

NARRATIVE SAFETY TOOLKIT



FOR YOUTH CLIMATE JUSTICE LEADERS
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Who is Project 90 by 2030

Project 90 by 2030 is a social and environmental justice organisation inspiring and mobilising South African society towards a sustainably developed and equitable low-carbon future.

What is the Youth Support Hub

Project 90 by 2030's Youth Support Hub is a youth-led initiative which aims to bring young people in the climate justice movement together and develop their skills, by connecting them to each other and to expert coaches who can help them grow. More information here: www.youthsupporthub.org.za



WHY THIS TOOLKIT

This booklet serves as a reference guide to help you identify and navigate the challenges and issues that may arise when interacting with media, running campaigns and sharing your public profiles. It is not an exhaustive list of to-dos, but it serves as a general best practice.

Need help? Please reach out to the Youth Support Hub for tailored advice on a one-on-one basis.

Contact: supporthub@90by2030.org.za

Who is this toolkit for? This toolkit is tailored for young climate leaders involved in community engagement, advocacy, and movement-building who seek to amplify their message while safeguarding their credibility and impact.





HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

When...	Go to...
Before Campaigns or Public Actions	Strategic Communication (4Ws + H), Building a Strong Message, Understanding Your Audience
Before Posting on Social Media	Think Before You Share, Understanding Risk, Digital Realities: Online is Forever
Before Media Interviews or Public Speaking	Engaging with Media, Pre-Interview Checklist, ABC Technique, Envelope Technique
When You're Unsure About Risk	AWARE Framework, Understanding Risk
When Thinking About Safety (Yours & Others)	Protecting Yourself and Others, Consent Matters & Exposure vs Protection
When Facing Online Backlash or Harassment	Digital Realities, Managing Online Risks
During a Crisis	Crisis Communication Basics, The 5 C's of Crisis Communication
When You Want to Strengthen Your Message	Building a Strong Message, Messaging Tools & Phrase That Pays
When Facing Misinformation or Disinformation	Recognising the Patterns, The Truth Sandwich, Response Protocols, Building Resilience
Short on time?	Go straight to Final Takeaways

Final Note: You don't need to use everything in this toolkit at once. Start with what you need, when you need it. Come back to it as your work grows and your context changes.



UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE SAFETY



What is Narrative Safety?

Narrative safety is about understanding the risks that come with public storytelling and communication - and making informed choices about how to share your message.

It means:

- Knowing what to say and what not to say
- Protecting your identity and others when needed
- Being aware of how your message could be used, misused, or misunderstood

Why Narrative Matters

A good narrative is essential in strategic communications because it shapes how messages are perceived, remembered, and acted upon.

Facts inform - but stories move people.

A strong narrative can:

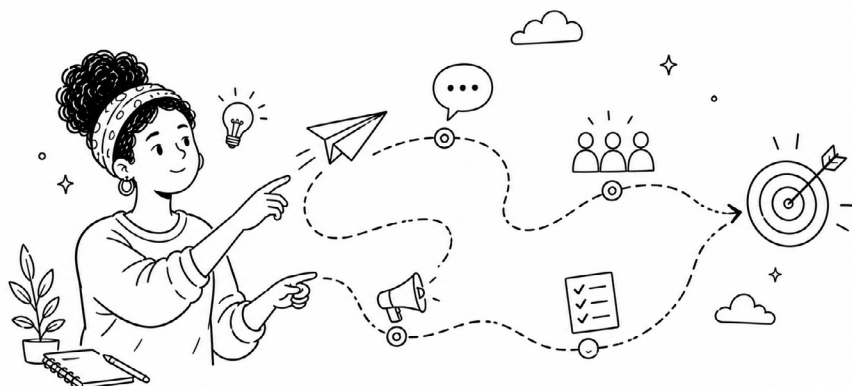
Make climate change feel real and local
Build trust and credibility
Influence decisions and behaviour
Mobilise communities

But a poorly framed message can:

Be misunderstood or misrepresented
Trigger backlash
Put you or others at risk



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION



Having an impactful narrative is all about being prepared, which means having a clear strategy and communication plan. Use the framework below to plan your communication - this will ensure that you are always ready to deal with any campaign, media engagement or challenges that may emerge.

Building Your Communication Strategy

A strategic communication plan consists of the following components. For each, consider both the practical action and the safety implication:

Component	Action	Safety Consideration
Objective (WHY)	What are you trying to achieve?	WHY would someone try to challenge what you are trying to achieve?
Messaging (WHAT)	What is the core message you want to convey?	WHAT could cause challenges or be at stake when communicating your message?



Component	Action	Safety Consideration
Audience (WHO)	Who needs to hear your message for real-world impact?	WHO could be listening that could cause issues or challenges to your safety?
Activities (WHAT)	What steps will you take to communicate?	WHAT risks do those steps carry?
Actions (HOW)	How are you going to achieve your objective?	HOW could you be exposed to safety challenges and harms when trying to achieve your objective?
Timing (WHEN)	When is the best moment to share your message?	WHEN are you planning to share your message and how could it impact your physical and digital safety, and your wellbeing?

Assess Before You Act: The AWARE Framework

Before taking any public action or launching a campaign, use the AWARE framework to assess your safety:

Step 1 - AWARE: Do you see the risks?

Are you aware of the safety risks relating to your work?

Some concerns are immediate consequences, while others are collateral impacts.

- Context Check: What are the laws? What is your profile?
- Risk Analysis: Identify small vs. big narrative safety issues without paralysis.

Step 2 - WILLING: Is the risk accepted?

- Are you personally willing to take this risk?
- Is the organisation willing?
- Is the community willing?

Step 3 - INFORMED: Do you know how to manage it?

Do you have the knowledge to Prevent, Detect and Respond?

Step 4 - ABLE: Can you actually do the steps?

Consider questions of: Resourcing, Legality and Financing.

Step 5 - THEN WHAT?: The "After World"

What if the risk occurred? Consider the chilling effect vs. your goals.

Prevention is always better than cure.



BUILDING A STRONG MESSAGE



Before speaking out, get clear on your message

Keep It Simple

Your message should be one clear idea you repeat consistently over time.

Examples:

- Climate change is already affecting us
- Clean air is a human right
- Fossil fuels are harming our health

How you deliver your message will constantly change, but it is important to stick to **ONE MESSAGE, OVER TIME, IN VOLUME.**



Principles of Good Messaging

Principle	What It Means
Clear & Simple	Say less, more effectively.
Emotionally Resonant	Connects to values and lived experience.
Real-World Impact	Tied to everyday life and community realities.
Real-World Impact	Repeated across all channels and over time.

Show, Don't Tell

Instead of saying “climate change is real,” show what that looks like:

- Dry taps, flooded homes, rising food prices
- People connect with what they can see and feel

Instead of saying “the planet is warming,” describe the “shrinking glaciers” or the “earlier spring blooms.”

- **The Shared Value:** Find what the audience cares about - money, safety, tradition - and attach your message to it.
- **Localise the Global:** People cannot feel a 1.5°C global average, but they can feel a dry tap or a record-breaking heatwave in their own suburb.

Consideration of Challenges and Issues in Messaging

Every form of communication comes with challenges, whether engaging media, political officials, or communities - but sharing our stories is essential for impact.

Before speaking out, assess potential risks and plan for possible negative outcomes.

Additional notes:

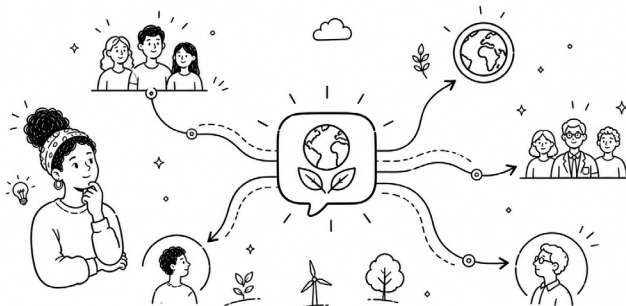
- **Misinformation & Misrepresentation** - Messages can be distorted. Stay clear, accurate, and grounded in facts.
- **Government or Institutional Repercussions** - Activism may be seen as a threat. Know your rights and consider risks before posting publicly.



Strategic Messaging Matrix: “Climate Change is Real”

Audience	The “Angle”	The Communication	Why it Lands
Parents & Homeowners	Financial Stability	“Insurance premiums are doubling due to local flood risks; we must build infrastructure that protects our kids’ future.”	Connects global shifts to the household budget and family legacy.
Business Leaders	Risk Management	“Yields are dropping 40% due to shifting seasons; we must invest in water reclamation to protect our long-term margins.”	Uses the language of material risk and profitability rather than morality.
Farmers & Rural Communities	Lived Experience	“The rains don’t come in October like they did for our grandfathers; the heat is staying longer and drying the boreholes.”	Validates heritage and observation over abstract scientific data.
Policy Makers	National Security	“Droughts are driving unsustainable migration to cities; we need a resilience strategy to manage water grids and housing.”	Frames the issue as a matter of public order and resource competition.

In the above example our MESSAGE is “Climate change is real” even if we do not use those words.





Checklist for Assessing Your Messaging

Question to ask yourself	To consider
Is my message clear and aligned with my objectives?	An unclear and misaligned message could lead to it being misinterpreted or distorted. This could lead to bad faith actors taking actions that could cause harm or issues with your safety.
Could my message be misinterpreted or distorted?	
Have I considered potential backlash from different audiences?	Backlash could look like many different things depending on your positionality and what it is that you said or did - knowingly or unknowingly. This could result in: a SLAPP suit (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), online/digital harassment and bullying, or physical safety concerns and harms.
Who might oppose my message, and how might they respond?	
Am I using language that is inclusive and culturally sensitive?	Considering how we say something is just as essential as saying it. If we are not aware of this we could expose ourselves to backlash, harm, or other challenges.
Have I tested the message with a trusted group for feedback?	Testing your message goes beyond just making sure it sounds good - it also allows us to identify anything that could cause challenges and harms. It helps make sure our message is strategic and effective.
Am I prepared to respond to criticism or misinformation effectively?	Ensure your messaging is backed by facts and evidence. Make sure you are safeguarding your online/social media presence. Depending on the intensity, ensure you have support structures in place to help navigate wellbeing, legal, and other challenges that could arise.
Does my message have the right timing for maximum impact?	Consider: Elections (media coverage increases but so does risk), COP (you have to go home after).
Does my message reinforce my credibility and long-term goals?	A message that shifts over time, or contradicts your past statements, gives opponents an opening. Stay consistent and build on what you have already said publicly.



Case Study: Telling Your Story Safely

Effective communication requires thinking through not just what you say, but who and what you include. Sharing names, locations, or images may seem harmless but can put people at risk.

Example: A journalist from a community newspaper is interviewing you regarding climate justice and air pollution in your area. In this interview you are proud to speak and share all the information you can to ensure your message gets out there. You also happen to share a photo of yourself alongside a few other people without asking them for permission. You're all wearing the organisation's t-shirt. The following week the newspaper releases the article, it has the picture and right above it the title reads: "Local youth climate leaders Call Out Mining Company". This has helped your cause in getting the message out, but it has also jeopardised the safety of all in the image.

In this example we see two things:

1. Consent Matters Consent is crucial in information sharing to protect the individual or group's privacy and autonomy, ensuring that they have control over their personal data and are aware of how it will be used.

Always get permission before sharing people's information or images. It protects privacy, supports informed decisions, and safeguards vulnerable individuals.

2. Exposure vs Protection Activism can only be impactful if you tell your story. This comes with risk, but can also come with opportunity. Careful planning helps minimise harm while maximising impact.

Being visible as a young climate leader can create opportunities, but also potential safety challenges. Strategic communication means weighing both before taking action.

Managing Communication Challenges

Mitigating narrative challenges starts before you speak or communicate your message with the media, partners, government, etc. It is about understanding what you are putting out there and understanding how it can be used against you.

What	Example of the challenge	Mitigating the challenge
Pre-emptive Framing - Address potential counterarguments in your messaging.	A youth-led climate group anticipated pushback on their campaign against coal.	They framed their message around public health rather than just environmental concerns, making it harder for opponents to dismiss their campaign and cause.



What	Example of the challenge	Mitigating the challenge
Credibility and trustworthiness - Build partnerships to strengthen credibility.	A youth advocacy group fighting for education reform.	They partnered with respected academics and NGOs, making it more difficult for challengers to discredit their efforts.
Digital Security Awareness - Be mindful of online risks and harassment tactics.	A young climate leader has been receiving online threats and harassment.	Read up on and adopt digital safety measures, such as using encrypted communication, two-factor authentication, and attending regular online safety best practices training.

Smart Messaging: Strategy Over Reaction

By thinking about what you're going to say and planning beforehand, you are removing many of the risks involved in communication and maximising your impact. This is what strategic communication is all about.

Example 1: Youth Activism & Environmental Advocacy

Scenario	An organisation in a mining community wants to campaign against a new coal-fired power plant.
Tactic Used	Instead of direct confrontation, they frame their message around health impacts on children and air quality. This appeals to a broader audience and gains media traction without alienating policymakers.
Outcome	The campaign successfully influences local leaders to impose stricter environmental regulations.

Example 2: Urbanisation & Green Spaces

Scenario	A youth youth climate leader group in Windhoek wants to raise awareness about the loss of green spaces due to rapid urbanisation.
Tactic Used	They launch an urban tree-planting initiative with community participation, using social media to highlight the benefits of green spaces instead of solely criticising development projects.
Outcome	By positioning their campaign as a solution-based initiative, they secure support from local policymakers and businesses.



Messaging Makeover: Turning Panic into Power

LESS EFFECTIVE

"The world is ending tomorrow if we don't act now! Corporations are monsters destroying everything."

[Overly Emotional | Accusatory]

MORE EFFECTIVE

"Climate change is already here - but bold action today can still protect our future and our jobs."

[Action-Oriented | Hope-Based | Credible]

The Phrase That Pays (PTP)

A sticky, memorable, repeatable, and evocative slogan that encapsulates a complex truth in a few words. When the core message is that climate change is real, the best slogans move away from the abstract and toward the undeniable.

A PTP should:

- **Be sticky.** Is it easy to remember and repeat?
- **Provoke a nod.** Does the audience recognise the truth in it immediately?
- **Be jargon-free.** Does it avoid words like "anthropogenic," "mitigation," or "sequestration"?

Different ways to say "climate change is real" using PTP:

- "The seasons have shifted. Have you?"
- "Record heat isn't a fluke; it's the new front page."
- "Our taps are running dry before the rains even arrive."
- "The floods don't ask for your opinion on the science."
- "Passing down a planet, not just a property."
- "Climate risk is financial risk."
- "The cost of inaction is higher than the price of change."
- "Nature doesn't do bailouts."
- "You can't grow an economy on a dying planet."
- "Nature isn't waiting. Neither should we."
- "Unprecedented is the new normal."
- "Reality doesn't require belief."
- "The climate has changed. Now we must."

TIP: Don't confuse a phrase that pays with your message itself.





UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE



Never target “the general public.” There is no such thing. Be precise and specific. Identify who holds power and who influences them.

- **Who can help us win?** Decision-makers with authority to enact change.
- **Who can block us?** Opponents or skeptics who need to be countered.
- **Who can be activated?** Allies and influencers to amplify pressure.

Key Players in Southern Africa

- **Decision-Makers:** Energy & Environment Departments, Treasury / Finance, Municipal Leaders, Health Ministry
- **Influencers:** Traditional Leaders / Chiefs, Faith Leaders, Health Professionals, Scientists
- **Media Gatekeepers:** Community Radio Producers, Online News Editors, Vernacular Stations
- **Youth & Communities:** School Networks, Student Unions, CBOs (Community-Based Organisations), Impacted Communities



Aligning Tactics to Objectives

- Influence Policy Change → Briefings, Op-Eds, Direct Email
- Mobilise Public → Radio Call-ins, WhatsApp Chains, Social Media
- Build Solidarity → Joint CSO Statements, Events

Southern Africa Realities: Know Your Channels

- **WhatsApp & Facebook | Mass Reach:** Primary channels for community organising and broad public dissemination due to low data costs.
- **TikTok & Instagram | Youth Voice:** Visual storytelling platforms crucial for engaging Gen Z and building emotional connection.
- **X (Twitter) & LinkedIn | Influence:** Strategic spaces to target policymakers, journalists, and international allies.

Strategic Timing Hooks

- **Policy Cycles:** Parliament openings, IRP deadlines
- **Budgets:** National budget speeches
- **Disasters:** Floods/droughts (narrative linking)
- **Global Moments:** COP, Earth Day, Youth Day



PERMANENCE OF DIGITAL NARRATIVES

In the age of online spaces, social media, and Artificial Intelligence it is important to remember that what you say and how you say it could be taken out of context to serve a purpose that was not originally intended. This could be done intentionally by bad faith actors or unintentionally by individuals who don't understand your objective. That said, when done right, digital spaces can be a powerful tool to drive impact through our communications.

Why Social Media Matters for Climate Advocacy

- **The Vital Bridge:** Connects isolated campaign work directly to public influence, bypassing traditional gatekeepers.
- **Shape & Influence:** Shift public narratives, challenge misinformation, and apply direct pressure on key decision-makers.
- **Mobilise at Scale:** Social media rapidly tests messages and builds long-term movement power through consistent engagement.

Why You Should Have a Public Profile

- To strengthen energy and climate discourse
- Establishing and expanding the legitimacy of your voice
- Diversifying the pool of voices that are seen and heard
- Creating more opportunities for you and your activism
- You are able to manage risk and maintain your safety

Digital Realities

Here are some things to remember when it comes to digital narratives and how to navigate the challenges that could emerge:

Online is forever

- The internet doesn't forget - what you do or say has a very high chance of being there forever.
- The best way to deal with negative or poor experiences is to do more interviews and posts to "bury" the links you don't want others to see.

Being misquoted

- This is usually an accident but can sometimes be done intentionally if the person interviewing you has ulterior motives.
- If you are misquoted, approach the journalist first, then their editor, and if you don't receive a satisfactory response, approach your local media ombud. As a last resort you can "call out" the platform with your social media. Be mindful of not taking it too far.



Being quoted with the incorrect context

- There is little you can do when an out-of-context quote is still technically accurate.
- Let your statements stand independently; be mindful that your message makes it into most or all of your statements.

Trolls

- There is no point in engaging with those who interact with your statements in bad faith.
- They are after attention - starve them of that. But remember that not everyone who disagrees with you is trolling. Contestation is still important.

Criticism

- Work on your personal resilience. Debate is important in a pluralistic society.
- Avoid bad faith arguments, but be willing to defend what you believe in, supported by the relevant facts.

Stereotypes

- People are often minimised to simple “types” with certain actions and opinions being expected of them in turn.
- Consider what people assume about you as a youth climate leader and respond appropriately.

Being quoted without your knowledge or consent

- A journalist or content creator doesn't have to disclose who they are. Everything you say, even if you're overheard, is able to appear in print or broadcast.
- Be mindful of what you say and where. If you don't want to be quoted but want to provide context or background information, clearly state that you are speaking off the record.

Managing Online Risks

Threats	Prevention	Detection	Response
Trolling, brigading, & coordinated harassment	Audit: Lock profiles & limit location sharing. Alias: Use pseudonyms for high-risk roles. Train: Media training to avoid bait.	Set Google Alerts for your name. Monitor mentions: Track keywords & tags. Buddy System: Friend checks comments.	Do Not Engage: Starve trolls. Document: Screenshot URLs/time. Block/Mute: Clean feed ASAP. Escalate: Tell org/legal aid. Offline Threat: Activate physical safety plan.



CRISIS COMMUNICATION BASICS



What is a crisis? A crisis is a dangerous, unstable, or potentially damaging situation that disrupts normal functioning and cannot be resolved with normal everyday problem-solving methods.

What is crisis communications? Crisis communications is the strategic process of managing and disseminating information during a crisis to protect an organisation, group, or individual's reputation and general safety.

As young climate leaders in Southern Africa it is essential to understand that when communicating our messages or running campaigns, we face the possibility of a crisis emerging that could lead to challenges and issues for your safety.

The 5 C's of Crisis Communications

- Concern
- Commitment
- Competency
- Clarity
- Confidence



Key Things to Consider

- The best way to deal with a crisis is to ensure you have a strong strategic plan before you act. Be prepared with:
 - A strong communications plan that is reviewed regularly for changes
 - Your lines of communication - Who should I alert first? How should I alert them? What do I do if I can't get a hold of them?
- Assess if you are in a crisis:
 - Does the situation I find myself in match the description of what a crisis is and how could it affect my work?
 - Should I respond myself or would I be making it worse for myself or my group?
 - Whilst it is essential that you do have a timely response, how you do it matters. Consider who poses the challenge to your safety or the success of your work, and based on who it is, consider whether you should speak or have legal support assist.
- Rapid but thoughtful response/action:
 - The longer you leave it, the worse it could get. Respond and act quickly but with accurate information to prevent it from getting worse.

Scenario 1: Speaker at a Youth March Says the Wrong Thing

Example	A young climate leader who is part of a community based organisation at a mass mobilisation for climate justice has accidentally called for a political party to act and has isolated them as the cause of the issue.
Effective Crisis Response - In the moment	Immediate clarity by the main MC/organiser of the mobilisation, not shutting down the youth climate leader but rather framing the message in a different light: "I agree we need our leaders to act, but it takes all of us to do so. No one is perfect but we can all aim to do better, and we will do so together."
Effective Crisis Response - After	The organisation should monitor its social media/online presence for potential harassment and should also prepare a statement for release if it escalates. Additionally, the organisation should consider speaking to legal experts if things get worse.
Ineffective Crisis Response - In the moment	No one clarifies or attempts to change the narrative of the youth speaker. The MC and speakers that follow further add to the initial sentiment and further condemn the political party: "Yes we agree! That party must do better and they are to blame for this injustice. Thank you to the speaker for bringing this point forward!"
Ineffective Crisis Response - After	Posting the clip or speaking further without a clear corrective strategy.



Scenario 2: Youth Climate Leader Calls Out a Mining Company

Example	A young climate leader, part of a community based organisation, is on a television interview - their name, organisation, and face visible. They have just called out by name the big mining company in their community for destroying people's livelihoods and environment.
Effective Crisis Response - In the moment	Immediate response to clarify the basis of the claims, grounded in facts and evidence. Quickly then pivot to generalities about the impacts and cause without naming the mine.
Effective Crisis Response - After	Monitor social media, prepare a statement diverting attention to the core issues, and consult legal support if the company escalates.
Ineffective Crisis Response	No follow-up, no preparation, and no support structures in place.





ENGAGING WITH MEDIA



Journalism and Journalists

Radio, TV, and online news face hard times. Understanding the operating environment is important to ensure that you and your content are featured in a way that serves your message and keeps you safe.

Mitigating the Risks of Media Engagement

When journalists and content creators publish stories, it is usually done with an “angle” - a specific focus or perspective taken in the final product. It determines HOW the information is presented and what aspects are emphasised. In an ideal world, this is to make a story more relevant, engaging and informative to the audience.

If journalists attend a protest to oppose a new mine, they are unlikely to just say what they saw and what they were told. Different angles could be:

- **Political:** How government funding, policy and partnerships made the mine possible.
- **Industry:** To highlight how it is becoming harder to do business as communities reject investment.
- **Economic:** The impact of opposing development on jobs.
- **Human Interest:** A profile of a youth climate leader, delving into their background and why it led to their involvement in a particular movement or civil society.



Due Diligence

Unfortunately, you may also encounter bad-faith actors. These people or groups pretend to act with honesty and fairness, but their true intentions are to deceive you and harm your message. This is not exclusive to the media, but you need to know at least a little about who you are engaging with and providing commentary to.

Examples of bad faith actors:

- Front “grassroots” environmental groups secretly backed by the fossil industry to push misleading narratives.
- Campaigns that shift blame to the consumer.
- State media.
- Media owned and operated by corporate interests.

It is not always easy to identify these. A journalist may also unknowingly be influenced by these, which will change the way they angle a story.

Do your best to know who you are speaking to and ensure your message comes through clearly. This makes it harder for your words to be taken out of context. A simple message is harder to twist into something else.





Pre-Interview Checklist

1. Have I clarified my “Why”?

- Have I prepared 1-2 stories or personal examples that connect to the topic?

2. Do I know the platform and audience?

- Have I researched where the interview will air (radio, TV, podcast, online)?
- Do I know what tone and language will connect best with this audience?

3. Have I prepared my key messages?

- Have I written down 3 main points I want people to remember from my interview?
- Are my points simple, powerful, and easy to understand?
- Be clear on your message and why you are engaging with the media.

4. Do I have strong local examples to share?

- Have I prepared African or community-specific examples?

5. Have I thought about possible questions?

6. Have I practiced my delivery?

- Have I rehearsed speaking clearly, passionately, and calmly?
- Have I timed my responses (keeping them concise)?
- Have I practiced with a friend, mentor, or recorded myself?

7. Do I have my appearance and setup ready (if virtual)?

- Am I wearing something that makes me feel confident?
- Have I checked my background, lighting, and sound quality?

8. Have I prepared a call to action?

- Do I know how I will inspire listeners/viewers to act?

9. Am I calm and confident in my voice?

- Do I trust that I don't have to know everything?

Other Key Points to Remember and Prepare Before Interviews

- **Host:** Who are you speaking to?
- **Personal Mantra:** An inspirational/motivational quote. This is for personal reference, not for the interview. Remember to smile (when appropriate).
- **Shared Value:** Something that everyone can agree on - “We want our children to grow up happy and healthy” or “We need more jobs.”
- **Solution:** What you are advocating or fighting for.
- **Problem:** Be more specific than saying “climate change.”
- **Phrase that Pays:** Your catchy quote that delivers your message and can be repeated often.
- **ABCs:** Examples of how you want to acknowledge, bridge and communicate your message when faced with questions you don't want to answer.
- **Stats and Numbers:** Keep them on hand for easy reference. Where appropriate, use imagery instead of specific complex numbers.
- **A story:** Find the human angle. Speak about a specific village, person, etc. and how their lives have been impacted by the Solution or the Problem.



Pre-Interview Checklist

- Be available at short notice for quotes and interviews, as long as you are ready and prepared to do so in a way that serves your message and your safety.
- Don't wait for them to contact you - reach out in a timely manner when appropriate.
- Have your "phrase that pays" ready and repeat it often.

The ABC Technique

The ABC technique is useful for ensuring that you deliver your key messages in broadcast and written media interviews.

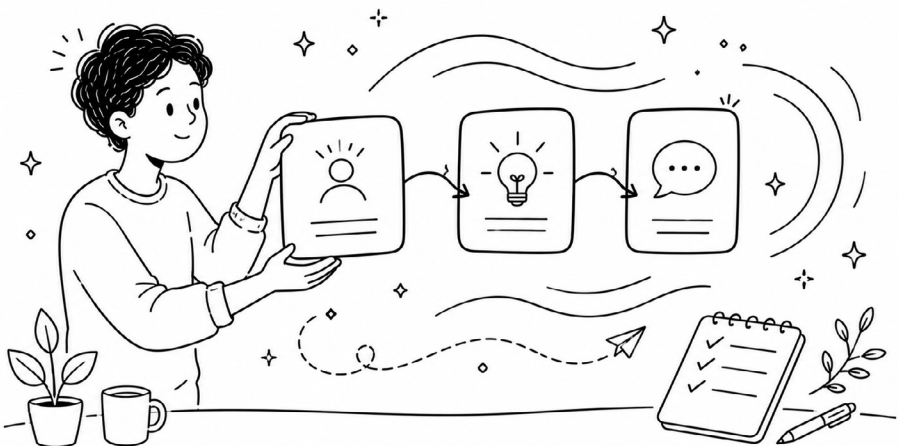
Why use the ABC technique?

- You will be faced with many questions that are hostile, irrelevant, or ignorant. Don't answer those questions - it wastes precious interview time. Use the ABC to bring it back to your key messages.
- No one can be expected to know everything. There is no reason to feel nervous about what you don't know - you are there to say what you do know. If you don't know the answer, admit it or gloss over it. Then, quickly and confidently bridge it back to what you want to discuss and move on.

A - Acknowledge the question being asked or the point being made.

B - Bridge away from the question.

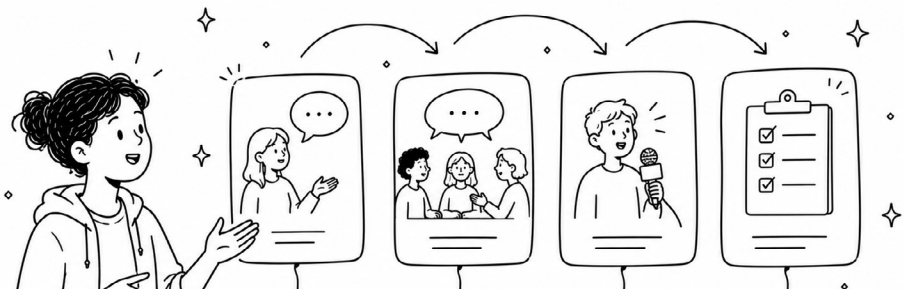
C - Communicate your key concepts and deliver your message.

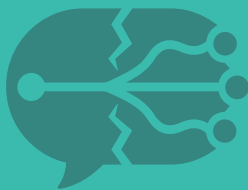




ABC Examples

Acknowledge	Bridge	Communicate
That's clearly an important question...	But what you asked me on here to speak about is X... / But to put this in perspective... / But what matters most to your listeners is surely...	Key Message
I'm glad you asked me that...	Because it gives me a chance to be very clear with you...	Key Message
I can't comment on that specifically, but...	What I can tell you is that the broader context is...	Key Message
That's clearly a crucial question...	But to put it in context, let me just say that...	Key Message
I can't speak for every x/y/z, but...	What I can say from my own experience/the evidence in front of me is...	Key Message
That's a fair question, and I don't have that exact statistic in front of me, but...	What I can tell you is...	Key Message





MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

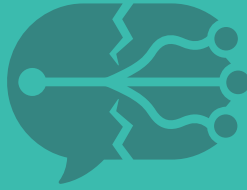


Understanding the Threat

Not everything you read, see, or hear is true - and in climate justice work, false narratives can be weaponised to undermine your message, discredit your movement, and protect powerful interests. It is important to understand the difference between two related but distinct threats:

Type	Definition	Intent	Example
Misinformation	False or inaccurate information	Unintentional - the person sharing it may genuinely believe it	A community member shares an old, debunked statistic about renewable energy costs
Disinformation	False information deliberately created and spread	Intentional - designed to deceive, confuse, or harm	A fossil fuel-backed "grassroots" group spreads fabricated data about job losses from coal phase-outs

Both are dangerous. Disinformation is a coordinated attack. Misinformation is the wildfire it starts.



Recognising the Patterns

Bad faith actors use predictable tactics. Learning to spot them early gives you the upper hand.

Undermine the Science Attacking the validity of data or scientific consensus. This looks like cherry-picking studies, misrepresenting statistics, or amplifying fringe voices to suggest the science is “still debated.”

Example: “Scientists can’t even agree on whether climate change is human-caused.”

Sow Doubt Delay tactics that don’t deny the problem outright but question urgency. The goal is inaction, not debate.

Example: “Is it really that urgent? We have time to get this right.”

False Solutions Promoting unproven or insufficient technologies as a reason to avoid taking real action now.

Example: “We don’t need to phase out coal - carbon capture will solve everything.”

Personalise the Attack Shifting focus from the issue to the messenger - targeting your credibility, background, or motives to distract from your message.

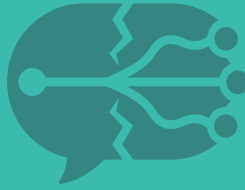
Example: “Why should we listen to a 22-year-old with no scientific degree?”

Golden Rule: Verify Before You Amplify. Before sharing any content - even content that supports your position - confirm it is accurate. Being caught sharing false information, even accidentally, hands your opponents a weapon.

Staying Ahead: Monitoring

You cannot respond to what you don’t see. Set up a basic monitoring system to track narratives before they become crises.

- **Track Keywords:** Set up Google Alerts for your name, your organisation’s name, and key campaign terms.
- **Follow Fact-Checkers:** Know who the credible fact-checking organisations are in your region and follow their outputs.
- **Monitor Mentions:** Regularly check tags, comments, and search results across your active platforms.
- **Know the Landscape:** Be aware of which media outlets, accounts, or groups have previously spread disinformation in your space.



Responding: The Truth Sandwich

When you do need to counter a false narrative, how you respond matters as much as what you say. Repeating a myth - even to debunk it - can accidentally reinforce it in people's minds. Use the Truth Sandwich to correct the record without amplifying the lie.

Step 1 - Lead with Truth Start with the accurate, positive statement. Make this your headline.

"Renewable energy is now cheaper than fossil fuels in most regions of the world."

Step 2 - Brief Myth Reference Briefly name the false claim - just enough to acknowledge it without dwelling on it.

"Despite misleading claims that the transition is too costly..."

Step 3 - Explain and Reinforce Close with the evidence that supports the truth, and return to your core message.

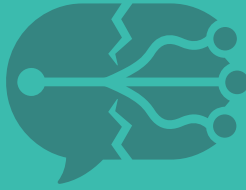
"Investment in solar creates three times more jobs per dollar than coal - and those jobs stay local."

Why this works You open and close with the truth, which is what people remember. The myth is sandwiched in the middle, acknowledged but not amplified.

Response Protocols

Not every piece of misinformation requires the same response. Use your energy wisely.

Situation	Recommended Response
False claim gaining traction in your community	Correct once clearly and publicly. Pin or highlight your correction.
Troll or bad faith account spreading lies	Do not engage. Starve them of attention. Document and report.
Media outlet publishes inaccurate information	Approach the journalist first, then the editor. If unresolved, contact the media ombud.
Coordinated disinformation campaign targeting you or your organisation	Escalate immediately - involve your organisation's leadership, legal support, and communications team. Document everything.
Viral content your followers are sharing uncritically	Post a clear, calm correction with sources. Educate, don't shame.



Building Resilience Before the Attack

The most effective defence against disinformation is a community that already trusts you. Build that trust before you need it.

Pre-emptive Trust Establish your credibility consistently and early. Share your sources. Be transparent about your process. Acknowledge uncertainty when you have it - honesty builds more trust than always having the answer.

Media Literacy Educate your followers and community on how to spot false information. A community that can identify manipulation is far harder to deceive.

Teach them to ask:

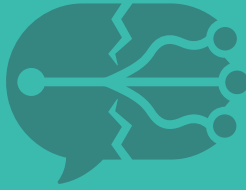
- Who created this content and why?
- Is this source credible and independent?
- Is this information current?
- Can I find this confirmed by a second, unrelated source?

Content Approval Before sharing viral content - especially content that supports your campaign - run a basic checklist:

- Is the source identifiable and credible?
- Has this been reported by trusted fact-checkers?
- Is the statistic or claim accurately represented?
- Am I sharing this because it's true, or because I want it to be true?

Rights-Based Framing Frame your message around universal rights - clean air, safe water, a liveable future - rather than political positioning. Rights-based framing broadens your appeal, makes it harder to attack you as partisan, and anchors your message to something that is difficult to disprove.





A Note on Numbers

When using data to counter false narratives, how you present numbers matters.

Threats	Prevention	Detection
"47% of households..."	"Almost 1 in 2 households..."	Fractions feel more human and concrete
"1.3 billion people..."	"Nearly the population of Africa and Europe combined..."	Analogies create scale people can feel
"0.0034% increase in particulates..."	"Air quality in this district has declined every year for a decade..."	Lived reality beats abstract precision

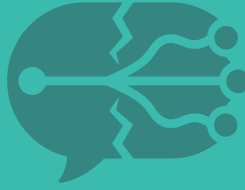
Remember: *This is a conversation, not a research paper. People connect with what they can feel, not what they can calculate.*

Case Study: Staying Credible Under Attack

The Stop EACOP campaign - working to block the East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline - faced sustained disinformation about the economic benefits of the project. Rather than getting drawn into a debate on the fossil industry's terms, campaigners focused relentlessly on financial risk: briefing banks and insurers with verified data, targeting the money rather than the argument. The result was that major financial institutions publicly withdrew, not because they were persuaded on climate grounds, but because the credibility of the campaign made the reputational risk of involvement too high.

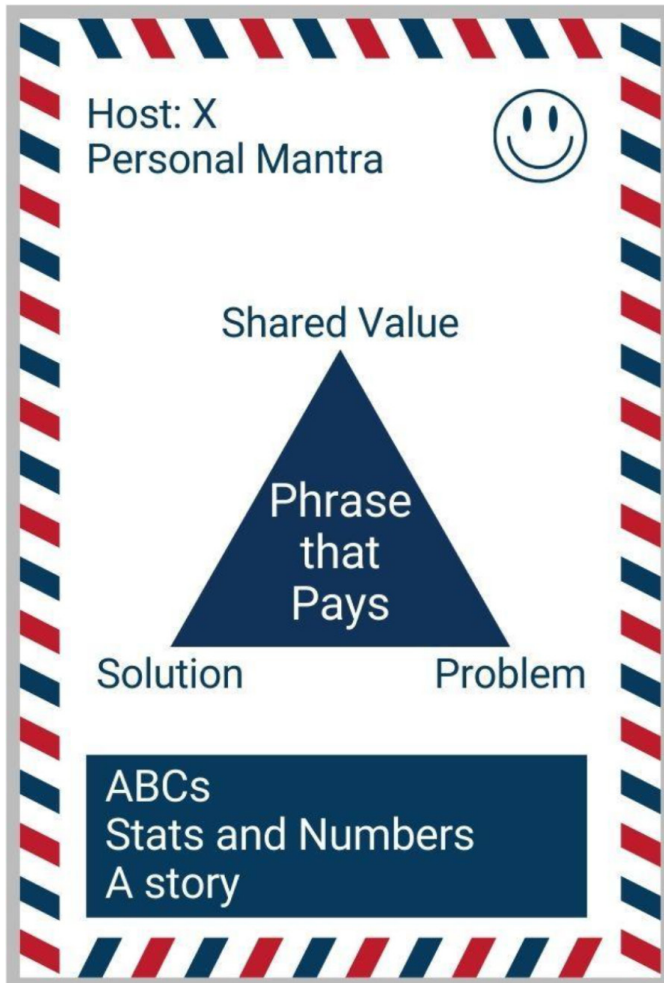
The lesson: *Credibility is a strategic asset. Protect it, invest in it, and deploy it deliberately.*

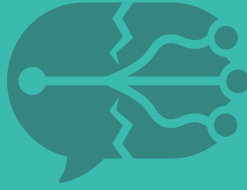




Back of the Envelope Technique

The below serves as an at-a-glance source of all the information you are likely to need to get through an interview. Fill it in before any media engagement.





Jargon Busting

We use acronyms, abbreviations, terms, and expressions that ease communication amongst ourselves but inhibit understanding outside our circles. Learn to avoid them!

Terms:

- Adaptation
- Abatement
- Loss and damage
- Just Transition

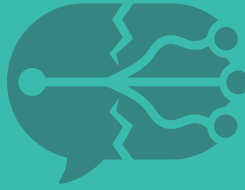
Abbreviations and acronyms:

- IPCC
- ESG
- COP
- SDGs

There are many more! Include your own:

Always consider your audience and how you want to reach them.





Final Takeaways

- **Be prepared** - Develop a solid communication strategy using the components above before speaking out.
- **Stay on message** - Consistency builds trust and credibility.
- **Know when to speak**. Not every moment is the right moment, and you don't have to follow every trend!
- **Mitigate risks** - Assess potential backlash and prepare response strategies.
- **Engage wisely** - Use language that fosters inclusivity and long-term impact.

Appendix: Pre-Interview Checks

Don't agree to be interviewed until you know what exactly you're signing up for.

- DUE DILIGENCE DONE

Format:

- LIVE
- PRE-RECORD

Setup:

- SOLO
- PANEL
- DEBATE

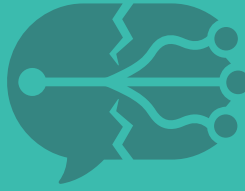
Location:

- IN-STUDIO
- DOWN THE LINE → PHONE / ZOOM / FIELD CROSSING

DURATION OF INTERVIEW: _____

WHAT I WILL LIKELY BE ASKED: _____



ANGLE OF SEGMENT: _____



Blank Envelope

Host: _____

Personal Mantra: _____



ABC _____

Stats and Numbers _____

A story _____