19 TIPS TO MESSAGE COVID-19
In our virtual world, influencers are some of our most effective messengers, inspiring trust among large, varied audiences. To help influencers channel this power to fight COVID-19, we researched and tested the best messaging tactics for encouraging compliance with public health guidelines.
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We need you! You’re influential, and can really make a difference on inspiring compliance and the right behaviors in order to bring COVID-19 to a halt. Before you publish your Tweet, take a look at these guidelines to see how it can maximize positive outcomes.
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Remind people that we’re in this together - Use words like “we” and “us” rather than “you.” This framing will create solidarity, communion, and a stronger connection to your audience.

TRY THIS

We’re all in this together. Let’s come together by staying apart.

INSTEAD OF

It’s not safe or responsible to leave your home.
TIP #2

Use cause and effect -
Rather than just stating the desired action, make it clear why the desired action is warranted.

TRY THIS

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
When we wash our hands, soap destroys the virus, but it's only effective when we do it for 20 seconds.

INSTEAD OF

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
Wash your hands for 20 seconds.
**Phrase in the positive** - State recommendations in the positive (“do”), rather than the negative (“don’t”). People don’t like their liberties taken away, and therefore react negatively when being told what they cannot do.

**TRY THIS**

To be safe, it’s a good idea to maintain physical distance.

**INSTEAD OF**

You should not be socializing right now – it’s dangerous.
Avoid flaunting your privilege - If you don’t, your posts will feel condescending and ignorant, and people will feel less connected to you. Instead, highlight the interconnectedness of COVID-19.

**TRY THIS**

*Influencer* @influencer · Apr 25
If the Coronavirus has taught us anything, it is that we are all in the same boat. We count on each other to stay safe!

**INSTEAD OF**

*Influencer* @influencer · Apr 25
Nothing says social distancing like a quarantini on my private beach! Cheers!
Hedge claims - Use words like “might” rather than “will.” You’ll sound more humble, open-minded and less dogmatic, giving you more credibility.

TRY THIS

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
It’s quite possible that the pandemic may overwhelm our medical system.

INSTEAD OF

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
The pandemic will overwhelm our medical system.
Highlight agreement before disagreeing - People listen to us when they feel like we understand them or that their opinions are respected. Use phrases like “I agree that...” to establish common ground and to gain trust.

TRY THIS

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
I agree that we need more transparency and that staying home is burdensome, but for the safety of our community, I’m not taking any risks.

INSTEAD OF

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
People need to take this more seriously.
Normalize compliance - People typically want to conform to social norms. Convey the idea that most people are doing the right thing. If we convey the idea that people are not complying, it becomes more socially permissible to ignore health guidelines (if others aren’t complying, why should I?).

**TIP #7**

**TRY THIS**

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
By staying apart, we are playing a part in an act of collective humanity to keep our fellow humans alive and well!

**INSTEAD OF**

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
Too many people are disregarding public health guidelines, and having fun at the park.
Normalize compliance (within social groups) - Show examples of what people in your core audience’s group are doing to comply. For example, if your audience is mostly Gen Z, show younger people engaging in positive behavior in order to maximize positive results.

**TRY THIS**

**INSTEAD OF**
Be careful about accidental "othering" - Using words like “the elderly” or “the incarcerated” makes these individuals come off as “them” rather than “us.” This othering can unintentionally divide us. (Rule of thumb: avoid labels that can be preceded with “the”.)
Reframe power - Avoid labels that suggest weakness (i.e., the vulnerable) and avoid the “savior” framing.

TRY THIS

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
By keeping our physical distance, we slow the spread, which protects the availability of life-saving healthcare that we all depend on.

INSTEAD OF

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
Be a hero, and make sacrifices to save the vulnerable.
Focus on local interests - To increase compliance, it’s more effective to show the local effects of COVID-19 than to note how it’s affecting a community across the country or across the world. The closer to home, the more seriously the crisis is taken.
TIP #11

Make success feel attainable -
Using fearful language might incite feelings of helplessness. Despite the seriousness of the issue, help people believe that we can overcome it and focus on solutions.

TRY THIS

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
This country has always known how to pull together! We did it in WWII, after 9/11, and after the housing crisis of 2008.

INSTEAD OF

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
This is the most consequential thing we've ever faced.
Emphasize our *duty* to others - You are seen as more trustworthy and messages are more effective when they speak to our duties towards loved ones and group members.

**TRY THIS**

- It is our duty to make sure that our families and friends stay healthy.

**INSTEAD OF**

- The moral thing to do is to make sure our families and friends stay healthy.
TIP #13

Focus on new meaning and purpose - Crises provide rare opportunities to grow past our perceived limitations. Focusing on higher-order values can help your followers find meaning in this crisis.

TRY THIS

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
This crisis has taught me to refocus on what’s really important in my life, like family and friends vs. work.

INSTEAD OF

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
I cannot get a slot for Amazon Fresh delivery no matter how hard I try!
TIP #14

Be specific with the desired behavior - Using broad terms (ie “social distancing”) is not particularly useful. Instead, frame your message around a clear, tangible, action.

TRY THIS

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
It has never been more important to stay at home.

INSTEAD OF

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
It has never been more important to practice social distancing.
Look for the helpers - People are inspired when they hear about someone doing something selfless for another person. Take the opportunity to challenge prejudices and biases by showing how certain marginalized groups are participating in finding solutions.

Try This

<insert picture here> of doctors, nurses, and other helpers who belong to a group that may be on the receiving end of hatred and bias.

Instead Of

<insert picture here> of white doctors who typically get a bit more love in times like these.
Underscore agency and choice - Emphasizing choice and agency acknowledges people’s needs for autonomy and control. If people feel like “business as usual” is a harmful choice, rather than a passive/default situation, they will be less likely to do it.

INSTEAD OF

INFLUENCER @influencer · Apr 25
We have all been ordered by the government to wear face masks.

TRY THIS

INFLUENCER @influencer · Apr 25
We put our loved ones and ourselves at risk when we choose to leave the home without face masks.
Help people understand confusing information rather than reprimanding people who don't.

TRY THIS

These charts show that the virus is still spreading to many people so it is essential that we all do our part to stop it by staying at home.

INSTEAD OF

People are clueless about reading graphs that show how much the virus is spreading so they are reckless about going out.
Focus on the danger to loved ones -
Rather than stating potential risks in the abstract, or even the risk to oneself, state the risks to their loved one’s lives. People are less affected by messaging that communicates the potential risks to the individual, rather than the risks to the ones whom they love.
TIP #19

Focus on reciprocity - When people learn sacrifices others are making to keep us safe, it subtly but effectively encourages reciprocity.

TRY THIS

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
Doctors, nurses, and other health care workers are risking their lives to keep us healthy, and many of them are falling ill. As our healthcare workers put their lives on the line, we can do our part simply by staying home and limiting physical contact with others.

INSTEAD OF

Influencer @influencer · Apr 25
Everyone should stay home because too many people are getting sick.
THE QUICK RECAP

Tip #1: Remind people that we’re in this together • Tip #2: Cause and Effect messaging • Tip #3: Phrase in the positive • Tip #4: Avoid flaunting privilege • Tip #5: Hedge your claims • Tip #6: Highlight agreement before disagreeing • Tip #7: Normalize compliance • Tip #8: Take caution not to accidentally “otherize” • Tip #9: Reframe power • Tip #10: Focus on local interests • Tip #11: Make success feel attainable • Tip #12: Emphasize our duty to others • Tip #13: Focus on new meaning and purpose • Tip #14: Be specific with the desired behavior • Tip #15: Look for the diverse helpers • Tip #16: Underscore agency and choice • Tip #17: Help people understand • Tip #18: Focus on danger to loved ones • Tip #19: Focus on reciprocity
THANK YOU!

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