Connecting with audiences: a short guide for communicators who work in English to raise awareness of Earth law
Introduction

This guide is for anyone who wants to communicate with the public about Earth law. The advice in these pages concerns writing but is also somewhat applicable to public speaking.

This guide is about how to make readers feel welcome. It outlines how to shape content to meet readers “where they are at.” Empathy for the reader is crucial for effective communication.

- Communicators take the message to the reader
- Communicators understand the reader’s struggles
- Communicators work to actively engage the reader

The first section explains how to tailor content to make it suitable for particular readership groups.

The second section looks at how word choices exclude readers.

The final section introduces storytelling as a way to appeal to everyone.

Earth law is an exciting area for communicators to work in. It includes law, science, economics, ethics and culture. The Earth law conversation needs to be heard by every person on the planet.
Section 1

When everything we write supports the message we want to communicate, we have the chance to produce well structured writing. Content that serves no purpose is difficult to place into a coherent and logical outline.

To know whether content serves a purpose we have to understand why we are communicating, who we are communicating to and how we want them to respond.

**Defining our purpose**

- What’s the message?
- Who’s it for?
- What response do we want?

If content isn’t designed to deliver the message it’s like a football in a coat pocket. It ruins the outline and shouldn’t be there.

Earth law writing is designed to be read by environmental and legal specialists, the general public, and community leaders. We write to tell readers what Earth law is. We ask readers to support specific causes such as individual rivers and mountains.

**Who are our readers?**

- lawyers and law makers
  - scientists
  - leaders
  - environmentalists
  - activists and campaigners
  - citizens
  - and more …

Each readership group is a niche. Earth law communicators sometimes specialise in writing for particular niches. The needs of one niche can be very different to the needs of another.

Writing for lawyers about the rights of rivers is not like writing for townspeople. Townspeople need to know how the law works. Lawyers know the law and want further legal detail.

Having a clear idea about the needs of a readership niche helps us to produce well structured writing that communicates a message.
Taking inspiration from magazine journalism

The magazine industry caters for niches as diverse as fitness, wildlife and photography. Magazine journalists often specialise in writing for one or two related niches.

Watching magazine journalists at work is a lesson in how to structure content towards different audiences. These writers think logically about how to shape stories that are likely to interest their intended readers.

Case study – Red Fen wetland

Wildlife journalist Jenny goes eco-camping in Red Fen wetland. Afterwards she submits articles to four nature and ecology magazines.

“10 rare birds in Red Fen wetland” goes to Birdwatching weekly.
“Rare butterfly in Red Fen wetland” goes to Butterfly spotter monthly.
“Eco-camping in Red Fen wetland” goes to Eco-holidays magazine.
“Interview with Red Fen Earth law advocate” goes to Earth Law quarterly.

Three articles are accepted. The Birdwatching editor asks Jenny to focus on a rare heron in the wetland. Jenny agrees to a rewrite.

Jenny and the editor have different ideas because reaching out to readers is an objective and a subjective process. The following exercises highlight the objective aspect of tailoring content to readers.
Exercises

Jenny has written four articles to persuade groups to support Earth law for Red Fen wetland. Link each article to its intended readership group. Do you recognise the priorities of individual readership groups?

Readership groups
Red Fen Town Council
Red Fen Elementary School
The National Council for Lawyers
The National Institute for Ornithology

Articles
Red Fen wetland as a test case for Earth law
How our wetland supports our town economy
Brick dust factory puts Red Fen heron at risk
How Earth law helps us to care for animals

Jenny’s friend Bob has written articles for environmental lawyers. Can you link each article to its intended readership group?

Readership groups
First week at university
Final year at law school
In mid career
Nearing retirement

Articles
Earth law mentoring leave a legacy that last a lifetime
New career paths open in the field of Earth law
Make Earth Law Clubs your first stop in freshers week
Earth law sabbaticals reinvigorate lawyers

Bob has written for a national newspaper about Earth law for Red Fen wetland. Jenny says the article isn’t 100% relevant to readers interested in national news. Which two sections should he delete?

Sections of Bob’s article
How Earth law will work to help Red Fen otters
How Earth law can be built into national law
How Earth jurisprudence helps international human rights
How Earth law has helped fish in six countries
Bob has written for the newsletter of an academic group that researches otters in Red Fen. Jenny tells Bob that some content is unnecessary for experts. What should he cut? Knowing when readers don’t need information is a very useful skill.

**Sections of Bob’s article**
The life cycle of Red Fen otters
Diseases faced by Red Fen otters
How Earth law can help Red Fen otters
How readers can help the Earth law campaign for Red Fen otters

Bob has written for an elementary school. Jenny tells him to shorten his article because it’s too much information for children. What should he cut? Knowing not to overwhelm the reader is another useful skill.

**Sections of Bob’s article**
How Earth law can keep wildlife safe in Red Fen wetland
Earth law’s precedents in national and international law
How the new law will make a difference to an otter’s day
Challenges against Earth law in the Supreme Court

**Final thoughts**

When we know who we are writing for it helps us to shape our writing. We choose interesting and relevant content. We cut out the irrelevant, the unnecessary and the overwhelming.

Ironically, writing for lawyers about Earth law is like writing for small children about Earth law. Neither group needs to read the details of how a court works. It’s unnecessary for lawyers and too much information for little ones. Being able to think in this logical way about readers’ needs is a foundation skill for Earth law communicators.
Section 2

Sometimes we can’t tailor content to specific readership groups. Our readers are everyone. Instead of shaping content to appeal to specific groups, we have to work hard on not excluding any group.

Even readership groups have internal diversity. The advice in this section should also be heeded by writers who specialise in niche areas.

This section outlines three issues that make texts unwelcoming to readers.

- Prioritising readers who have privilege
- Neglecting readers who experience reading difficulties
- Using jargon and specialised language

Mistakes that prioritise privileged readers

In more patriarchal times it was normal to write “he” when referring to an unknown person. Language use often reflects who has privilege in a society. The problem with the following sentence is rooted in white privilege.

“A variety of pinks including fuchsia and nude.”

Using nude to describe pink derives from the assumption that nude skin is white people’s skin. To avoid prioritising white readers, the writer should replace nude with pale pink.

These days we are aware that privilege affects our word choices. Yet, it’s not always obvious to us where privilege exists. To be inclusive writers we have to monitor our own prejudices and assumptions.

Would you make the mistakes in these sentences?

All children should go jogging.
Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston look like average Americans.
Everyone loves eating beef and pork.

Privileged writers sometimes homogenise less dominant social groups. In Britain, where just 5% of the population is Muslim, it’s sometimes assumed that all Muslims are Pakistani.
Seeing yourself homogenised is an unwelcome experience. As writers we must be sensitive to the diversity within our readerships. Look at these sentences. Would you make the same mistakes?

This one is French and that one is Native American. The CEO from China is here. Anyone speak Chinese? Women love fashion and beauty.

We should avoid addressing our words solely to the most privileged members of our society.

**Welcoming readers who have reading difficulties**

Reading requires attention, memory, processing speed, access to the senses, experience, literacy and the ability to connect letters with sounds. A reader’s abilities in these areas may fluctuate due to medication, injury, illness and experience.

By weeding out bad writing we can make reading slightly easier for the many readers who have difficulties.

**The enemies of easier reading**
- Unnecessarily long paragraphs
- Unnecessarily long sentences
- Unnecessarily long words
- Massive blocks of text
- Meandering, rambling and waffling
- Ornate and flowery language

Unnecessary length excludes readers who tire easily. Without clear writing to guide them, tired readers may lose their way. Poor writing is difficult even for readers who read without difficulty.

With a few simple adaptations we can shape texts to support readers who struggle.

**The friends of easier reading**

Share the essential message at the start. Readers who depart early will understand the message. Readers who stay will be given a route map to help them through later pages.

Divide long text into sections. Tackling one section at a time is easier for readers than navigating through a single block of text. Each section
should have a coherent message that contributes to the overall purpose of the document.

Use visuals. Infographics display crucial information at a glance.

Some readers listen to text with the help of software that speaks the words aloud. It’s worth checking to see whether our writing truly communicates when read in this manner. Writing that’s difficult to listen to is probably a tough read.

Opening the conversation to the whole community

We learn language from the people we mix with. Every group uses words that newcomers don’t know. Acronyms, jargon, slang and academic vocabulary all exclude newcomers.

When scientists write for the public they try to avoid using specialised words that are too little known to be widely understood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialised vocabulary</th>
<th>Plain English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panthera genus</td>
<td>Big cats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homo sapiens</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seismologists</td>
<td>Earthquake researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesolithic</td>
<td>Middle Stone Age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writing in plain English opens knowledge to everybody.

Plain English words are those known to the widest section of the community. Not all vocabulary has a plain English “translation,” but every concept can be explained in everyday language.

Knowing which words are too specialised for the wider community is a matter for careful judgement.

**When does a word need a plain English translation?**

- It’s rarely used in everyday speech
- It’s not widely used in the media
- It’s only used by a particular group or industry
Difficult Latin vocabulary

Law and Science have inherited a treasury of words from Latin. Words with Latin origins are common in literary English too.

These elegant words are often not commonly used in spoken English. They may exclude some readers. Can you add to this list of Latin origin English words and their plain English equivalents?

Masticate – to chew
Augment – to add to something
Ameliorate – to improve
Perambulate – to walk
Pusillanimous - cowardly
Pugnacious - quarrelsome
Desiccate – to dry up
Precipitation – rain/snow
Quotidian - daily
Imagine going to a fair and telling people the story of how a river won legal rights.

Your story introduces Earth law to a lawyer. Another listener, a fisherman, thinks about river health for the first time. You inspire an artist to paint a river and auction the work for charity.

Storytelling is useful when we don’t know our audience. Stories speak to individuals in the way they are ready for. Everyone gains something unique from an interesting and well told tale.

Two forms of storytelling are particularly useful for Earth law: nature writing and journalism.

Nature writing

Nature writing enables readers to experience a landscape through reading. It is also a very enjoyable activity for writers who love nature.

In nature writing we share the story of our personal experiences within nature. If you are visiting a site as part of your Earth law work, why not write about it?

Nature writing is a form of creative writing. Nature writing comes from the writer’s firsthand experience of being outdoors.

Nature writing tips

• Use all available senses. How does a place look, smell and feel?
• Focus on firsthand experience of a few strong “characters.” Write about an animal or plant and its place in the landscape.
• Make sure something happens in the story. Ensure action by dividing the story into three acts: beginning, middle and end. Act 1: Setting the scene, Act 2: The heart of the action, Act 3: Resolution

On the next page look at the picture of a dog in a sunlit street lined with trees. Imagine yourself in the picture. How many senses would you use to describe your experience of it?
Who would be the main character in your writing? The dog, the trees, the colour of the leaves, the light, or the hill? There’s no wrong answer.

When exploring nature please take the appropriate safety precautions for the location and let a responsible adult know where you are going.

**Journalistic storytelling**

With journalism we can tell the story of advocates, groups, legal efforts, and environmental developments. Journalists report on current affairs. The key questions for journalists are who, what, where, why and how.

Environmental journalism can be dangerous. Before we begin it is strongly recommended to undergo vocational journalism training run by experienced journalists.

Good quality journalism is a wonderful storytelling tool for the Earth law movement. It communicates what is happening in the environment and in the growing field of Earth law. Journalism is risky but very rewarding for practitioners who take training and safety seriously.
Thank you for reading this guide

How you use this guide’s advice will depend on your knowledge of your audience and of the situation in your country. The groundwork for your Earth law writing is you.

The Earth needs writers who care about their readers. Having a heart for the audience is the basis of good communication.

Thank you for reading this short guide. Good luck with your communication work.
Here are the answers to the exercises in section 1

Red Fen Town Council = How our wetland supports our town economy
Red Fen Elementary School = How Earth law helps us care for animals
The National Council for Lawyers = Red Fen wetland as a test case for Earth law
The National Institute for Ornithology = Brick dust factory puts Red Fen heron at risk

First week at university = Make Earth Law Clubs your first stop in freshers week
Final year at law school = New career paths open in the field of Earth law
In mid career = Earth law sabbaticals reinvigorate lawyers
Nearing retirement = Earth law mentoring leave a legacy that last a lifetime

How Earth law will work to help Red Fen otters
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How Earth law can keep wildlife safe in Red Fen wetland
Earth law’s precedents in national and international law
How the new law will make a difference to an otter’s day
Challenges against Earth law in the Supreme Court

Did you recognise the problems with the sentences in section 2?

All children should go jogging. (Prioritises children who can walk and have access to safe jogging areas. Excludes children who can’t walk and children who live in unsafe neighbourhoods.)
Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston look like average Americans. (Prioritises white people. Excludes the many Americans who do not look European.)
Everyone loves eating beef and pork. (Prioritises meat eaters and people who don’t follow religious diets. Excludes Jews, Muslims, Hindus, vegans and vegetarians.)

This one is French and that one is Native American. (Native Americans are many nations. Either say “This one is European and that one is Native American.” Or specify the indigenous nation “This one is French and that one is Navajo.”
The CEO from China is here. Anyone speak Chinese? (Several languages are spoken in China.)
Women love fashion and beauty. (All women are individuals with their own tastes and interests.)
Legal stuff

Authorship
The author of this guide is Helen George. www.earthcopy.com

Disclaimers
This guide has been produced to promote communication education among supporters of Earth jurisprudence. None of its content is a reflection of the opinions or beliefs of any individual Earth jurisprudence organisation.

The examples (e.g. Bob, Jenny and Red Fen wetland) used in this guide are fictional. Any similarity between the examples and people, events, places or publications in the real world is purely coincidental.

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