

Simplify Your Environmental Health Message

Most people living in the U.S. are not able to interpret scientific information. Simplify your data and messages so decision-makers and your community can easily understand and use your information to make healthy decisions.

Know Before You Go

KNOW your audience. Consider what their science literacy level may be, what is important to them, and what they may know (or not know) about your topic.

KNOW your goal. Write down what you want your audience to think, feel, and do differently after they hear your message. Keep this top-of-mind when preparing your key message.

KNOW your key message. Summarize the most important part of your message in 1-3 sentences. Include this at the start of your conversation or written message.



Use 6th Grade Science Level

Unless you know otherwise, assume your audience's science literacy level is around 6th grade.

A 6th grade science curriculum covers parts of a cell, human organs, plant ecosystem, water cycle, periodic table.

54% of adults in the U.S. read below 6th grade reading level

Harry Potter series is written at a 5th-6th grade reading level

Skip Acronyms

In the world of environmental health, there are acronyms for most everything. But the more we use these shortcuts, the less clear our ideas are in simple English.

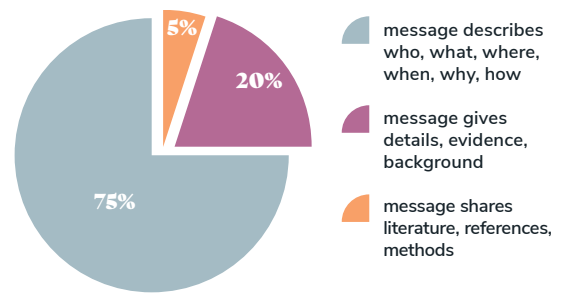
Also avoid using technical terms. If you must, define them before you use them.



Keep It Shorter Than an Elevator Ride

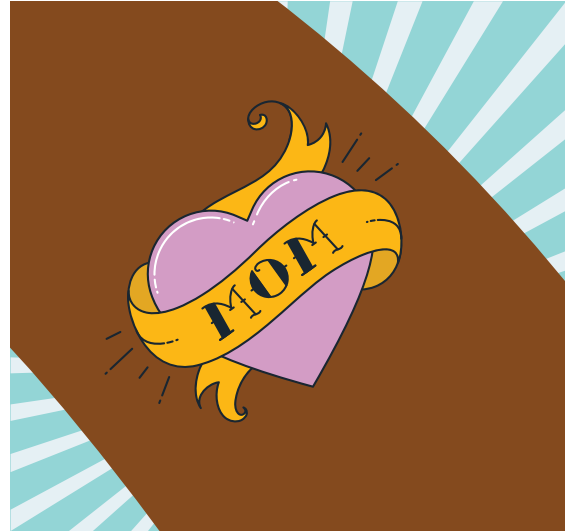
Try to keep your message shorter than an elevator ride to the 6th floor (with no stops). If you are communicating a longer message, focus on the BIG PICTURE.

- Say the most important information first.
- Stay focused to 3 main points and start with a strong hook.



Show More Than Tell

- The human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text. Share images, tables, charts, or real-life examples to help make your message memorable.
- Bring in a guest who has experienced a severe foodborne illness. Use examples of how food safety measures have saved lives, and when mistakes have cost lives.
- Use analogies and metaphors. Environmental health concepts can be hard to visualize. Compare your topic to something the audience is familiar with: "Much like a tattoo, PFAS are difficult to get rid of once they are in your body. They are considered 'forever chemicals'."



Keep It Conversational

A conversational tone is informal, inclusive, and easy to understand and will help you connect with your audience, earn their trust, and leave them with a memorable message.

Use pronouns, such as "I," "you," and "we," to keep your message conversational.

After you have developed your message, give it to a nonscientist and see what they think.

