



Ready, Set, FrameCheck!

Framing is what we say and how we say it. It's the values we use to build support for our cause, the metaphors we choose to explain an abstract or unfamiliar process, the messengers who make our case. Other frame elements include tone, explanation, numbers, solutions, and visuals. Together, these elements create an overarching frame that has the power to shape how we think about social issues and act on them. Use this checklist to ensure your communication is well framed.

Does it:

Lead with a VALUE?

Strategic framers give people the “big picture” viewpoint. Does the piece begin with a recommended value that helps people see what is at stake for all of us in addressing an issue? It should! Never lead with an opposing view, a data point, or a problem framed as a crisis—all framing strategies that are likely to backfire. Values help readers understand why afterschool STEM programs matter and help build support for public investments in them. *Be sure to use one of the following tested values at or near the top of your communication:*

- *Future Preparation* (afterschool STEM programs help prepare kids to participate in the 21st-century workforce)
- *Collective Prosperity* (we all benefit when kids have access to afterschool STEM programs)
- *Fairness Across Places* (all kids, wherever they live, deserve opportunities to explore STEM)

Avoid “SWAMPINESS”?

Our minds are like swamps: rich mental ecosystems filled with assumptions and beliefs, some more helpful than others. Strategic framers choose words carefully to cue helpful beliefs (the orchids in the “swamp” of public thinking) and navigate around unhelpful ones (the alligators). To avoid running into the alligators, steer clear of ideas, words, and phrases that will likely reinforce readers’ unhelpful assumptions. For example, does your message talk about how STEM programs prepare children to succeed in lucrative careers (which positions STEM education as an issue that affects individuals rather than society)? Choose words strategically to guide people’s interpretation of your message toward the

conclusions you want them to draw. And get rid of crisis-oriented or hyper-emotional language; that just causes people to disengage. Refer to the [STEM Swamp](#) to be sure you've navigated around the most likely traps.

Provide sufficient EXPLANATION?

Strategic framers leave nothing to chance. Does the message spell out the STEM acronym the first time it's used and take care to explain the value (for our society) of afterschool and summer STEM programming? Does it use step-by-step explanation of the causes and effects of quality STEM learning opportunities (or a lack of them)? Does it use tested metaphors to explain key concepts that can help people understand how STEM skills develop, such as:

- how learning takes place in settings outside of school (STEM Ecosystem metaphor)
- how cognitive skills develop (Weaving Skills Ropes, STEM Fluency, or Activation metaphors), and
- what we can do to fix disparities in access to STEM programs (Charging Stations metaphor)?

Does it explain—or does it merely assert? Revisit the tested metaphors to consider where there might be room to build in more explanation.

Steer clear of NAKED NUMBERS?

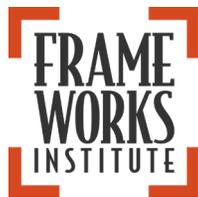
Strategic framers help readers make sense of data by avoiding “naked numbers”— data and statistics that are presented alone, without frames or context. Have the data in the message been put into context so their importance is easy for a non-expert to understand? Are data used to enhance and support an overall explanatory approach? Or do they stand alone, as if numbers have magical “prove my point” powers? Remember that people will interpret data themselves—often in unproductive ways—if you don't do it for them. Take FrameWorks' online course on “social math” to practice framing with numbers.

Offer specific SOLUTIONS?

Strategic framers always make solutions visible and possible. Are practical, feasible solutions offered and explained? Do the solutions offered help people see access to quality afterschool STEM programs as a “public issue” with broad implications for our entire society, rather than as an issue that only affects some groups or communities? Remember that solutions are most effective when presented as the logical “fix” for the problem at hand, rather than merely listed or named. Be sure to demonstrate how the proposed solution matches the scope of the problem.

Use well-framed VISUALS?

Strategic framers pay attention to every component of a message. Do the images—photos, infographics, illustrations, or videos—support the overarching framing strategy? Or do they reinforce people’s assumptions that afterschool STEM learning is only for “certain kinds” of kids or only about increasing personal earning power? The brain processes visuals much faster than text—some say 60,000 times faster. To paraphrase the adage, pictures may actually be worth 60,000 words. So make sure the visual elements complement the rest of your well-framed message.



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