

# NABZ-IRAN

**Working to Raise Awareness around Human Rights Violations in Iran**

## **E-Learning Course Creating Persuasive and Powerful Messages**

### **Introduction**

Any type of meaningful political or policy reform requires convincing a majority of people that change is good and desirable. Communicating persuasive arguments is one of the most important things you'll do to convince others that change is right for them individually and for society as a whole. Actively identifying and communicating to your audience about your ideas for change is what we call *messaging*. The *message* itself is the actual content, or ideas, you wish to communicate.

During this course, you'll learn the basics of messaging, elements of a good message and how to effectively use a message to advance your goals. Included are lessons on:

- What is a message?
- Attributes of a good message
- Knowing your audience
- Advocacy in a repressive environment
- Putting together a messaging plan
- Applying your message

Messaging is an art, not a science. There is no one correct method to communicate which is applicable to every situation. You'll learn basic principles which are generally effective when messaging, but success or failure depends on how you apply these principles to your own situation. No strategy should be set in stone. The art of effectively communicating a message requires judgment and wisdom. This is acquired through practice and understanding your target audience, their interests and experiences. *This course will help you learn how to develop, adapt and target your messages.*

### **Take this Course**

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## LESSON ONE: WHAT IS A MESSAGE?

Throughout your day, whether you are aware of it or not, someone is communicating and messaging to you. Most of the common messages we are exposed to on a regular basis are product advertisements. Some of the messages we hear come from a government or religious leaders. What they all have in common is their attempt to influence what we buy, how we act or how we think. There are many ways to define “message” and “messaging” but for our purposes, we’ll use the following:

**LANGUAGE, IDEAS, SYMBOLS OR BEHAVIOR DESIGNED TO  
INFLUENCE A TARGET AUDIENCE**

*Messaging* of course is the verb form of the word and refers to the act of communicating your message.

While you are not selling a good or service, you still must package your ideas into compelling words and actions that are relevant and desirable for your audience. You are competing for people’s attention in a crowded marketplace and often promoting ideas which may run counter to what people have believed for many years.

Ultimately your message and messaging tactics are a means to an end. They should be designed to advocate, to raise awareness and to change behavior.

It’s also important to say what a message is *not*. It is not a substitute for action nor is it a substitute for sound public policy solutions. If you are only talking but not acting, your message will lack credibility. We include the word “behavior” in our definition because communication is both verbal and non-verbal. Your behavior often speaks louder than your words and the two must work together.

In later modules we will discuss message integrity and methods to ensure your message is credible and to achieve your goals.

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## Two Important Types of Messages

Messages will generally fall into one of two categories: *Positive or Negative*.

**Positive:** What do you stand for? What is your vision for tomorrow? What are the positive changes you would like to see in society? How will you fix problems? Who do you support?

**Negative:** What are you against? Whom do you oppose? What angers you? What are the problems in your country you wish to highlight?

Generally speaking a negative will describe a problem, criticize a policy or person and describe what you are against. A positive message will offer a vision for the future, express support for a principle or policy and/or explain how you wish to correct problems in society. Your target audience should always have a clear understanding where you stand on important issues.

Both negative and positive messages are important to your overall communications strategy. However, *the positive message is always more important than the negative*. Why? Because anyone can criticize the problems of society but people will only listen if you have a viable alternative. If you offer no credible solutions, you will not build a critical mass of support for your message.

Negative messages are effective at focusing anger and attention on problems and those responsible. Positive messages offer people an alternative, hope and the correct path forward.

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## Two Important Types of Messages (continued)

Consider the following two statements. Which one is an example of a negative message and which is a positive message? Which one do you find more appealing? Why?

“We must stop the unlawful jailing and persecution of students, lawyers and ethnic minorities”

*Versus*

“We want an Iran where everyone enjoys the basic rights of free speech, religious freedom and the right to freely associate with others”

Once you have finished your assessment, click Next for our review of the statements.

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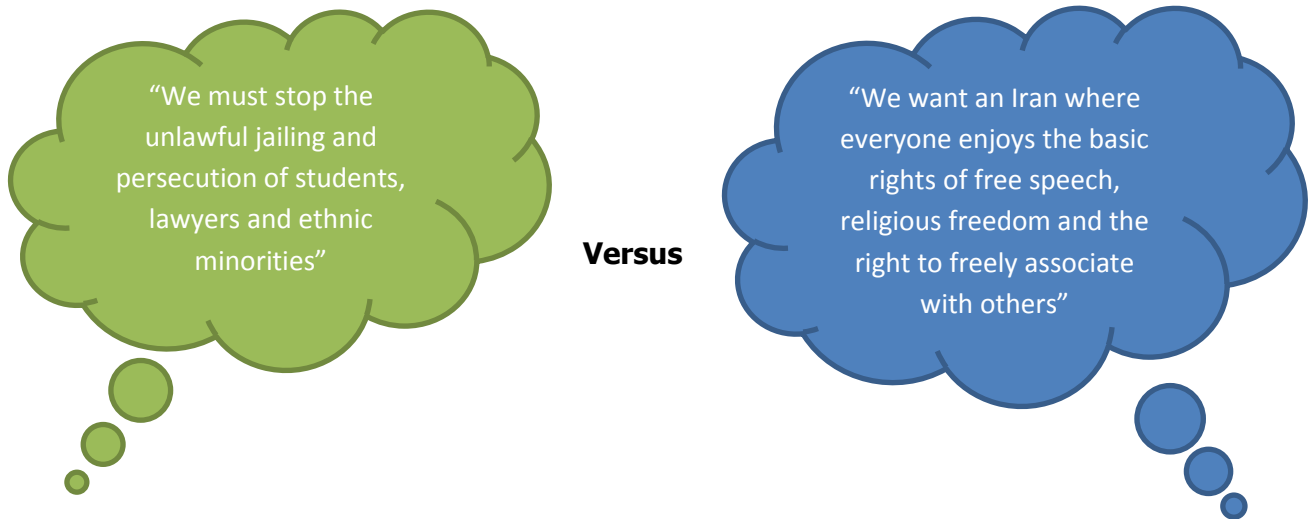
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## Two Important Types of Messages (continued)



The statement on the left is an example of a negative message – it tells you what the speaker is *against*. The message on the right indicates what the speaker *stands for*. Negative messages tend to stir the emotion of anger, while a positive message may stir feelings of hope. Both are powerful motivational feelings. A positive message is better for two reasons:

1. It is less likely to be viewed as an attack on anyone directly.
2. It offers a solution, which is more important than simply stating a problem.

### ***Develop your message:***

Take out a piece of paper at home. Write down three positive messages expressing values or ideas you support. Ask yourself, "If I could change three things about my country/community/profession, what would they be?"

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## Lesson One: Key Points to Remember

- A message is language, symbols, ideas or behavior designed to influence a target audience.
- There are two types of messages: negative and positive.
- A negative message states what you oppose or identifies a problem, while a positive message states what you support or identifies a solution.
- A positive message is more important than a negative one because it focuses on solutions. In advocacy, credible solutions will always resonate with your audience more than restating problems.

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## Quiz

- 1. Which item is not an example of a message?**
  - a. Language
  - b. Symbols
  - c. Political Platform
  - d. Behavior
  
- 2. A message is designed to...**
  - a. Be a substitute for action
  - b. Influence a targeted audience
  - c. Suppress your opponents message
  - d. Confuse your opponents
  
- 3. A message is ultimately a form of**
  - a. Advocacy
  - b. Explaining what you stand for
  - c. Exposing the problems with the opposition
  - d. Displaying your command of language
  
- 4. Why is a positive message more important than a negative message?**
  - a. A negative message generates too much anger.
  - b. A positive message is easier to understand than a negative message.
  - c. Anyone can criticize, but a positive message offers a positive vision for the future.
  - d. Too much negativity will turn off your audience.
  
- 5. A positive message will:**
  - a. Offer a vision for the future
  - b. Express support for a principle or policy
  - c. Explain how to correct problems in society
  - d. All of the Above
  
- 6. If your message will lack credibility if:**
  - a. If you are not talking about acting on issue
  - b. If you only offer a positive message
  - c. If you only offer a negative message

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## LESSON TWO: ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD MESSAGE

Whatever the content or intent of your message is, there are several elements a message must have to be successful. In this lesson we'll examine these elements from a tactical perspective, as well as review the values and ideals your message should contain.

Imagine you are walking down the aisle of a grocery store. As you scan the products your eyes are drawn to the variety of brand names, logos, pictures, colors, words and packaging. These are all types of messages designed to entice the consumer. Within seconds your brain is taking all the information in, filtering through what is most appealing and deciding what best suits your tastes.

The same principle applies in messaging. Most people might only see or hear your message briefly. Within seconds it must capture their attention, make sense and ultimately win them over to your cause. People instinctively reject what they can't immediately understand or doesn't speak to their interests. If your message is complicated and requires lengthy explanation, it isn't working.

With that in mind, your message should be....

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## ➤ **Short and Simple**

Messages must be concise. If you are unable to deliver your message effectively in less than a minute you are likely to lose the attention of your audience. It must be instantly understandable and relatable to your audience. It must be easy to remember and repeat.

***Example: "We want an Iran where everyone enjoys the basic right of free expression."***

## ➤ **Truthful and Credible**

Your message must be factual and believable. While you may use emotional appeals and choose to emphasize some facts over others, you must never lie or distort the truth. It must be consistent with what actually has happened. If you are unsure of all the facts concerning an event or issue, you should say so upfront or not comment at all.

Your message also must reflect who you are, your values, practices and experience. If people don't trust or believe you, your message will lack credibility.

***Example: "The recent arrests of more than a dozen journalists suggest the regime is intent on stifling free expression in advance of the upcoming election."***

## ➤ **Relevant to People**

Does your message relate to people's daily lives and concerns? Does it fit their personal experience? Will your ideas positively impact their lives? Is it useful? Does your message fit the facts and understanding of your audience? People will instinctively reject what isn't important to their interests.

***Example: "The price of basic food staples is too high for the average family income."***

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## ➤ Show Differences

This principle is important in two ways. First, how does your message differ from those you oppose? How does your message articulate policy differences with those in power?

Secondly, how does your message stand out in a crowded marketplace? How are your solutions more workable than others? There may be many activists, political parties or NGOs competing for the public's attention. How is your message unique?

Here we return to the discussion in our previous lesson of positive and negative messages, and more specifically why *the positive is more important than negative*. Your positive message should discuss solutions to problems that differ from your opponents. This is particularly relevant in political campaigns where candidates must distinguish themselves from each other. But it is also necessary in convincing your audience that your message offers a viable and credible alternative to the status quo. If your message does not present a difference from others, the audience will default to the familiar status quo message.

### *Example:*

**Them: "Our commitment is to maintaining the values of the Islamic Revolution."**

**You: "Our commitment is to the promotion of universal values of basic human rights."**

## ➤ Speak to the Head and the Heart

Messages aimed at the heart will grab people's attention quickly, evoke feelings of sympathy, sadness, anger or even motivate people to act. Messages aimed at the head will convince people that your ideas make sense, are right and can work.

Your message must be both. The art of messaging requires a balance between the two – knowing when to emphasize one over the other. Too many statistics and theories and your message becomes abstract and boring. Too much emotion and you're liable to distort the actual facts.

### *Example:*

**Head: "Iran's current unemployment rate stands at 11.2 percent according to the Statistical Center of Iran."**

**Heart: "Reza has a degree in engineering yet has been unable to find a decent job after more than a year of sending his CV to dozens of companies."**

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**Exercise:** In your own words, write down on a piece of paper your reaction to each statement in the example. What is the difference between each? What is the imagery in your mind's eye when you read each statement?

**"Iran's current unemployment rate stands at 11.2 percent according to the Statistical Center of Iran."**

**"Reza has a degree in engineering yet has been unable to find a decent job after more than a year of sending his CV to dozens of companies."**

The first example is simply a black and white number in your head: academic and abstract. Statistics are useful in making a point, but always connect them to a human story. The second statement conjures an image of an individual, someone you might even know, who is struggling to find employment. You can imagine him circling want ads in the paper or applying to multiple jobs.

The best messages combine appeals to the head *and* the heart. Continuing with the example above, the following statement reflects how to combine statistics and a human story:

**"Iran's 11.2 percent unemployment is more than just a statistic. It represents millions of people like Reza who are college educated yet struggling every day to find a decent job."**

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## ➤ Targeted

You'll often see the word targeted connected to concepts like message or audience. It simply means that you are speaking to a particular group of people and not the whole population. Targeting requires knowledge of the people to whom you are messaging. Who are they? What are their concerns? What are their lives like?

Examples of targeted audiences include youth, women, religious minorities or the elderly. It is often best to be a member of the targeted audience that you are addressing. People are more apt to believe and trust those most like themselves.

We'll discuss more about targeting audiences in Lesson Three of this course.

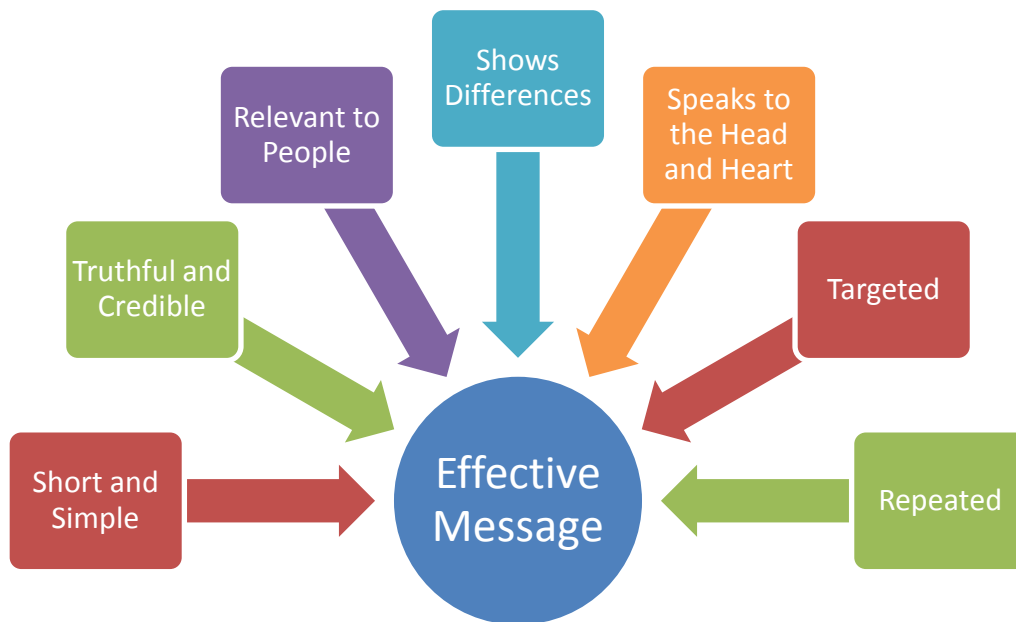
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## ➤ **Consistently Repeated, Repeated, Repeated**

Your target audience must hear and see your message multiple times before they remember or even register it. While you may be living and breathing your message, most people are not. They may only hear it a few times. For the message to be effective, your audience must hear the same message many times in many different ways.

Closely tied to the concept of repetition is that of *consistency*. While events and circumstances may change, your message must not. Of course there will always be new facts and news to contend with, but the mission and values your message represents should remain the same. This is especially important when speaking at a public event or to the media. Giving inconsistent answers or changing your message with different groups will ruin your credibility.



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## ➤ **Contain Universal Values**

When crafting your message there will be a variety of ideals you will wish to communicate – values which demonstrate who you are and where you stand. While you might not use the exact words or phrases mentioned below, the values they represent are usually contained in any good advocacy messaging, no matter the specific issue. They also provide broader context to your message’s intent. They are called “*universal values*” because they are values to which most people, no matter what culture or context, can relate. They also are values that it is difficult for people to oppose.

<u>Universal Values</u>		
Jobs and income security	Education	Equality/Fair Play
Good Health	Personal Safety	Strong Families
Opportunity	Human Dignity	Justice/Rule of Law
Religious Conviction	Political Participation	Human Rights

What all these values have in common is the broader issue of quality of life and in some cases, human rights. At the heart of any public policy issue is the search for common good so that we all might enjoy a higher quality of life while respecting and valuing others despite our differences.

This list is certainly not exhaustive and the details of each will differ by culture and country.

*What other universal values can you identify in your community?*

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## ***Test Your Knowledge!***

On a separate sheet of paper, list at least three universal values mentioned in the statement below.

“Women in our country have been treated as second class citizens for too long. They are routinely denied access to the same quality educational and professional opportunities as men. This limits their ability to develop fully and to provide for their families.”

Once you have completed your list, click Next for our analysis.

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“Women in our country have been treated as second class citizens for too long. They are routinely denied access to the same quality educational and professional opportunities as men. This limits their ability to develop fully and to provide for their families.”

This statement references several universal values. For example, “women as second class citizens” speaks to human dignity. Education and opportunity are closely tied to the values of jobs and income security. Finally, the ability of women to provide for their families directly addresses the values of a strong family.

As you can see, it is not difficult to incorporate a variety of universal values into your message. Almost all public policy issues impact quality of life.

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## Lesson Two: Key Points to Remember

Your message should:

- be short and easy to remember;
- show differences between your position and that of your opponents;
- be consistently repeated;
- speak to the listeners' head and heart;
- be truthful and credible;
- target to a particular group of people;
- be relevant to your audience; and
- contain universal values, such as economic life, quality educational opportunity, justice, and human rights.

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## Quiz

- 1. A good message is short and simple because:**
  - a. An audience must grasp the meaning of your message in seconds.
  - b. It must be easy for the messenger to remember.
  - c. Your audience is probably not that smart and cannot understand a complex message.
  - d. Your time is limited and you have other important things to work on.
  
- 2. When considering whether your message is relevant to your audience, which statement is more effective?**
  - a. A message using the latest statistics and a recent university report on human rights.
  - b. A message telling the story of a student who has been detained and a family's inability to gain access to visit her.
  
- 3. A message that shows differences is important because:**
  - a. People like a variety in the messages they consume.
  - b. It is not important because showing difference with others is too controversial.
  - c. The audience grows tired of hearing the same thing over and over.
  - d. You have to distinguish your message from others in the marketplace.
  
- 4. Changing your message and saying different things to different audiences:**
  - a. Demonstrates adherence to properly targeting your audience.
  - b. Confuses your audience and will harm your credibility.
  - c. Prevents your opponent from effectively responding.
  - d. Shows a mastery of your message.
  
- 5. Answering the question, "why should an audience care about my message?" speaks to which attribute?**
  - a. Targeted
  - b. Repetition
  - c. Relevant
  - d. Short and simple
  
- 6. People will not believe or trust you, and your message will lack credibility if**
  - a. You use emotions to appeal to your audience
  - b. You over emphasize some fact over others to distort the truth
  - c. Use facts concerning an event or issues you are unsure of
  - d. Both A and B
  - e. Both B and C
  - f. Both A and C
  - g. None of the above

**7. You do not always need to practice and be consistent with your message**

- a. True
- b. False

**8. Examples of “universal values” include**

- a. Religious Conviction
- b. Justice/Rule of Law
- c. Human Rights
- d. Political Participation
- e. Education
- f. All of the above
- g. None of the above

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## LESSON THREE: KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

The definition of an audience is exactly what you might imagine. Simply put, it is *the group of people to whom you intend to speak*. In mass communication, the theory is to segment your audience into groups - young or old, educated or uneducated, rural or urban, etc. – and then tailor your message to their interests. As we mentioned in the previous lesson, this concentrated focus on a subset population is what is referred to as *targeting*.

Only by knowing your audience, their interests, their values and their hopes and struggles will you be able to create a message that truly resonates with them. The most effective way to know your audience is to be a member of that audience. For example, a woman who has been the victim of domestic abuse or a student activist who has been imprisoned will always be a more compelling advocate for human rights than anyone who has not been a victim of human rights abuses.

It also is important not only to communicate regularly to your audience, but also to *listen* to them. Understanding their concerns, values and interests will allow you to speak more effectively to them, and make you a more credible spokesperson.

While you will have to identify various target groups, the best way to develop your message is with one individual in mind. Personalizing your message to an individual is always the most effective way to communicate.

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## Types of Audiences

There are two types of audiences you'll want to consider. The first is a *representational* audience, or those people whom your message will represent. Broadly speaking, for whom do you speak?

### **Who are some of the groups which might be considered as a representational audience?**

Youth	Low Income People	Women
Ethnic/Religious Minorities	Human Rights Lawyers	Physically Disabled People
Labor Union Members	Gay and Lesbian People	Academics and
Intellectuals		

What do all these people have in common? They tend to be marginalized groups who are most subject to repression. They do not usually benefit from the status quo nor do they have a seat at the table of power. There may even be laws or cultural traditions which restrict their civil rights. They are generally more receptive to messages of reform and change than those groups who benefit from the status quo. More than likely you or someone you know identifies with one or more of these groups.

Each one of these groups will have emotionally compelling stories to tell of their oppression, of struggle, of marginalization. Listen to those stories and tell their stories to others.

Common sense tells us that those who are struggling economically, facing discrimination due to their gender or whose concerns are ignored by the government are the ones most interested in messages of reform. Those who enjoy the benefits of government power and economic privilege are most protective of the status quo.

### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate piece of paper, list three representational audiences most likely to be interested in your message. Are there others in your community not listed above?

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## Types of Audiences (continued)

The second audience to consider in your message is the *influencer* audience. These are people who will have influence to effect change on your issue or to broadcast your message to a wider audience.

The most obvious influencer audience member is a senior government official who has the power to create or change public policy in your country. Another example might be a respected religious figure who can influence government policy.

It may be difficult to communicate with government and religious leaders, particularly if they have a poor human rights record. However, most leaders care about their public, and international, image. Targeting your communications toward foreign leaders, international organizations and independent media – groups who may be able to amplify your message in public or in private discussions with government or religious leaders – can encourage those leaders to take action.

### Examples of an Influencer Audience

Foreign Media	Government officials	United Nations
European Union	International NGOs	Diaspora Community

### ***Develop your message:***

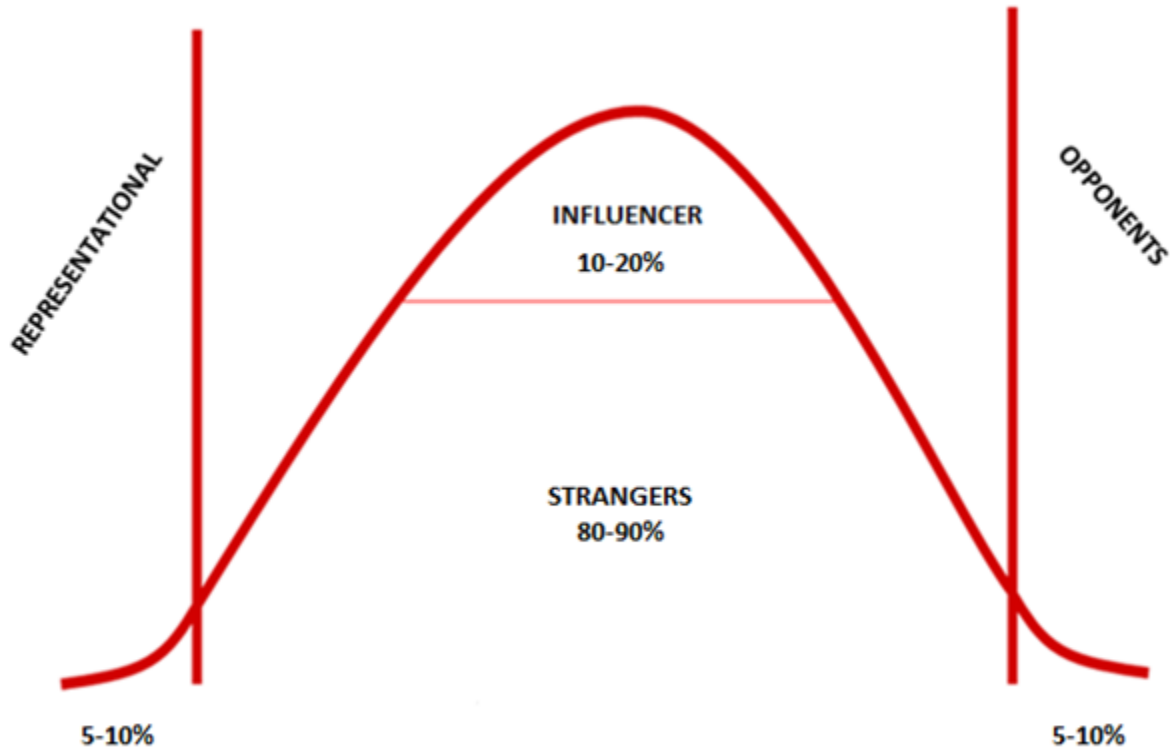
On a separate piece of paper, list three influencer audiences most likely to be interested in your message. Are there others relevant to your message/issue not listed above?

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## Mapping Your Audience

To get your message out to a wider audience, it is important to know the size and scope of who you are trying to reach. In general, if you were to map out your audience, it would look something like this:



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## Mapping Your Audience (continued)

The representational audience encompasses approximately 5 to 10% of your audience. As mentioned previously, this group already agrees with your message as you are advocating on their behalf. They will also be able to assist in spreading your message.

The majority of your audience, however, will be strangers (80-90%). They have yet to hear your message and may or may not have an opinion on your particular issue. Within this group lie potential influencers who can help shape opinions and disseminate your message. They make up 10 to 20% of your audience.

The remaining 5 to 10% are your opponents. They will always disagree with you no matter your message or how you try to convince them.

By breaking down your audience, you will learn who you need to target. This will also allow you to create a clear and concise message so you can begin moving people from being “strangers” to members of your representational audience.

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## Personalize the Policy

While you might follow news of the government, human rights and international institutions closely, most people do not. Government tends to create its own language of bureaucratic phrases, statistics and jargon contained in government journals, press conferences and policy statements. It is easy to see how the average citizen can quickly get confused and lose interest when government officials speak.

What are people actually talking about at home around the kitchen table or over tea among friends? Most are concerned with issues such as paying the monthly bills, finding employment, the cost of groceries and raising children. In some countries people may even fear for their safety based on their beliefs, their religion or their concern for human rights. Stories of average people who live in your community coping with problems are always more relatable than what a government official in an office hundreds of miles away might say. When possible tell a story that your audience can relate to rather than relying on statistics, theories or government reports. A compelling personal story will always be more memorable. This isn't to say that statistics will not be necessary in conveying your message. But it's important to put a human face on the statistic.

This may require you to translate obscure government policy into its impact on kitchen table issues. People will only understand issues as they relate to their average lives. Telling stories of human struggle creates an emotional connection with your audience. Stories also create a mental image in the audience's mind of the problem being discussed, while statistics rarely do.

Remember, no one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.

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## ***Test Your Knowledge!***

Review the two statements below. What are the differences between them? Which do you find more persuasive? What elements of a strong message does each have?

Once you have finished your assessment, click Next for our review of the statements.

“The expected decline in earnings potential and a sharp rise in inflation are making economists pessimistic about next year’s economic indicators”

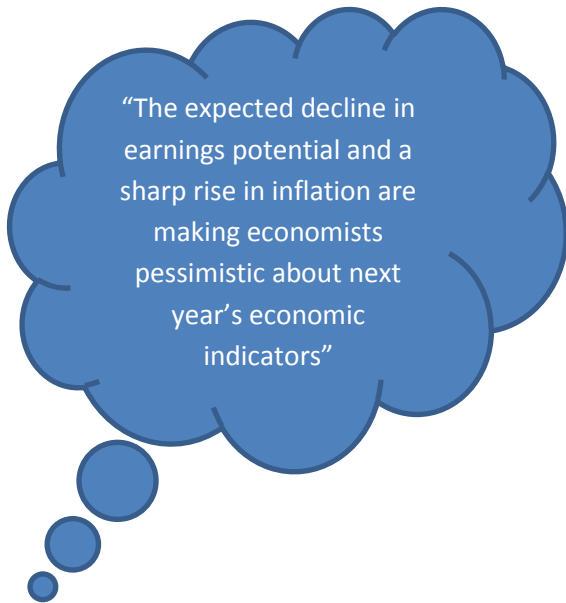
**Versus**

“Alireza is working two jobs and barely feeding his family of five. There’s a chance he might soon lose one of his jobs. He faces taking his son out of school to work.”

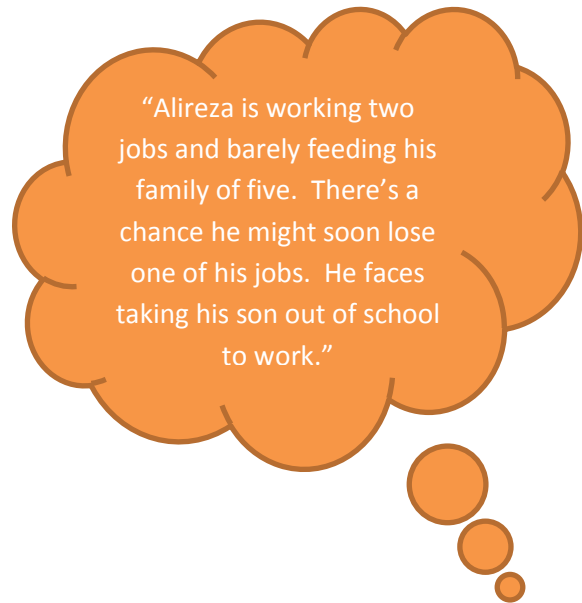
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The statement on the left elicits no imagery in the listeners' mind and is geared to economic specialists or academics. It ignores the human consequences of economic recessions. The statement on the right, however, paints a vivid picture of a struggling family with which many people may readily identify. It tells a human story and one that will be easily understood and remembered.



**Versus**



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## Lesson Three: Key Points to Remember

- When targeting your message, it is important to understand the interests of your audience.
- Representational audiences are groups on behalf of whom your message may speak, such as women, students or ethnic minorities.
- Influencer audiences are those who have the power to influence change related to your issue or who can pressure those in power to make changes.
- Personalize the policy. Tell human interest stories that paint a memorable picture for your audience.

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## Quiz

- 1. Who of the following might be considered a representational audience?**
  - a. A newspaper editor
  - b. A foreign diplomat
  - c. A government official
  - d. A female human rights attorney
- 2. Who of the following could be considered an influencer audience?**
  - a. A university student
  - b. An independent blogger
  - c. An NGO official working in Europe
  - d. The chief executive officer of a company
- 3. A member of an influencer community might....**
  - a. Represent a foreign government meeting in Iran
  - b. Represent a human interest story connected to your message
  - c. Be someone with strong management experience
  - d. Be a student activist willing to support your cause
- 4. Why do marginalized groups tend to be receptive to messages of reform?**
  - a. They are the most educated in society and therefore more likely to understand your point
  - b. They usually suffer the most from an unjust and repressive system
  - c. They prefer hearing stories rather than statistics
  - d. They need to be told what to do because they can't figure it out on their own
- 5. *Personalizing the policy and kitchen table* issues refer to**
  - a. Explaining issues in a way that relates to the average citizen's daily concerns
  - b. Telling people about your personal life
  - c. Creating policy that relates to personal behavior
  - d. Statistics related to the behavior of people
- 6. Once you have developed your message you do not need to regularly communicate or listen to your audience.**
  - a. True
  - b. False
- 7. What members of a representational audience have in common?**
  - a. They tend to be marginalized
  - b. They are subject to repression
  - c. They do not benefit from the status quo
  - d. They do not have a seat at the table of power
  - e. All of the above

**8. The majority of your audience will be**

- a. Representational
- b. Opponents
- c. Strangers
- d. Influencers

**9. Telling a story that your audience can relate to can be more effective than relying on statistics, theories or government reports**

- a. True
- b. False

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## LESSON FOUR: ADVOCACY IN A REPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENT

In this lesson we will examine and understand the challenges faced by those advocating in Iran. Here we explore some of the issues associated with a repressive environment, commonly used tactics to silence dissent, and arguments you might hear from the other side. It is important to understand that while repression begins in a legal framework, it is nurtured through an environment that shapes how people behave, speak and think. There is a context to your work, a history of events and beliefs that have shaped this environment. The better you understand this context, the better advocate you will be.

### Red Lines and Self-Censorship

Among the many methods a repressive state uses to maintain power is manufacturing consent and obedience among its citizens. The regime perpetuates “red lines” – *taboo behaviors and issues deemed as threatening to the government and therefore shrouded in social prohibition and off limits for discussion and public action*. Political red lines in society restrict behavior to suit the interests of those in power.

#### Examples of “Red Lines”

- Discussion and criticism of public officials
- Discussion and critical examination of official government policy
- Discussion and critical examination of religion and its role in politics
- Discussion of human rights and the treatment of minorities
- Discussion of gender equality, gender relations, women’s rights and sexual mores
- Public gatherings and the formation of independent organizations not expressly authorized or designed to promote the interests of the state

Self-censorship is the most common cultural phenomena used to cope with red lines. It is *avoiding speech – even ideas – which may be deemed controversial, provocative or even illegal*. Most citizens in a repressive country tend to self-censor as a matter of security to avoid raising the suspicion of authorities, jeopardizing employment or facing imprisonment.

These strict, yet unwritten, codes dictate public behavior considered “acceptable” and “unacceptable.”

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## Why is self-censorship the autocrat's best friend?

- It maintains the illusion that people support the system the regime has created.
- It promotes manufactured consent.
- It allows them to announce to their supporters and the world that they believe in basic civil liberties such as free speech and free association while not having the messy public relations hassle of punishing people who publicly dissent.
- It prohibits an honest and transparent discussion of an unjust legal system.

Self-censorship gives the government the best of both worlds. People silence themselves out of fear of punishment so the regime doesn't have to issue embarrassing laws or take actions that suppress free speech. It allows those in power to control the narrative of human rights in the country while actively discouraging the public from speaking out.

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## Navigating Red Lines

As frustrating as red lines can be, it is important to understand what they mean for your own protection. Everything written in these lessons should be considered within the context of your own personal safety. Never engage in speech or behavior that may put you or others in danger.

Sometimes messaging may need to be less specific or even abstract. Subjective and difficult to define, indirect speech may include use of metaphors, code words or even slang that only specific audiences will understand. This may allow you to deliver a message while maintaining plausible deniability on its particular meaning.

Many artists have shown great skill in using metaphors, imagery, poetry and symbols in order to discuss controversial issues in creative ways. Shirin Neshat is an Iranian visual artist living in exile in the United States. Shirin's powerful [photography](#) and [video artwork](#) explore the politics of culture and gender identity in Iran. Human rights groups like [Nabz-Iran](#) and the [International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran](#) have chosen to depict issues and people in Iran through the use of cartoons.

Another approach is using humor or ridicule to point out the absurdity of government policies. Humor and ridicule serve to delegitimize such laws and those that promote them.



Cartoon by Kianoush Ramezani depicting Internet freedom in Iran as featured on Nabz-Iran.

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## Navigating Red Lines (continued)

While repressive regimes prefer the public not to discuss certain issues, those are most often the issues that need discussing. Dictatorial political power relies on people's obedience to self-imposed silence. Without free speech and freedom of information there can be no honest public discussion. These principles are fundamental to transparency and government accountability.

"How can we fix the problems of society if we are not allowed to discuss the problems of society?"

Speech must be smartly deployed, however.

Appeal to the heart and to the head but don't exaggerate. Ensure that heart-filled arguments remain close to the facts of a case. Human rights abuses in Iran can evoke anger and grief, but it is important to retain your composure when articulating your message. Overly emotional arguments can lead to hyperbole and harm your advocacy efforts. Name calling, slander, lying or inciting to violence greatly harms your efforts and gives your opponents ammunition against you. It also alienates allies who might otherwise agree with you but are turned off by overheated rhetoric.

### The Harmful Effect of Hyperbole

- Leads to distortion of the facts
- Allows your opponents to paint you as a troublemaker and lacking credibility
- May alienate potential allies

*If you advocate correctly you won't have to exaggerate. The facts will speak for themselves.*

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## Maintain the Moral High Ground

When appropriate, incorporate the values of human rights, common decency and calls to conscience in your message, for example, ensure your demands fall within those of the [UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). See also the works of [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) and [Mahatma Gandhi](#). Their strict adherence to nonviolent civil disobedience inspired millions across the world. Their moral authority came from their unwillingness to lower themselves to the tactics of their oppressors. In this manner they gained greater legitimacy and international attention.

Keep these principles in mind as you craft your message. You do not want to advocate for anything that puts you at odds with international law or standards of human rights. Like hyperbole, this too will diminish your credibility and alienate potential supporters.

### *Develop your message:*

On a separate sheet of paper, list up to three principles in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights connected to your message.

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## Disagreeing without Being Disagreeable

Don't be afraid to disagree with people. There are rhetorical ways to be polite and respectful while disagreeing. "I agree with you on xxx, but that's not really the issue here..." or "I agree with your principle of xxx, which is why I believe (insert point of disagreement)."

Them: "The Rule of the Jurisprudence comes from Islam and is the basis of our revolution. To criticize it is to challenge Islamic law."

Us: "This is not a matter of religion. We are all good and loyal Muslims. This is about basic quality of life in Iran, good jobs and basic civil rights."

There's another strategic advantage to being polite towards your adversaries: it confuses and disarms them. It makes it harder for them to level attacks against you when your arguments come across as reasonable and well mannered.

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## Use of Sweeping Vague Offenses

The Iranian regime, like many other repressive governments, uses vague laws to punish any speech or behavior it deems threatening. This creates a justice system where any judge or politician can prosecute a political opponent.

### Examples of Vague Offenses

- “Participating in an illegal gathering”
- “Enmity against God”
- “Spreading propaganda against the system”
- “Gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security”
- “Insulting the leader”
- “Sowing corruption on Earth”

These laws are designed to target the regime’s enemies based on thin evidence and to imprison people without due process. Amnesty International, an NGO dedicated to advancing human rights globally, provides [greater details](#) regarding Iran’s penal code and many of these issues. Vague laws are hard to counter because they rely on offenses which mean nothing substantively but can be used to punish any perceived insult to the government.

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## **Appeals to Unity, Nationalism, Stability, Religious Tradition, etc.**

Be wary of anyone, particularly government officials, attempting to silence dissent through appeals to national unity, stability, history, devotion to senior leaders, religion, or equating criticism of the government as treasonous or dangerous. Honor religious tradition and culture, but don't allow others to use those values as censors.

These types of arguments can be persuasive as they play on your patriotism, nationalism and other appeals to being a "good citizen." Don't fall for them. In Lesson Six, you'll learn ways to deflect these arguments while reinforcing your own message.

"Everyone, even those who make general recommendations about the election through (expressing) concerns, take care not to serve the purpose of the enemy."

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei

January 8, 2013

In the example above, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei equates public criticism of the election with aiding the "enemy," another common tactic of intimidation.

Not only are these appeals meant to silence dissent, but they perpetuate a culture of complacency, where no one is expected to concern themselves with government policy beyond blindly following it. This culture is useful to autocrats who wish to avoid critical analysis of their behavior and policies.

The cure for "bad" speech is more speech. Only through robust public dialogue and competing ideas can people arrive at the truth.

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## Lesson Four: Key Points to Remember

- To deliver your message safely, use indirect speech such as metaphors, code words or even slang that only specific audiences will understand.
- Your message needs to be smartly deployed; appeal to the heart and the head but don't exaggerate or use overheated rhetoric.
- Maintain the moral high ground and incorporate values and common decency into your message.
- It is OK to disagree with people, so long as you do so in a polite and respectful manner.
- Don't fall for arguments, particularly from government officials, the play on your patriotism, nationalism or religion, as they are only meant to silence dissent and perpetuate complacency.

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## Quiz

- 1. Red lines are perpetuated by dictatorial regimes for the purpose of**
  - a. Protecting society from harmful ideas and behavior
  - b. Shielding government officials from accountability and critical analysis of their policies
  - c. Creating clear rules for a healthy public discussion
  - d. Guiding journalists in the best way to cover government policies
- 2. Incorporating principles from the following document is important to maintaining the moral high ground in your messaging**
  - a. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  - b. A respected book on Iranian history
  - c. Charter of the Arab League
  - d. United States Constitution
- 3. Self-censorship is useful to autocrats because**
  - a. It protects people from unauthorized speech
  - b. Prevents people from getting in trouble
  - c. It avoids messy public relations problems of stifling dissent
  - d. Promotes a fair discussion of a regime's policies
- 4. If confronting vague laws, which tactic may be useful in your messaging?**
  - a. Humor and ridicule
  - b. An emotional appeal to the audience's heart
  - c. Attacking the individual who issued the law
  - d. Citing UN statements on vague laws
- 5. A state perpetuates "red lines" in order to**
  - a. Maintain power and manufacture consent and obedience among its citizens
  - b. To protect its citizens from negative influences
  - c. To create a predictable environment for citizens to operate in
- 6. What is the most common cultural phenomenon used to cope with red lines?**
  - a. Protesting
  - b. Self-censorship
  - c. Advocacy
- 7. Why is self-censorship the autocrat's best friend?**
  - a. It maintains the illusion that people support the regime
  - b. It promotes manufactured consent.
  - c. It avoids the regime for dealing with a messy public relations hassle of punishing people who publicly dissent.
  - d. It prohibits an honest and transparent discussion of an unjust legal system.
  - e. All of the above

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- 8. An overly emotional argument (hyperbole) can harm your advocacy efforts because it:**
- Leads to distortion of the facts
  - Allows your opponents to paint you as a troublemaker and lacking credibility
  - May alienate potential allies
  - All of the Above
- 9. It is strategically advantageous to your message to be polite towards your adversaries**
- True
  - False

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## LESSON FIVE: PUTTING TOGETHER A MESSAGING PLAN

When putting your plan together it is helpful to think of it as an overall campaign of advocacy. After all, messaging is a means to an end. Advocacy messaging seeks to build consensus on an issue through persuasion rather than coercion. In the first lesson we defined a message as “language, ideas, symbols or behavior designed to influence a target audience.” The end, or goal, is to influence a target audience. So let’s start by asking some crucial questions based on this definition.

- What do you want to achieve with your message?
- Who is your target audience and why?
- What do you want your target audience to do?
- What is the most effective language, ideas, symbols or behavior to best influence your target audience?
- What messaging tactics and tools will you use to get out your message?
- Who is most qualified to be the spokesperson for the message?

While these questions seem quite obvious, there have been many advocacy (and political) campaigns that failed because there was no coherent message, they did not target an audience or there was no viable alternative to the status quo presented. It is important to mention upfront there are no simple, easy answers. We hope, however, by raising these questions to spark your creativity and generate some good ideas.

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## What do You Want to Achieve with Your Message?

Let's start out by identifying the issues about which you seek to advocate. Ask yourself: What are you passionate about? What are the issues, ideas and people that need more attention in society? What is the change you want to see in your community, country? What problems do you wish to address? If you are working within an organization, what is your mission? It is critically important to have specific answers to these questions otherwise your audience won't know what you stand for and will most likely ignore your message. Your message should come directly from the answers to these questions. Avoid getting distracted by messages that do not address the issues for which you wish to advocate.

### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate sheet of paper, list up to three things you wish to achieve with your message.

### Examples

Create a more just governing system in Iran where human rights and basic civil liberties are respected

Enact or change laws to be more in line with international standards of justice and human rights

Raise human rights to the level of the nuclear program negotiations in the eyes of the international community

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## What do You Want to Achieve with Your Message (continued)?

Think about your ideal Iran. What would your community, your government, your country look like if those things you advocated for were enacted? This is what the [Center for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies \(CANVAS\)](#) calls a Vision of Tomorrow. It is your primary objective and permanent guideline for your advocacy campaign. Circumstances and tactics may change, new facts emerge, but your Vision of Tomorrow will not.

### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate sheet of paper, in as few sentences as possible, state your Vision of Tomorrow.

When advocating before any audience, an important part of your job is to sell the reform as achievable and realistic. This means explaining a larger mission by the sum of its component parts. You probably will not change the human rights situation in Iran overnight, but you can highlight to the international community the plight of a political prisoner whose condition is being kept secret or communicate with representational groups to gather information and support.

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## Who Is Your Targeted Audience and Why?

You may recall in previous lessons we discussed target audiences and the difference between *representational* and *influencer* audiences. Another way to understand the difference is that representational is who your message speaks *for* while the influencer is who your message speaks *to*. Generally speaking, you will communicate with representational audiences to gather more support for your cause and you will target influencer audiences to urge action on your issue. While keeping your goals in mind, decide which of these groups you want to target. Which group will have the most impact to help you reach your goal?

Examples of Potential Representational Audiences:

- Families of political prisoners.
- Women who suffer violence and discrimination.
- A student whose education is cut short by imprisonment.

Examples of Influencer Audiences:

- The diplomatic community; foreign diplomats traveling to Iran on official business; international leaders attending gatherings concerning Iran or international conferences which Iranian government officials attend.
- Foreign reporters who cover Iran and are unable to travel around the country or gain access to independent information.
- International NGO groups who can widely publicize information concerning human rights abuses.

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## Who Is Your Targeted Audience and Why (continued)?

Think of the interests of your target audience. What is likely to get their attention? How do your interests converge with theirs? Do they have any constituents who come from a representational audience?

Think of the goals of your message. How does it apply to your audience? Is it geared towards a narrow or broader audience? It is important to identify who you are trying to target in order to have the most impact with your message. In some cases you might reach out to a narrower group to reach a broader audience.

Leverage your influencer audience – generally your narrow audience – to reach out to their broader networks. Don't try to replicate someone else's audience from scratch. For example, if you are trying to affect change in one particular community, you may be able to identify a religious or political figure who has influence in that community and engage that person, rather than try to reach everyone who lives in that community one individual at a time.

Which representational groups are most likely to influence an influencer audience? Who are the Iranian exile members in that diplomat's home country?

When you speak to your audience, remember to speak to their interests and aspirations. Speak as though you are one of them. They must understand how they are connected to the issue or will personally benefit.

### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate sheet of paper, list up to three representational audiences and how your advocacy will benefit them.

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## What do You Want Your Audience to Do as a Result of Your Message?

Good messages call upon their audience to take some kind of action. What do you want your audience to do? What do you want them to know? What are the obstacles to them taking action? What would make them more likely to take action? What can you do to reduce obstacles?

Do you want to persuade others in Iran to consider political or rule of law reforms? Do you want to encourage Iranians to carefully consider the candidates in an election and to vote? Do you wish to share news of Iran to the international media?

When addressing problems, *always offer solutions*. This is part and parcel of motivating your audience. If no solution or alternative to the status quo is presented in your message, your audience will not act and your credibility will be greatly diminished.

### ***Develop your message:***

List up to three actions you wish for your target audience to take. For each, write down what might motivate your audience to act and what might prevent them from acting.

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## **What Is the Most Effective Language, Ideas, Symbols or Behavior to Best Influence Your Target Audience?**

How you express yourself is critical to your success or failure. Those who have experience in journalism or writing – whether professionally or artistically – know that words matter. The details of the words used can mean the difference between poetry and an instruction manual for your car battery.

Have you considered the language, environment, character and perspective of your audience? What are your audience's interests and how are you speaking to those interests?

When creating your message, be as direct and specific as possible. Issues go unsolved and people escape accountability due to messaging that does not clearly articulate a problem and solution. Remember the first lesson about positive and negative messages: negative message = problem; positive message = solution.

Anyone can complain about issues and this may certainly excite your audience who will readily agree. However, in order to solve problems your message should include solutions which are realistic and measurable. Otherwise your audience will be left with no clear remedy or action item.

Sometimes you will not belong to the group you are trying reach. In this case, you will need to make an educated guess as to which message resonates best with that group. If you find your message is not working, do not be afraid to revisit and refine your message.

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## What Is the Most Effective Language, Ideas, Symbols or Behavior to Best Influence Your Target Audience (continued)?

“Women in Iran have been treated as second class citizens for too long and deserve more rights.”

“We endeavor to eliminate discriminatory laws against women, specifically Articles 19, 20, 21 and 115 of the Constitution with respect to the principle of unconditional gender equality. We are aware that the president has no power to change laws but we are also aware that if the government is committed to the principle of equality and views it as its responsibility, it is able to utilize its capabilities and to encourage the parliament to include the principle of equality in the Constitution.”

[Coalition of the Iranian Women’s Movement for voicing their demands in the Election, 2009](#)

Are you able to see the difference between these two statements? The first is a general declaration that many women might agree with, but it doesn’t address a specific problem much less a solution. While this may be a good line for an impassioned speech, it does not help advance any progress on women’s rights.

The second statement, by contrast, points to specific discriminatory laws that should be eliminated in order to promote “unconditional gender equality.” The statement then goes on to encourage the president and parliament to reform the constitution. Contained here is a problem, a solution and a call to action of government leaders.

### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate sheet of paper, list up to three goals you seek to achieve with your message. Identify specific solutions or actions that should be included in your message to achieve those goals.

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## What Messaging Tools and Tactics Will You Use to Achieve Your Goals?

First things first: Be safe. Don't do anything that will jeopardize yourself or your allies. Only you know best what is safe and what is not. Lesson Four discusses further the challenges of advocating and messaging in a repressive environment.

That said, advocating for change requires a concerted, sustained effort. Change does not roll along on the wheels of inevitability, it comes from continuous struggle.

- What kinds of things will you do to achieve your end goal? Will your message be solely online? Will you make lists of various audiences to communicate? Will you meet in groups with others to share information and educate them? Are you considering public demonstrations or signage? **Do your research**

There are many ways to communicate your message. You will need to learn and decide what the best tactic is to reach as many members of your target audience as possible – radio, print, social media, door to door, whatever the tactic, it needs to match how your audience best communicates.

- **Go to people where they are**

Learn how your target audience communicates with one another. If your target audience is mostly on Facebook, meet them there. If your target audience listens to the radio, listen to the program and take note of the advertising and adapt your message accordingly.

- **Learn what sparks their interest**

Find out what gets them talking. How are they speaking with each other (formally or informally)? How often do they post a message?

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## What Messaging Tools and Tactics Will You Use to Achieve Your Goals? (continued)

The most important tool you have is the truth and your ability to clearly articulate it. One of the most important platforms is the Internet, of course. Access to the Internet and social media can be challenging in Iran, however. It is important to understand tools that may be available to evade censorship or surveillance in order to communicate. A good example is [The Tor Project](#) which provides free software and other tools which you might find useful while working online. [Frontline Defenders](#) provides an extensive resource for understanding and confronting online censorship.

For more on protecting yourself and your work online, see Nabz Iran's [course on digital security](#), which provides practical steps you can take to secure against cyber-attacks and addresses online threats, securing your computer and securing your communications.

While the majority of messaging these days is conducted online or by mobile, don't miss opportunities for face-to-face communication. A sincere conversation among friends or neighbors can be more powerful than any social media posting. When safe to do so, person-to-person contact will always be the best form of messaging.

Other tools may be printed material such as books, pamphlets, stickers, articles of clothing, banners and even [toys](#)!

### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate sheet of paper, list up to three ways you will communicate your message to your target audience.

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## What Messaging Tools and Tactics Will You Use to Achieve Your Goals? (continued)

In addition to getting your message out, you will need to continually assess whether your message is effective. As you develop your message, ask yourself: How will you measure the success of your messaging? Is your messaging resonating? Are you reaching your target audience? Are people receptive to your messaging? Are they responding?

These are all the questions you need to keep in mind and continue to revisit as you communicate your message to your audience.

There are many tools that can help you address these questions, for example:

- Blast emails measure open and click through rates;
- Facebook measures demographics so you can see if your target audience and actual audience match up;
- Google analytics measures website activity; and
- Twitter analytics measures your influence in the Twittersphere.

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### Who is Most Qualified to Communicate the Message?

For many out there, it is you. If you are able to enlist others however, it is preferable to have a member of a representational audience serve as a messenger. A university student can best explain what it is like to face political pressure on the curriculum, for example, or a woman who is denied professional and educational opportunities because of her gender, and so on. A messenger from a representational group has first-hand knowledge of the unique problems they are facing and will have more legitimacy than those not part of the group.

#### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate sheet of paper, write down who will communicate your message.

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## Lesson Five: Key Points to Remember

- Build consensus on a message through persuasion not coercion. Your end goal is to influence a target audience.
- Answer key questions to identify your issue. What are you passionate about? What do you want to change? Your message will come directly from these answers.
- Your message should include achievable, realistic change. Offer solutions to the problem.
- Figure out your target audience (representational or influencer).
- Speak to your audience's interests so they can understand how they are connected to the issue.

Be direct and specific when creating your message. Clearly articulate a problem and a solution.

- Do your research. Figure out the best tactic to reach your audience. Learn how they communicate and what gets them talking.
- Continually assess the effectiveness of your message.

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## Quiz

### 1. What is a *Vision of Tomorrow*?

- a. A plan to craft a message around tomorrow's news
- b. A campaign vision based on what you might think tomorrow will look like
- c. What your country would look like if your advocacy goals were enacted**
- d. Imagining a world where there was perfect rule of law

### 2. The component messaging parts of your vision must...

- a. Be achievable**
- b. Not offend anyone in power
- c. Be a list of promises
- d. Focus on multiple problems

### 3. The following statement is true or false

Generally speaking, an influencer audience is one whom your message speaks for while a representational audience is one to whom your message speaks.

- a. True
- b. False**

### 4. A specific problem and solution in your message is important because?

- a. It clarifies your advocacy goals**
- b. It focuses your audience on the problems of the regime
- c. It explains who you are targeting
- d. It allows for a wider discussion of a public policy issue

### 5. Which of the following represent an effective *specific* solution in an advocacy message?

- a. Free all prisoners of conscience
- b. Ensure women have equal access to economic opportunities
- c. Allow for more freedom of the press
- d. Prohibit universities from denying women the right to study any courses of their choosing

### 6. Your message should:

- a. Include achievable, realistic change
- b. Offer solutions to problems
- c. Encourage action
- d. All of the above

### 7. Which audience will you communicate more with to garner support for your cause?

- a. Influencer
- b. Opposition
- c. Representational

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**8. When creating your message, be as direct and specific as possible.**

- a. True
- b. False

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## LESSON SIX: APPLYING YOUR MESSAGE

By now you should have a good idea of your message, objectives and which audiences you will target. Messaging is not simply putting words and sentences together in a clever way, however. There are specific techniques to ensure your message is correctly understood and is competitive with opposing messages. In this section we explain several techniques useful in presenting your message and managing it in the marketplace of ideas.

One of the first important lessons to learn is message discipline: establishing your message, consistently repeating it and not allowing your opponents to change the subject.

### Framing the Debate

Beyond language and ideas, successful messaging requires defining the playing field, or context, for your message. *Framing the debate* is a metaphor of how you want the audience to understand the issue which is being advocated. As in a painting, a frame is meant to focus the viewer's attention on a particular aspect of the subject presented.

The same is true when establishing your messaging points. When you are able to effectively frame the argument you will have better control over the message and the perception of your audience.

The simplest way to frame an issue is to ask a question and answer it. For example:

*"What are the greatest problems facing Iranian women today? Educational and professional opportunities"*

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## Framing the Debate (continued)

Another way to frame an issue is to present two choices in which the answer clearly advances your message:

*"When considering this latest piece of legislation before the Majles, we have to ask ourselves: Does it advance women's independence or stifle them? Requiring adult women to obtain permission from a male guardian to leave the country clearly is a setback for women's rights."*

Thus you define the problem, issue a judgment and set a standard which your opponents must meet.

Framing the message is a form of controlling the message. Controlling, or staying on message, is critical to your message's consistency and purpose.

### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate sheet of paper, use a series of questions and choices to frame two of your messaging points

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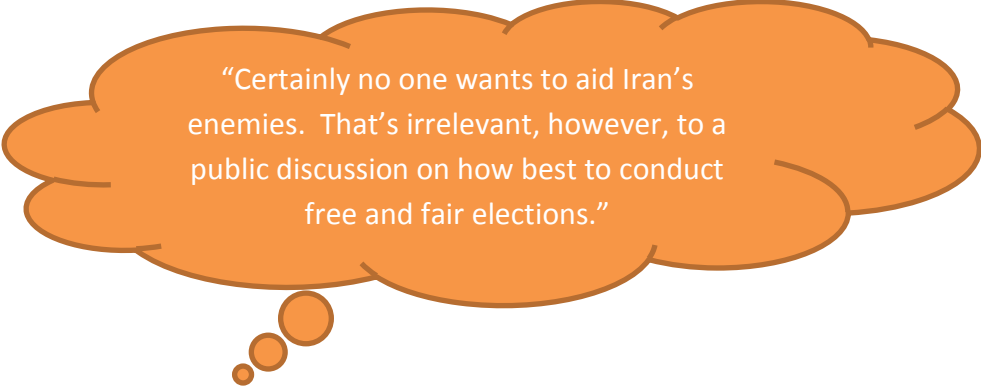


## Bridging

Just as you will frame your message, your opponents will define their message on *their own* terms. In Lesson Four, we discussed various laws and red lines authoritarian regimes use to keep people intimidated into “acceptable” thought. These pronouncements are examples of how they frame the narrative in the regime’s interests.

A useful rhetorical tactic in bringing the narrative back to your terms is called *bridging* or *pivoting*, whereby you move from one topic to another. It is particularly important in dismissing your opponent’s argument and advancing your own.

When supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini declared in January 2013 that anyone expressing public concerns about the upcoming election should take care to not “serve the purpose of the enemy” a typical bridging response aimed at discussing the integrity of the election might be:



“Certainly no one wants to aid Iran’s enemies. That’s irrelevant, however, to a public discussion on how best to conduct free and fair elections.”

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## Bridging (continued)

In the next example, a response is given to appeals to religious tradition that seek to avoid a discussion on equal rights for women or to justify discrimination against women.

“We all respect religious tradition, that’s not the point. This is about equal rights for women. In fact, national unity requires everyone be treated equally and with dignity.”

Can you see the dynamics at work in these examples? The opposing message is mentioned, agreed upon and dismissed. It then pivots back to your message. This simple formula can be used in many circumstances to suit your purpose. It may be especially useful in rebutting arguments in which vague laws are invoked such as those discussed in Lesson Four.

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## Using Your Opponent's Words to Advance Your Own Message

Using your opponent's words when it advances your message is another useful tool. It demonstrates that some of your opponents actually agree with you and puts the opposition in an awkward position by highlighting that there is no uniform consensus around their policies.

Regarding women's rights you might state, "I agree with President Ahmadinejad's chief of staff who [said](#) 'women have been oppressed and treated unjustly in our society in the past, and this oppression still exists.'"

If you manage a website, you may want to keep a record of such comments. Documenting information about injustice, political prisoners, political infighting among leaders, and other censored news can constitute part of your communications strategy. In addition, maintaining a record of relevant, important human rights information, statements by regime officials, news and other facts and statistics can advance your public policy goals.

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## Do Your Homework

Before you advocate, know the details of the issues you are advocating: its history, opposition arguments, key players involved, case studies, etc. Because messaging on public policy may require understanding the law, speak to a lawyer if you are able. Otherwise you might find yourself in a losing argument with someone more informed than you.

## Watch What They Do, Not What They Say

As an advocate you will, by definition, also be a watchdog. Laws and rhetoric are one thing, but their implementation, or lack thereof, can be quite another. Many civil society organizations play an important role monitoring such implementation to ensure stated goals are achieved. Often, a government apologist will list favorable statistics regarding women's advancement, the number of females in high government positions, or various women's rights treaties and laws a government has signed. If you have done your homework, however, your message will explain what was *not* said, gaps in legal enforcement or the institutional discrimination face by women, for example.

As an advocate watchdog your job is to set standards for your issue and measure those in power by your standards, *not theirs*. This is why the earlier lesson on clearly stating a problem and specific solution is critical to your messaging. If you have no stated solution, or proposed action, for the issues you are advocating, you will have no standard by which to judge those in power.

This is also important in exploring charges of hypocrisy in your opponent's behavior. Do their words and deed match? Are they acting out of noble motives, or financial ones?

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## **When in Doubt, Focus on Economic, Quality of Life Issues**

Ultimately anyone involved in public policy, civil society or government is interested in improving the quality of life for the greatest amount of people, or at least should be. In particular, quality of life begins with economic concerns: a secure job, the ability to pay for basic necessities, provide for a family, etc. It is difficult to argue against unemployment statistics for example or the inability to afford the cost of basic necessities like petrol, rice, bread and meat. Economic issues have the added benefit of not being subjected to loyalty tests, measurements of religious devotion or other forms of ideological litmus tests. In other words, no one can argue with someone who is unemployed or underemployed about poor conditions in the economy.

## **Networking**

The more people your message reaches, the greater your ability to impact the conversation surrounding your issues. It is important, therefore, to find and communicate with others who share your interests, and hopefully, your objectives. While different people will message on differing topics, you may find commonalities on broader goals such as improving human rights in Iran, education, or health care. For example, a student activist, an independent journalist and a female human rights attorney may not at first glance have many things in common. However, they may have all experienced similar stories of harassment and discrimination. They will have a natural empathy to people and groups who have also been harassed.

Social networking sites are the best platform for communicating with new people and finding those who may be sympathetic to your cause. There are many Facebook or Twitter accounts dedicated to human rights advocacy in Iran, for example. Retweeting on Twitter, "Liking" or "Sharing" on Facebook are popular ways magnify your message and reach new audiences. As you support others in their messaging, so too will they support you.

### ***Develop your message:***

On a separate sheet of paper, list up to three representational groups not directly related to your advocacy but who could be allies and explain why.

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## Lesson Six: Key Points to Remember

- Practice message discipline. Establish your message and consistently repeat it to ensure it is understood by and resonates with your audience.
- Understand the context in which you are presenting your message. Frame your message so your audience can understand the problem and the solution.
- Bring a conversation back to your message through bridging. This allows you to move from dismissing an opponent's message towards advancing your own.
- Use your opponent's words to advance your message.
- Do your research. Know all the details of the issue for which you are advocating.
- As an advocate you are also a watchdog. Evaluate those in power by your standards, not theirs.
- Find and communicate with others who share your interests to get your message out.

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## Quiz

- 1. Framing an argument does which of the following?**
  - a. Explains your message to your audience
  - b. Answers the narrative of your opponent
  - c. Defines a problem and its resolution
  - d. Focuses attention on the concerns of your audience
  
- 2. What is the most common method of framing an argument?**
  - a. Asking a question and answering it
  - b. Listing a variety of messages you are advocating
  - c. Providing answers to questions posed by your opponents
  - d. Explaining the flaws in your opponents message
  
- 3. Advantages to messaging on economic problems are...**
  - a. Avoiding discussion of controversial religious issues
  - b. The economy is an easy issue for your audience to understand
  - c. Quality of life is the chief responsibility of those in power and cannot be countered with vague law threats
  - d. It is easy to argue with someone who is unemployed and having difficulty buying basic necessities
  
- 4. Bridging is a messaging technique commonly used to**
  - a. Move from topic to topic in order to engage the audience
  - b. Connect two opposite ideas
  - c. Connect several problems with one solution
  - d. Dismiss your opponents message and advance your own message
  
- 5. An advantage to networking with your message is**
  - a. It attracts attention to your message
  - b. Numbers expand your influence
  - c. It creates multiple messages
  - d. Leverages the power of social media
  
- 6. Bridging a message allows you to**
  - a. Pivot from one topic to another
  - b. Connect two different messages
  - c. Connect two similar messages
  
- 7. Using your opponent's word can be detrimental to your message.**
  - a. True
  - b. False

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## Creating Persuasive and Powerful Messages: In Conclusion

Your advocacy effort requires a strong messaging strategy. A good message should be simple, easy to understand and remember, repeated and speak to the interests of your audience. The public is largely aware of the problems facing society, but they want to know what you, and especially *they*, can do about it. Your communications should focus on specific problems and specific solutions. The tactical art is balancing your negative and positive messages: what you stand for and what you stand against.

Once you have settled on various messages and themes in your advocacy, understanding your audience is the next important consideration. To whom are you speaking and why? What are the interests and concerns of your audience? Use facts and statistics to make your point but include human interest stories to make your message memorable and identifiable, particularly when speaking to representational audiences.

Your advocacy does not occur in a vacuum and needs to be understood in the context of the repressive culture of Iran. The regime uses various tactics such as intimidation, red lines, vague laws, and state controlled media, which leads by necessity to a culture of self-censorship. Beginning your advocacy can be daunting under such conditions. Ultimately you can only control your own behavior so be attuned to ways in which you can make a difference, even in small ways. Always maintain the high moral ground in your advocacy, never incite to violence, and use the UN Declaration on Human Rights as a guideline for an appropriate legal structure.

Keep your message simple and to the point. Know your issue and audience thoroughly. Combined with smart strategy and tactics, your advocacy effort will educate and motivate. The art of advocacy comes from creativity in how you communicate, knowing your issue thoroughly, your choice of words and countering your opponents' arguments. Like most things in life, practice and experience will sharpen your skills.

Be safe, be courageous and be determined. Never give up!

## QUIZ ANSWERS

### Lesson One Quiz

- 1) C. Political Platform. A political platform is a document devised by a political party to list policy positions. It is not by definition a message.
- 2) B. Influence a targeted audience. Your message is designed to influence a targeted audience's attitudes and to ultimately change behavior and bring about reform
- 3) A. Advocacy. Your messaging strategy is ultimately designed to advocate and influence various public policy issues.
- 4) C. Anyone can criticize but few have credible and actionable plans for fixing society. Stressing positive messages adds greater credibility to your message as well.
- 5) B. Generally speaking a negative message will describe a problem, criticize a policy or person and describe what you are against. A positive message will offer a vision for the future, express support for a principle or policy and/or explain how you wish to correct problems in society. Your target audience should always have a clear understanding where you stand on important issues.
- 6) A. It's also important to say what a message is *not*. It is not a substitute for action nor is it a substitute for sound public policy solutions. If you are only talking but not acting, your message will lack credibility.

### Lesson Two Quiz

- 1) A. Your message must be short and simple so that it immediately grabs the attention of your audience.
- 2) B. A human interest story is always more compelling and memorable than reciting dry statistics and reports.
- 3) D. Your message has to explain how your ideas are different from others and they are worthy of support as opposed to other messages.
- 4) B. Your message must be consistent and repeated in order for your audience to understand and remember.
- 5) C. An audience will only listen and care about your message if it is relevant to their lives.
- 6) E. Your message must be factual and believable. While you may use emotional appeals and choose to emphasize some facts over others, you must never lie or distort the truth. It must be consistent with what actually has happened. If you are unsure of all the facts concerning an event or issue, you should say so upfront or not comment at all.
- 7) False. Of course there will always be new facts and news to contend with, but the mission and values your message represents should remain the same. This is especially important when speaking at a public event or to the media. Giving inconsistent answers or changing your message with different groups will ruin your credibility
- 8) F. They are called "*universal values*" because they are values to which most people, no matter what culture or context, can relate. They also are values that it is difficult for people to oppose. What all these values have in common is the broader issue of quality of life and in some cases, human rights. At the heart of any public policy issue is the search for common good so that we all might enjoy a higher quality of life while respecting and valuing others despite our differences

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## Lesson Three Quiz

- 1) D. A female human rights attorney could be an example of someone representing an audience accustomed to discrimination
- 2) C. An NGO official working on human rights issues could be an influencer audience member whom you might target to publicize your message and reach international policy makers
- 3) A. A foreign diplomat meeting in Iran is an example of someone to whom you might target your message to bring pressure on the government.
- 4) B. Marginalized groups are most likely to be oppressed and therefore receptive to messages of reform
- 5) A. Explaining issues through everyday concerns of average citizens is an effective tactic to ensuring your message is relevant
- 6) False. It is extremely important to regularly communicate and listen to your audience. Understanding their concerns, values and interests will allow you to speak more effectively to them, and make you a more credible spokesperson.
- 7) E. All of the above. A representational audience are those people for whom your message will represent. They are generally more receptive to messages of reform and change than those groups who benefit from the status quo.
- 8) C. The majority of your audience, however, will be strangers (80-90%). They have yet to hear your message and may or may not have an opinion on your particular issue. Within this group lie potential influencers who can help shape opinions and disseminate your message. They make up 10 to 20% of your audience.
- 9) True. Stories of average people who live in your community coping with problems are always more relatable than what a government official in an office hundreds of miles away might say. This isn't to say that statistics will not be necessary in conveying your message. But it's important to put a human face on the statistic.

## Lesson Four Quiz

- 1) B. Red lines are meant to shut down discussion of government policies and for government officials to avoid accountability.
- 2) A. UN Declaration of Human Rights. Keeping within these principles will help to maintain your credibility both internally and internationally.
- 3) C. Self-censorship allows autocrats to proclaim support for free speech publicly while not having to publicly silence dissent
- 4) A. Humor and ridicule can be effective in pointing out the absurdity of such laws and to delegitimize them.
- 5) A. The regime perpetuates "red lines" – *taboo behaviors and issues deemed as threatening to the government and therefore shrouded in social prohibition and off limits for discussion and public action*. Political red lines in society restrict behavior to suit the interests of those in power.
- 6) B. Self-censorship is the most common cultural phenomena used to cope with red lines. It is *avoiding speech – even ideas – which may be deemed controversial, provocative or even illegal*. Most citizens in a repressive country tend to self-censor as a matter of security to avoid raising the suspicion of authorities, jeopardizing employment or facing imprisonment.
- 7) E. Self-censorship gives the government the best of both worlds. People silence themselves out of fear of punishment so the regime doesn't have to issue embarrassing laws or take actions that suppress free speech. It allows those in power to control the narrative of human rights in the country while actively discouraging the public from speaking out.

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- 8) D. Appeal to the heart and to the head but don't exaggerate. Ensure that heart-filled arguments remain close to the facts of a case. Human rights abuses in Iran can evoke anger and grief, but it is important to retain your composure when articulating your message.
- 9) True. There are rhetorical ways to be polite and respectful while disagreeing. It makes it harder for them to level attacks against you when your arguments come across as reasonable and well mannered.

## Lesson Five Quiz

- 1) C. What your country would look like if your advocacy goals were enacted
- 2) A. The component parts of your message must be achievable, among other attributes
- 3) B. False. An influencer audience is one you speak *to*, a representational audience is one you speak *for*.
- 4) A. A message containing a specific problem and solution clarifies your advocacy goals so that your audience knows exactly how to identify and fix the problem.
- 5) D. This solution is most specific and measurable of the choices
- 6) D. When advocating before any audience, an important part of your job is to sell the reform as achievable and realistic. This means explaining a larger mission by the sum of its component parts.
- 7) C. Generally speaking, you will communicate with representational audiences to gather more support for your cause and you will target influencer audiences to urge action on your issue. While keeping your goals in mind, decide which of these groups you want to target.
- 8) True. Issues go unsolved and people escape accountability due to messaging that does not clearly articulate a problem and solution. Remember the first lesson about positive and negative messages: negative message = problem; positive message = solution.

## Lesson Six Quiz

- 1) C. Framing an argument focuses your message on identifying a problem and its resolution.
- 2) A. Asking and answering a question allows you to establish the problem and solution. It is the most common form of framing an argument.
- 3) C. Messages on the economy speak to quality of life issues which those in power are responsible for and they cannot be countered with vague laws concerning ideology, national security or religion.
- 4) D. Bridging helps move from countering an opponent's message towards advancing your own message
- 5) B. The greater the numbers of people following your message the greater your influence will be
- 6) A. A useful rhetorical tactic in bringing the narrative back to your terms is called *bridging* or *pivoting*, whereby you move from one topic to another. It is particularly important in dismissing your opponent's argument and advancing your own.
- 7) False. Using your opponent's words when it advances your message is another useful tool. It demonstrates that some of your opponents actually agree with you and puts the opposition in an awkward position by highlighting that there is no uniform consensus around their policies.