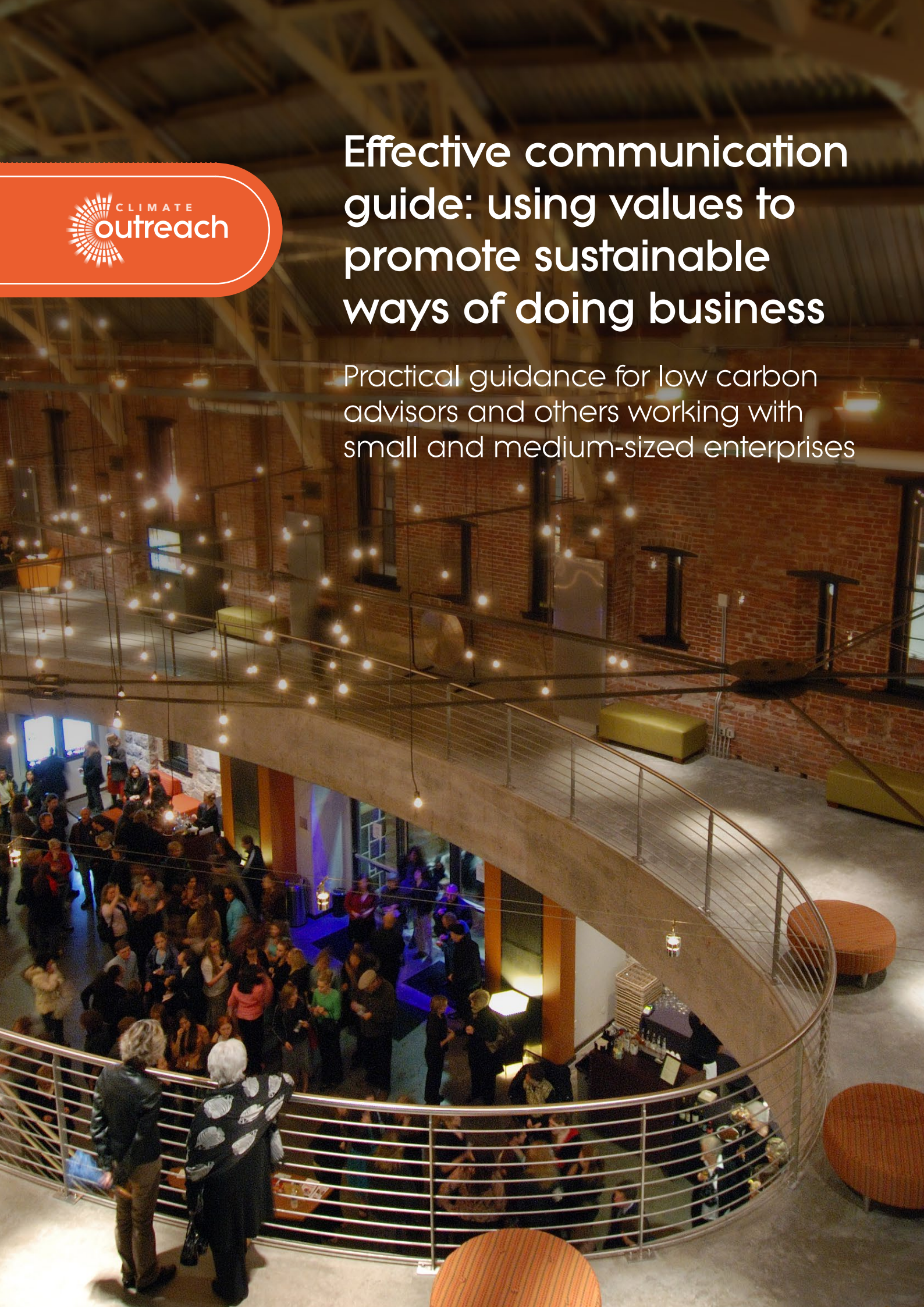




Effective communication guide: using values to promote sustainable ways of doing business

Practical guidance for low carbon advisors and others working with small and medium-sized enterprises



About Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach is a team of social scientists and communication specialists working to widen and deepen public engagement with climate change. Through our research, practical guides and consultancy services, our charity helps organisations communicate about climate change in ways that resonate with the values of their audiences. We have 15 years experience working with a wide range of international partners including central, regional and local governments, international bodies, charities, businesses, faith organisations and youth groups.

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Free online course

You can explore the issues raised in this guide in more detail through an online course, [Promoting sustainability in business: a values-based toolkit](#). The course was co-created by members of the project team, business advisors, owners and managers. It sets out the key research evidence, provides a variety of realistic, case-based illustrations and incorporates a practical toolkit that you can adapt for your own purposes.

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Cover photo: An energy efficient LEED building. Photo by [Portland Center Stage](#) (CC BY-NC-2.0).

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Introduction

How can the owners and managers of small businesses be engaged more effectively about climate change?

"It is pointless trying to get small business managers and owners to think about, and engage with climate change."

"Small businesses have not got the time or resources to devote to worrying about the long term future."

"Businesses are there to make money, not save the planet."

These are some of the frustrations and challenges that were voiced by the low carbon advisors and other intermediaries who participated in the Growing Greener project. Advisors and intermediaries said that energy saving often has to be discussed in terms of reducing costs. However, if advisors only ever talk to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) about climate change in terms of how much money they will save, then that is likely to be the only basis on which SME owners and managers will engage with climate change.

Does this mean that it's not possible to engage a large section of the SME population with climate change?

The work done by Climate Outreach suggests not. Our research has shown how to get beyond talking about climate change in language that only appeals to environmentalists, and instead recommends using values that people hold in common (Corner, Marshall and Clarke, 2016).

This research has revealed several approaches, narratives and values that can act as a bridge between what at first appear to be irreconcilable differences. The insights in this guide combine that expertise and experience with the findings from a nationwide project called [Growing Greener](#). The Growing Greener project brought low carbon advisors and intermediaries together with researchers and communication specialists to identify more effective ways of engaging with SMEs on climate change and other important environmental issues.

Who is this guide for?

This guide has been written for business advisors and others who work with the owners and managers of SMEs. It is also relevant for people working within enterprises who want to reduce their environmental impact, and face the challenge of persuading others to get on board.

The evidence-based insights contained in this short guide will help you connect the personal values of SME owners and managers with a greater concern for the environment. This values-based approach has more potential to deepen and strengthen engagement with low carbon business practices than can be achieved through purely financial win-win messages.

What are 'values'?

Values are a person's guiding principles (Schwartz, 2012). People's attitude on different topics may change over time but there are certain psychological attributes that are less likely to change. These attributes help form the core of their identities and central among these are values. Researchers have identified two sets of opposing values. This finding has important implications for communicating about climate change. Some people favour 'extrinsic' values, such as wealth, power, ambition and social standing. Other people place more importance on 'intrinsic' values; social justice, equality, love of nature. These are important when communicating about climate change, as it has been found that 'intrinsic' values are consistently associated with concern about climate change (Corner, Markowitz, and Pidgeon, 2014).

This means the way that different values are used by advisors and intermediaries when talking about energy and climate change matters, because promoting one type of value e.g. by talking about the economic rationale for energy saving (an extrinsic value) is likely to weaken the prominence of opposing values e.g. the environmental benefits of energy saving.

This guide provides you with recommendations for talking about climate change using language that is a bridge between these opposing values. (See the [Open Educational Resource](#) for more information about values).

What's in the guide?

The guide provides six key principles for using values in conversations with SMEs and follows this with a list of 'dos' and 'don'ts' for maximising the effectiveness of your SME-targeted climate change communication. The guide finishes with an evidence-based framework for using the best visual vocabulary for your outreach and communication activities.

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Key values underpinning climate change communication with SMEs

The examples below connect statements about cutting carbon with widely held values and concerns. The examples are in bold and the explanations follow.

Avoiding waste is common sense.

Common sense, being realistic, and down to earth pragmatism – these are important values for many small businesses. The need to avoid waste is a commonly held value across society, especially with awareness of plastic pollution currently so high.

Just like the economy, a responsible, long-term energy policy demands a willingness to make decisions today for the good of tomorrow.

Business owners and managers express a sense of responsibility to the business and employees. Decision-making in general, and the ability to make decisions with a sense of responsibility to others in mind, are attitudes that will be familiar to SMEs.

Clean, renewable sources of energy offer a reliable and secure energy supply, fuel national prosperity, and secure long-term jobs.

The wish to minimise risk and maximise certainty are priorities for SME owners and managers. This type of narrative relates these priorities to the potential of renewable energy to offer energy security and independence, whilst also speaking to the growth imperative, common to many SME owners and managers.

We are living beyond our means. Climate change is like a debt that we pass on to our children.

The sense of duty and responsibility to future generations resonates strongly with many audiences, even if they are not parents themselves. The desire to avoid burdening future generations with the cost of cleaning up our mess can be expressed in ways that connect this concept with the financial concerns that are often priorities for many SMEs.

Climate change and SMEs:

Six principles for more effective communication

1 People do not just define themselves by who they are – they also define themselves by who they are not.

Show your clients that taking effective action on climate change is something ‘we’ do, and isn’t just something ‘those’ environmentalists worry about. Sharing case studies that can tell a story about why and how people like themselves have cut their carbon footprint will help your audience identify with your message.

2 Communicate from the ‘values up’, not the ‘numbers down’.

People make sense of the world on the basis of their values; when it comes to issues such as climate change, people’s world view is more important than facts and targets. Use stories that connect the business case with the values of the person you are speaking to, and their concerns as a human being. The vision of clean and affordable energy, for example, is an idea with wider appeal than the need to meet targets set for the year 2050.

3 Connect climate change with other environmental concerns, and the desire for a less wasteful society.

When talking about energy efficiency, use the idea of our common wish to avoid being wasteful. Research has demonstrated that the desire to use resources carefully is widely held, and provides a strong rationale for reducing our energy use (Cardiff University, 2017).

4 Highlight how action on climate change is an issue of security.

Security matters. Businesses want a sense of security, just as we want to feel secure on a personal level. Climate change is itself a driver of a more uncertain future for us and our families. Using home grown renewable energy sources offers the potential for greater energy security.

5 Highlight continuity with what is familiar and trusted.

A sense of tradition and continuity with the past are values that sit side-by-side with business leaders’ desire to have a certain and knowable future. Talk about renewables in terms of the nation making best use of its natural resources. Show how new technologies speak to the best of British ingenuity and resourcefulness.

6 Stress the inevitability of a low carbon future.

Momentum for the switch to a low carbon energy system is growing amongst the public and within the business sector. Ambitious targets are locked into energy policy. When businesses feel this is the normal thing to do they will have less reason for postponing action.

Top tips for a values-based approach to discussing climate change



DO

- ✓ Use personal stories that resonate with the audience's key values.
- ✓ Speak to widely held concerns about being wasteful in our use of resources.
- ✓ Talk about what we do know about climate change and climate policy.
- ✓ Focus on the immediate and tangible benefits of acting on climate change.
- ✓ Use credible and authentic messengers who your audience can identify with.
- ✓ On energy saving, rely on the common sense logic of using energy carefully.
- ✓ Be honest and authentic when talking to your clients – speak from your own values.
- ✓ Recognise the importance of image and social acceptance on how other people perceive us. No one wants to be viewed negatively.



DON'T

- ✗ Rely solely on numbers and facts.
- ✗ Assume conventional 'environmental' language will work.
- ✗ Lead with what is unknown or uncertain.
- ✗ Talk about long-term targets or abstract distant issues such as sea level rise in 2100.
- ✗ Rely on voices who are not trusted e.g. politicians.
- ✗ Stress change, or focus on unfamiliar technologies without stressing continuity.
- ✗ Speak from a script, or try to fake it. Integrity is what matters.
- ✗ Assume that businesses hold certain values because they're in a particular sector or location.

Make the most of your communications with an effective visual vocabulary

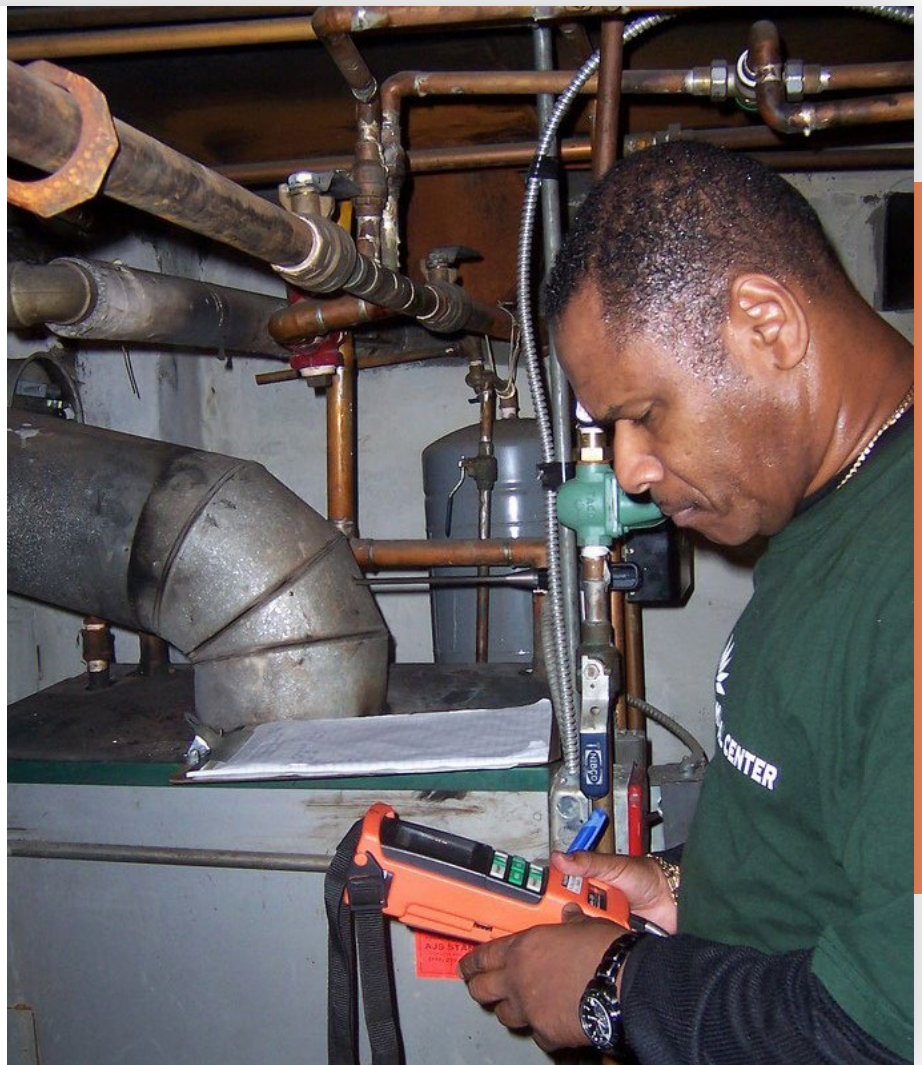
Humans are visual animals; our understanding of the world is in part shaped by what we see, and how that makes us feel. It is for this reason that Climate Outreach have developed an evidence-based library of photographs for use in climate change communications. Sustainable business communications often rely on safe, overused and clichéd images, like the classic image of a seedling in a clump of soil, sitting in the palm of a hand. So how can a better visual narrative be crafted for use in business contexts?

The [Climate Visuals library](#) contains over 700 photographs, which offer tested alternatives to the familiar images used to communicate sustainability. The most relevant principles for using imagery in your sustainability communications are detailed below.

Principle 1 Show real people, not staged photo ops

Authenticity and integrity are important elements of building productive engagement with your audience. If the image you use lacks these qualities it may backfire, and be seen as manipulative. Show real people taking real low carbon action; a person and situation your audience can identify with (e.g. a person fitting insulation). Avoid staged photographs, especially those featuring politicians posing for a photo opportunity.

Image: An energy auditor performs a boiler check. Photo by [Community Environmental Center](#) (CC BY-NC 2.0).



Principle 2 Tell new stories

Familiar 'classic' images (such as the seedling resting in the palm of a hand) may communicate the sustainability message to those familiar with the subject, but that very familiarity may lessen the impact. It is important to tell a human story, to show people taking action on sustainability. Use images that tell rich stories with layers of meaning to help your message connect on the basis of shared values.

Image: A woman fuels her fuel cell vehicle at a hydrogen fueling station. Photo by [Dennis Schroeder](#) (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).



Principle 3 Avoid images of 'typical environmentalists'

Images of 'typical environmentalists' only resonate with a handful of people. These kinds of images will communicate that climate change is for 'them' not for 'us'. The way people respond to climate change images is shaped by the same factors that dictate their attitudes to climate change, namely their values and world views. In general, images showing an efficient and sensible response to climate change are rated highly across the political spectrum. These include images of solar panels and insulation.

FIGURE: A construction worker installs a new heating system. Photo by [Marcela Gara](#) (CC BY-NC 2.0).



For a full list of the seven principles of effective visual climate communication, and to access images which encapsulate these principles, visit www.climatevisuals.org

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Further reading and resources

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