

# The Cheat Sheet

A really quick guide to framing and messaging.

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Cognitive science -the science of how brains really work, is something we ought to know about because our mission after all is to persuade people and people use their brains to make political decisions. Ironically, conservatives have been paying attention to this science for forty years while we've largely ignored it.

## People don't think the way we think they think

The first thing to know is that people -*everyone*, including you and me- are not particularly objective or rational beings -especially when it comes to politics. In addition, facts and logic, true they may be, are just not terribly persuasive, no matter how much we think they should be.

What does work is an appeal to values and to emotions, and how that works is tied up in the words and ideas we use to get our messages across. The process of using values and emotions to persuade voters to see things our way involves the science of framing.

As with any skill, the skill of effective message framing takes study and time -and if you are reading this, you are probably in the heat of an election and may have never heard of any of this before. There is plenty of info at the [connectionslab.org](http://connectionslab.org) website including our new online course, but you need something now. This cheat sheet should get you going.

## Framing

Let's boil political framing down to its simplest form.

Frames are stories in our brain about how things work. You have stories for simple things like bicycles or more abstract and complex things like "the common good"

Stories have actors and roles and scenes and scenarios. An example from our friend Antonia Scatton:

A couple is eating. They finish, get up and walk out. Are they right or wrong? Hard to know right? Let me give you a word: Waiter. That word gives us a scene - a restaurant. We have actors: waiters, cooks and patrons. And we have things that ought to happen in the restaurant frame, namely that guests pay for their meals. Our couple is clearly wrong.

I could change the frame to "dinner party". Guests are not expected to pay for meals at a dinner party, so our couple is morally right.

Changing the frame changes the story —and, in this case, the morality.

Here's a political example. Trump's frame for immigration at the southern border is crime. Immigrants are criminals, Trump is the hero for catching them and they deserve the punishment of being deported and having their children taken from them. Change the frame to refugee: people are fleeing grinding poverty at best and daily threats to their lives from drug wars at worst. Refugees deserve empathy and help, those who give it are morally good, those who punish refugees are morally wrong. All that from a change of frame!

## Frame with values

All politics is moral. It's all about right and wrong. Below are some common liberal values that you can work into your messages. When talking to voters about issues, you'll find one or more of the following values that apply to the issue. Ground your messages in these ideas.

**Empathy**

**Empowerment & Protection**

**Common Good & Investment**

**Interdependence & Inclusiveness**

**Excellence & Fulfillment**

**Decency & Dignity**

**Equity & Opportunity**

**Empathy & Social Responsibility**

**Public Support for Private Success**

The liberal worldview summed up in Paul Wellstone's famous quote:

**We all do better when we all do better**

### Examples of value framing:

Strong **public** schools **empower** every student to be well prepared for success in work, home and **community** life.

Our **community** can work together to **invest** in beautiful parks and trails that are great for kids, parents and **boost** our quality of life and home values.

Note the word "boost" evokes the empowerment and investment frames. You can light up the ideas, not necessarily the exact word above.

Our first **duty** as citizens is to **protect** one another. Common sense background checks for all gun purchases is the **responsible** thing to do.

Municipal fiber broadband for all homes and businesses will draw new technology businesses and provide good paying jobs to citizens in our community.

Frame messages this way and you'll start a productive conversation with the voter.

**Check your candidates messaging!** Candidates are great at saying WHAT: "Our kids need good schools" and HOW: "Pass the school levy". They hardly ever say WHY. Use those value words!

## Stop, Drop and Roll

Prepare yourself to frame effective messages with this quick method. The more you practice the easier it will get.

### STOP

What is the conservative\* frame? What story are they telling?

What is your position?

What core liberal value is appropriate for this issue and audience?

### DROP

Stay out of conservative frames!

Drop the urge to debunk (it keeps you in their frame)

Drop facts and logic (they're just not very effective).

### ROLL

With a message firmly grounded in a liberal frame.

Make it clear why you care.

\*What we mean by "conservative" are the conservative strategists and extremist media personalities that have dominated the Republican message machine.