Advocating Change

Learner Handout
eCards

Q. How many students does it take to change the world?
A. Just one, but the world has to *want* to change.

When communicating messages about the environment and other issues we care about, we are asking people to change—change the way they think and change the way they behave. Our job as writers and graphic artists is to motivate our audiences to want to change. Our words and images need to convince them to see things differently, to make different choices, to set different goals, or to take different actions.

When you want to be convincing, the most important step is to consider from the other person's perspective what it is you want to say. Whether you are asking one person to change a small habit or convincing the federal government to put a lot of time and money into a huge program, you need to put yourself in their shoes and compose your message and your graphics so that it speaks directly to them.

We all already know how to do this in some areas of our lives. We know the best way to ask a parent or a sibling for what we want, for example. We know that some approaches will be more likely to get us what we want than others. We know that, for the other person, some tones of voice and ways of talking are more convincing than others. We know that it usually works better to ask for one thing than to ask for a thousand, especially if the other person knows how strongly we feel about it and how much we have thought about it.

Creating an effective eCard means bringing skills you already have in one area of your life into another. This handout can help you do that. Changing the ways we use energy and changing the sources of energy that we choose are big steps, but every voice and every action makes a difference.

Strategies for Creating a Convincing eCard

1. **Think about your audience:** An eCard that is good for one reader might not be right for another. The audience you are writing for will affect your tone and your content. An eCard to a family member, for example, would be very different than an eCard to the Prime Minister of Canada!

   While deciding who will receive your eCard and what you will say, consider these questions:

   - How much does this person know about energy?
   - What responsibilities does this person have around energy?
   - What changes does this person have the power to make?
   - Is this the person I want to write to?
   - What kind of eCard is likely to catch their attention?

   If you know what you want to say but are not sure who the best person is to say it to, ask your teacher for help. Your teacher can talk to you about the roles of different government officials and energy companies, or help you find out about them yourself.

2. **Focus on your message**: Instead of telling the reader to do ten things, focus in on the one that matters the most to you. Take the time to think about the issue carefully and find the points and facts that best support it.

3. **Motivate the reader:** Give your reader a reason to change. It might motivate some people to know that their actions could help the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions; others might be more likely to respond if you tell them that they can save money. Parents really listen when you tell them about benefits for their children, and governments listen when they know something will help the whole economy or when they think that many people share the same concern.

4. **Be passionate:** You are attempting to change the world! This calls for a little enthusiasm! Don't be too emotional in your eCard but do let the reader know that you care about the issue.

5. **Use facts:** People can be inspired by the enthusiasm of a message, but to be convinced they often need to know the facts as well. When writing your eCard, show the reader the logic behind your message. Let them see that it would be a smart decision for them to make the change you are suggesting.

6. **Be accurate:** Your accuracy with facts and even with spelling and grammar lets your audience know that you can be trusted as a reliable source of information. Accuracy suggests that you have thought about the issue carefully and that you have taken the time to create a meaningful message.

7. **Create hope:** Often people need some encouragement to make a change. They need to know there is hope, especially around complicated issues like energy. They need to know that even by taking a small step they can make a real difference in the face of big problems. Let the reader know that change really can happen. Tell them how others have changed or how you have changed.

8. **Be concise:** Have one central idea in your eCard and use good supporting points, but don't ramble on about them or repeat them. You don't want the reader to lose interest and stop reading!

9. **Triple check your work:** An eCard is not a casual email or text message. The quality of your image and the grammar and spelling in your message need to be as good as you can make them.

Strategies for Communicating Online

Like any message you send online, your eCard goes to another person, a person who has feelings just like you do. It is important to think of the other person and how they might react.

When typing on a computer, it is sometimes hard to remember that we are communicating with actual people. A tip to keep in mind whenever you are writing online is — *Don't "say" anything in your message that you wouldn't feel okay about saying to the person face to face.*

When you are composing a message, sometimes it helps to picture the face of the person you are writing to, if it is someone you know. If you don't know the person, sometimes it helps to picture someone you imagine that person to be like. For example, maybe when writing to a mayor who you don't know, you could imagine that that would be a bit like writing to the President of your school, who you do know.

With online communication, there is always the possibility that your message will be forwarded on. You may write a message for one person, but that person may send it on to someone else. Another tip when writing online is — *Don't "say" anything in a message that you wouldn't feel okay about other people reading.*

In the case of eCards, you know for a fact that what you write will be read by others: not only the audience you are writing it for, but also your teacher who will have to approve your eCard before you send it. Additionally, the other students in your class may read it too.