

Toolkit: Communicating Climate with Communities

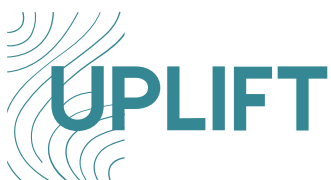


Photo by Becky from [Open Eye](#)

Introduction

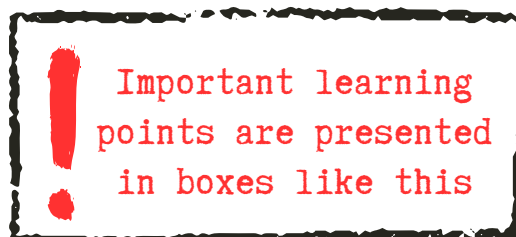
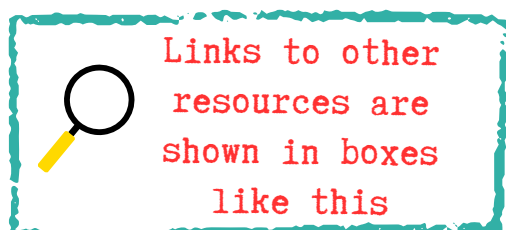
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HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Use as a resource from cover to cover or dip in and out looking at what interests you.

Some of the techniques are especially useful if you are starting a new campaign, or experiencing challenging conversations, either online or in person.



The basics



LISTEN!

CLIMATE CONVERSATION TIPS

Ask rather than tell

Show genuine interest

Stories, not facts

Find out about them

You don't have to lead with climate:

Ask open ended questions

Take your time

- weather
- news
- your life
- the past
- what they love

Be specific, not abstract - things are happening NOW & HERE

Be positive, hopeful & urgent

Keep it:

- about them
- local
- positive
- curious
- human

Remember: you are just talking to folks about "stuff"

Aim is to find a way to **unite** people on this issue

Use empathy and apply it to someone else's world view

Reasons to talk about climate

- Most people want serious action on climate but many rarely talk about it with others
- To NORMALISE conversations around climate
- Give people space to think
- Involve people & make them feel heard
- Create a tipping point



Climate justice is a topic best left for people who are already climate aware

How do people feel about climate?

A global survey interviewed 130,000 people across 125 countries and found 89% thought their national government¹ “should do more to fight global warming”



READ
The 89%
project

The survey asked whether people would contribute 1% of their income each month to fight global warming, and how many others they thought would do the same. →

Most people assumed only a minority would contribute, but in reality over 50% were willing in nearly all countries.

Globally, 69% said they would contribute, compared to an estimated 43%—a perception gap of up to 40 percentage points in some places.

Why do perception gaps matter?

- Perception gaps encourage a “spiral of silence” in which people don’t talk about the issue because others aren’t
- If people around you are not talking about a subject then the assumption is that it is unlikely to be an existential threat requiring urgent action
- People are instinctively drawn to majority views and are also more likely to do something if they think others are doing it too
- MPs continue to underestimate the importance of the environment for voters, meaning that climate policies are not as ambitious as public sentiment

→ For example, in 2024 72% of the UK public supported onshore wind being built in their areas, but only 19% of MPs thought a majority of their constituents did so.

We want to NORMALISE
conversations around climate
& create a social tipping
point to trigger meaningful
(global) action

Language

The words we use matter.

Let's take the word "1.5°C"

This is a
people
story, NOT
a science
story



For many people involved in climate action, 1.5C is a commonly used term, a shorthand for a really crucial milestone that we never wanted to reach. An agreement that was made by governments in Paris in 2015, to take action to keep global temperatures below 1.5C above pre-industrial times.

When Potential Energy Coalition carried out research across the planet, asking people how much they thought the UN said was a safe limit, they said 4°C!

Think about the best language to use to convince someone of the urgency for action.

Let's consider some commonly used language around climate, which of these words/phrases are good to use or better to avoid when talking about the causes and impacts of climate change?:

Decarbonisation
Overheating
Greenhouse gases
Fossil fuels
Hottest year on record

Extreme weather
1.5°C
Tipping Point
Pollution
Net Zero



Extreme weather
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Decarbonisation
Greenhouse gases
1.5C
Tipping Point
Net Zero

Framing

The way action on climate change is framed makes a huge difference to how much people support it.

Here is an example we love from Climate Outreach of how messaging and language can have different effects.

Presenting technical terms : "their council setting a target to reach net zero emissions by 2045"	50% support this
Adding a basic explanation : "their council setting a target to reach net zero emissions by 2045 by providing a cleaner and more reliable energy supply, improving public transport, and creating new jobs"	64% support this
Giving a vision of better : "local climate policy that benefits people's health and happiness, makes their area safer to live in, and protects local nature, while also working towards a sustainable future for our children and next generations"	78% feel positively towards this

Focus on why climate action matters & what it means for people's lives

Make climate action clear and appealing to people - both through the language you use and how you frame an issue or conversation.

Communicate climate action within the context of people's actual lives and paint a picture of the benefits this could have to them and their families.

CLIMATE FRAMING TIPS

Protecting nature	Great place to have a positive conversation. Remember, "nature" means different things to different people e.g. coastal, urban, gardeners
Health & happiness	Talk about a "good life" & "wellbeing" - Exercising & being outside is accepted as good for health & mental health being affected by climate impacts
"Doing our bit"	Accepted that it's the right thing to do
Reducing waste	Waste/pollution/sewage reduction is strongly supported by most
Future generations	Referencing children or grandchildren is a strong motivator for people
Normalise action, not inaction	89% want their govt to do more to tackle climate change
Fairness	People with less money shouldn't have to do as much & should be prioritised for support
Common enemy	Every segment blames big polluters for causing climate change
Acknowledge the gravity & be realistic	People are very sceptical of false optimism. Need to be specific & tangible - highlight what has been achieved before & how things can change with the right choices.

Always use down to earth language

AVOID: jargon, acronyms, dates & stats

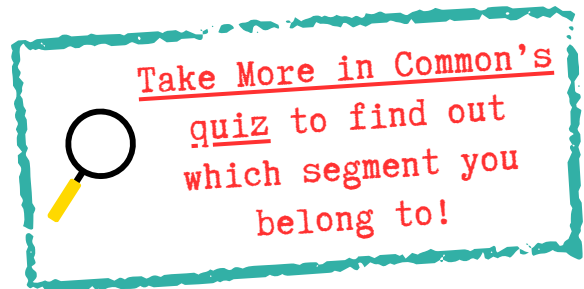
Tips adapted from work by [Climate Outreach](#) & [Heard](#)

VIDEO - "[How to talk about climate for change](#)" by [Heard](#)

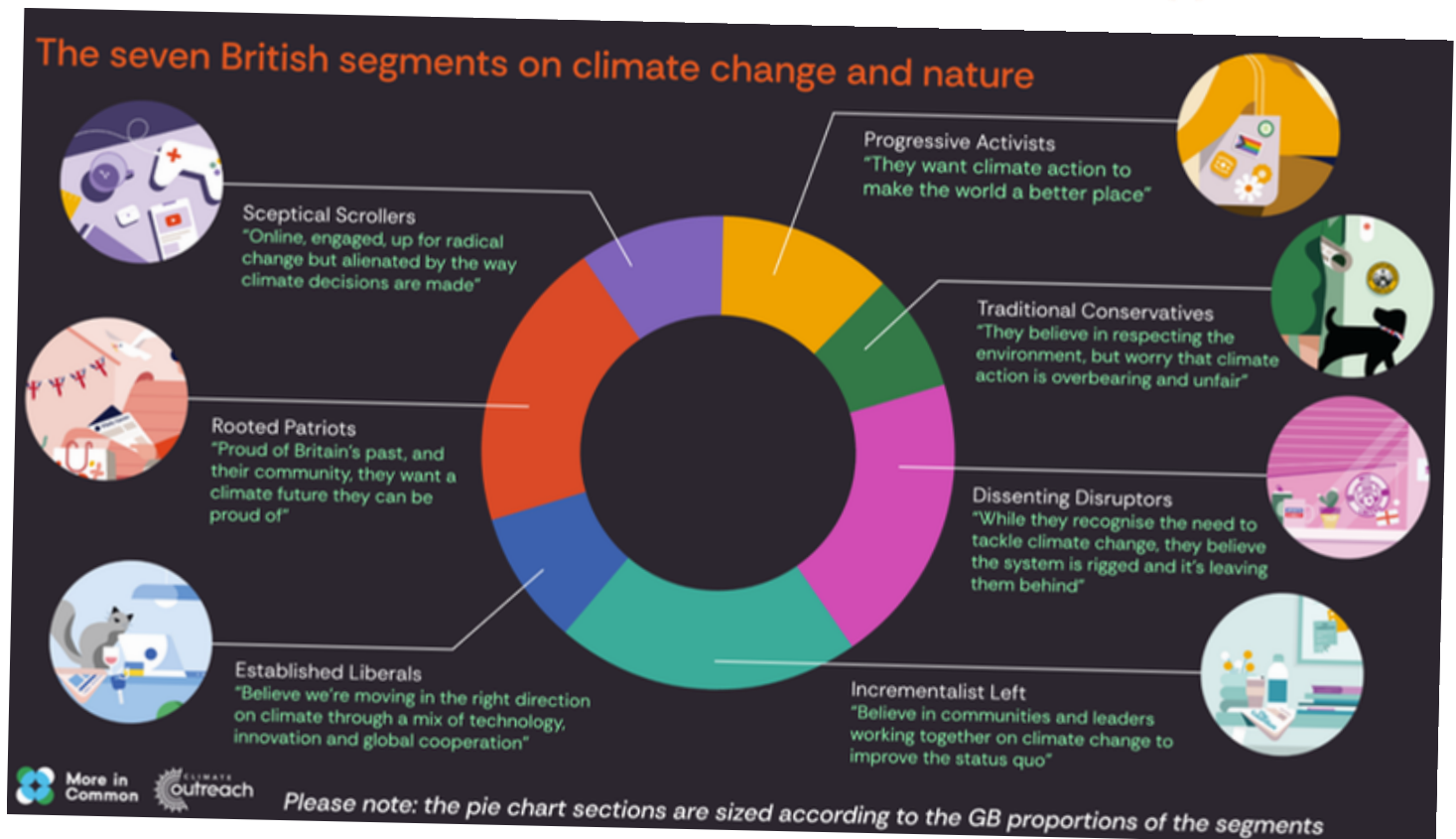
New Narratives: Seven Segments

Want to be more targeted in your communication, or have your messages heard beyond your usual suspects?

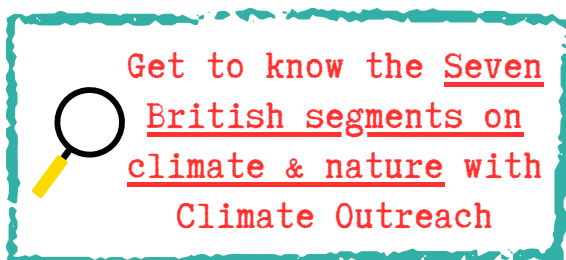
We're inspired by [Climate Outreach](#) and [More in Common's](#) work on seven British Segments, where society is grouped into seven distinct audience segments based on people's values, core beliefs and worldviews (rather than political beliefs, age or other demographics).



More in
Common



Read about what the different segments care about, what their top concerns are and how they think and feel about climate change to be able to tailor your communication better and meet people where they are at.



How to use the Seven Segments

Let's go through an example, in this case planning an event for a specific segment.

Things to think about - you can use these questions as a design brief:

- What kind of event are you holding? Is there a theme?
- Where would you hold the event?
- Who would be part of the offering at the event?
- What is the point of the event? Is there an outcome you are trying to achieve? Are you asking them for/to do something?
- What are the best mediums for promotion?
- How will you reach your audience? Where would you advertise?
- What images might you use?
- What would your copy be for promoting this event? What would you say?
- What would your key talking points be once you have people at the event?
- What subjects should/would you avoid?

Imagine that we want to try and engage with Traditional Conservatives...

they are the least likely to have a strong emotional response to climate change (29%), & many avoid talking about it where possible (36%)

they lack trust in those in politics or protests, favouring specialists & farmers

they worry about harm to nature

they have a strong dislike for frequently used climate action terms & phrases so AVOID: 'net zero' 'climate justice', 'just transition' & 'climate leadership'



they believe in respecting the environment, but worry that climate action is overbearing & unfair

they are nostalgic, worrying about a decline in respect for tradition & authority

How to use the Seven Segments

Here's an example (completely imagined!) event we have designed to attract Traditional Conservatives. This is a simple poster format, which could also be used as a flyer and easily adapted into a social media asset.

they worry about harm to nature so the event is framed around, & takes place in, nature

we know TCs are traditional & nostalgic & trust farmers so an event at a local farm should interest them

opportunity to talk about several different topics, e.g. biodiversity, local food supply, food miles, seasonality, food waste & saving money - delivered by their trusted messenger

family friendly & FREE



BURNSIDE FARM
FRESHLY GROWN

FARM TOUR at Burnside Farm

FREE!

Saturday 20th May | 11am-2pm

Come along for a friendly visit to Burnside Farm & see where our local food comes from.

Hear from the MacDonald Farmers about how Burnside Farm works with nature to care for the land, support wildlife & produce good local food.

After the tour, enjoy a relaxed cookery demo followed by lunch using fresh produce from the farm.

Pick up simple tips for making the most of seasonal ingredients, reducing food waste & saving money in the kitchen.

FAMILIES WELCOME – free tractor rides for the kids!

SPACES LIMITED!
- to book email ruth@sccan.scot
or phone 07999 098 123

sccan

as a climate organisation we would keep a low profile & the spotlight would be on the person this segment trusts - the FARMERS

the focus is NOT on climate change & we will not use any climate terms either in the marketing or at the event

Photo by [Gozha Net](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Focus on offline promotion, as this audience is less likely to use social media – put posters in places like libraries, GP surgeries, churches, local businesses, schools and nurseries, and consider ads in local newspapers.

Share with trusted community networks like the Women's Institute, Young Farmers, and the farm's own contacts. Approach friendly people who might fall into this segment and ask where they think is good to advertise.

Misinformation: why is it a problem?

Understanding the evolution of disinformation is the first step in building a defense. It is no longer just about denying science. It's about eroding trust in solutions.

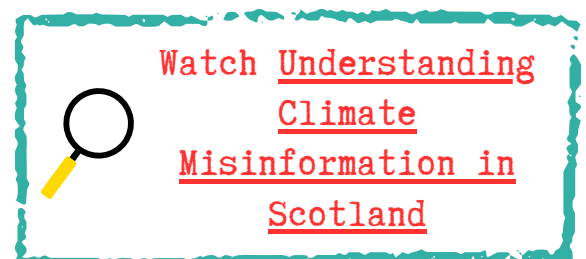
- There is a visible move from straightforward climate denial toward "strategic skepticism"
- Misinformation makes it "easy to stay where you are". Austerity, isolation, poverty, lack of trust, and being shut out of decision-making make people suspicious and angry. This creates fertile ground for vulnerability to mis/disinformation
- Narratives frequently characterise net-zero and climate actions as economically harmful or a delusion that breaks energy systems
- Climate policies are often framed as being incompatible with personal freedoms, frequently linked to conspiracy theories about "global elites" "54minute cities" or Low Emission Zones (LEZ)
- Disinformation often focuses on questioning the extent of human responsibility for climate change rather than the existence of the change itself
- Popular pieces of climate disinformation are spread globally but are often adapted with a local lens. In Scotland, many claims specifically target the oil and gas industry and renewable energy



Photo by [Glenn Carstens-Peters](#) on [Unsplash](#)

SCCAN ran an online session looking at how misinformation spreads, its real-world impacts, and what can be done in response, with speakers:

- Dr Lluís de Nadal Alsina, lecturer & researcher at the University of Glasgow specialising in climate obstruction & populist social movements
- Alastair Brian, head of fact-checking at [The Ferret](#)



Misinformation: Identification & Verification

Here we offer some practical steps to spot dodgy claims and the digital tools available to verify them.

Check if the content is intended to make you feel extreme anger, sadness, panic, or worry, as this is a common tactic to bypass critical thinking.

- Be wary of statements that make absolute or extreme claims without nuance
- Look for fake or discredited experts and check if the author provides reputable, verifiable sources for their numbers
- Recognise content is designed specifically to trigger algorithms through controversy, attacking public figures, or playing on existing prejudices
- Use your critical thinking. Before sharing, pause to ask if the information fits a pre-existing prejudice you might have, lacks clear context, or uses 'strategic skepticism' to frame climate action as an attack on your quality of life and personal freedom



Photo by [terbe rezso](#) on [pixabay](#).

Ask• how does it make me feel?



- is it designed to provoke outrage or other strong feelings?
- who made this content & who might benefit from me believing this or sharing this story/meme/news item?
- is this an opinion or is it backed by credible evidence?

- AI-generated images often have inconsistencies in physical features, a 'glossy' appearance, or distorted background text.
- Digital Verification Tools: Use [Google Lens](#) or [TinEye](#) for reverse image searches. For data, cross-reference claims with official sources like the [Met Office](#), [Office for National Statistics](#), the [Climate Change Knowledge Portal](#), or the [Wayback Machine](#) for archived web pages.



Photo by [KenamiRyoko](#) on [pixabay](#).

Misinformation: Useful approaches

SIFT method

S Stop
I Investigate the source
F Find better coverage
T Trace the claims to original context

STOP

Climate change is a 'high-arousal' topic. If you see a headline like "New Study Proves Global Warming is a Hoax," your brain might jump to validation or outrage. Stop. Recognise that climate misinfo often plays on your desire for hidden truths or fear of economic change.

INVESTIGATE THE SOURCE

Climate sceptics often use 'think tanks' that sound official but have no scientific credentials

- Test: Open a new tab & search for the organization. Does it have a history of being funded by fossil fuel interests?
- Check expertise: Is the author a climate scientist (climatologist, oceanographer) or a "scientist" in a completely unrelated field, like mechanical engineering or economics?

FIND BETTER COVERAGE

Scientific truth relies on consensus. If a post claims a single volcanic eruption emits more CO2 than all human activity, search for that claim alongside keywords like 'scientific consensus' or 'fact check'

- You can compare the claim against reputable scientific bodies like NASA, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, or the IPCC
- If 97% of climate scientists agree on a fact and your source is the only one disagreeing, the burden of proof is on that source.

TRACE THE CLAIMS TO THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT

Climate misinformation relies on taking a small piece of data to hide a larger trend (cherry-picking)

- Example: You might see a graph showing temperatures flatlining over a specific 5-year period. Trace that back to the full dataset (the last 100 years). You'll usually find that the 5-year 'pause' is just a tiny wobble in a massive upward trend.
- Verify the study: if a post says "A new study says..." find the actual paper. Often, the study's authors will explicitly state their findings do not disprove global warming, despite what the headline claims.

Misinformation: Useful approaches

The 'Truth Sandwich'

- 
1. Start with the truth
 2. Briefly explain what's misleading
 3. End by restating the truth, with evidence

Example - Somebody says or writes:

"Climate action is pointless because humans aren't the cause of climate change, and all these policies are going to cost too much. We shouldn't bother."

A 'truth sandwich' response:

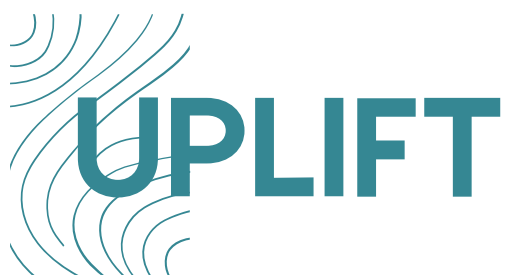
"scientists agree that climate change is real and caused by human activity. By saying that action is pointless or too expensive ignores the growing costs of floods, heatwaves, and damage already happening. Acting now is widely recognised as cheaper and safer than doing nothing."

Misinformation: Strategic communication & community action

Effectively pushing back requires addressing the social reasons why people become receptive to misinformation in the first place.

- Trust in journalists and politicians is low (27% and 11% respectively), while nurses and engineers remain among the most trusted professions
- Misinformation does not always "cause" a backlash; rather, people often use it to justify existing grievances about feeling excluded from politics or the green transition
- Recognise that people's daily lives send signals about whether they matter to society. Neglected communities are more likely to turn to social media and find content that confirms their suspicions of 'global elites'
- Instead of trying to convince people to support climate policy because it has social benefits, make climate goals the co-benefit of social outcomes, e.g. campaigning for social policies that help with the cost of living that are also, by design, good for the climate
- Let practical action do the communicating, e.g. helping a community weatherproof their homes communicates more about climate than ads or slogans
- Directly telling someone they are 'wrong' can make people defensive. Repeating false claims, even to argue against them, can actually reinforce them
- Face-to-face conversations with others in your community help create a 'human firewall' to the spread of mis/disinformation
- Respond with compassion, curiosity, and truth

Enormous THANK YOU to
Uplift for funding this
project & also for all
the amazing work you do



Climate conversations can be
hard.

Please look after your mental health &
that of your friends, colleagues &
communities - the Climate Psychology
Alliance can offer support



If you have any further
questions, would like to
collaborate, or want a
chat about any of the
content in this toolkit
please contact
kirsty@sccan.scot

