

# ACS Messaging Boot Camp:

## Giving Jargon the Boot: Simple Messages for Clear Communication

Create your core messaging statements by following the steps below. Using 10 words or less, answer the four questions. It may help to 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.

### What You Do—write what your organization does.

**Step 1—What You Do.** State what you do but in 10 words or less. Review it. If your grandma wouldn't understand it, erase and start again.

### How You Do It—write the ways you and your organization work to meet your mission.

**Step 2—How You Do It.** This is your time to shine. Talk about the unique work you do. What is different about your work than what other organizations do? What is your value? Keep it to 10 words or less and keep it wonky-free.

### Why It Matters—think about your target audiences and why what you do matters to them.

**Step 3—Why Does It Matter?** 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 the community? Write down all of the ways the issue impacts them and the people they represent. For each target audience, keep why it matters to 10 words or less.

### Why Should Anyone Care—bring it all together for someone who does not care about your issue.

**Step 4—Why Should Anyone Care.** What's at stake? What will happen if there's no action? How does this impact the community? The economy? What are the outcomes for the people it serves? How does your work solve a problem? What will be most persuasive for your audience? What information does your audience need to hear? What action do you want the audience to take? Keep it to 10 words or less, and in words your parents would understand.

**Step 5—Review and Practice.** Review all of your messages. Are they simple? Easy to understand? Would someone not familiar with the issue understand them? If not, start again. Practice delivering your statements.

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For additional tools and resources find us on the web at [www.advocacyandcommunication.org](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org).



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# Message Creation Checklist

It is important for your message to communicate who you are, what you do, why it matters and why people should care. Once you have draft messages and a plan for sharing them, use this quick checklist to double check that you are on target and most effective in your communication.

Do your messages...	If not...
✓ Relate back to your communication goals?	Revisit your communication goals and make sure your messages will resonate with your target audience and accomplish your objectives.
✓ Reflect your current communication approach? It's easy for messaging to become stale or outdated.	Set aside time every year to refresh your messaging and make changes to your communication approach.
✓ Roll off your (or your messengers') tongue?	Practice messages so they become natural and can be integrated into any conversation or presentation.
✓ Avoid industry jargon?	Simplify! How would you explain it to a 5th grader?
✓ Use positive language?	Find the upside and make that your approach.
✓ State a problem and a solution, never one or the other?	Rephrase messages to include a solution. If you don't have a solution to recommend, find another problem to address.
✓ Use data to back up points, without being overly academic?	Choose one or two compelling points and simplify the way you present them.
✓ Talk about benefits to society, not just affected children, youth, or families?	Think about what's in it for those who do not have children or a stake in the investment.
✓ Talk about results or outcomes not transactions or activities?	Envision the end result of your effort and connect your effort to results of your work.
✓ Talk about values or beliefs (i.e. strengthening families)?	Connect your issue to broader societal values.
✓ Tie to "popular" issues in your community—autism, developmental delays, infant mortality, school dropout, school to prison pipeline, or violence?	Think about how your issue relates to the issues that are topmost on the minds of your audiences? Using these issues can allow messages like the long-used brain development argument to be "refreshed".
✓ 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.
✓ Use a personal story to get the point across?	Find a story from your network and use it to bring your issue to life.
✓ Relay a simple and clear idea? Get to the point and do not try to over-explain the issue.	Help your audience understand your issue. Remember that less is more. One compelling sentence always trumps a ho-hum paragraph.
✓ Use the right messengers?	Identify the people who can influence your target audience and incorporate them in your messaging strategy.

