



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Level 2: Fundamental activist skills

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**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**





Get excited for developing your own messaging!

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BEFORE WE BEGIN

If you haven't signed up to join our movement yet, head over to our [Get Active](#) page.

You can find other modules on fundamental activist skills [here](#). We recommend getting familiar with them all if you are new to activism.

If you have any questions please get in touch with us at communityorganising@amnesty.org.au.



2007 annual general meeting. © Amnesty International

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our module on effective communications. An important part of achieving change for human rights is how we talk about it. It's about the words and images we use to communicate the issues we care about. Using the wrong message can close hearts and minds towards our work. But, when we put it all together in the right way, we inspire people to join us.

To achieve this we have to ensure that our communications are more strategic and clear. They need to be relatable and motivate people to act. We want to inspire our supporters and encourage people to join our movement. We have to show them our purpose and values. So they know who we are and what we do. Most important, we have to show our human rights impact in Australia and overseas. Creating the right message is how we change minds, earn trust and extend our influence.

Our communications also need to reach and mobilise more people. Because more people means more power. We each have a voice and the power to shift public discourse, we can all influence others in some way. Through this module you will learn our core concepts to create meaningful communications. You will be able to explain who we are, why human rights matter and inspire more people to get involved.



Your audience waiting to be inspired and influenced.

Target audiences

A lot of us have a standard approach when we talk to other people about something we care a lot about. We tend to use the same language, arguments and information that convinced us to care about it. Because if it worked on us then why wouldn't it work on everyone else as well? Without thinking too much about it, our default target audience tends to be "everyone". We use the same messaging over and over again without tailoring it for a different audience.

Because of this we run the risk of creating a comfortable bubble around ourselves. A bubble filled with people with the same views. An echo chamber which rarely expands to include other groups of people. Soon, some of us don't understand where these supposed voices of opposition are coming from. Because everyone in our circles are all saying the same things.

So we have to think more about the people we are communicating with. Who do we want to reach? How are we going to get our message to new people? We can figure that out by defining who our target audience is. If we know that we can work out how we need to speak to them. We'll know the when, where, what and how to reach and inspire them.

Some questions to ask yourself before planning your communications

- Where does your audience live?
- What age bracket are they in?
- What's their lifestyle?
- What's their background?
- How do they get their information?
- How do they communicate with others?
- What is important to them?
- What are their political leanings?
- Are they already involved with Amnesty or similar organisations?
- What barriers might they face for the ask you're giving them?

Be clear about who you are targeting and try to understand the context of their lives. Get to know their concerns and motivations. We want to tailor our messaging for the audience/s we are speaking with.

Of course, we have to avoid stereotyping individuals based on traits or background. But, asking questions like these will lay the foundation for your message. It points you in the right direction. Your audience will respond much better to it than a more universal approach. It shows you are taking the time to get to know them. That you think it's important to communicate with them in a way that they prefer. They'll be a lot more receptive because of it.



Activity: Create your own audience profile and answer the following questions. Talk to a number of people you know to get some different responses. Learn a bit more about what makes people tick.

Name? Age? Political leanings? How do they receive news and information? E.g. via Twitter, The Australian subscription. Who do they trust? E.g. their mosque, surf lifesavers, their neighbours. What is important to them? What type of world do they want to create? What do they think about Amnesty / your campaign / activity? What are your shared values?



Values-based messaging

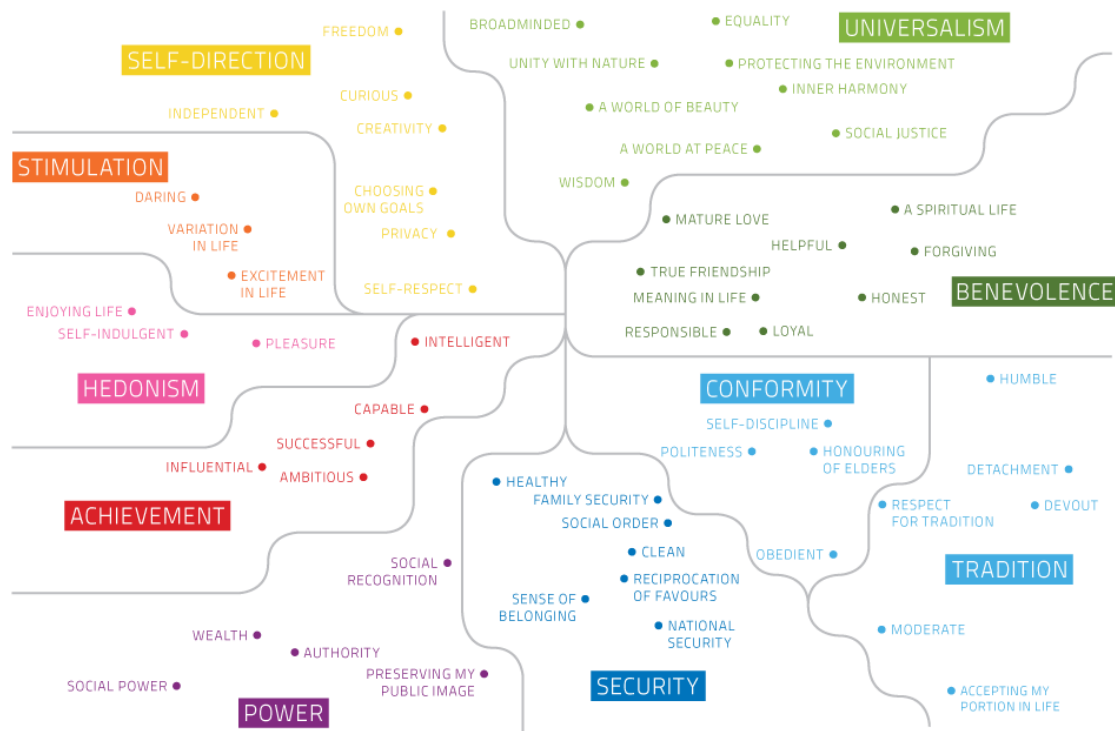
Now that we know the audience better we have to connect them with the issue. Knowing what drives them and what they have strong feelings about will help. Using that knowledge to shape our communications is known as values-based messaging. This type of messaging activates our fundamental principles and core beliefs. It creates an opportunity for us to be on the same page.

Demonstrating shared values and goals will resonate with most people. It gives us an opportunity to appeal to people in a relatable way on an emotional level. Appealing to people using only facts is ineffective. Because if the facts don't align with someone's core belief, they're easily dismissed. We need to take the facts and change how we frame them to trigger their core values in a different way.

But, what exactly do we mean by values? There has been a lot of research into this over the last several decades. Psychologists have identified a consistent list of occurring human values. The values map on the next page is the work of psychologist Shalom H Schwartz. His research compiled survey data from 65,000 people from 68 countries around the world. He found that the thousands of words people used to describe their values could be shrunk down to 58 words or values. You could then collect these words together to form 10 groups of core values.

We all hold these values, some stronger than others. These often change over time, during key life events etc. It's important to remember that there are no right or wrong values to hold.

This version of the values map and the explanation of its groups were both developed by [Common Cause](#). They have a lot of great resources explaining values based messaging, so check them out. Which of the following values are important in your life?



UNIVERSALISM

UNDERSTANDING, APPRECIATION, TOLERANCE AND PROTECTION FOR THE WELFARE OF ALL PEOPLE AND FOR NATURE.



BENEVOLENCE

PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE WELFARE OF PEOPLE WITH WHOM ONE IS IN FREQUENT PERSONAL CONTACT.



TRADITION

RESPECT, COMMITMENT AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE CUSTOMS AND IDEAS THAT TRADITIONAL CULTURE OR RELIGION PROVIDE THE SELF.



CONFORMITY

RESTRAINT OF ACTIONS, INCLINATIONS AND IMPULSES LIKELY TO UPSET OR HARM OTHERS AND VIOLATE SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS OR NORMS.



SECURITY

SAFETY, HARMONY, AND STABILITY OF SOCIETY, OF RELATIONSHIPS, AND OF SELF.



POWER

SOCIAL STATUS AND PRESTIGE, CONTROL OR DOMINANCE OVER PEOPLE AND RESOURCES.



ACHIEVEMENT

PERSONAL SUCCESS THROUGH DEMONSTRATING COMPETENCE ACCORDING TO SOCIAL STANDARDS.



HEDONISM

PLEASURE AND SENSUOUS GRATIFICATION FOR ONESELF.



STIMULATION

EXCITEMENT, NOVELTY AND CHALLENGE IN LIFE.



SELF-DIRECTION

INDEPENDENT THOUGHT AND ACTION - CHOOSING, CREATING, EXPLORING.

We all can see aspects of ourselves in each of these groups, even if it's only a little. Each of us will preference certain values more than others, depending on the context we are in at the time. The most important thing is to be aware that the words you use trigger particular values. This will then have a positive, neutral or negative effect on different people.

So, how does this work in your context? Anytime you have time to shape a message to an audience before it goes out, you can use these principles. It's a bit harder to do in situations like face to face conversations where you have to respond fast. But here's some examples that you can give a go:

Writing an email or a letter, posting on social media, recording a video, making a placard or banner and much more.

OUR VALUES

Amnesty International stands for **equality, justice, freedom, and human dignity** and upholds these values:

■ **EMPOWERMENT** WE BUILD PEOPLE POWER

■ **PERSISTENCE** WE ARE RESOLUTE IN PURSUIT OF OUR GOALS

■ **INTEGRITY** WE HOLD OURSELVES TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS

■ **COURAGE** WE ARE FEARLESS IN UPHOLDING HUMAN RIGHTS

Refining your message

We've now covered some of the fundamental elements of effective communications. The next few sections are all about how to fine tune your message.

1 Communicate who we are, our purpose and what we do.

It's important for anyone in our movement to know how to talk about Amnesty itself. We want to ensure that it is consistent, relevant, accessible and inspiring. Explaining who we are and what we do can be complex. Here are some messages you can use for clarity and inspiration. These messages use values to appeal, hope to inspire and simple, accessible language.

Who we are: Amnesty International is a global community of 8 million people fighting courageously for human rights for everyone. We're people from all walks of life, standing up for justice, freedom and equality. Together, we free people unjustly jailed, bring torturers to justice and change oppressive laws. Together, our voices are powerful. Everyday we move closer to a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

Our purpose: Amnesty International protects human rights, which are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every one of us. They ensure every single person is treated equally and justly. They are based on dignity, mutual respect and compassion regardless of race, sexuality, religion or beliefs. Rights are about being treated, and treating others fairly and ensuring everyone has the ability to make choices about their own lives. When we promote and defend

human rights, all our lives are better and we can create a better world for ourselves and our fellow human beings. Worldwide, our basic human rights are under attack. But ordinary people are fighting back.

What we do: If you had to sum up what we do in one sentence, you can use "Amnesty International: We defend human rights."

2 Use hope-based messaging.

There are a lot of upsetting things happening in the world. The topics we talk about can make people feel overwhelmed. Despair and fear are not motivating drivers of change. Incorporating hope, courage and confidence into your messages show the possibility for change and impact. We have to instill in people the belief that we can create a better future and invite them to be part of it. These are five simple steps to help you include hope in any piece of communication.

- Show one part problem, two parts solution i.e. the bulk of your message should be about the solution, not the problem.
- Highlight opportunities for change.
- Tell people what we stand for.
- Portray the people central to our campaigns as heroes, not victims.
- Share past successes to help people recognise and believe in our ability to drive change.

What emotions does your message trigger? Anger, sadness, disgust, fear and suffering? Can it instead trigger hope, affirmation, courage, empathy and determination?

3

Explain which human rights are being abused and why they matter.

Our research in Australia shows there is not a lot of understanding of human rights and why they matter. Only one in two Australians have at least a moderate knowledge of human rights. Even fewer, only one in four, name human rights abuses as an issue of interest. We must always remind people that these rights exist and are important for their lives. Also that people like us are standing up for them.

When we discuss issues of global importance today we must connect them to human rights. Naming the rights that are being abused or under threat in each situation. We must use simple language without jargon so people can better understand their rights.

“Shared global solutions are needed to provide refugees with the protection and rights due to them. These are not special rights, they are simply human rights such as safe shelter, food and water, the opportunity to work, access to education and legal assistance.”

Our handy booklet, '[Understanding Human Rights](#)' will tell you everything you need to know about human rights.

Also it's important to name those responsible for denying rights. This gives a face to the perpetrator and creates a target for action.

“The Australian Government has sent hundreds of men, women and children to suffer in offshore processing centres.” Instead of *“Hundreds of men, women and children are being detained in offshore processing centres.”*

4

Use plain English, a conversational tone and an active voice wherever possible.

At Amnesty International, we pride ourselves on our strong research. But we must ensure that our communications connect to the broader public. We need to frame human rights in a way that is accessible using simple, relatable language. The sort of language that we use with our friends and family.

Active vs passive

In a sentence written in the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action. When using the passive voice the subject receives the action. For example:

Active: 'The Qld government is locking up children...'

Passive: 'Children are being locked up by the Qld government'

We try to avoid using the passive voice because they tend to make sentences wordier, more vague and more difficult to follow.

Uncomplicated words

It might make us feel smarter to use big words, but we need to keep our messages as simple as possible so that people don't have to spend too much time trying to comprehend them. It's better to write something that a child in later primary school could understand.

Putting it into practice, here are two examples of a paragraph with the same message. The first being overly complicated, the second one far less so.

“Amnesty International currently stands impressively as one of the world's most revered and macrocosmically kened human rights organisations that researches human rights abuses all over the planet and runs potent campaigns to bulwark the human rights of everyone.”

“Amnesty International is one of the world's most respected human rights organisations. We research human rights abuses and campaign to protect the rights of all people.”

There are a number of websites online that can analyse what you've written which lets you know how difficult your message is to read.

The [Hemingway Editor](#) is one example. This also lets you know if you're using the passive voice as well, so that's a bonus.

5 Use respectful and inclusive language.

We want to make sure our language is always empowering, not alienating or even offensive. We've included a few examples here, but there is a lot more to this than we have space to cover in this module. If unsure, check the terms you are using with the person / a person from the group you are writing about. Better still, have the message written by someone from that group so it is in their own voice. Here are some general tips to get you started.

Always use culturally-sensitive, inclusive and empowering language e.g.

- People with disabilities, NOT disabled people
- Person living with AIDS; not AIDS sufferer
- Muslim people NOT Muslims
- 'Victim' should not be used unless the person has died or the person self-identifies as a victim. e.g. rape victim could be 'survivor of rape' or 'An unknown assailant attacked and raped x person.'

When representing gender in language and images; avoid gender stereotypes. Avoid gender-biased terms and use more inclusive words. For example: people, humanity, human beings (not mankind), representative, spokesperson, chairperson, chair, etc.

Some tips on how to write about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- Always capitalise: Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- For Australia-based campaigns: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is preferred over Indigenous people, but Indigenous is okay if space doesn't allow.
- For international issues: use Indigenous Peoples (both capitalised)
- Use 'Aboriginal person' or 'Torres Strait Islander person' if referring to a singular person.
- Use a person's clan/group name if this is how they refer to themselves (check how they wish to be identified)
- Do not use the nouns aborigines, natives, islanders, indigenes, ATSI

That's just a taste of how to use inclusive language, it's something all of us have to strive to be better at and continually improve on.

[Check out our modules on being a genuine ally and cultural competency for more.](#)

6 As much as possible, communicate values visually.

Amnesty strives to uphold empowerment, persistence, integrity and courage in everything we do. These values should also be present in the images we use. Amnesty is about showing everyday people facing challenges head on and changing them. Here's a few things to keep in mind:

- Use images that keep a person's respect and dignity in tact. Do not use images that portray anyone as helpless victims that need saving. e.g. someone crying or in pain. Instead use empowering images where you see the strength and defiance in that person.
- Never misrepresent the individual, situation, context or location of the photo.
- All images must have free, prior and informed consent from the individuals portrayed. If you're not sure if you can share the image, play it safe and don't use it.



Activity: Take all of these tips and write an article about an issue you are passionate about. Imagine you are writing for the media or putting together a piece of communication to fellow activists. It doesn't have to be something you share with others, just use it for practice. Try using both text and images to create the most powerful message you can.

EXAMPLES

“I am a long term member of Amnesty because I believe that a human rights focus should form the basis of all aspects of our lives, and volunteering for Amnesty is a great way of doing that.”



How Australian communities can help solve the global refugee crisis



**ANGER GALVANISES.
HOPE ORGANISES.**

What's next?

Thus ends our module on effective communications. It's a lot to take in. But, we wanted to make sure we gave a brief overview of the more important aspects of effective messaging.

We've covered what we have to work out before we form our messages. Like who the target audience and what their values are. We've also provided tips for how you keep your messages accessible, respectful and full of hope. Don't worry if you don't become a master right away, none of us do. Keep practicing and learning more about this. You'll be inspiring people to take action in no time. Also make sure to have a look at our other modules on [fundamental activist skills](#) too.

If you have any questions you can get in touch with us at communityorganising@amnesty.org.au. Thank you for your time!



Visit the Skill Up page for more activist development resources.

www.amnesty.org.au/skill-up/

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