandate, there isn’t as much agreement about its purpose.

That is, while most people agree that museums should deepen knowledge in areas we are already interested in, there is less agreement about learning as a way to expand our worldviews and perspectives.

Of course, these purposes are not mutually exclusive. In the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, we wanted to probe deeper than the yes/no answers, and in no case further than to ask a question entirely (an indicator that the experiences listed may not have felt personally relevant to them).

For the majority of respondents, the response to the knowledge-gaining experiences we asked about were positive.

“Don’t go to all the museums, go to one or two that actually interest you.”

“We should analyze the purpose. I think the purpose should be to be exposed to different experiences. The model of education where all the decisions are made for you is not the right model. I like to have the autonomy to be able to choose what I want to do.”

In contrast, those who were more Neoteric seemed to relish being intellectually challenged. Consistent with their higher levels of eudaemonic curiosity, those who are more Neoteric in their viewpoints were significantly more likely to skip the question entirely (an indicator that the experiences listed may not have felt personally relevant to them).

“Instead, a significant percentage defaulted to a ‘just information’ response and/or were defensive. The model of education where all the decisions are made for you is not the right model. I like to have the autonomy to be able to choose what I want to do.”

The difference between these approaches, more Traditional or more Neoteric, matters deeply. It can make the difference between reinforcing preferred worldviews versus a more inclusive approach to others that is necessary to help create a more equitable society.

"I always prefer to be challenged, or have my viewpoint changed, or questions made. An educational institution should be a place to learn new things and new information, new ideas."