

100 VIEWS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

<http://ChangingClimates.colostate.edu>



CLIMATE CHANGE IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS SO HOW DO YOU TALK TO EVERYBODY?

TALK TO THE PEOPLE IN FRONT OF YOU

Audiences vary hugely. Who is listening to you, right now? What do they care about? What do they already know? Why have they taken the time to listen to you? You know more about some things than they do. But don't forget, they know lots of important things you don't: talk with them, not down to them.

USE ORDINARY ENGLISH

Substitute regular words for specialized words. Avoid acronyms, words you learned in advanced courses, words whose common uses don't match their specialized use or that sound ordinary but mean different things in different fields. Unless you're sure all your listeners see them all the time, avoid numbers, equations, and metric units. Use miles, pounds, and degrees Fahrenheit. When it's truly necessary, define your words and explain your numbers: but beware of distracting your listeners by making them translate as they listen.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

In the words of architect Mies van der Rohe, "Less is more."
Focus on key information. Make fewer points. Repeat the things you most want your listeners to remember, and flesh them out with telling examples. Make what you say easy for your actual listeners to grasp right away. This means your slides, too. Don't distract them with crowded graphs, complicated figures, extra words, or fancy backgrounds. Clean up your images to best reach your listeners. This does not mean *dumb it down*. It means *be a smart communicator*.

MAKE IT VIVID

Use analogies and metaphors. Illustrate your main points with memorable pictures. Gesture. Make sound effects. Let your enthusiasm show. Give everyday examples. Connect to your listeners' daily lives. Tell stories, preferably about people. Emotions responding to facts are powerful communicators. Don't be afraid of them.

MAKE IT MATTER

So what? Why should we care? Stress what matters most, to whom, and why. Should it matter to your listeners? Why?

(over)

SPEAK FROM YOUR HEART

Why are you using your time to talk to these people? What values and interests do you share with them? What do you care about, and why? Let your personality and passions show.

Speak with whatever authority is genuinely yours, not more, not less.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Many people don't want to think about this topic, and who can blame them? Try not to trigger one of the common shutdown responses: helplessness, denial, despair.

How you "frame" what you say can help. Bring it home to your listeners; think about what matters to them and how climate change may affect those things.

Say what we can actually do to help. Make clear the difference between what we can't change and what we can. Some futures are much better than others, and we get to help choose.

Emphasize what's best known, not uncertainties. As a scientist, you may be most involved with what's unknown, but many critical things are very well understood. Make this clear.

TO LEARN MORE

On our website, hover over *The Human Face* and click on *communication*.

If you're new to the subject, start with Tony Davis's introductory pieces on Grist.org.

If you're already involved, don't miss "The Psychology of Climate Change Communication," an excellent compilation of useful information. If communicating on this topic is key to your work, join the ClimateAccess.org network, where good resources are accumulating quickly.

To track American attitudes—a start for thinking about your immediate listeners—follow the Six Americas project.

To prepare for questions prompted by naysayers but asked by genuinely interested listeners, read "The Debunking Handbook" and "How to Talk to a Climate Skeptic."

You may also contact us at Changing Climates: SueEllen.Campbell@colostate.edu and John.Calderazzo@colostate.edu.

