

# Ten evidence based principles for effective climate communication

## How to open the door

### 1. Connect with people's values

What are people's concerns linked to climate? Find it out and base your communication on it.

### 2. Trusted messengers

Communicate authentically – and consider nurturing fresh voices from across all segments of society.

### 3. Test & research

Do not trust your own instincts – better research the characteristics of your target group, and test the effectiveness of your message.

## How to reach minds and hearts

### 4. Bring climate home

Show relevant local (regional/national) examples of consequences and climate action – with a focus on solutions.

### 6. Use imagery to tell powerful stories

Show the humans behind climate – in realworld stories and authentic imagery.

### 5. Use frames consciously

Use words and narratives that they resonate with your target group.

### 7. Provide accurate information

Use clear, non-technical language and lead with what we know for certain.

## How to turn concern into action

### 8. Provide spaces for interaction

Make climate a topic in everyday conversations and consider organizing public dialogues formats.

### 9. Make climate action the ,new normal'

Show people ,like you and me' that have begun to take climate action.

### 10. Offer possibilities for personal action

Encourage people to reduce carbon foot prints and to engage in social organising.

# Ten evidence based principles for effective climate communication

## Highlights

- Effective climate communication is not primarily about delivering better information.
- People make sense of climate by stories that ‘feel right’ – and climate communication can help exchanging these stories.
- This needs to include people from all over the society.
- A focus needs to be on how to turn concern into action.

## How to open the door



### 1. Connect with people's values

People usually try to align their thoughts and actions with their values. This also applies to the climate issue. Therefore, climate communication should connect to people's values. In doing so, it is important to take a step back: Many climate communicators have an ‘environmentalist background’, and intuitively communicate climate from this perspective. While this may resonate well with other environmentalists, it does not necessarily connect to what broad segments of the population care about. So try to find out about the values of the people you want to reach. Values like fairness (applying stricter environmental rules to everyone), avoiding waste (ending our throwaway culture), unity (coming together in our efforts to protect the environment) and pride (in ‘doing your bit’) are visible across the segments of the British population.

→ <https://climateoutreach.org/britain-talks-climate/>



### 2. Trusted messengers

Trust is a precious commodity in communication, and climate communication is powerful when people trust the ‘messenger’. This can be achieved, for example, by speaking to people's world views and identities. Perceived consistence between the climate message and the behavior of the messenger is also helpful (‘walking the talk’). People naturally trust people from their own communities. Thus there is a case for nurturing fresh voices and new messengers, who are already trusted by people.



### 3. Research, test and don't trust your instincts

Because we are deeply involved in our own issues, we cannot depend on our own intuition to tell us what would work for other people. We need to step back, and make a deliberate effort to really understand a target group. This can be done by consulting existing research (e.g. the ‘Britain talks Climate’ material) or doing own research (from informal conversations to more formal narrative workshops or surveys). It is advisable to test any messaging before going public.

## How to reach people's minds and hearts



### 4. Bring climate home – highlighting solutions

Although climate impacts have grown in salience during the last years, climate is still sometimes presented and perceived as an issue far away. This may lead our brains to ignore the threat. Showing examples of relevant climate action and adverse effects of the climate crisis on a local (or regional and national) level can help create the salience needed. While risk perception can motivate people, positive emotions like hope are probably even more important, and showing climate action can inspire hope. Climate communication should acknowledge however that the changes ahead are possible, but they will not be easy.



### 5. Use frames and narratives in a considered way

Intentionally or unintentionally, all messages about climate change are 'framed' by the context in which they appear. A certain framing may cause different associations in different audiences – depending on whether the framing resonates with the audience's world views, values and identity. Climate communication should therefore consider deliberately which frames and narratives to use. For example the benefits of climate action most agreed-upon among the British population are 'protecting future generations'; 'protecting nature and wildlife' and 'preserving the countryside'; 'creating a healthier society and improve well-being'; 'using renewable energy because it is fairly sourced, secure and accessible to all'.



### 6. Use imagery to tell powerful stories

We tend to make sense of any given issue through stories we tell each other about it and the images they create in our minds. By showing the human faces behind an otherwise abstract issue, stories speak to the more emotional part of our brains, which is not easily reached by graphs or statistics, but central for our moral risk-perception and motivational processes. Powerful stories include heroes, challenges and emotional high points. Photographs are a powerful tool to complement a verbal story, if imagery shows real people and follows some other principles as highlighted by Climate Visuals.

→ <https://climatevisuals.org>



### 7. Provide accurate information

Accurate information on its own is not sufficient for effective public engagement. However, information plays an important role. It seems that people somehow have a right to know about the causes of climate change, how it effects them, and what needs to be done, so they can take informed decisions. There is often a rather superficial public understanding for climate change: For example, many people do not connect the dots between climate change and energy. This needs correct information, communicated in an easily understandable way. Concerning uncertainty in science climate scenarios, communication should focus on what we know for sure.

## How to turn concern into action



### 8. Provide spaces for interaction

Climate communication has often been understood as 'strategic messaging', with people as passive receivers of optimised messages. However, in order to strengthen public engagement, it seems important that people become active parts of conversations. Climate communication can support such conversations: Be it encouraging people to talk about climate in their everyday conversations with family and friends or creating spaces for public dialogues that bring together science, society and politics.

→ <https://climateoutreach.org/programmes/talking-climate/>



### 9. Make climate action the new ,normal'

There are few influences more powerful on people's attitudes and behaviours, than their friends and social networks, and the beliefs and behaviours they perceive as normal around them. If climate communication succeeds in delivering social proof that 'people like you and me are starting to take action' it can shift social norms. In order to maximise positive momentum for climate action, a variety of personal action should be shown, reaching beyond pure consumer behaviour.



### 10. Offer possibilities for meaningful personal action

In order to nurture public engagement, climate communication tries to motivate and empower people to take action. There are essentially two directions of personal climate action that are needed for overall change: Firstly, reducing individual 'carbon footprints', and secondly, acceptance for climate regulations and engaging with the political processes needed to bring about these regulations. While climate communication has so far focused primarily on lifestyle issues, in the future it could also increasingly encourage political engagement and social organising.

## Background

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For a summary of the scientific evidence base for this 4-pager: Sippel, M., Shaw, C., Marshall, G. (2022). Ten key principles: How to communicate climate change for effective public engagement. Climate Outreach Working Paper. Climate Outreach, Oxford. DOI to follow...