



The Water Words That Work  
Environmental Message Method  
Steps 1-4  
Eric Eckl

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### The Method

The Environmental Message Method is  
a step-by-step process for **translating**  
professional conservation materials into  
words and pictures that motivate  
everyday citizens to action.

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 **Introduction**

“... Much more effective than our previous approaches.”

*-- Ted Withrow  
Kentucky Division of Water*

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 **Introduction**

“... I get a better response since I started. I get more questions than I used to get.”

*-- Andrew Peloso  
Indiana Division of Environmental Management*

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 **Introduction**

“... we received more response via phone calls, emails, and notes...than anything we have previously done. You have a made us a believer.”

*-- Jeremiah Johnson  
Beckley (WV) Sanitary Board*

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**The Method**

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**The Key Point**

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**The Due Diligence Test Panel**

- Clients provide Water Words That Work with a *draft* brochure, web page, email, video, etc....
- 25 Everyday citizens rate the piece and share their reaction

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 **Step One, The Panel Says:**

- There was so much garbage shown and the damage was so big that it gave me pause. Would what I could do really help stop all that horrible waste?
- I think I'm to avoid runoff of some sort but am not clear on what I can do that actually closes a beach or makes a fish sneeze.
- The actions of one person alone do not really add up to much...

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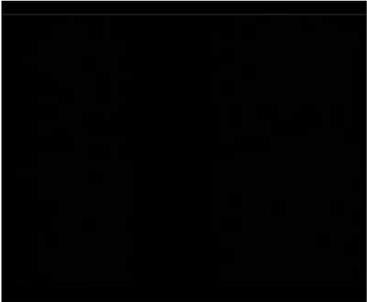
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 **Step One: Begin with Behavior**



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 **Step One, The Panel Says:**

- If i contribute by planting a tree or just doing small things i can make a difference in my community and decrease the affect on water pollution.
- If one person's actions are multiplied by the actions of many people, then together they can make a huge difference in the total polluton problem.
- Knowing that small actions can make a big difference is very motivational.

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 **The Panel Never Says...**

- Who cares about water pollution, anyway?
- Despair is very motivating
- I make lots of time to worry about things I can't do anything about...
- Thank you for giving me a list of 50 tips, I'm looking forward to picking the one that's right for me...

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 **The Facts Do NOT speak for themselves**  
(not outside of peer group which has elite educations)

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 **Step One: Begin with Behavior**

**Political Behavior:** Voting, writing officials, coming out to public hearings, etc.

**Personal Behavior:** Adopting some new behavior or purchasing habits, etc.

**Charitable Behavior:** Making a financial contribution in support of your work, or by participating in a walk-a-thon or other event.

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 **Education vs. Action**

EVERY 20 MINUTES A  
**NEW CASE OF  
 AUTISM  
 IS DIAGNOSED.**  
 CLICK HERE TO DONATE  
 TO EASTER SEALS

Goal: \$500.00  
 Achieved: \$0.00

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 **Education vs. Action**

July 21, 2008, 5:35 pm  
**Protest at Radio Station Over Autism Comments**  
 By SEWELL CHAN



Todd Shapiro, right, took part in a protest outside WOR's office in Lower Manhattan over Michael Savage's comments about autism. Councilman David I. Weprin, left, and Eric N. Golub, center, also demonstrated. (Photo: Patrick Andrade for The New York Times)

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 **Education vs. Action**

**Is my child Autistic? ...**



Watch for Red flags of Autism in your child  
 The following red flags may indicate a child is at risk for atypical development, and is in need of an immediate evaluation.

- ▶ No big smiles or other warm, joyful expressions by 6 months
- ▶ No back and forth sharing of sounds, smiles, or other facial expressions by 9 months
- ▶ No babbling by 12 months
- ▶ Avoids eye contact
- ▶ Trouble forming relationships
- ▶ Difficulty using language
- ▶ Doesn't respond to emotional signals

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**W**  
WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

### Education vs. Action

**Not everyone who gets hit by a drunk driver dies.**



12-year-old Sarahilda was 20 years old when the car she was riding in was hit by a drunk driver. Today at 21, she is still working to put her life back together. Join our cause. [Join our cause.](#)

**DON'T DRINK & DRIVE** 

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**W**  
WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

### Education vs. Action

**DONATE NOW**

MADD's lifesaving work is possible because of caring people like you.

**CLICK HERE**

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**W**  
WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

### Education vs. Action



2008/06/04

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**Begin with Behavior: Exercise**

Come up with **just one thing** that an everyday citizen can do about the issue on your piece. For example:

- 1. Personal Behavior:** Scooping poop, new lawncare habits, buying environmentally friendly products, getting a home energy audit, etc.
- 2. Political Behavior:** Boycotting a company, signing a petition, calling or writing an official, attending a demonstration or rally, etc.
- 3. Charitable Behavior:** Making a small gift, making a large gift, writing an organization into their will, agreeing to match others' donations, participating in a swim-, walk-, march-, paddle-a-thon, etc.

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**Step Two: Find Foolproof Photos**

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**Step Two: Find Foolproof Photos**

Please rate the following statements about the images. Pick 1 to indicate that you strongly disagree. Pick 2 to indicate that you somewhat disagree. Pick 3 to indicate that you somewhat agree. Pick 4 to indicate that you strongly agree. \*

	1	2	3	4
The images get my attention	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The images demonstrate what I can do	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The images show how my actions make a difference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please elaborate on your thoughts about the images in this piece. \*

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**When the panel doesn't like the pictures, they say things like:**

- Showing a couple of pictures of fish and a bald eagle doesn't really tell me much about how my efforts would make a difference.
- The title page simply has a picture of a guy fishing; very generic...
- Two men shaking hands and what looks like a woman hiding behind a tree. Not impressed. Let's see some action!

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**When the panel does like the pictures, they say things like:**

- The images show how people of all ages and skills can help save the river, from children to skilled workers and experts who pitch in and get their hands dirty!
- I really like the picture on the first page of two people cleaning.. it shows the causes of pollution and also what I can do as a citizen. **It wouldn't hurt to put another picture.**
- I think the photos are relevant and appealing but **should be larger, cut down the text** a bit to make room.

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**The panel never says...**

- I want to see a more detailed map, with multiple data layers!
- Don't show me what to do, I like to figure it out myself
- I really relate to those athletic white men using all that expensive equipment in the wilderness by themselves.

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 **Pictures We Forget: Faces**



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 **Faces**



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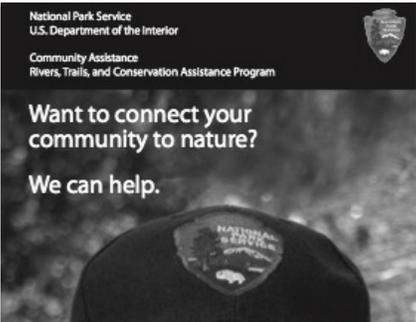
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 **Step Two:  
Find Foolproof Photos**

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Community Assistance  
Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

Want to connect your  
community to nature?  
We can help.



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If you want to protect your local river, save an unspoiled landscape, or build trails to help everyone enjoy nature, the National Park Service can help.

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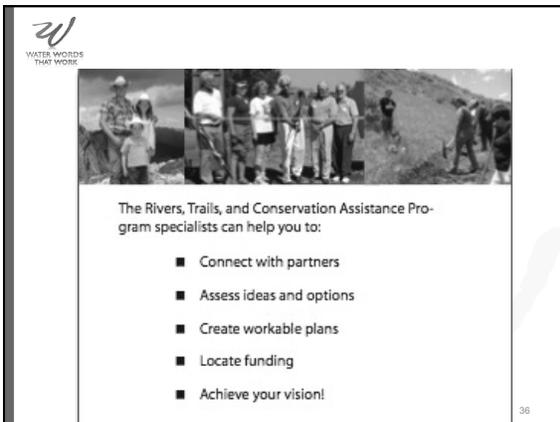
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The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program specialists can help you to:

- Connect with partners
- Assess ideas and options
- Create workable plans
- Locate funding
- Achieve your vision!

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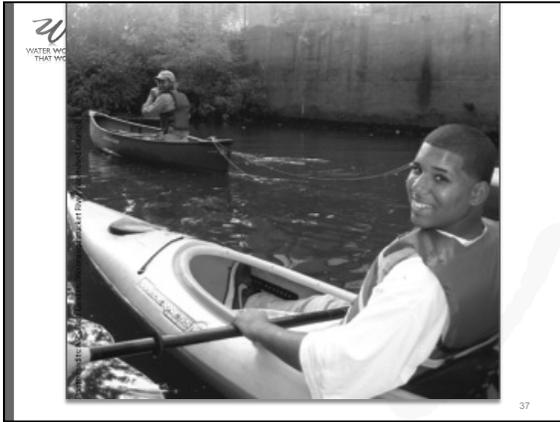
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 WATER WORDS THAT WORK

## Monkey See, Monkey Do



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 WATER WORDS THAT WORK

## Monkey See, Monkey Do



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 WATER WORDS THAT WORK

## Foolproof Photos



All the soap, scum, and oily grit runs along the curb. Then into a storm drain and directly into our lakes, rivers, and streams. And that causes pollution which is unhealthy for everyone. So how do you avoid this whole mess? Easy! Wash your car on the grass or gravel instead of the street. Or better yet, take it to a car wash where the water gets treated or recycled.

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**W**  
WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

## Foolproof Photos

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**W**  
WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

## Foolproof Photos: Exercise

Draw a picture that increases the odds that your audience will do the behavior you identified in step one.

# Big Faces! No Feet!

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**W**  
WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

## Step Three: Swap the Shoptalk

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**Step Three:  
Swap the Shoptalk**

WATER WORDS THAT WORK

	1	2	3	4
The piece has a clear message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could explain this piece to others without showing it to them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The piece was prepared with the general public in mind	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you describe the audience this piece is intended for? \*

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**Too much shoptalk?**  
The panel says:

- Who is it for? ... someone a lot smarter than i...
- ...it is not written in an interesting or easy to understand manner for the general public.
- It gives the facts in a dry and clear way but it is not exciting.

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**Not much shoptalk?**  
The panel says:

- This piece is intended for everyone. It is a simple piece ... showing how the average person can make a difference.
- This piece was clearly intended for a general audience. **It was easy to read and informative.**
- It's for people who will write letters, sign petitions, get out and get involved.

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 **The panel never says:**

- More facts please, I'm not convinced you know what you're talking about.
- I enjoy the challenge of learning all these new words at once.
- Thanks for keeping the excitement level low, I can't handle too much.

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 **Step Three:  
Swap the Shoptalk**



**Danielle Donkersloot (NJ DEP) says:**

Would you grandmother use this word?

If not, it's shoptalk. Swap it out!

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 **A: Riparian**

**B: Riverbank**



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WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

A: Watershed management

B: Land and water conservation



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WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

A: Open Space

B: Natural Area



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WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

A: Family vacations

B: Tourism



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WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

A: Polluted Runoff 

B: Stormwater

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WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

A: Clean water 

B: Water Quality

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WATER WORDS  
THAT WORK

**Swap the Shoptalk:  
Exercise**

Circle the **first five** words in your passage that flunk the grandmother test.

Come up with substitutes.



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 **Too few words that work?**  
**The panel says:**

- What is the issue? Keeping it clean? Preserving it? Protecting wildlife? ... based on this information, I have no idea.
- I do not live near a lake, so this would not affect me.
- This is not really a pressing issue in my town but it is to others.

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 **Use the words that work?The panel says:**

- Anything that affects water and quality of the land effects me, my family and everyone else.
- Making sure there is an adequate water supply for our present and future needs affects nearly everyone.
- If we want to make the world better for future generations we need to address these issues and work together to fix them.

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 **The panel *never* says:**

- Whoa! *Your* job is to give me facts. It's *my* job is to figure out what to do.
- Enough with the pep talk already, I don't doubt that I'm up to this.
- I'm not ready to get off my butt just yet... maybe if you pile on some more bad news?

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 **Exercise #4:**  
**Insert Words That Work**

- Imagine you are writing an email or letter to urge people to support the personal, political, or charitable behavior you identified in Step One.
- You are going to send it to these 10 citizens!
- Write the opening paragraph -- up to 50 words -- to encourage them to do the action you came up with in the first exercise
- Use as many **words that work** as you can. The group that uses the most words is the winner!

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 **In Real Life**

- **1% to 2%** of the words should be on the Words That Work list.
- Use them *here*:
  - Titles
  - Headlines
  - Photo captions
  - Quotes attributed to people

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 **Questions**

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