

Your Words Can Change the World

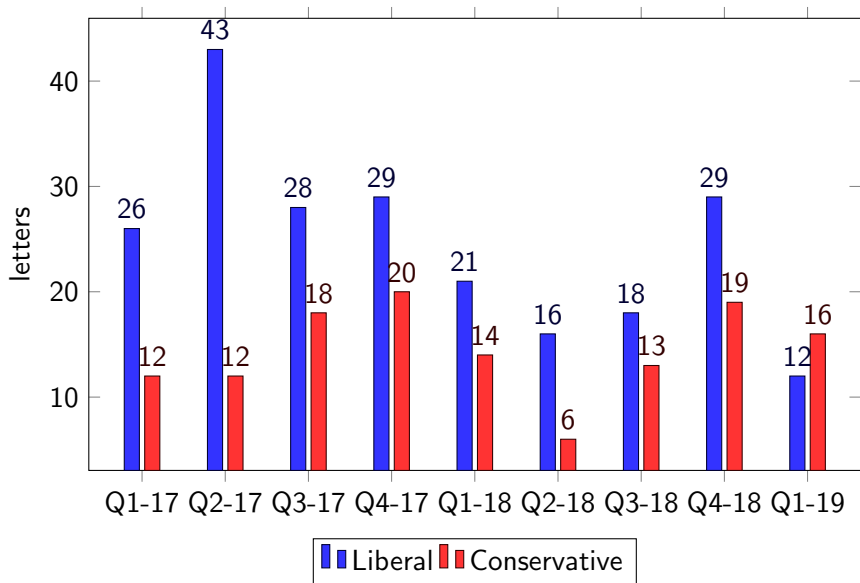
Some Tips and Do's and Don'ts

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Why Write a letter to the Editor?

- A letter to the editor is a chance to influence a wider audience than your immediate friends.
- People that do not necessarily participate in social media tend to read the newspaper.
- We can change the narrative and the way issues are discussed.
- Your letters will encourage and give hope to others who feel that they are alone in our community.

Past Letters to the Editor - Journal Gazette Times-Courier



- A topic can be anything that you feel passionate about. It can be a specific issue or you can address a general philosophy.

Examples:

- Medicare for all - It will not just improve our healthcare, but it will improve our society.
- Living wage.
- Education for all.
- The climate crisis.
- Coles County Board Invocation.
- The Green New Deal.
- The Mueller investigation - 199 criminal charges against 34 defendants.

Don't Think of an Elephant

George Lakoff's books are excellent resources for understanding framing—which is necessary for effective communication.

- Don't Think of an Elephant!
- The Little Blue Book - The Essential Guide to Thinking and Talking Democratic

Quoting from the first book:

“We think with our brains. We have no choice. ... Thought is carried out by neural circuits in the brain. ... The deepest of those neural structures are relatively fixed. And we are mostly unconscious of their activity and impact. ... the most important brain structures for our politics can be studied from the perspective of the mind. They are called frames. Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. ... Reframing is social change.”

Framing Quote two – Lakoff, Don't Think of an Elephant

“When we successfully reframe public discourse, we change the way the public sees the world. We change what counts as common sense. Because language activates frames, new language is required for new frames. Thinking differently requires speaking differently. Reframing is not easy or simple. ... Frames are ideas, not slogans. Reframing is more a matter of accessing what we and like-minded others already believe unconsciously, making it conscious, and repeating it until it enters normal public discourse.”

Framing Example 1 – Lakoff

Example:

- Saying the words, “tax relief” is a conservative frame that invokes the idea that taxation is an affliction. And the person who takes taxes away is a hero, and anyone who tries to stop them is a bad guy. Any argument for taxes is already lost at this stage.

Instead:

- Our **taxes are a wise investment** in our future. Our parents invested in the future, ours as well as theirs, through their taxes. They invested their tax money in the interstate highway system, the Internet, the scientific and medical establishments, our communications system, our airline system, the space program. They invested in the future, and we are reaping the **tax benefits**, the benefits from taxes they paid. Today we have assets—highways, schools and colleges, the Internet, airlines—that come from the **wise investments** they made.

Framing Quote three – Lakoff, Don't Think of an Elephant

“All politics are moral, but not everybody operates from the same view of morality. Moreover, much of moral belief is unconscious. We are often not even aware of our own most deeply held moral views.”

“The brain and cognitive sciences have radically changed our understanding of what reason is and what it means to be rational. Unfortunately, all too many progressives have been taught a false and outdated theory of reason itself, one in which framing, metaphorical thought, and emotion play no role in rationality. This has led to ... progressives constantly giving lists of facts. Facts matter enormously, but to be meaningful they must be framed in terms of their moral importance. Remember, you can only understand what the frames in your brain allow you to understand. If the facts don't fit the frames in your brain, the frames in your brain stay and the facts are ignored or challenged or belittled.”

Framing Quote four – Lakoff, Don't Think of an Elephant

“It is vital—for us, for our country, and for the world—that we understand the progressive values on which this country was founded and that made it a great democracy. If we are to keep that democracy, we must learn to articulate those values loud and clear. If progressives are to win in the future, we must present a clear moral vision to the country—a moral vision common to all progressives. It must be more than a laundry list of facts, policies, and programs. It must present a moral alternative, one traditionally American, one that lies behind everything Americans are proud of.”

Common Progressive Moral Values: [equality](#), [honesty](#), [working together for the common good](#), [caring about and helping others](#), [creating a better world](#), [freedom](#), [democracy](#). These are all [patriotic American values](#).

Framing Example 2 – Lakoff

While under pressure to resign during the Watergate scandal, Nixon addressed the nation on TV and said, **“I am not a crook”**. And everybody thought about him as a crook.

This gives us a basic principle of framing: **When you are arguing against the other side, do not use their language.** Their language picks out a frame – and it won't be the frame you want.

Framing Example – our local newspaper

RUSSIA PROBE
**Trump says his
White House
counsel not a
'RAT' like Nixon's**

Framing Example 3

Example:

- History shows us that our economy booms when the minimum wage is raised. A problem with raising the minimum wage is that small businesses will suffer since they will not be able to afford it. Etc.

Is this good framing?

Framing Example 3

Example:

- History shows us that our economy booms when the minimum wage is raised. A problem with raising the minimum wage is that small businesses will suffer since they will not be able to afford it. Etc.

This is not good framing. We are repeating the opposition framing that small businesses will suffer. This re-enforces the frame that raising the minimum wage means small businesses suffer and you are essentially arguing against yourself.

How can we reframe it in a progressive way?

Framing Example 3

Example:

- History shows us that our economy booms when the minimum wage is raised. A problem with raising the minimum wage is that small businesses will suffer since they will not be able to afford it. Etc.

How about:

- History shows us that our economy booms when the minimum wage is raised. Many millions of people all have more money that all gets spent and infused into the economy. More people can **afford the products of small businesses** so businesses get an **economic boost** from a **fair minimum wage**. Etc.

Some ideas to keep in mind:

- Introduce your main topic in the first paragraph. (e.g. Taxes)
- Present your ideas first. (e.g. Taxes are an investment.)
- Present your ideas efficiently and passionately, with moral framing. (e.g. Taxes are an investment that lift up our free and democratic society.)
- Do not include a lot of data and facts. Instead, present ideas that you believe in.
- Present your ideas in a positive light with your own framing and do not invoke opposition framing. (e.g. Our investment in taxes is patriotic and paves the way for our future, our children's future and our grandchildren's future.)
- Conclude by repeating the key words of your framing. (e.g. Taxes are an investment in a free and democratic society.)

Our local paper allows 500 words but this does not mean you should use 500 words. Shorter is often better.

When arguing an issue:

- **Share real stories** about how your issue affects real people.
Or share stories about how you learned basic values from your mother, teacher, etc.
- **Say it simply.** For example, if you say “environment” there is no one clear image that comes to mind. If you say “forest”, “soil”, or “water” they bring clear images to mind. Work to use words that bring clear images to mind.

Example: Which is better?

- Conservatives often argue for “cutting needless spending”, but thousands of bridges are in danger and roads are falling apart. Instead of cutting spending, we need to rebuild our infrastructure.
- The economy needs an infusion of cash to put people to work rebuilding our infrastructure and growing our economy.

Framing Example 4 – Lakoff

Example: Which is better?

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- The economy needs an infusion of cash to put people to work rebuilding our infrastructure and growing our economy.

Both have problems. In the first one, everyone is for “cutting needless spending”, and it invokes the frame that spending is needless. In the second one it is good to reframe the issue as “putting people to work rebuilding our infrastructure and growing our economy”. The phrase “The economy needs an infusion of cash” may evoke the image of throwing money at the problem. Instead, “We need to invest in our infrastructure which will put people to work and grow our economy.”

Framing Example 5 – Lakoff on Medicare for all

Conservatives have effectively repeated the following:

- Single payer is **socialized medicine**.
- Single payer will **lead to rationing, like in Canada**.
- **Costs will skyrocket** under single payer.

Progressives have repeatedly rebutted these with laundry lists of facts. This has unconsciously promoted these lies by negating them. Instead:

- Everyone's life depends on **Medicare for all**. Health is a **life-and-death issue**.
- Everyone's freedom depends on **Medicare for all**. You're **not free if you have a serious illness or accident without treatment**, which almost everyone has sooner or later.
- The **cure for a sick America** is **Medicare for all**. Americans care about each other. That is the basis of our democracy. **Patriotism requires Medicare for all**.

Progressive Framing Document by the Charleston Think Tank

The Charleston Think Tank spent a year writing Progressive Framing, which is a resource for helping choose good framing when discussing issues or writing letters to the editor. See <https://charlestonhuddle.com/act/pdf/FramingTable.pdf>

Progressive Framing Document Example

Economy

TOPIC	Progressive View	Other Viewpoints	Real Life
American Dream	The opportunity to lead a decent productive life should be accessible to all. The goal is for no American to be illiterate, homeless, or living in poverty.	The American dream is for those who work for it or inherit it.	The America Dream is getting further and further out of reach for more and more people.
Globalization	It is a global economy and we are all in this together.	America First, Make America Great Again. Walls, travel ban, isolationism, protectionism.	Technology and travel are bringing us closer together. The ease of movement of labor and capital has allowed corporations to exploit globalization to the detriment of ordinary workers around the world.
Living Wage	A full time job should provide wages that are adequate to live on.	Destroys small businesses and interferes with the free market.	Wages have been stagnant since the 70's while executive salaries have risen dramatically. Two workers are often needed to support a family and many workers hold two or more jobs.
Wall Street vs. Main Street	People over profit. Main Street is hurting. Trickle Up Economics. Reduce corporate influence in Congress.	Wall Street and big business rule. Trickle Down Economics.	Past conventional wisdom said if Wall St. prospers, everyone does well. Trickle down has never worked and never will. Decades of mergers have robbed the country of jobs and businesses that anchored our communities. It's time once again to break up monopolies. Businesses are making record profits - they don't need tax breaks or incentives.

Things Progressives should do – Lakoff

- ① Just speaking truth to power does not work. You need to frame the truths effectively from your perspective.
- ② Speak from your moral perspective at all times.
- ③ Remember that voters vote their identity and their values, which need not coincide with their self-interest.
- ④ Unite and cooperate. Progressives come in many varieties. We need to find our common values ([equality](#), [honesty](#), [working together for the common good](#), [caring about and helping others](#), [creating a better world](#), [freedom](#), [democracy](#). These are patriotic American values.). Think and talk from shared progressive values.
- ⑤ Be proactive, not reactive. Play offense, not defense. Don't just say what you believe . Use your frames, not their frames.
- ⑥ Speak to the progressive base in order to activate the progressive model in independent voters. Don't move to the right. Rightward movement hurts in two ways. It alienates the progressive base and it helps conservatives by activating their model in independent voters.

Feedback

- Let at least one other person read your letter to get some feedback. Many of us in the Huddle or the Coles Progressives would be happy to look over your letter. A fresh pair of eyes sometimes spots framing improvements and finds typos.
- Wait a day and then read your letter with a fresh perspective. Often you will think of ways to make improvements.

How to send

- Most newspapers have an online submission form. The Journal Gazette & Times-Courier's submission link is https://jg-tc.com/forms/contact/letter_to_the_editor/.
- A letter is limited to 500 words and you may submit a letter as often as every three weeks.
- The Huddle website at charlestonhuddle.com (click on the Newspaper tab) has links to the Journal Gazette & Times-Courier and seven other area newspapers with online submission web pages and contact information for 15 other area newspapers.

Let's write a letter!

Let's use the last few minutes of our time today to write a letter to the editor.

The following framing slides are from The Little Blue Book - The Essential Guide to Thinking and Talking Democratic by George Lakoff. There are many useful ideas here that can help us use good framing.

- American democracy is built on the ethic of citizens caring about other citizens. Its **moral mission** is to **protect and empower everyone equally** by the provision of public resources.
- **The public is the foundation for the private** — for decent private lives and for private enterprise that works.
- **No one makes it on his or her own without the public.** People who are wealthy haven't built their own roads and schools, educated their own knowledgeable employees, or done their own basic research, nor are they fully protected by their own army and police, and nor do they maintain their own clean food supply.
- “Smaller government” really means **total corporate government** and the **dismantling of our nation** as we know it, love it, and need it to be.

The Shift From Public to Corporate Government

- Privatization is the **replacement of elected governments** with **unelected corporate governments**, which run more and more aspects of American life **for their own profit, not for the public good.**
- As more of the Public is **eliminated and privatized**, corporations make more money, though ordinary people do not.
- Corporations have extraordinary political power, the power to give unlimited money to organizations that fund candidates in elections. This power is being used by corporations to **shift the governing structure** of the country to themselves. This is **undemocratic.**
- Conservative officeholders who refuse to raise taxes as a matter of conservative principle are **creating deficits.**
- The Public and the Corporate **need each other and need to be in balance.**

Corporations Govern Your Life

- This debate is about **liberty** from **corporate government** and **corporate meddling in our lives**.
- **Corporations govern our lives** with almost no accountability. Due to a lack of regulations, corporations are in many cases **free and even encouraged to run our lives** in ways that are **intrusive, oppressive,** and even **tyrannical**.
- Corporations **intrude on our personal lives** collecting private information about us and snooping on the way we use our computers.
- Health insurance companies make decisions about **your health and your life**. Their decisions are governed by their own interest in maximizing profit. If health insurance companies are not regulated and if health care remains in private hands, you become **a bystander while others decide how healthy you will be and whether you will live**.

Corporations Govern Your Life—Continued

- On a daily basis, Americans face corporate **nuisance, intrusiveness, invasion, control, interference, oppression, theft,** and even **tyranny.** The massive control of corporations over our lives impinges on our most basic **freedoms.** To protect ourselves from this imposition, we need regulations.
- Government—that is, people **who work for you** and are **accountable to you**—work to **protect your liberty.**
- Corporations govern you **for their profit and benefit, not yours.** They are **transparent** about it only if government requires them to be through regulation.
- The struggle over adequate regulations is between **corporations' interest** in making **maximal profit at your expense** and the **government's interest** in **protecting your life and your liberty.**

Predatory Privatization

- Government has a **moral duty** to protect and empower its people. Private corporations have no such duty to citizens, which is why maintaining a **robust Public** is absolutely necessary to ensure everyone's well-being, prosperity, and safety.
- Privatization is the transfer of public property, public functions, and public institutions into private hands. ... Where **people's basic protection and empowerment** are concerned, it is **the government's duty** to preserve the freedom of citizens.
- Privatization can be **predatory** and downright immoral when, for the sake of profit, it **removes or prevents the protection and empowerment of the public**, whether by handing our kids' education over to corporations or putting our water supply in corporate hands.

Predatory Privatization—Continued

- Privatization makes the life of citizens **more expensive**: corporations work to **maximize profit** with no more obligation to customers. (Privatization costs the public more because corporations must make a profit.)

Workers are Profit Creators

- Workers are **profit creators**. Corporations can profit only if people work for them.
- Health care benefits and pensions are part of the **pay earned** by workers. They are **deferred payments for work done**.
- Health care benefits and pensions **benefit the workers and the companies that provide them**.
- Health care benefits and pensions **add to profits**. They buy loyalty so that companies can **avoid the costs of recruiting and training new employees** as well as the **costs of operating with untrained employees**.
- Companies are **ethically responsible** for setting aside funds for workers' deferred payments and **not using them for anything else**. **Spending** those funds—on capital investment, stockholder dividends, or payments and bonuses to top managers—is **unethical**.

Public Education Benefits all and Protects Freedom

- Public education is necessary for a democracy and a vibrant economy.
- Democratic freedom requires education. You are **not free** if you don't know what is possible for you, what affects you, and how to do things you care about.
- **We all benefit** from our educational system ... **We need others to be knowledgeable. Whether or not we happen to be in school, we are using the educational system.**
- The more **education is limited to an elite**, the more it will **cost to access** the **knowledge** education offers. **The more critical knowledge is monopolized by privatized higher education, the more expensive it becomes.**
- A democratic society requires education that is both widespread and deep. Every day we depend on others being educated ... In a democracy, **knowledge needs to be democratized**, and the democratization of knowledge can only come through public education.

Rethinking Food

- The Farm Bill should promote and subsidize **healthy food** and discourage, ban, or at least not subsidize **harmful food**.
- We shouldn't give **public money** to mostly corporate agriculture **that puts profit ahead of safe and healthy food**.
- **Sun food** is food grown organically and locally. **Oil food** is grown with petroleum-based pesticides and insecticides or uses a lot of oil to be shipped long distances. Most funding goes to **oil food** and almost nothing goes to **sun food**. **That should be reversed**.
- Farm Bill funds should **feed people**. **Food stamps prevent hunger if not starvation**.
- **Poisons should be removed from food**. That includes **pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics, and toxic fertilizers**, especially those with **radioactive waste**.
- **Crop insurance is profit insurance**. Taxpayers shouldn't be wasting food money on it.

Systemic Effects in Nature and Economics

- **Dirty energy industries**—oil, coal, and natural gas—make a lot of their money by **not cleaning up**. They profit by not paying the **full costs of doing business** and instead **placing those costs on the public**.
- **Nature is never free. Taking or destroying it places costs elsewhere.**
- When corporations take **“free” water for fracking, “free” boreal forests for tar oil, and our “free” air and water to dump their pollution, we bear the cost.**
- **Surreptitiously transferring costs and risks to the public is the economic and moral equivalent of theft.**

An Infrastructure for Eternal Energy

- It is time to phase out the **old polluting energies**—coal, gas, and oil—as soon as possible and replace them with energy sources that are **eternally present, clean, and free**: the **sun, wind, water, and soil** energies.
- We need to **clean up our energy**.
- **Phase out dirty energy**. Don't prolong it with subsidies.
- **Sun, wind, water, and soil are eternal energy sources**.
- **Eternal energy is the future. It's here now; it's free; it's clean.**
- **Nuclear power is a nuclear threat. Look at Japan.**
- So-called **nuclear waste is highly radioactive** and will stay that way for over 10,000 years. It can **leak** or **be stolen** and **kill**. There is nothing clean about it. **Radiation pollution is the worst form of pollution.**

An Infrastructure for Eternal Energy—Continued

- **Just as a penny saved is a penny earned, so energy saved is energy produced. Conservation does as much for us as production. Save, don't drill.**
- **Good soil feeds us forever.** In the long run, **a farm's soil is worth more than the oil** underneath. Don't drill.
- In terms of energy alone, **conservation is equivalent to drilling.** But **drilling destroys, while conserving saves.** Conservation, not drilling, should be subsidized.
- **For citizens, conservation wins. For oil companies, drilling wins.** Which matters more to you?
- **Preventing conservation is wasting energy.**