

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE, DEFINE YOUR STORY, NAIL YOUR MESSAGE

Effective messaging isn't just about words—it's about making sure your organization communicates its identity, values, and objectives to your audiences in a way that is clear and compelling. At RALLY, we like to say we're "audience obsessed" – everything we create starts with a relentless focus on our audience's needs, values, and priorities.

We ask: What do they already feel? How would we tell them this story? What will move them to act?



USE THIS GUIDE TO

- Clarify your identity, values, and goals
- Define your audience
- Tap into what they feel, need, and believe
- Craft messages that connect and drive action

WHAT IS MESSAGING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Messaging is an agreed-upon language that an organization or campaign uses to describe its mission, the issue, values, and key components of a campaign or organization. It serves as the foundation for all communications materials and allows everyone across a campaign to speak in shared language. Campaigns without messaging have no clear guiding language to define their work, losing the opportunity to build awareness and inspire engagement.

GOOD MESSAGING IS...

- **Infused with tension and a point of view:** Good messaging should come with some heat to be memorable. If your messaging is agreeable to everyone, even your fiercest opponents, it's not going to move the needle or evoke a reaction among your target audience.
 - Spark a reaction. Say something memorable. Have an opinion. Add some spice.
- **Audience focused:** Effective messages must connect to your audience's needs and values to resonate more deeply.
- **Brief:** Short, clear messages hold attention. No long sentences here!
- **Written how people speak:** Avoid big words and complex phrases. Use informal language. Allow your personality to shine through.
- **Digital-first:** Since most messages will end up living on digital channels —good messaging can be boiled to a single sentence or slogan.

WHAT IS NOT MESSAGING

Messaging includes the key ideas, themes, values, and tone a brand wants to convey to its audience across all touchpoints. Copy is how we express the message — the actual written content that appears in ads, websites, emails, social media, etc.

STEP 1

DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

A target audience is the specific group of people you need to reach or influence to achieve your goals. It’s never “everyone.” When you try to talk to everyone, you end up talking to no one.

Defining your audience is the first step in nailing your message. Who specifically does this target? Who has the power to create change? Whose opinion on this issue matters most?

Consider elements such as:

Demographics	Psychographics
Age, gender, location, occupation, income, education, marital status, etc.	Interests, values, attitudes, lifestyles, and behaviors.
Needs & Preferences	Engagement Level
The problems they want to solve, their desires, and what motivates them to act.	Their current relationship with your organization or message—ranging from unaware to highly engaged.

My primary audience is: _____

Secondary audiences (if any): _____

STEP 2

SHAPE YOUR STORY

With your audience identified and the basics in mind, you’re ready to start shaping your story. This is where we define the story we want to tell, how we want to tell it, and what values and emotions we want to tap into. With a foundation in place, we can keep on-track and on-message, even if circumstances change.

Another key consideration is where the audience you identified in step 1 is in the audience journey. This will determine if your audience needs to be educated → engaged → activated, which should be reflected in the messaging you develop.

At this stage, we also consider prompts like:

Narrative and story flow
How did we get here? What's the context that defines this moment?
Problem definition
How do we define the problem in the world or in our issue space that we're addressing? How is that distinct from others?
Human element
What heroes, villains, deeper values and aspirations are at stake? How can we make this personal for our audience?
Framing
How are we defining the choices? How are we defining the alternative viewpoint?
Vision
What's at stake? What's the vision for change and outcomes?

STEP 3

ADD EMOTION AND IMPACT

Emotionally charged messages are more likely to capture attention, be remembered, and influence behavior. Research shows that if a message does not evoke an emotional response, it is less likely to be noticed, stored in memory, or recalled later. Using the framework you started in step 2, add impact by considering the following:

Emotion	Tension
What are the sources of emotion? Are there human or cultural elements that could drive emotion? What emotions are we trying to evoke in our audience? What do we want them to feel? What feeling do our audiences already have about this?	Where can we find tension in the message? What could be new or contrarian? Where is the heat or contrast?
Tone	Pick up
What does our voice sound like and how is it distinct to us vs our peers? What tonal balance is necessary to win?	What do we expect our audience to take away? How would they say it?

STEP 4

WRITE YOUR MESSAGES

Now we’re ready to begin drafting our core and sub-messages that reflect the thinking that we established in the framework. We’ve left you space to develop your messages below.

Audience
<i>(Who are you communicating to?)</i>
Core Message
<i>(The big idea. An overarching statement that defines the essence of your campaign or organization. Should be broad and universal and sets up problem/solution.)</i>
Supporting Messages
<i>(The big idea. An overarching statement that defines the essence of your campaign or organization. Should be broad and universal and sets up problem/solution.)</i>
Opposition Response
<i>(Addressing opposing arguments or opposition without defensiveness.)</i>
Call to Action
<i>(What action do you want your audience to take now?)</i>