

framing nature toolkit

A guide to how
words can
help wildlife

Public
Interest
Research
Centre





**CHANGE THE
WORDS**

**CHANGE THE
THINKING**

**CHANGE THE
OUTCOME**

Our wildlife matters... but so do our words.

This guide will show that our choice of words is just as important as any other decision we make in conservation.

The guide will explain what framing is and how we can use it to create a better world for wildlife.

If we communicate with an understanding of framing we are more likely to convince, motivate and inspire others to help our cause.

Every job involves communication so there is something in here for everyone.

We have filled this toolkit with [exercises](#) and [examples](#) to enable you to put framing into practice.

If you want to [learn more](#) about the research and theory we used to create this toolkit check out our earlier publication ***Common Cause for Nature***.

Now let's begin...



WHAT WILL HELP YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS TOOLKIT?

There should be something in each section for everyone, but if you are in a hurry this contents page is to get you straight to the part of the toolkit that you will find most helpful.

WHAT IS FRAMING?

I want to learn what framing is and why it is important...

Go to Section 1—What is framing?

I want to understand what framing has to do with my work...

Go to Section 2—How does framing relate to my work?

FRAMING IN PRACTICE

I want to avoid common communications pitfalls...

Go to Section 3—Avoiding the traps.

I want to make my communications more effective...

Go to Section 4—Top tips for effective framing.

I want to talk about nature in a helpful way...

Go to Section 5—Going wild.

I want to stop using unhelpful language...

Go to Section 6—Your words or theirs?

I want to look at my own communications...

Go to Section 7—What am I really saying?

I want to use images more effectively...

Go to Section 8—A picture paints...

I want to see some examples of good framing...

Go to Section 9—Framing in action.

CREATING NEW FRAMES

I want to take a new perspective on my communications...

Go to Section 10—A fresh perspective.

I want to know my own story...

Go to Section 11—Back to basics.

I want to think about why I am communicating in the first place...

Go to Section 12—What is your message for?

I want to be inspired to create something new...

Go to Section 13—Star jumps and magic markers.

I want to make my communications motivating...

Go to Section 14—Linking values and frames.

FRAMING PEOPLE & PLACES

I want to know more about my audiences...

Go to Section 15—Who are you talking to and why?

I want to know how to apply these communication tools to places...

Go to Section 16—Framing of nature reserves and zoos.

I want to know how to apply these tools to events and activities...

Go to Section 17—Activities as frames.

FRAMING AS STRATEGY

I want to see how our language impacts on our strategy...

Go to Section 18—How words power organisations.

I want to know how to test my communications...

Go to Section 19—Putting your framing to the test.

I want to get others involved and/or get in touch...

Go to Section 20—Now what?

I want to find out more about the theory behind this stuff...

Go to Section 21—Resources.



what is framing?

Our words and actions are key tools in conservation but we are not currently using them to their full potential.

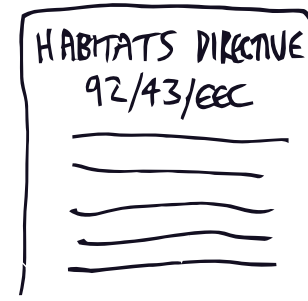
This is where framing comes in...



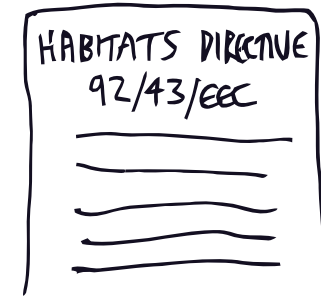
POTENTIAL TB
CARRIER



ONE OF BRITAIN'S
MOST LOVED SPECIES



UNNECESSARY
RED - TAPE



VITAL WILDLIFE
PROTECTION

1 | WHAT IS FRAMING?

Why framing matters to conservation

The goal of conservation is to help wildlife and our natural world thrive. To do this we need the support of decision makers and the public. Research has shown that certain words and experiences are more likely to inspire and motivate people than others.

Therefore our language is integral to our goals.

It is time to subject the language we use to the same level of scrutiny as other traditional conservation activities, such as managing the water levels on our nature reserves or understanding the population trends of threatened species.

Our words and actions are key tools in conservation but we are not currently using them to their full potential.

That is where framing comes in.

WHAT IS FRAMING?

Frames are related bits of information stored in memory, they are mental structures. These mental structures can be engaged by a single word, a phrase or an image, as long as it carries a clear set of associations and implies a way of viewing the world.

The sociologist Erving Goffman uses the metaphor 'life as a play' to describe how frames work, because they share much in common with theatre. Like a play, frames have a characters, locations, props, plot-lines, relationships, emotions and drama.

They include words, images, characters, actions, relationships, emotions and—importantly—values ([see Common Cause for Nature](#)).

WHAT'S IN A FRAME?

Let's take **"RED TAPE"** as an example.

REPETITION:

Its constant use has made it a powerful and recognisable metaphor and frame.

IN YOUR HEAD:

Even if you do not agree with it you will still recognise it and it will still trigger associations in your mind.

EVOKES:

It brings to mind associations about the inefficiency of law, how it holds back the potential of business and how many laws are overly restrictive.

IN THE FRAME:

In this frame business and progress are the heroes and legislation and bureaucrats are the villains.

PROBLEM & SOLUTION:

It effectively casts the debate into a simplistic two sided issue where the removal of legislation will lead to a better outcome.

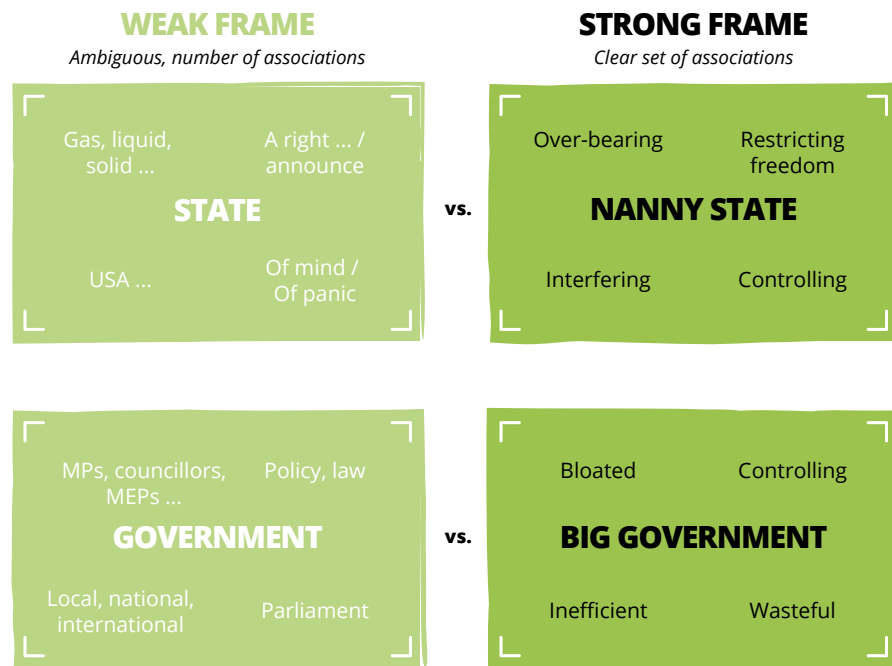
NARRATIVE POWER:

Its constant use means that a single phrase now produces a whole narrative.

FRAMES ORGANISE REALITY FOR US; THOSE WE HEAR MOST OFTEN BECOME OUR COMMON SENSE.

What makes a frame? A frame is a mental structure. This mental structure can be engaged by a single word, a phrase or an image, as long as it carries a clear set of associations and implies a way of viewing the world.

All words and phrases engage frames, but some are ambiguous or weak, while others have a strong relationship to one particular frame.



IMPORTANT: You are already framing!

In your work you are constantly framing things. When you choose one set of words rather than another it has implications—you activate certain associations and beliefs instead of others, these can either be helpful or work against your interests.

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE BELIEFS AND VALUES THAT YOUR COMMUNICATIONS ARE CURRENTLY ENGAGING?

Example: A word like ‘school’ doesn’t seem particularly loaded, and yet it carries with it all sorts of associations and will bring to mind our personal experiences with the word and also the connections we make to popular culture (TV, film, etc). So if a friend says my new job is like “school”, people can identify with what they mean. They are suggesting their workplace is strict and hierarchical, while if they said it was like a “holiday” it might suggest there is too little structure.



YOU CANNOT HELP BRINGING SOME ASSOCIATIONS TO MIND WHEN YOU USE CERTAIN FRAMES.

As linguist George Lakoff argues, mentioning a frame will reinforce it—even if you are disagreeing with it.

Example: When the American President Richard Nixon said “I am not a crook”, he instantly made the association, between himself and a crook, even as he denied it. Tell someone “don’t think of an elephant”, Lakoff points out, and an elephant is the first thing we think of; it is hardwired into our brains.

In practice: When tempted to challenge a claim, remember that restating the original frame may reinforce it. Try to avoid using frames you do not agree with wherever possible.

WHAT’S ALREADY IN PEOPLE’S HEADS REALLY MATTERS

What story or frame does your communication engage and reinforce?

Example: Let’s take the word “farming”—what does it bring to mind?

Most people get a picture of a jolly farmer and small holding of happy animals. Think about children’s books, television programmes, toys and adverts for butter—these have been the main influences in forming the frame of “farming” in most people’s minds.

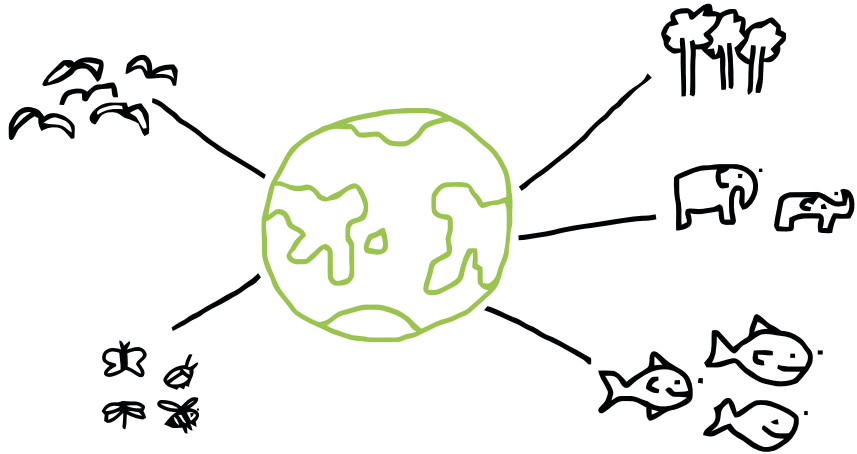
When we say that farming is causing a problem we are bringing to mind small farms with happy animals and low stocking densities. We need a term that evokes the impact of modern farming, something like “industrial agriculture” or “industrialisation of the countryside”.

Not convinced?

Try this: We are going to have a quick game of Pictionary!

Without using any letters or symbols and imagining your audience is your family, give yourself 60 seconds to draw “biodiversity”. Then do the same for “wildlife”.

Compare the pictures—in what ways are they different? The frames are very different and evoke very different associations. Try it again for “farming” and “agriculture”.



More than words

Framing is not simply about words, it is every aspect of communication. Just as certain words bring to mind certain associations, so do places, images and even body language. Later in this guide we will look at these other aspects of communication.

Values

There is a close link between our communications and our motivations. Framing is important because it influences the way we think, feel and act: much of this is to do with our underlying values.

For more on values see CCFN.

I WANT MORE THEORY....

Suggestions for further reading can be found at the end of this guide.

What frames do you use most at work?

Think about one issue you talk about a lot at work: farming, fundraising, site management, attracting visitors, anything. List the words and phrases you use most around these issues.

What associations do they bring to mind?

Now pick a couple of the words or phrases and create a spider diagram showing the different associations that come to mind from those terms and the terms immediately related to them. You can also try the above pictionary exercise with some of the terms—it might reveal associations you have not thought of.

2 | HOW DOES FRAMING RELATE TO MY WORK?

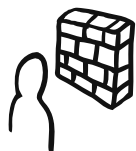
Understand why framing is important whatever your role

All jobs involve communication and therefore framing. No matter who your audience is—colleagues, the public, decision makers, scientists, supporters—the way you choose (consciously or not) to communicate any issue with them will have an influence on the outcome.

Issues that apply to all types of conservation work:



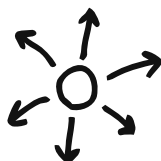
Jargon—All jobs in conservation have their own technical language or abbreviations. Using this jargon can trap us into a single way of thinking and distance us from non-expert groups.



Defining problems—The words you choose to use to describe the problems and issues you face at work will impact on the solutions you come up with. (See Section 15 for further detail.)



Your surroundings—The layout of your office, your meeting rooms and even your nature reserves will influence the work that takes place in them. Your previous experiences there, and the way they have been laid out, will bring to mind certain ways of working and approaches—meaning that you will always work in a similar way. This may sometimes be helpful but can also trap you into patterns of thinking. (Conservation sites themselves are also frames: see Section 16.)



Pretty much everything—It is harder to think of something that isn't "framing" rather than something that is. The key is to identify the strong frames that help and hinder you. This toolkit will help you to identify the key framing issue in your work—whatever your role.

To give some examples:

- + If you work in planning to prevent wildlife from being harmed, then meeting with developers is an exercise in framing. Where you have the meeting is important: a site visit will change the feel of the meeting and make the impacts seem more tangible. Giving examples of developments that have gone ahead without harming wildlife can make your proposed changes more real and acceptable.
- + If you are working in a reserve or zoo shop then the layout of the shop, the products you are selling and your interactions with visitors all matter. What are you selling in the shop? How does this relate to the work of your organisation? What are the associations you make with this product? What does that then say about your organisation and your conservation goals? Is it even clear why you have a shop?

So even if you do not do any external communications there is still a lot about framing you should know—in particular we recommend you look at Sections 13 and 18.

EXERCISE: Appoint a jargon advisor!

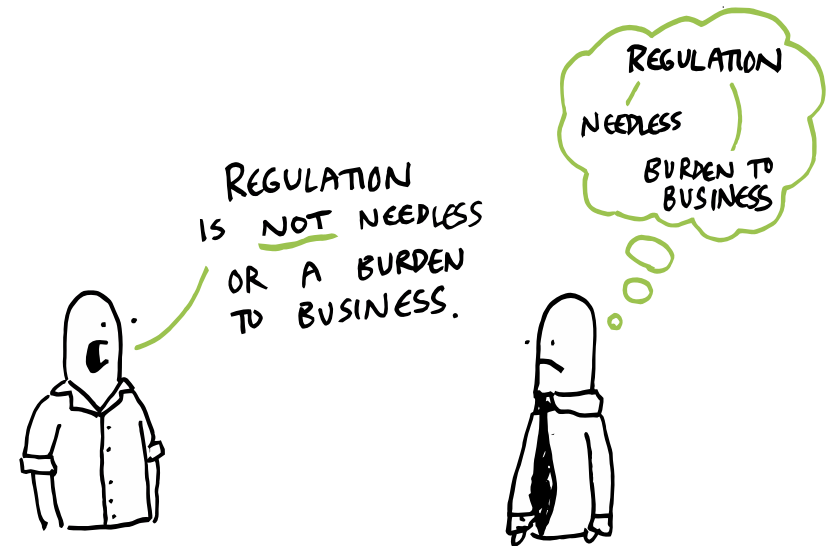
Find a friend or family member who knows little about conservation and try your messages on them. Ask them to look out for any jargon you are using or anything they don't understand, also ask them to repeat what you just said and make notes. If they don't understand something don't explain it, change it! They are the audience and it is what they hear that is important, not what you say!

How does the way you communicate at work differ from how you speak to your friends and family? Why is it different?



framing in practice

The more we adopt a certain approach the more we become convinced that this is the only way to do things—effective communication is about challenging these assumptions.



3 | AVOIDING THE TRAPS

What to avoid when creating communications...

In the previous section we saw how framing is important. In this section we will analyse a frame and consider some traps to avoid.

Facts need to be part of a story

On their own, facts and figures are unlikely to motivate.

Do not go straight to the depressing stuff

First highlight what is amazing about the nature. What makes voles so brilliant? This is why we should care about them.

Watervole numbers have **dramatically declined** by **over 50%** over the last five years. Without our help the fate of these helpless creatures is **sealed and extinction looms**. Not only are voles popular with the **public**, but they also bring in tourists, increase local **species diversity** and perform ecosystem functions that equate to £2.34 per vole. **Donate just £25 today** and **our influential organisation will clean up** our waters and secure a better future for the voles.

Use 'clean', 'pristine' and 'healthy' with caution

These frames are linked to ideas of sterile and lifeless environments and are likely to engage unhelpful security values (see CCFN).

Avoid transactional relationships

Conservation is not a business. If we are to change things we need more than just people's money. Do not make it seem that you are being paid to save nature but rather that it is something you will do together with supporters.

Can you see any of these traps in your own communications? Which is the trap you most commonly fall into?

Do not throw in the kitchen sink

There is a reason advertisers and politicians use clear and simple messaging: it works! Although it is tempting to try and cover all bases and any potential counter arguments this does not make for a good clear message. A focused, powerful and emotional single reason will be more powerful than listing 100 different reasons.

Do not overdo threat

We need to highlight the problem but not depress people.

Point of the intrinsic worth of nature. Before highlighting the problem talk about how amazing nature is.

Show your passion and avoid passive third person

The voles are popular with the public but are they popular with you?

Do not make nature a victim, give it an active role

Try not to construct frames where nature only has things done to it. Although nature cannot save itself it can do other active things like surprise and amaze us.

Try to avoid jargon

Test your message on someone outside the conservation sector, you might not even recognise what terms are jargon.

Ensure the problem and solution are clear

Here the problem itself is absent. If people can recognise the problem they are more likely to want to help.

Do not play the superhero

Give a role to supporters rather than making it seem you can do it all on your own.

Avoid talking about ambition, success and power

These frames are likely to make people focus on themselves rather than on people and wildlife.

4 | TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE FRAMING

What makes an effective message?

We have seen the pitfalls, now it is time to look at what we might want to include to make our framing work.

Point out the intrinsic worth of nature. Before highlighting the problem talk about how amazing nature is.

Pique curiosity. Implying their elusiveness and the luck in actually seeing them will likely engage curiosity which is helpful.

Give nature an active role.
Here voles inspire and excite us.

We love watervoles. **They inspire and excite** those lucky enough to see these **elusive** creatures. Sadly, their homes have been **destroyed and replaced by farmland and industry.** Together we can create new spaces to help the watervoles to thrive again. With **help and support from people like you,** we have already **helped save thousands of watervoles** across the UK in a number of great projects. There is hope and you can help us build on this great work.

Working with supporters not for them. Here the supporters have an active helping role.

Make the change seem possible. Link to past successful campaigns.

Be clear about the cause of the problem.

What are you already doing well?
What do you need to practice doing more of?

5 | GOING WILD

How to talk about nature...

We are part of nature

Try to use frames that make us part of the natural world.

Wildlife not biodiversity

Wildlife is what you have in your garden and connects better with people.

It's not just for scientists

Not everyone is enthused by science, using other forms of appreciation, like art are equally important.

Be evocative

Use sounds, describe sounds encourage people to get out and feel nature. Make it emotional.

Let's talk
about
Nature

It's for everyone

Too often we frame nature, especially connection with nature, as for kids rather than everyone.

Nature is not a product

Avoid frames that present nature as part of a transaction. People are not paying you to do conservation, they donate because they love wildlife.

Nature is not a barrier to be overcome

Avoid stating that "nature is not a barrier to ... jobs / progress / transport" this just makes people think that it is.

We love it!

Share in the joy of nature. Let people know how much you care about it. Don't be afraid to talk about care, beauty, compassion and meaning.

How do you most often frame nature?
How do other organisations & groups talk about nature?

6 | YOUR WORDS OR THEIRS?

How to avoid repeating harmful frames

Just as when US President Nixon said “I am not a crook” everyone thought ‘Oh Nixon is a crook’, the same thing happens when we repeat unhelpful frames: even if we are challenging them.

If we say “Badgers don’t carry TB”, we are simply reinforcing the link between badgers and TB even though that is exactly what we are trying to challenge. Research has shown that ‘mythbusters’ can actually serve to reinforce myths.

Wherever possible we must try not reinforce frames that are unhelpful to our cause. We can either choose to rework frames so they no longer reinforce something unhelpful or we can choose not to get into an argument and instead focus on our own message.

This approach has been used successfully by politicians in America who often use the phrase ‘don’t debate, relate’, because getting your own message out is more important than arguing with your opponent.

To give some examples:

- ✗ **Don’t say:** ‘Wind turbines aren’t noisy.’
- ✓ **Instead say:** ‘Modern wind turbines are graceful and quiet.’
- ✓ **Don’t debate:** ‘Wind farms are supported by most people.’

- ✗ **Don’t say:** ‘Badgers don’t spread TB’
- ✓ **Instead say:** ‘Increased cattle movement and lower restrictions are likely to have caused an increase in TB’
- ✓ **Don’t debate:** ‘Badgers are one of Britain’s most loved animals’.

EXERCISE: Instead say

List your top four frames to avoid and create an alternative that you can use instead. Pin this on the office wall.

✗ **Don’t say:**

✓ **Instead say:**

✓ **Don’t debate:**

✗ **Don’t say:**

✓ **Instead say:**

✓ **Don’t debate:**

✗ **Don’t say:**

✓ **Instead say:**

✓ **Don’t debate:**

✗ **Don’t say:**

✓ **Instead say:**

✓ **Don’t debate:**

7 | WHAT AM I REALLY SAYING?

Looking at your own communications

An important first step in applying framing to your work is to look at your own communication.

The following questions will help you work out the likely impacts of your current framing.

A worked example shows how the questions can be answered.

EXAMPLE

Let's use this headline as an example.

(In practice you could use this on longer text, images or even places—see reserves and zoos as a frame Section 16).

“Prince William warns poachers are outrunning efforts to stop wildlife trade.”

1) What is the focus? **What is given most importance?**

“Prince William warns poachers are outrunning efforts to stop wildlife trade.” 

Prince William is very much at the fore. He and his warning are the focus, while the efforts to stop the wildlife trade are also present.

SO WHAT?

It is likely to be good for Prince William but not that beneficial for the cause. The focus and emphasis here are on the Prince and the depressing future for wildlife. As it stands, the headline feeds both celebrity and hopelessness.

The use of threat is unlikely to motivate the reader, while the language around Prince William is likely to portray him as powerful, which could be problematic as it places him above others, giving his views greater importance. This also has implications for the values activated by the frame which we will discuss later in this section.

WHAT MIGHT BE BETTER?

Ideally Prince William would not be the focus of the frame, but obviously the Prince provides the media hook—removing him from the article may no longer make it “news”. As the headline stands, we would suggest that there is little gained from the current framing as it is likely to make people feel hopeless rather than motivated to act.

If the Prince has to be in the frame then highlighting what needs to be done to address the problem would be a more positive frame. It is also worth highlighting past successes as these show that change is possible and that the problem can be solved.

2) Who are the actors? **What are their roles?**

“**Prince William** warns poachers are outrunning efforts to stop **wildlife trade.**”



Prince William is present, his role is saviour and important messenger—he can see something we cannot and he is warning us of an impending threat that has been overlooked. Poachers are also present, they are the villain who is out of control, they are currently winning and outwitting (“*outrunning*”) those trying to stop them.

The wildlife trade is also an actor in the frame. Inanimate objects or events can be cast as an actor in a frame if they are doing something or having something done to them.

SO WHAT?

It is unhelpful to present poachers as faceless evil villains. They are often desperate people taking big risks and being rewarded little—with most of the money going elsewhere. Reinforcing this characterisation is likely to bring to mind tactics of stamping out or defeating the villain rather than focusing on what is actually driving the trade. It also helps to obscure the role of those managing the illegal trade. There is also racial subtext to this, there are several criminals involved in the different elements trading but it is often only black poachers that are given the negative focus of the frame and usually given the role of villains.

WHAT MIGHT BE BETTER?

Emphasise why the demand exists and how it can be addressed. Bring buyers and suppliers into the frame as this brings the deeper cause into the picture. This may be hard to capture in a headline but longer messages should attempt to incorporate this.

3) Metaphors & imagery? **What images come to mind?**

“Prince William warns poachers are outrunning efforts to stop wildlife trade.”



There is threat—images of dead and helpless wildlife. Evil poachers outrunning and outfoxing those trying to stop them. There is also the shadow of paternalistic colonialism—the Prince as a heroic figure leading the call to stop the villains.

SO WHAT?

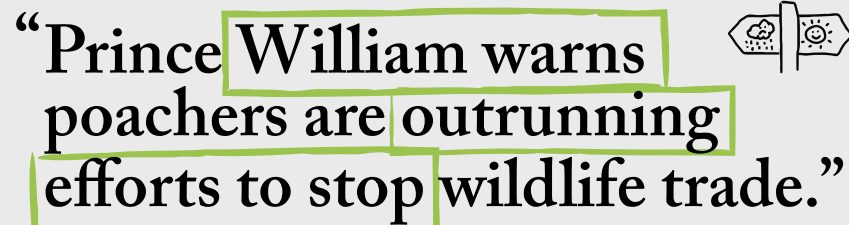
The message is threat heavy and depressing, the imagery brings to mind the problem rather than the solution. It certainly highlights the problem, but in a way that seems overwhelming and unsolvable—this is unlikely to motivate people to act.

WHAT MIGHT BE BETTER?

Try to evoke imagery of a winnable struggle rather than a lost cause. Highlight the problem but also show what can be done about it. Words that bring to mind past gains or a clear pathway forward—something that shows how we can stop poachers outrunning us rather than highlighting the fact that they are.

4) Foreshadowing? *Slippery slope or happy ever after?*

“Prince William warns poachers are outrunning efforts to stop wildlife trade.”



The foreshadowing is the possible future that the frame is hinting at.

Most frames suggest two possible futures, though they may emphasise one over the other:

- *Slippery slope*—what will happen if we do not address the problem.
- *Happy ever after*—what the author sees as the problem being solved.

Slippery slope: Illegal wildlife trade will go out of control and lead to extinction of animals

Happy ever after: People listen to Prince William and more resource is given to keeping poaching under control. The wildlife trade is stopped or at least slowing down.

SO WHAT?


As before, the narrative implied by the frame is a simplistic diagnosis of the problem and leads to an understanding that is just about stamping out poachers rather than decreasing demand for the trade.

WHAT MIGHT BE BETTER?

A narrative that allows the foreshadowing to draw on a wider picture of the issue and how it can be solved.

5) What's missing? *What's the elephant in the room frame?*

“Prince William warns poachers are outrunning efforts to stop wildlife trade.”



Frames focus our attention on a particular aspect of reality. But just as important as what's *in* the frame, is what's missing. Are any actors notable by their absence? Is anyone affected by the topic of the frame but not included?

In this example the causes of the problem are absent. There is nothing about the people driving the ivory trade, who is buying it and who is selling it. It is not clear why people want ivory—what is causing the demand?

SO WHAT?

The frame reduces the narrative to a simplistic battle between good and evil. The evil poachers and the good people trying to stop them. Poaching is a risky activity, what is the situation of the people doing it that makes them risk their lives? We cannot possibly expect a single sentence to contain all of this but what is chosen to be part of the frame and what is left out is really important. **Whenever you examine a frame look for the elephants!** (Even though Lakoff told us not to!)

WHAT MIGHT BE BETTER?

To have some of the wider context of the wildlife trade in the frame.

6) What values & beliefs underpin this frame?

What do you have to believe for this frame to be effective?

What values are being activated by the frame?

“Prince William warns poachers are outrunning efforts to stop wildlife trade.”

Beliefs

You need to believe that Prince William knows what he is talking about and think that it is important that he specifically is saying it—you must believe in his social standing and credibility.

You need to believe that poaching is out of control and that it is a problem. You also need to believe that the wildlife trade can be stopped by only targeting poachers and not other actors in the trade.

Values

Values are the deep motivations that drive us. The Appendix contains a map of the recognised values that we all share. Of these values this frame is most likely to be engaging power values (through the prominent role of the Prince) and security values (through the use of threat). Both of these values are unlikely to be helpful.

To see more about how values and frames link and how to use positive values see Section 14. To see more on the research and theory on values see CCFN. There is more on beliefs in the Section 12.

7) What's the alternative?

When looking to reframe the example we must first ask the question - what is the purpose of the news coverage? Will hearing that poaching is running out of control raise the profile of the issue? Possibly, but will it be likely to motivate people? Unlikely, a story about what can be done and how it is working is far more likely to galvanise support for action, as we know overuse of threat can paralyse people. Given that this is likely to depress rather than motivate people what is the purpose of the article?

What about the role of the Prince? There is some [research](#) to suggest that celebrities gain more from involvement in charity causes than the charities themselves.

“Together we can build on the decades of work we've done to stop the criminal 'wildlife trade', vows Prince William.”

This is still problematic in terms of Prince William being the focus in terms of the engagement of power values. However, the emphasis is more hopeful and the problem is still highlighted.

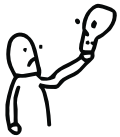
This reframing also looks a little clunky as we have crammed everything into a headline which you wouldn't normally do but hopefully it gives an idea of the principles.

EXERCISE: Now analyze your own communications

What is the focus? What is given most importance? Who or what is at the forefront of the frame?



Who are the actors? What are their roles? Who is doing what to who? Is there a hero, villain and victim? Are the roles helpful?



Metaphors & imagery? What images come to mind? When you read the text what mental images come to mind? Try to focus on the text in front of you rather than the issue in general.



Foreshadowing? Slippery slope or happy ever after? If the frame is taken to its logical conclusion what is the positive or negative outcome from the writers perspective.



What is missing? What is the elephant in the room? What is conspicuous by its absence? What might you expect to see that you don't? Are there any actors missing?



What values & beliefs underpin this frame? What values are likely to be engaged (see values map in the appendix)? What do you have to believe for this frame to work?



Can you reframe the communication and make it better? Use different actors? Change the focus? Change the beliefs and values that are likely to be engaged?



8 | A PICTURE PAINTS...



Using images effectively

Just like language, images are frames that engage different sets of beliefs and values. The following section sets out some of the key things to consider when using images in conservation.

People or landscapes

Are you showing a landscape that will engage a feeling of awe?

Powerful landscapes are great to inspire awe in people and attract attention, but how do they relate to your issue? Is the wildlife you are campaigning on in the frame?

WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE? WHERE IS THE WILDLIFE?

Sometimes portraying wildlife and nature without any human element can make it seem distant and abstract. It can unintentionally foster an unhelpful, fetishised version of nature that is pristine and devoid of people. While this might inspire awe and wonder, it also cultivates an idea of nature being wild—untouched, distant and separate from humans. Whether or not this framing is helpful may depend on what you are trying to achieve with your message.

Putting people in the picture



Who is in the frame and what are they doing? What are they wearing? Even the people's clothes can affect how a message influences people.

Are you showing an expert? For example, a scientist, a bird watcher in

outdoor gear with all the equipment? Or are you showing a more diverse group of people in terms of race, sex, age, disability?

What does your image say about who nature is for and what people should do when they are outdoors?



If there are people in the frame are they in nature or are they sticking to a path—what are you implying with the imagery? Is nature somewhere people can be free to explore? Are there places they cannot go because they are dangerous or because it's an area that needs protection for the sake of the wildlife? Is the reasoning for the protection made clear? If not, why is the image being used?

Threat vs. Hope

When we are highlighting a problem we should not shy away from showing it, but be aware that overdoing the threat can paralyse people. Try and use powerful positive images alongside those of threat to show why the issue matters—it is the beautiful wildlife we care about. We would always suggest making the positive image the bigger of the two to highlight the beauty of what is being lost.



Humour

Don't be afraid of experimenting with humour, much of conservation messaging is serious or scientific.

Humour is a powerful source of influence—just look at its prolific use in advertising. Although hitting the correct tone might be difficult and takes practice it is worth persevering with.



What image would you never consider using and why?
What do you wish you had an image of that you don't?

9 | FRAMING IN ACTION

Some real world examples of good framing

EQUAL MARRIAGE CAMPAIGN—IRELAND



Campaigners told strong stories about families and family values. The stories centred on a story of Irish society that was fair, equal and generous. The poster campaign focused on equality. Not only is equality an intrinsic value and likely to motivate supporters (see [CCFN](#)) but the campaign was also straightforward and tightly focused. You can see from this poster that the language was simple and clear. Notably the campaigners refused to be drawn into debates with the opposition, learning early on that it simply fueled their fire. Read more about it [here](#).

Good examples don't just come from big NGO's or advertising agencies. Marches and protest show that framing expertise is not confined to experts and is something that any group can do well.



Take this example for football fans campaigning for lower ticket prices. This clever and simple slogan directly challenges the “market frame” of fans as consumers and nothing more. The slogan reminds us that being a fan is more than buying a ticket.

If you are arranging a march or protest, while it is good to have a lot of placards to get a clear message across remember that it gives supporters little room to express themselves. It is always good to encourage people to create their own messages—it is a simple way of getting people more engaged. It is also something that gets shared on social media and makes the event more enjoyable to those that attend—a sea of logos may be good for brand recognition but can make things look sterile and staged.

A good compromise we really liked was ‘*For the love of...*’—placards that allowed people to fill in what they cared about.

FOR THE LOVE OF



We really loved the connection between climate change and the things people care about, it is a great, uplifting and clever way to get lots of disparate groups to connect with the issue.

Appealing to many different audiences on their own terms. If we had one criticism of the campaign it would be that it does not connect to actions clearly enough.

However, it does set a good precedent for how to campaign more positively on an issue that has often been depressing and overwhelming.

BLUEPRINT FOR WATER STRAPLINE

We provided Blueprint for Water (an NGO water policy coalition) with some communication advice. As an issue water pollution has a lot of potential pitfalls, words like polluted, clean, clear, unspoilt and pristine often pop up. These can be unhelpful due to their associations with cleanliness and security values (see CCFN). They also bring to mind sterile environments, adverts for cleaning products or a dentist. We encouraged a stronger focus on the wealth of wildlife rather than the clarity of water.

“CREATING A VIBRANT FUTURE FOR WATER, PEOPLE & NATURE”

We like this strapline as it is clear and positive and avoids the pitfalls mentioned above. We also talked about how to make wildlife more active in the frame. Rather than talking about a creating homes for species, we suggested a more evocative and emotive approach using the sounds of wildlife to evoke a vision of what our waters could be like.

All waters and wetlands, from our ponds and rivers to our seas should be alive with the splashing, buzzing and croaking of flourishing wildlife. By working together and managing our water more effectively, we can ensure a future full of wildlife-rich places that everyone can explore and enjoy.

We need to experiment more with the ways we describe nature and this is a great example of something a little different.

RSPB MOMENTS



RSPB moments captured the stories, and importantly feelings of supporters when they interacted with wildlife. The language and imagery were really evocative and likely to engage intrinsic values (see CCFN).

These were mostly used within publications to supporters so not often seen outside RSPB membership. The mixture of great wildlife photography and evocative personal experience is something that any NGO could easily replicate with their supporters.

30 DAYS WILD (WILDLIFE TRUSTS)



This campaign is great, getting people out in nature is not only good for their wellbeing but also helps to create experiences that will help people reframe how they view the natural world. PIRC had a small but hopefully notable input, encouraging the Wildlife Trust to really emphasise self-direction in this campaign.

Rather than simply completing a list of activities, which can lead to people focusing on the task rather than the experience, people were encouraged to do their own thing. Although ideas of activities were provided they were just options and people ended up participating in unexpected and creative ways. We also like the breadth of type of engagement with some suggestions concentrating more on feeling and experiences than traditional conservation activities.

Keep an eye out for good examples and let us know about them.

**What is the most memorable framing you have seen?
What made it effective?**



creating new frames

Getting creative with framing is not all about the new. It is also about connecting your communications with the stories that people already know.



10 | A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Look at your communication from a different angle

AS WE SAW IN SECTION 2, FRAMING IS NOT JUST AN EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS ISSUE.

Framing is affecting your work every day in ways that you are unlikely to be aware of. Our jargon and approaches trap us in loops that force us to view problems and solutions from a certain perspective—we become convinced that there is only one way to view a problem and a solution.

To find truly novel solutions to any type of problem we must look at things from a new perspective.

The following **exercises** will help you break out of your normal thinking, they are fun (for some at least!). They may feel a little alien to you at first but don't give up, keep practicing and new insights will come.

The first three exercises are built on the framing analysis tools found in the “What am I really saying?” Section.

We recommend that you place a time limit on the exercises and whenever possible do them in groups or at least pairs (though you can try them on your own). Give yourself at least half an hour to do them and if possible make time for discussion afterwards. Also make notes, although these exercises might not provide the answer immediately they are likely to start a new helpful train of thought. Oh and have fun!



1. Change the focus

What is your normal focal point? Water? Landscape? Birds? Pollution? Visitors? Funders? What could you learn from changing your focus?

Purpose: Switching the focus will highlight areas you might have overlooked, it could also provide the basis for a new framing of your issue.

List what you think your main focus is along with a list of three secondary points of focus, things we know are important to our issue but do not focus on directly.

What would your work look like if you focused on one of these different parts of your issue? How would your approach change? Would you allocate your resources differently? Would you talk to different people?

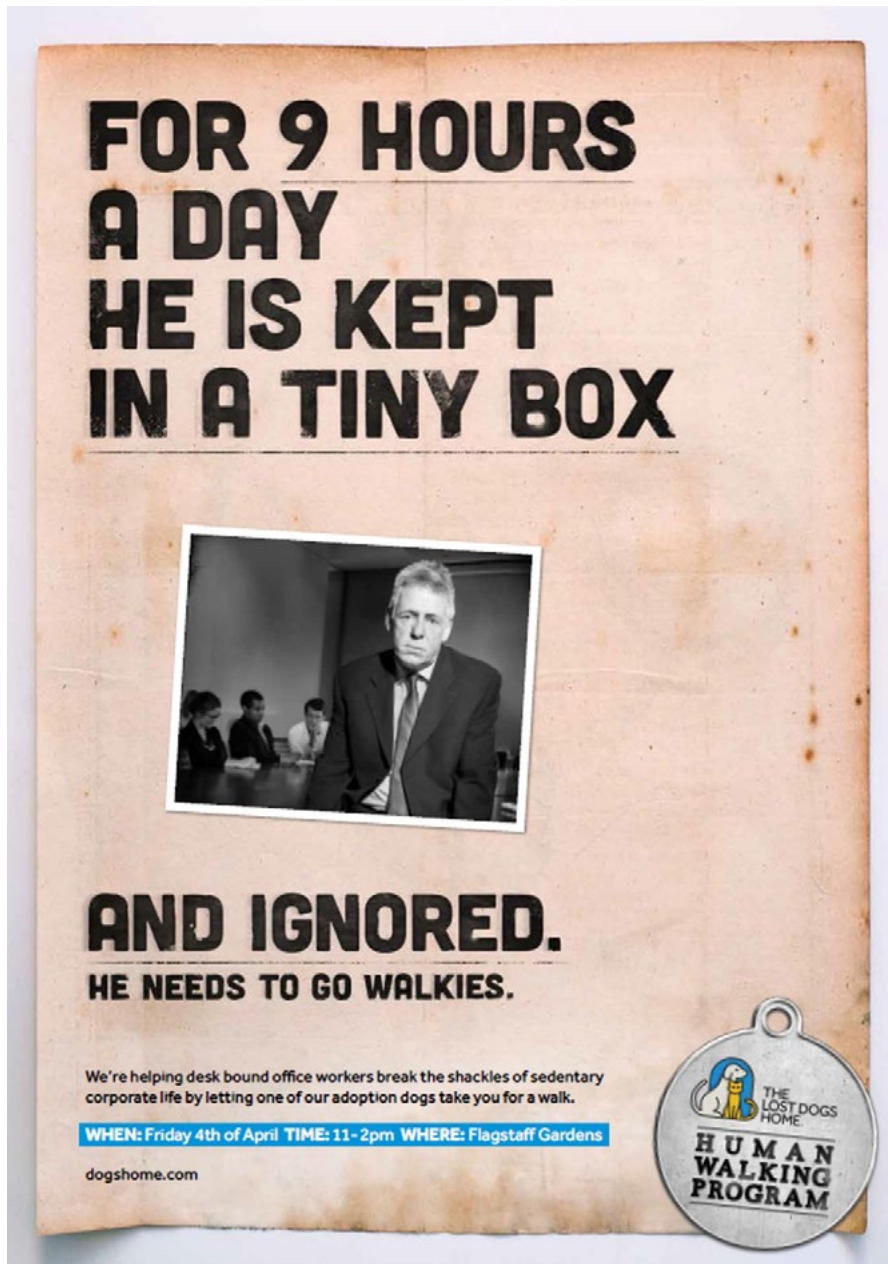
Outcome: Have a go at creating a sentence or shorter frame based on this different focus. Are there any insights from doing this exercise that you can now bring back to your current work?

Here is a great **example** of changing the focus:



Typically dog rehoming campaigns focus on the animals, often showing them as helpless victims.

In this instance the frame has been subverted:



2. Identify the elephant in the room

What is the one thing related to your issue that you rarely talk about?

Purpose: to identify parts of your problem you might usually overlook.

An elephant based prop is good for this or even just a drawing on a white board. We would advise against using real elephants as they can be distracting and require a lot of room. Now list some common words and phrase used in your work, or even better look at some of your publications and press releases.

Outcome: What are the elephants you can identify? How might highlighting these change your framing?

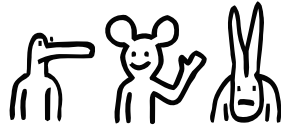
Example: Are you focusing on research to back up your case rather than examining why so little policy is actually based on evidence? What would happen if you discussed the elephant? Where might it lead you?

In a video example [from Bond](#) the idea of using pity in messaging is challenged—pity and disempowerment are often overused in development campaigning, while their negatives are often overlooked. The analogy they use is a blind date where a well meaning but patronising person comes along to speak for the man on the date.



What is the elephant in conservation communications?

3. Find new characters



Who do you not talk about, what roles do they do?

For example are you always looking at the roles and influence of farming and government? How about the agri-chemical industry and food consumers? What new insights to the problem would come if you looked at these actors?

Purpose: Too often we target a single group. Could we affect change if we concentrated on the role of other actors?

List 5 groups you commonly talk to, or include in your frames.

List 5 groups that are related to your issue but you don't talk to or include in your frames.

What would your communications look if you included those overlooked groups? How would the focus change? How does it relate to your issue?

Outcome: Have a go at producing frames that include the new actors.

4. Subvert a well established frame



How could you use a recognisable frame without reinforcing it?

It can be unwise to unquestioningly use the frames of others as they can frequently be unhelpful. Even if you are criticising the issue, using the same terms can reinforce it. However, clever use of a well known frame could subvert it.

Purpose: Parody and subversion allow you to use the familiarity of well practiced and effective framing but to a different end.

How would you subvert a political speech, an advert, a soap opera—to help you highlight wildlife? What terms should you be careful to avoid?

Outcome: Have a go at producing a subverted frame for your issue. An advert is probably an easy place to start, but remember to avoid the pitfalls of the transactional frame (see “pitfalls” section above for further explanation). What would an advert contain that is similar to other ads? What would be different (what is unique about wildlife)? List them first if it helps.

Example:



This placard mocks the way Donald Trump talks and uses it as a protest against him.

Here the style of talking, rather than the content, is being parodied, so it is unlikely that negative frames are being reinforced.

What issue is most in need of a new perspective?
What's the best reframing you have seen?

11 | BACK TO BASICS

Know your own story

A strong vision needs a clear narrative. To do this you need to get back to basics.

YOUR VISION

The first part of creating a new narrative or frame is to come up with the bare bones of your story for your campaign or problem. A strong and effective narrative needs to be clear and simple. To keep the language as simple as possible, aim for something that even a 10-year-old could understand. A good first step is to go back to first principles and describe what you are doing in the form of a fairytale.

What is the purpose? The reasoning behind this exercise is to get you to get down to the nuts and bolts of the story you are trying to tell without the jargon. This will then give you the bare bones of your vision with which to create a new frame.

EXERCISE: Write your mission in four lines in the form of a story.

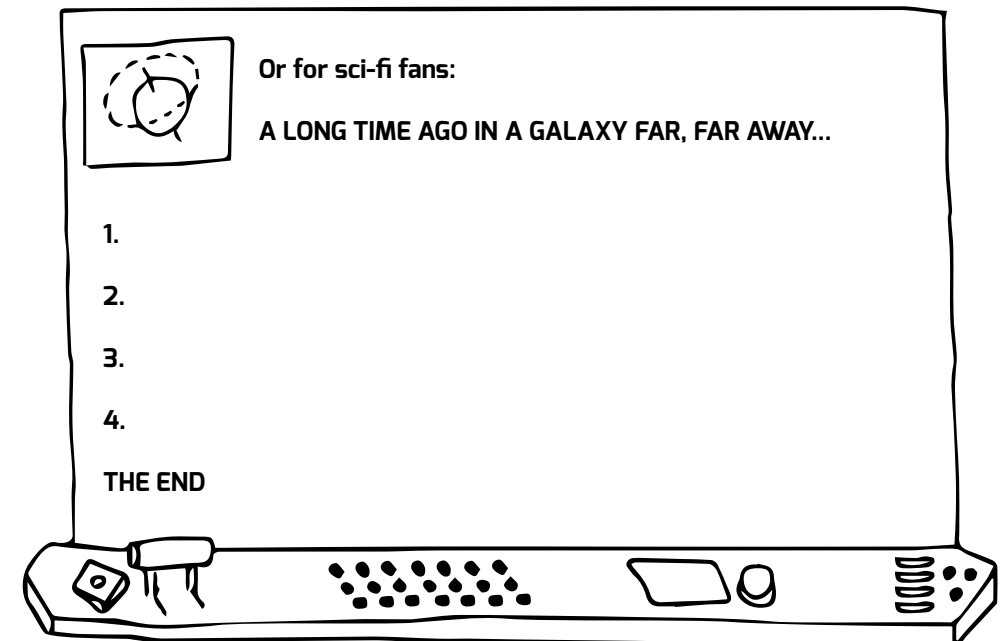
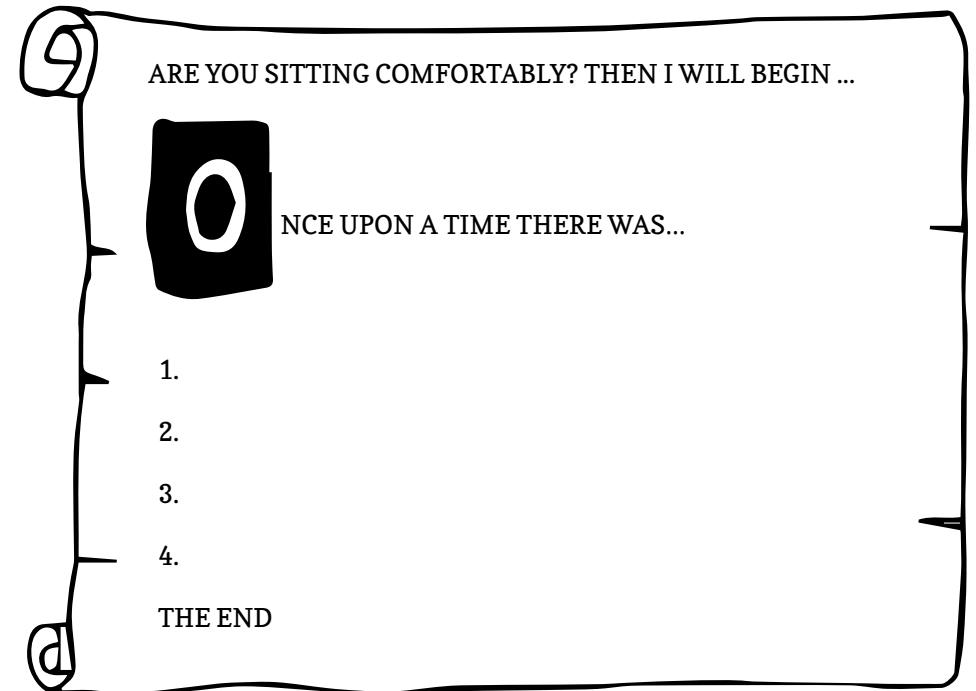
Your four sentences should cover:

What is the problem as you see it? What do you want to be different? (Has something been tried before, and failed?)

What would it look like if the problem had gone away? What do you believe it could look like?

What concrete actions would change the situation for the better? How?

What can I do? What do you want from your audience? How do they fit into the story?



12 | WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR?

Identify your framing task

It seems really obvious but it is important to ask why you are communicating, what exactly is it you are trying to do?

To identify your 'framing task' you need to think about who you are talking to and how they are thinking about the issue right now.

- Q What commonly held beliefs do you need to challenge?
- Q What commonly held beliefs do you need to reinforce?
- Q What shift in thinking do you want to see? What is your goal?

For example: Say my goal is to *get more kids into nature*.

The beliefs that might be helpful to me are:

That exercise is good for children; that children love wildlife and animals; that children should be able to play outside at school etc.

The beliefs that are unhelpful might be:

That outside is dangerous and strangers could pose a threat; that outside is dangerous because of traffic; that kids prefer screens to the outdoors; that there is no wildlife near me etc.

EXERCISE: What is your issue and your goal?

What commonly held beliefs are helpful (enabling beliefs) to it?
List as many as you can.

What commonly held beliefs are unhelpful (barrier beliefs) to it?
List as many as you can.

When you create a new frame you should examine these enabling and barrier beliefs and see which your new frame is likely to be engaging. You can use this to help develop your framing task.

Example framing task: Football Association

The Football Association has a grand vision of everyone of every age, gender, sexuality and race playing football all day long.

One of their desired outcomes is that more girls play football at school. The audiences they want to target are secondary school girls, plus their parents and teachers, because these people will influence the schools.

They run some focus groups and do some research to find out that the main barrier belief is that 'football is for boys'. They decide to try and transform this into the enabling belief that 'football is for everyone'.

Framing task: "We want schools girls, their parents and teachers to believe that football is for everyone, in order for more girls to play football at school."

EXERCISE: Set out your framing task

What is the goal, or desired outcome, of your communication?

Who do you want to communicate to?

What do you want people to believe after hearing your communication?

So your framing task is...

13 | STAR JUMPS & MAGIC MARKERS—GET CREATIVE

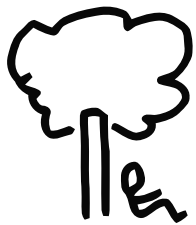
Be inspired to create a new communication

Now it is time to get creative!

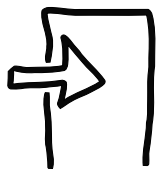
Breaking the cycle of using the same old jargon is difficult, as is coming up with ideas about how to communicate clearly and simply to non-experts.

CREATIVE CONDITIONS

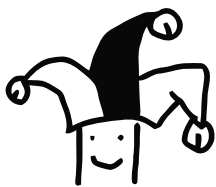
There are a couple of things that will help you get in a creative mood:



Go outside—Why is it we think an office environment is conducive to creativity? Go for a walk (without your phone)—this feels like cheating but it isn't, you are working, it just doesn't feel like it. You, like poets and artists before you, are getting inspiration from nature. Remember what we consider to be work is itself just a frame and not always a very helpful one at that.



Change the scene—If you can, go somewhere else to do this creative work, your office carries a lot of baggage, it is a frame loaded with a lot of experiences and a certain type of thinking that you will probably want to take a break from.



Wear a silly hat—Dr Seuss did this to get in the mind of his different characters. Doing something out of the ordinary can shake up your approach and your thinking, plus it's fun!



Energise—Mix in some physical activity, sitting on your bum is not always great for your brain. Try some of the exercises standing up or moving about.



Break out the materials—Coloured pens, paper, play dough, glue, scissors—gather up a load of stuff that helps you feel creative. It will help set the mood even if you don't use it all. It's always good to have the option.



Be as positive as possible—Don't dismantle the ideas of others, try and add to what each other is saying rather than criticising. If it isn't a safe space to offer a terrible idea it might not be a good space to offer up a brilliant one either. Sometimes a bad idea can spark a good one. This may feel a little strange but it actually works.



Make time—Carve out some time to get into the creative mind set. Too often we try and make our most important communications in time pressured situations. While we cannot avoid doing this sometimes, we must also set time aside for creative thinking.



Take breaks—Give yourself some breathing space, take breaks and come back to the exercises. Don't force yourself to agree on something on the spot, these exercises might start your brain going with an idea that will only fully form the next day. Give some time to reflect and ask the opinions of others on what you have come up with, especially those who don't work on the issue.

LEAVE YOUR DESK... I KNOW YOU DON'T HAVE TIME, DO IT ANYWAY—LEAVE THE OFFICE!

The following **exercises** are to help you think differently and creatively—something that's essential if you are to become skilled at framing.

1. My issue is like a... because...



Materials: Paper / pen / hat or bowl

Purpose: We so often think about an issue using the same frame that it clouds our ability to look at an issue differently or come up with new solutions. This exercise is one way to break out of our everyday thinking and lead you to powerful metaphors you can use in your new frames.

List as many random things you can think of on separate pieces of paper—animals, countries, cooking utensils, items of clothing. You could also do this exercise by printing off some random images.

Fold each piece of paper up and mix them up in a bowl.

Now get into pairs—take it in turns to draw out bits of paper and repeat the phrase as above. Each turn one of you will be describing while the other will be noting some of the key terms or points of interest.

Example: My issue is like a SPATULA because... it has a clear and specific function that is not fulfilled by anything else. It makes things more efficient and reduces waste. It is important but often overlooked... etc.

Outcome: End with a discussion about what helpful analogies and metaphors emerged.

2. A picture paints



Materials: Internet access/a computer/a printer or alternatively a pen and some paper

Purpose: This exercise encourages the use of images to help simplify your messages.

You will need to try and explain your issue using just three images. You can either draw three pictures by hand, (not using any symbols or letters) or find three images online that tell your story and print them off.

Now present the three images to your colleagues in the order that tells your story—**but do not say anything**. Get them to tell the story back to you before you give your interpretation. This will show how much it is the images doing the storytelling.

In follow up discussion think about what the focus of your images were and how they made you feel? Also was there anything missing? Could you think of alternative images?

Outcome: How could you use these images in your communications? Could you use them to form the basis of a new story to tell?

3. Meet an alien



Materials: A pen and paper to take notes, a silly hat or costume may also help.

Purpose: Make you aware of the assumptions you are making about what your audiences knows. It will hopefully help you fill in the blanks in your frames. It should shed light on where you have not provided enough information about the cause and solution of your problem.

Everyone writes their own version of the issue in no more than three lines.

Get into a pair. Take it in turns to be the alien.

One of you will be the alien (wear the silly hat if you have one to hand) the other will be the explainer.

As the alien, your job is to question everything. As your partner describes the issue from the lines they have written, don't be afraid to ask what any of the words mean (although we are working on the assumption the alien has a basic knowledge of English) or question why to any assumption.

Outcome: What have you been taking for granted? What might you have to explain better in your framing of the issue?

4. Simplify, simplify / jargon-free sessions



Start with a shout out of jargon you use and write these on a flip chart—these are banned words and are not allowed to be used. How do we know if its jargon? Would the average 14-year old understand it? Does someone not working in conservation use the word regularly? During the session add to the flipchart anything else that crops up. It is worth having a buzzer, bell or agreeing a noise anyone can make if these words are said.

Purpose: To make you aware of your assumptions about what your audiences know and the jargon you are using that might be alienating them.

Now discuss the issue and your approach. This will not be easy, you will need to concentrate in order to get out all the jargon, and you will find you can quickly fall back into it. If you are brave get someone from another department to come and monitor you with a buzzer.

Finally discuss how it felt—was it difficult? What was the hardest thing to change? What surprised you?

If you really want to stretch yourself use this tool made by [XKCD](#). Can you write what your organisation does using this tool?

Outcome: What jargon can you lose? How different did the conversations feel? Was anything surprising? How does jargon hold you back?

5. Adopt a new profession



In this exercise try not to use the terms or phrases you normally do and adopt the language of the groups you are imitating. For example it is unlikely that a Hollywood writer would use the term cross-compliance.

If your problem was

... a crime, how would it be talked about on CSI? Imagine you are the detective, what are the clues? Who are the suspects?

... an illness, what are symptoms, how would the doctor approach it?

... a screenplay what genre would it be and who would play what role?

... a chemistry experiment, what elements are needed and how do they react with one another?

... a recipe, what are the ingredients? What are the crucial parts of the process that need to go right in order to make the meal delicious?

... whatever other profession you can think of...

Outcome: What new ways do you have of describing the issue? Did any insights arise that you didn't have before? Any new metaphors?

What is your favourite natural sound?

How does it make you feel?

Draw something, anything...

14 | LINKING VALUES & FRAMES

Make your communications motivate

We know from the research (there is so much we had to put it into [a separate publication](#)) that messages that are likely to engage intrinsic values are more likely to motivate people to act on behalf of nature.

However, it can sometimes be difficult to know whether your frames will be likely to effectively engage those values. The following section should help make engaging intrinsic values easier—for more information on values, see [Common Cause for Nature](#).

Using values to create new messages

Purpose: This section is designed to broaden our vocabulary in terms of intrinsic values. The more words and inspiration you have to draw on the easier it will be to engage the right values.

Choose up to 3 of the intrinsic values (on the next 2 pages) of the values that you think might be helpful from the values map.

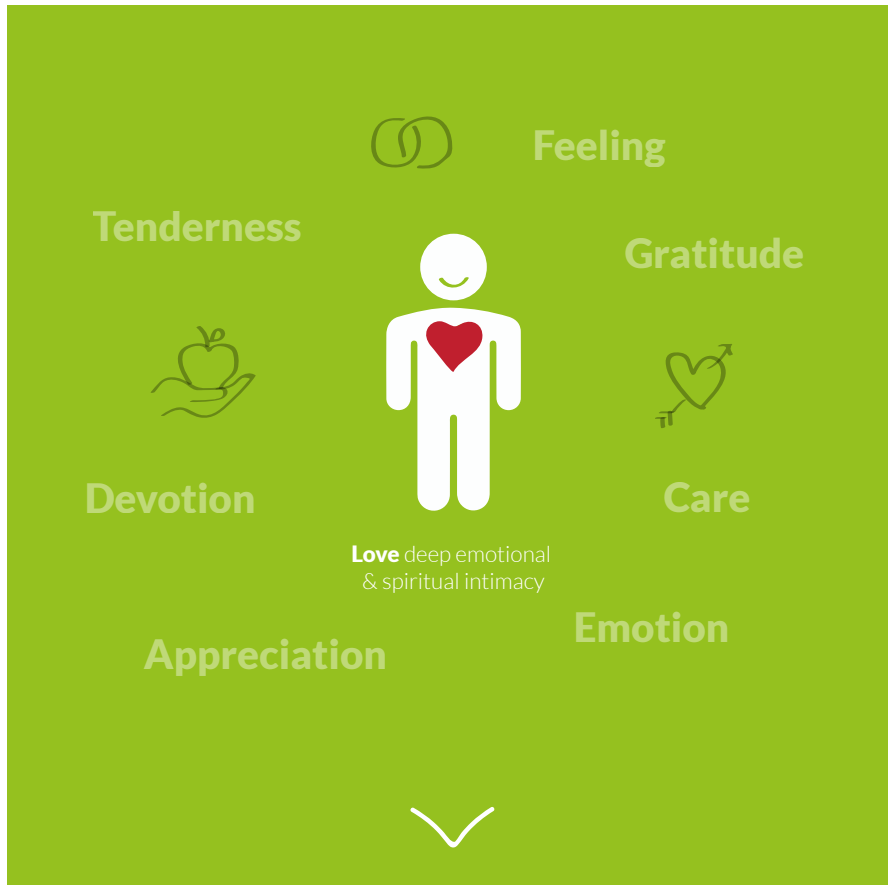
Write them in the middle of a large piece of paper.

Write down any related words or short sentences and draw any images that come to mind around the words. Put this on the wall and keep adding to it.

Use this values cloud as the basis for developing some new messages. Try to incorporate the words or phrase into frames about your issue.

Pick some more values and do the same again. Mix it up! Pick a value you wouldn't usually—like *friendship*, *spirituality* or *curiosity*.

For example...



Once you have developed a word and picture cloud like that above, use it to create some phrasing that is likely to engage those intrinsic values:

I love nature and care deeply about wildlife and its future.

I feel something I cannot describe when I am surrounded by nature, it makes me really appreciate being alive.

I love wildlife it is amazing!

A World of Beauty: beauty of nature and the arts

Intrinsic values include:

- A World At Peace:** free of war and conflict
- Broadmindedness:** tolerant of different ideas and beliefs
- Choosing My Own Goals:** selecting own purposes
- Creativity:** uniqueness, imagination
- Curiosity:** interested in everything, exploring
- Equality:** equal opportunity for all
- Forgiveness:** willing to pardon others
- Freedom:** freedom of action and thought
- Helpfulness:** working for the welfare of others
- Honesty:** genuine, sincere
- Independence:** self reliant, self sufficient
- Influence:** having an impact on people and events
- Inner Harmony:** at peace with myself
- Love:** deep emotional and spiritual intimacy
- Loyalty:** faithful to my friends, group
- Meaning In Life:** a purpose in life
- Privacy:** the right to have a private sphere
- Protecting The Environment:** preserving nature
- Responsibility:** dependable, reliable
- Self Respect:** belief in one's own worth
- Social Justice:** correcting injustice, care for the weak
- Spiritual Life:** emphasis on spiritual not material matters
- True Friendship:** close, supportive friends
- Unity With Nature:** fitting into nature
- Variety:** filled with challenge, novelty and change
- Wisdom:** a mature understanding of life

We made a deck of values which you can get at: publicinterest.org.uk/shop





framing people & places

Just as written communications contain frames, every place can be seen as a frame: whether it is a nature reserve, a museum or a zoo. People have strong associations with places, a certain set of expectations and beliefs about what the experience will be like and who it is for.



15 | WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO & WHY?





Learning more about your audiences

Once you have the basis of your message you might want to think more about your audience.

WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

It is likely that 100% of your audience will be human beings, while there are differences that we will talk about later it is important to remember that whoever you are focusing on, they all have lots in common.

THINGS MOST AUDIENCES HAVE IN COMMON:

-  **Facts on their own will not convince people**—we are not robots, we are all driven by our values and emotions so our communications should allow for this.
-  **We understand the world through stories**—while the type of story might change for each audience it is important to remember that stories are key.
-  **You can't just transfer people's interests: the "Justin Bieber Gorilla problem"**—if someone currently cares about Justin Bieber but not much about mountain gorillas, taking Justin Bieber to see mountain gorillas will only make them like Justin Bieber more—it is unlikely to make them interested in the conservation of gorillas (see Further Reading on page 90 for more on this).
-  **Messages focusing on intrinsic values are the most effective**—this is true regardless of what the person currently prioritises most. A number of studies have show this.

TARGETING A SPECIFIC GROUP

Why is it we often spend a large amount of time and energy trying to talk to those who do not agree with us? We strongly recommend talking to those who already care and building from there.

Potential audiences

If you need some help to think about who your audience might be—for example when starting a new campaign—it may help to simply generate a long list using the questions below (being as specific as possible):

- Who cares about your issue?
- Who supports it or opposes it?
- Who influences or shapes the issue?
- Who is affected by your issue?
- Who do you not currently talk to who's affected by this issue?

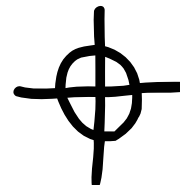
Who are you talking to?

You can split the groups you talk to into these four categories:



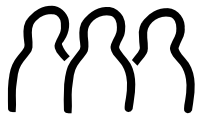
1. Constituency or base

This is your base. This is the choir that we so often talk about preaching to. When thinking about how to build this group we need to think about who else we can mobilise to work alongside us? Who shares our goals?



2. Target

This is the person you want to make a change happen. Who has the power to change the thing you want changed? Sometimes a message is suitable for the target, other times it will be more effective to focus your message at a different audience.



3. Audiences

This is who you are aiming your message at. Who will influence your target? Your audience could be your target or it could be a group that you think will influence your target. For example you might be targeting a politician but your audience will be the public as you think pressure from them on the politician will be more effective. What do you know about your audience?



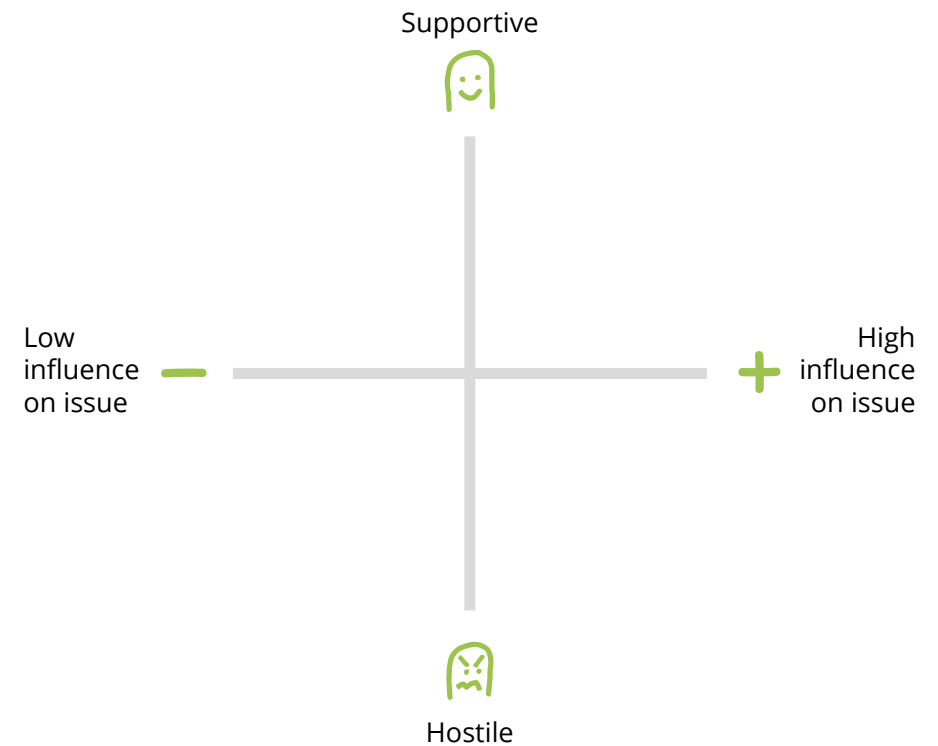
4. Opposition

There will always be a small group of people that you will find it hard to convince. The evidence shows that it takes a lot to change the minds of people with very strong beliefs. Therefore, if we want to have the most impact, it doesn't make sense to spend time or energy trying to change the minds of our strongest opponents.

Map your audience

Map your audiences and allies according to how hostile or supportive they are currently and how much they influence the issue. Think carefully about why you think they're influential – do they have a broad remit, or a high level of trust from others?

So, for example, if you think that 'parents' are quite supportive and quite influential, write them in the middle of the top right quadrant.



Know your audience

To create effective communications, you need to think about how to tell your story to your audience in a way that will connect with them and motivate them. Consider the following questions:

- What do they know about your issue?
- How do they think about it?
- What motivates them?
- What are their best qualities? Where do they show their 'good side'? What do they take pride in?
- What stories do they relate to?
- Which people and issues does your audience relate to?
- Who would make a good messenger, and via which medium?

Choosing a messenger

Different audiences will respond to messengers differently. For example there are many people who are skeptical about climate change, these people don't trust scientists so other messengers need to be used with this group.

A great approach is to have those affected by an issue speaking from their own perspective, like this brilliant initiative by [Mind](#). Although we cannot get wildlife to speak for itself we can try novel voices of those that live near or with wildlife. What about the use of celebrities? We cover this in the previous PIRC report [CCFN](#).

EXERCISE: Challenge your Assumptions

What's the purpose: To understand which of our assumptions are founded on evidence and which may be holding us back.

Write down three key audiences.

Now list all the assumptions you make about that group—what they do like, what they don't like, who they trust, what they aren't interested in, what they will and won't do?

Leave the list for a while, take a walk, do some other work. Now return to the list and really question it, what research or evidence do you have for these assumptions?

Finally, look at which assumptions you have least evidence for, how does this assumption influence your work? How would things change if it wasn't true?

Outcome: What do we know about this audience? What do we need to research about them? What might this tell us about the messages to use?

Who do you never try and communicate with? Why?



16

FRAMING NATURE RESERVES & ZOOS

Applying these communication tools to places

Just as written communications contain frames, every place can be seen as a frame whether it is a nature reserve, a museum, a zoo, or wherever you are right now reading this (don't worry we aren't watching you through the webcam... or are we?).

People have strong associations with zoos and nature reserves: when they arrive they have a certain set of expectations and beliefs about what the experience will be like and who they think it is for. This will be based on their own experiences, what their friends and families think and how these places are portrayed in wider culture—television, film etc.

This jumble of associations and experiences forms the person's "frame" of what a nature reserve or zoo is and importantly whether or not it is an experience for them.

Try the pictorial exercise from Section 1 again, you have 30 seconds to draw "zoo", "museum" or "nature reserve"—don't use symbols or letters, what associations come to mind?

The structure, layout and visitors all play a part in either reinforcing or challenging these preconceptions and mental associations. Small things can be important in reinforcing a frame.

For example, a person who feels that nature zoos are "only for kids" could have this impression reinforced by the number of children at a zoo or the abundance of toys in the zoo shop.

CHALLENGING THE FRAME

Every aspect of the place is important in creating the framing, but as in written communication, some will have bigger influences than others.

When trying a new approach think about the following:

- What could we do differently?
- How could we change the focus?
- Are there other characters we could use to tell the story?

Examples



- 1 Hides**
How do people know how to use these? They are often the focus of a reserve, what does this framing say about how we should interact with nature?
- 2 Keep to the path**
Are there any opportunities to interact with nature directly? Petting zoo, wild play area? Is your framing suggesting that nature is something apart from us that we just passively look at?

- 3 Welcome**
What is the first thing someone sees as they arrive? Could you have bird feeders, vegetation or similar in front of the entrance? Who would feel most welcome when arriving? What do you need to know before you arrive?



- 4 Don't exit through the gift shop**
Make sure there is something to do after the gift shop and before the visitor leaves, you want the experience to be summed up by something more meaningful than an economic transaction.

What is the last thing the visitor experiences when leaving after a great day out? Is it something that makes them feel inspired by the natural world or it is an argument with their child about whether or not the purchase of a kaleidoscope is necessary?

What could you easily change to improve the framing of your site? What do you just have to live with? How could you mitigate the things you can't change?

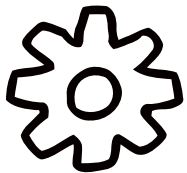
17 | ACTIVITIES AS FRAMES

Applying communication tools to events and activities

A lesson, a guided tour, a talk or even a nest box-making event—they are all frames. The language you use, the venue, the amount of guidance you give and the opportunities you offer for engagement all influence this framing and how participants will feel afterwards.

What makes an event motivating?

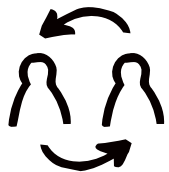
Similar principles to the effective framing section, but also the following:



1. SETTING

Where does your event start and finish? What sort of frame does this create? Could you change the surroundings or at least key things about them?

Example: One unnamed nature reserve had a big sign saying 'Go explore'. Opposite this was a large sign saying 'Keep off the grass!' Such mixed messages are not ideal.



2. PARTICIPATION

Give people an opportunity to be actively involved and engaged (drawing, acting mime, singing).

Example: Give people multiple ways to do an activity, provide opportunities to be creative. If you are talking to kids about an animal can you give them an opportunity to act things out rather than just talking at them?

Health and Safety

Some events might require a health and safety briefing—how do you frame this? Where you do this is also important.

What is the focus?

Is it on safety itself or on what safety lets you do? Framing the H and S component as “what you need to do in order to have fun safely” is a different frame to “how to keep safe”.

It is placing more emphasis on the activity than on the safety itself. Focus on safety specifically is likely to be unhelpful as it could engage security values ([see Common Cause for Nature](#)).



3. INTRIGUE

How can you pique people's curiosity? Can you tell them intriguing snippets about something to make them want to find out more. Could you incorporate a treasure hunt or point to a mysterious object?

Example: We noted some great subtle slate labels at one nature reserve, they were hidden in the reeds and looked natural but conveyed information about the species found there—great for stimulating curiosity!



4. REFLECTION

Can you you give people time to think on their own or discuss in pairs what they have learnt?



framing as strategy

The language you use in your strategy and policy work will create an internal culture based on this language. It is inescapable. It is therefore important that we check new terms to ensure we are not locking ourselves into a single set of perspectives and therefore a single set of solutions.



18 | HOW WORDS POWER ORGANISATIONS

How language impacts on your organisational strategy

It is probably more accurate to say that your work is framing rather than suggesting that framing is something that impacts on your work. Whatever your role, whatever your goal, framing is essential.

Professionalism can constrain us



“Professionalism” and “strategy” are of course frames that impose a certain set of rules on us. A particular way of talking, a particular way of working and a particular way of behaving that makes people respond in certain ways. Some things are not professional or strategic and other things are.

Framing and strategy



The language you use in your strategy and policy responses will create an internal culture based on this language. It is inescapable, if you are responding to something then of course you have to talk about it. However, it is important that we constantly try and check this by using new terms and perspectives to ensure we are not locking ourselves into a single set of perspectives and therefore types of solution.

Many government terms are normalised and used internally without a second thought to how they might change our thinking. Try approaches like adding “so-called” or “what the Government refers to as”. This may sound long-winded but keeping a distance from policies like “so-called biodiversity offsetting” might keep a healthy skepticism about what is being offered. Another option is to create your own terms for policies and proposals and use these internally instead of government terms.

EXERCISE: Examine your strategy, how much government language do you recognise? List some of the terms, draw spider diagrams to draw out the associations you make with these words.

Now collectively think of some words you would never write in a strategy or government response. Perhaps words like “love” or “beauty” What do you associate with these words? Think about why these words are not used? Are they unprofessional? Why? What dictates the frame of professionalism?

The focus of your strategy



The focus you give will change the focus of the whole organisation. By putting some things in your strategy and leaving others out you are creating a particular frame and focus.

IN PRACTICE: Monthly framing meetings where you ask questions about the terms you are using at the moment: what are the pitfalls of this term? Can we use an alternative? Use the analysis tool from Section 2.

Targets



The setting of targets is a clear example of framing influencing the strategic direction of an organisation. The wording of targets is incredibly important, when we set a target we are giving focus to an organisation and if this is not done carefully we could be setting a goal that ends up overriding other things we care about.

Should our strategies set out to save wildlife? Encourage our staff and others to love wildlife? Create a culture where people are happy, motivated and not overworked?

How strategy is set

This is also a framing issue. Who has had most influence over the process, what opportunity have people had to feed into the process? Is it clear how

their views have been incorporated? Are senior staff given more chance to comment? What does this say about whose views you value?

EXERCISE: Change department for a meeting

If you work in a big organisation start a session by describing what each other does. So someone from marketing will describe the role of someone in conservation and vice versa.

It is vital not to correct the other person but rather just listen. Once they have finished ask some open-ended questions that help to explain a bit more why they have that impression—for example are there any bits of work that you think of specifically when you think of that department? Record what they say.

Though you will be very tempted to respond it will work much better if you don't. There is something about your role or your department that has led them to that impression. The way your work is framed by an organisation influences the perspective of others. Hearing from them is a good way to learn about how you are coming across. Their idea of what you do has been formed in large part by your communications with them.

It is vital that you have the best intentions when doing this exercise!

Finally...

The above are just some exercises you can do but don't expect to break out of your old frames and patterns in a single session. Looking at things from a new perspective takes time. It will also be worth looking at the exercises in Section 7 if you haven't already.

**What is given most importance in your strategy?
Whose views in the organisation does it most reflect?**

19 | PUTTING YOUR FRAMING TO THE TEST

How to test your communications

If possible it is always preferable to test your messages in some way. If you have the resource then testing can really help you hone a message.

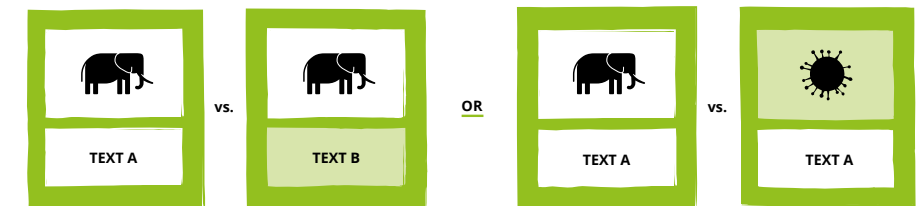
For a longer guide on testing, see: publicinterest.org.uk/testing

You need to identify **who you are going to test** (your audience); **what you're going to test** and compare (your independent variables), and **what outcome you expect** (your dependent variables). It's important to have some thinking behind each of these decisions, and also to have a hypothesis about the outcome your messages will have and why.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEST?

Keep it simple—Testing a sentence or two is better than long paragraphs. The longer the test framing the harder it is to see which aspect of the frame it is that is being most successful. For example a great opening sentence could carry a relatively ineffective paragraph.

Make sure you are comparing like with like—Test an image with the same text or same text with different images.



Know what's going on in each message (what you think will work or not). Have a working hypothesis for what you are testing and why.

Challenge your assumptions. Put in alternatives that challenge what you think your audience may like.

Each message should be sufficiently different from each other.

We saw an example where a threatening message tested positively. However when we found out more it turned out it had been tested against an even more threatening message and had performed better than that one. In this instance no positive messaging had been used as a comparison. Ensure that you are testing different approaches.

What role are you giving your supporters and volunteers? What do you want people to do as a result of seeing the message? Some methods allow you to include an intentions survey to give you information on this.

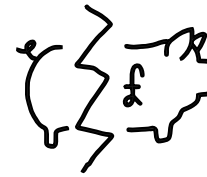
Has it actually been tested? Agencies might tell you certain things work and others don't, ensure you get the data on assumptions. We have seen focus groups used to come to conclusions that would not be significant through quantitative testing.

LISTENING VS. LEADING—THE LIMITS OF FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups will provide you with helpful insights about how people already understand the world—but it is vital to question what comes out of them. Just because a certain framing is popular it does not mean that it is necessarily helpful.

A really interesting and well resourced piece of research for DEFRA showed some of the popular frames for describing the relationship between humans and nature—four narratives were identified as often used—*Nature finds a way*, *Nature can't keep up*, *Humanity finds a way* and *Humanity can't keep up*. But no analysis was given to whether or not these frames are actually beneficial to use—in this instance knowing that these are popular narratives is helpful but does not mean that you should actively use them.

For example *Humanity finds a way* is particularly problematic as it has a particular technofix foreshadowing. The others might be useful depending on the frame created to feed into the story but, as they are, none are likely to be helpful frames. In summary this research is useful and interesting but must be treated with caution. Only once the narratives have been tested with regard to response and framed in a wider context can we tell whether they are useful or not.

Types of testing:**NO BUDGET**

With no budget but some time you can do other research:

Desk research: Use existing survey data from universities, market researchers or other institutions. E.g. Eurobarometer, European Social Survey.

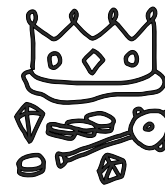
Pool your common knowledge: Get together with other activists, supporters or allies and pool your knowledge of what people think about your issue.

Basic media framing analysis: Create a media diary, or pick a few examples of print or online media that you think are representative of common understanding. Carry out a framing analysis with colleagues.

**LOW BUDGET**

On-the-street-interviews: Try sending a group of volunteers out onto the street and asking members of the public a few on-the-spot questions.

Low-cost focus groups: Invite a group of friends or university students to take part in a small 'focus group' in which you ask a number of questions to provoke conversation.

**MORE BUDGET**

Engage a research agency to run: **in-depth interviews, focus groups, or your own polling survey.**

If you could test one thing about a message to a high level of certainty what would it be? Why?

20 | NOW WHAT?

Get others involved and get in touch!

We hope you enjoyed this toolkit,

We are still still learning about framing and our insights are developing all the time, so hearing from you really helps us. Got a burning question? Or an example of good framing? Get in touch info@publicinterest.org.uk.

4 THINGS TO REMEMBER BEFORE YOU GO...

- ★ **You are probably already doing amazing stuff**—hopefully a lot of what is in this toolkit will just help you hone and understand what has worked for you.
- ★ **You are not alone**—There are lots of other people waking up to the importance of this issue. Reach out to others in your organisation and others across the sector that care about framing and exchange thoughts and practice.
- ★ **It's not just about communication**—With a deeper understanding of framing you will see that other aspects of our work, such as how our organisations are structured, have big impact on the outcomes of our work. For more on the implications beyond communications see [Common Cause for Nature](#).
- ★ **Nature is AMAZING**—You know this already but we have to remind ourselves at every opportunity why we do what we do. What is inspiring, intriguing, fascinating, beautiful and curious about the natural world? Take every opportunity to remind yourself and others of this.

Finally, here is a picture of a hedgehog, because it is clearly better than anything we or anyone else could ever write to finish this publication.



21 | RESOURCES

Slides

If you would like slides to give your colleagues a presentation on framing get in touch info@publicinterest.org.uk. PIRC are also available for training and workshops on framing.

Reading

VALUES

Common Cause for Nature

valuesandframes.org/initiative/nature

Common Cause

valuesandframes.org

The Common Cause Handbook

publicinterest.org.uk/the-common-cause-handbook

(full of references for even more reading!)

FRAMES

Finding Frames for Development

valuesandframes.org/initiative/development

FrameWorks Institute

frameworksinstitute.org

STORIES

The Centre for Story-Based Strategy

storybasedstrategy.org

Celebrity endorsement: 'Signifying the public: celebrity advocacy and post-democratic politics' and 'The role of celebrities in mediating distant suffering', The International Journal of Cultural Studies

manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/article/?id=12611

INSPIRATION

If it is all too much and you think you can't go on watch these (only one is UK-focused and two are of birds! But they are awesome!) Share your inspiration with us!

[Birds of Paradise](#)

[Peacock Spiders](#)

[Starling murmuration](#)

[Lynx standoff](#)

If you need more GO OUTSIDE!!!

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22 | APPENDIX: THE VALUE OF TWEETING

Four e.gs that use intrinsic values and have some of the positives we set out in the tips section:

Framing Nature @framingnature · 10h
 What inspires and surprises you most about nature?
 Share your story #wildyunexpected

← 58 ↻ 156 ★ 91 ⋮

Highlights the *world of beauty* value and is also likely to engage *curiosity*.

Framing Nature @framingnature · 10h
 Why do we love hedgehogs? No idea but we just know they are brilliant,
 what do you think makes them so great? #hedgehogs

← 58 ↻ 156 ★ 91 ⋮

Highlights the values of *love* and *world of beauty* and the intrinsic value of wildlife. Also starts a conversation that we want supporters to join.

Framing Nature @framingnature · 10h
 Thanks to our dedicated volunteers and staff for helping red squirrels
 thrive at our reserves—get out and see them! #seethereds

← 58 ↻ 156 ★ 91 ⋮

Here the squirrels are not just helpless victims they are thriving.

Framing Nature @framingnature · 10h
 We know you love our rivers as much as we do, that's why they need
 better protection from pollution—make your voice heard! link.com/sign

← 58 ↻ 156 ★ 91 ⋮

Avoiding *clean* and *healthy* as these are likely to engage unhelpful *security* values.



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 For the love of—The Climate Coalition
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 Dog—Lost Dogs Home Melbourne, Australia
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“I felt my lungs inflate with the onrush of scenery—air, mountains, trees, people. I thought, ‘This is what it is to be happy.’

Sylvia Plath

framing nature toolkit