

"What's the deal with the dolphins washing up on the beach in Gloucester?"

"I heard that the ocean near Japan is full of radiation from the Tsunami..."

"How are things going with the BP oil spill?"

At one time or another, we have all had a visitor approach us to ask a question about something they have read, or heard on the news, or are concerned about. People look to us as experts on all things aquatic, and research shows that the public *trusts* aquariums. As a trusted institution and information source, how can we maintain, develop, and act on that trust? *We are in a unique position to educate, inspire, and motivate our visitors to become global stewards*

Why Framing is Important:

People are deluged with information and cannot digest all of it. Careful framing can make it more likely that visitors will understand and internalize what we communicate. Framing is intended to help connect our information with values our audience cares deeply about and ideas they already understand.

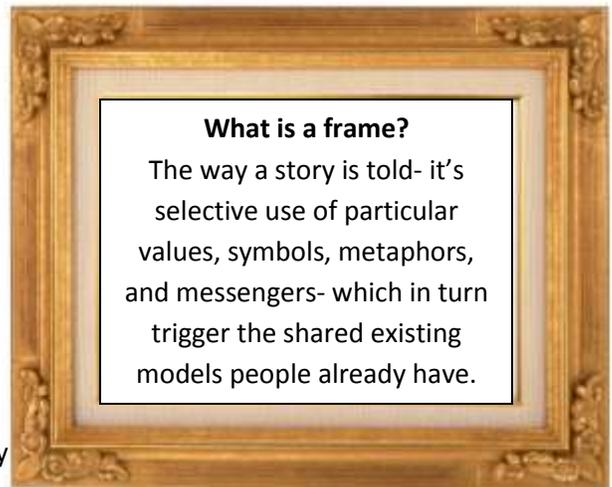
Six Simple Steps to Framing!

1) Start with a VALUE: Frameworks Institute (a nonprofit think-tank that conducts communication research to advance the resolution of social issues) has pinpointed four main "big picture values" with which Americans connect:

Innovation: we can invent new ways to address global climate change that also prove beneficial to our health and our economy. Since humans contribute to it by burning too much of our fossil fuels, humans can also fix it. It requires a big effort, but many of the technologies and needed skills are already available. Many are being developed right here, by scientists in New England and in the U.S. We should direct business and government to support innovation and phase out practices that contribute to global climate change.

Responsible Management: When we identify a problem, we should figure out how to fix it. It is irresponsible for our country to ignore the problem of climate change when we know what needs to be done. We should do the right thing by putting in place a long-term plan for reducing our country's contribution to global climate change. Dealing with the problem rather than letting it get worse is the responsible thing to do, so sensible policies that minimize current damage and prevent future damage to the environment from over-use of fossil fuels should be our top priority.

Stewardship: Many people share the belief that Earth is a special gift and we have an obligation to protect the environment for future generations. Exercising responsible stewardship means addressing problems and risks as they occur, not waiting until the problem has become beyond our control. We can be better stewards of the blue planet by correcting the environmental problems we have caused, investing in sustainable practices, and doing a better job in the future of stewarding our natural resources.



Interconnectedness: Our fate is intertwined with the fate of the ocean. Water is the basis for all life and ecological function. What happens in the oceans reflects and affects what happens on land: its one interactive system. By recognizing the connection between human practices and their impacts on marine life and habitats, we can do a better job of leaving the oceans in good shape for the next generations.

Can you think of examples of stories we already share at the NEAq that connect to these “big picture values”?



2) Use METAPHORS:

Heat Trapping CO₂ Blanket- Global climate change is caused, in part, by the man-made blanket of carbon dioxide that surrounds the earth and traps in heat. It is thickened by burning large quantities of fossil fuels- coal, oil and natural gas. By burning these fossil fuels, we release carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the air where it builds, thickening the blanket. The globe warms, and the atmospheric balance that keeps the climate stable is disrupted.

Oceans as a Heat Sink- Oceans provide the planet our largest heat sink, regulating our climate by absorbing, storing, and then slowly releasing large quantities of heat. In this way, the oceans buffer the climate of nearby landmasses and, eventually, of the entire planet.

3) Connect to SOLUTIONS:

Asking questions is a great communication technique. What do you think we can do to fix this problem? People will often come up with short term, episodic actions that they can do at home. While these individual steps are important, collective actions have a greater impact.

Try to direct people to more global scale solutions, i.e.:

- *alternative energy sources*
- *marine protected areas*
- *improve resource management policies*



4) Put the issue into CONTEXT:

Widen the lens to give the issue broader context. Make clear connections between the issue, the visitor, and solutions. Many times connections that we think are obvious are not as apparent to our visitors. Connect the dots for them. These connections are called *causal links*.

i.e. “Turtles live in an ecosystem that is connected to humans who have a responsibility to be stewards”

5) Use a conversational TONE:

We exist in an argument culture that tends to portray all socio-political and scientific issues as debates between two sides. Science communicators should acknowledge that there are many differences in opinion about the exact presentation and timing of effects, while focusing people’s attention on the underlying science of the process. By admitting that there may be many ways to solve the problem, and this is a task for human ingenuity, you allow for diversity of opinion.



6) Awaken SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

These conversations are a call to action! By connecting our visitors to our exhibits, and drawing upon universally shared values, we can start a dialogue. These conversations can lead people away from our tendency to identify as **consumers**, and more towards an identity as **citizens**.

References:

Frameworks Institute; NSF Climate Change Study Circles, Chattanooga, Tennessee