

How to Frame an Issue

In order to be heard, and have an impact, you need to plan what you are going to say about your issue. A common technique for doing this is “framing the issue.”

Framing is a way of structuring or presenting a problem or an issue. Framing involves explaining and describing the context of the problem to gain the most support from your audience. Your audience is key to framing. The way a problem is posed, or framed, should reflect the attitudes and beliefs of your audience. Regardless as to who your audience is, when framing an issue you should be specific about:

What is the issue/problem? Who is involved? What contributes to the problem? What contributes to the solution?

What is the issue/problem? Framing begins with naming the issue as a problem. Naming and framing the problem allow you to address the issue in specific terms to suit your cause or the purpose of your audience. Two common ways of framing are framing an issue broadly as “common ground,” and framing an issue from a “single angle.”

Common ground framing allows you to address the broad issue from many angles. Most societal concerns are a result of several different factors. A common ground approach is better for large, diverse audiences, who may not agree on all strategies. The single angle approach allows you to emphasize one or more particular factors contributing to the problem. It may be most helpful when you are working with a small, specific group of people. In many cases, the single angle approach can have an impact on a number of broader issues.

Who is involved? Framing the issue also involves identifying the audience you are speaking to or for. A primary audience is made of targets of change--those individuals who are affected by the problem, or whose actions may contribute either to the problem or solution. A key to successful framing is knowing your audience and directing your presentation in a way that addresses its needs. Gaining support from your audience is essential to the framing process.

What contributes to the problem? Framing helps communicate information about what factors are contributing to the problem. Problems in larger systems, such as the educational system or the economic system, can add to or perpetuate the problem.

What contributes to the solution? By knowing who is responsible for the problem and what other factors are contributing to it, you can begin to seek solutions or strategies for addressing it. Framing the issue with possible solutions can help to focus the actions of your audience.

Links to useful worksheets to help you develop your strategy and frame your issues:

https://www.bmsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/bmsg_overall_strategy_worksheet.pdf

http://www.bmsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/bmsg_message_development_worksheet.pdf