

Role playing resources for climate change communication education

These resources were used during the breakout sessions of the workshop. Please attribute CIRES Education and Outreach if you make a set of these for use with your community.

Media breakout card (cut and paste to index card)

Possible Interviewer Questions

- tell me about your research
- what is important about your research?
- what implication does your research have for everyday life?
- how do you know that humans are causing climate change?
- ...a question that is tangential or outside the topic of their research
- ...a question about making future predictions about climate change
- ...a question about their personal opinion around climate change solutions

General public breakout cards (cut and paste to index cards)

The “How to talk to a climate skeptic” handout provides information relevant to many of these scenarios.

Contrarian Argument role play 1

Joe Q. Public: I keep hearing that global warming is just a natural cycle. It will correct itself like it did before, right?

Scientist answer...

Joe Q. Public rebuttal: But how can we be sure it's not natural?

Contrarian Argument role play 2: They predicted global cooling in the 70s

Jane D. Public: It seems like scientists are always changing their mind about the Earth's temperature. In the 1970s, we were all afraid of snowball Earth.

Scientist answer...

Joe Q. Public rebuttal: But how can we be sure it won't turn around?

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Contrarian Argument role play 3: It's the Sun, stupid.

Joe Q. Public: I heard that the sun gets hotter at times and that's what is causing the current warming. So it can't be human caused.

Scientist answer...

Joe Q. Public rebuttal: But what makes scientists so sure it is CO2?

Contrarian Argument role play 4: Antarctic Ice is Growing

Joe Q. Public: I really don't understand why scientists are so worried about some ice melting. I even heard that Antarctic ice is growing.

Scientist answer...

Joe Q. Public rebuttal: But they say sea level has only risen a couple of millimeters – so what?

Contrarian Argument role play 5: Warming is due to the urban heat island effect

Joe Q. Public: You know, all of this global warming stuff is just because scientists don't put their instruments in the right place. All of the temperature gauges are in cities, and cities are warmer than rural parts of the world.

Scientist answer...

Joe Q. Public rebuttal: I also heard that all the CO2 gauges are on volcanoes like Mauna Loa, and volcanoes emit CO2? What about that?

Contrarian Argument role play 6: Climate change mitigation would be a disaster (nationally).

Jane D. Public: Well, the Earth may be headed downhill with global warming but there's nothing we can do about it. Our whole economy is built upon using fossil fuels for energy. To try to change that will be too costly and will mess up the nation's economy.

Scientist answer...

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Contrarian Argument role play 7: Climate change mitigation would be a disaster (personally).

Jane D. Public rebuttal: Well, what can I do about global warming anyway? It's too big of a problem for any one person to make a difference. Change has got to come from the top. Plus, I can't afford to buy a Prius!

Scientist answer...

Contrarian Argument role play 8: Why should I change my lifestyle when leaders like Al Gore fly all the time?

Joe Q. Public: I get so sick of people telling me that climate change is a big problem and I should do something about it. Last time I looked, Al Gore was still flying in an airplane every other day and owns a big house. Something's fishy if he wants us all to be so concerned, but does nothing himself.

Scientist answer...

Contrarian Argument role play 9: Why should the U.S. sign Kyoto when China and India haven't?

Joe Q. Public: I am concerned about global warming but don't see how anything I – or the U.S. -- might do can change it. Let's take the best-case scenario: the U.S. reduces CO2 emissions by 80%. Meanwhile, China is making coal-fired power plants as fast as humanly possible! Anything I do will be swamped by some Chinese person's increased emissions within the next 10 years.

Scientist answer...

College student breakout

A classroom controversy with roles for the instructor and three students.

Instructor of geology 101: All right folks, for next week we are going to be looking at the evidence for climate changes over the history of the earth. I am sure you are somewhat familiar with the current climate change or “global warming”, which unlike previous climate change is caused by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases. Looking at climate change over the history of the earth will help you put current climate change into perspective.

[a student's hand shoots up]

Student 1: What do you mean by anthropogenic? Do you mean human caused?

Instructor of geology 101: Yes, that's what anthropogenic means. The prefix anthro means...

Student 1: *[cuts instructor off, raising voice slightly]* Well, I don't think you can say that. Maybe the climate is warming, but a lot of scientists disagree about whether it is caused by humans.

Instructor of geology 101: *[raising eyebrows]* I wouldn't say it is fair to characterize the IPCC as having a lot of disagreement on that point. The IPCC...

Student 2: *[interjecting]* What is the IPCC?

Student 1: *[turning to student 2]* The IPCC is a bunch of scientists who are getting a lot of money from the government to all say the same thing about climate change.

Instructor of geology 101: *[looking bewildered]* Now, you may have heard that somewhere but...

Student 3: *[interjecting]* I don't know if that is quite right but I have heard that there is a lot of error in the data that they use to say how bad global warming is. They really can't predict what's going to happen.

Student 1: *[turning to instructor]* See? I'm not the only one in here who has a problem with this.

Instructor of geology 101:?

What happens next? Try writing an end to this scenario, or ideas about how it could have been defused by the instructor. Also, try discussing the feelings that arose when reading the scenario.