

Combating Misinformation: How To Talk About Science



Science makes the world better. From combating climate change to developing life-saving vaccines, science helps us solve problems, make decisions, and improve the world.

So why is there so much skepticism about science? In a recent study, nearly one in four Americans reported having “not much” or “no confidence at all” in scientists. On top of that, new research is showing that when trust in science is low we are more susceptible to misinformation. What lies beneath this lack of trust?

How People Think

Examining our cultural mindsets—the deeply-held, broadly-shared patterns in thinking that shape how we see the world—can help us understand not just what, but *how* people think about science.

Cultural mindsets that **undermine** trust in science:

1. Science is capricious.

“There’s a new study every other week! First it’s good to drink coffee, and then it isn’t?”

2. Science has a hidden agenda.

“Scientists are just manipulating information to serve their own interests.”

Cultural mindsets that **build** trust in science:

1. Science is awe-some and unlocks mysteries.

“Learning about outer space, how the body works, cures for diseases—the power of science is just amazing.”

2. Science creates progress through problem-solving.

“Where would we be as a society without science? We’d be back in the stone age.”

How We Talk

The choices we make in what we say about science can determine *which* of these mindsets are activated when we speak. Better framing can help us activate productive mindsets and more effectively counter misinformation.

✘ Avoid

1. Framing with scientific authority.

“The science is clear...”
“The weight of evidence is irrefutable...”

2. Unnecessary contradictions and hedges.

“We can never be sure, but science suggests...”
“Barring a new discovery...”
“The most likely explanation...”

✔ Advance

1. Give examples of science solving problems.

“Scientific research led to the addition of a raised position brake light on cars, which has saved countless lives.”

2. Explain rather than persuade.

“Brain architecture develops early, shaping the foundation of lifelong health, learning, and wellbeing.”

3. Lead with a broadly resonant and shared principle.

“We can all agree that reducing gun violence is an important goal that we should work toward.”