



Messaging Boot Camp: How to Give Jargon the Boot

No matter how well-intentioned, our efforts to influence hearts and minds in support of an issue will not be effective if we don't get our messages right. It can be hard to remember that as experts and advocates, we are not the target audience for these messages. Instead, we must convince others—sometimes those with quite different life experiences—of the importance of our work and persuade them to take action. Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC thrives on unlocking the puzzle of effective messaging. In this document, you will find tips and tricks from ACS' toolbox to help Give Jargon the Boot! Need more support developing and deploying messaging? We're here to help!

6 Steps to Simple Messages for Clear Communication

Create your message by following the steps below. In a single sentence that is 10 words or less, said in 30 seconds or less, and without jargon, answer the questions below. Think of a target audience in advance, such as a legislator, a parent, a member of the faith community, a teacher, or a business owner. How would they need to hear about the topic? After you write the sentence, read it out loud. Was it easy to say, or did you trip over complicated phrases? Could you easily communicate it to a stranger who has no knowledge of your topic? The goal is to communicate what your target audience *needs to hear* not necessarily what you *want* to say.

Step 1: Say What You Do.

State what you do in a single sentence of 10 words or less and said in 30 seconds or less. Chances are, you probably do many things, but for your intended audience, what will grab their interest? Review what you wrote by saying it out loud. If your mother wouldn't understand it, refine and simplify.

Step 2: Explain How You Do It.

If people care about what you do, they are going to want to know how you do it—this is your time to shine. What makes you unique? What is different about your work compared to other organizations? Keep it to one sentence that is 10 words or less, said in 30 seconds or less, and of course keep it jargon free.

Step 3: Answer “Why Does It Matter?”

This is the answer to the big picture question of why you exist. You’re speaking to a local legislator. Or a parent. Or a business owner. Or a teacher. Why does this issue matter to them? Why does it matter to their community? Write down the most important ways the issue impacts them and those they serve. Keep your answer to one sentence (pick the most powerful reason it matters) that is 10 words or less and can be said in 30 seconds or less. Avoid jargon so people are more likely to understand the value of what you do.

Step 4: Tell Them Why They Should Care.

What’s at stake? What will happen if there’s no action? What challenge does your work help to solve? What will be most persuasive for your audience to hear? This is where you connect your work to an issue or problem about which they care. Again, keep it to one short and simple sentence that is 10 words or less, can be said in 30 seconds or less, and is jargon free. This isn’t the place to express all data, research, and information available or what you want to say. This is about what your audience needs to hear to make them want to know more and keep the conversation going.

Step 5: Read Your Messages Out Loud.

10 words or less? 30 seconds or less? Jargon free? If you were explaining your work to your neighbor, would they understand its importance after hearing this? Did the sentences flow easily? If not, start again.

Step 6: Refine Your Work.

You've created the sentences above for a specific audience, but is there another that you want to reach? Will you need answers tailored for them? Revise your messages so that you engage each audience with messages that will resonate with *them*.

Message Creation Checklist

Now that you have your messages, use this checklist to ensure you are on target and most effective in your communication.

Do your messages...	If not...
<input type="checkbox"/> Include 10 words or less and fit into a 30-second statement?	Tweak the words and phrases so it is easier to say.
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid jargon?	Given jargon the boot and simplify! How would you explain it to a 5th grader?
<input type="checkbox"/> Relate back to your communication goals?	At least annually, revisit your communication goals and make sure your messages continue to support your goals.
<input type="checkbox"/> Roll off your (or your messengers') tongue?	Practice messages so they become natural and can be integrated into any conversation or presentation.
<input type="checkbox"/> Use positive language?	Find the upside and make that your approach.
<input type="checkbox"/> State both the problem and a solution?	Rephrase messages to include a solution. If you don't have a solution to recommend, find another problem to address.
<input type="checkbox"/> Use data to back up points, without being overly academic?	Choose one or two compelling statistics or facts and simplify the way you present them.
<input type="checkbox"/> Talk about benefits to society, not just one affected group?	Think about what's in it for those who may not share your commitment to a specific population or group of people. You want to stay positive on the whole, but it is also OK to state the consequences of inaction on this issue.
<input type="checkbox"/> Talk about results or outcomes not transactions or activities?	Envision the end result of your effort and connect your effort to the results of your work.
<input type="checkbox"/> Talk about values or beliefs (e.g., strengthening families)?	Connect your issue to broader societal values.
<input type="checkbox"/> Tie to popular issues in your community?	Think about how your issue relates to the issues that are topmost on the minds of your audiences. This is a chance to refresh go-to messages.

Do your messages...	If not...
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet people where they are?	Put yourself in the place of your audience member. What's most important from his or her perspective? Understand where the audience is coming from and their values and tie it to that.
<input type="checkbox"/> Use a personal story to get the point across?	Find a story from your network and use it to bring your issues to life.
<input type="checkbox"/> Relay a simple and clear idea?	Get to the point and do not over-explain the issue. Remember that less is more when helping someone understand an issue. One compelling sentence always trumps a ho-hum paragraph.
<input type="checkbox"/> Reflect your current communication approach?	It's easy for messaging to become stale or outdated. Set aside time every year to refresh your messaging.

