

Communicating Science

Instructions:

In “Losing Earth,” Nathaniel Rich writes about the difficulty scientists and environmentalists had educating the public about the greenhouse effect and climate change during the 1980s. Several factors contributed to this problem.

1. Climate science is complex and requires an understanding of not only atmospheric science but also computer modeling (22, 27).
2. There is a “lag between the emission of a gas and the warming it produced” (26).
3. Climate change’s “insubstantiality made it difficult to rally the older activists, whose strategic model relied on protests at sites of horrific degradation — Love Canal, Hetch Hetchy, Three Mile Island. How did you protest when the toxic waste dump was the entire planet or, worse, its invisible atmosphere?” (38)
4. Industrial lobbying groups and other business organizations actively worked to undermine climate science in the 1990s by adopting a strategy of “emphasiz[ing] the uncertainty in scientific conclusions” (64).

Scientists often have trouble translating their research into a language that a general audience can understand. It is important that people know about the science of climate change because it is not only a scientific issue but a social and political issue. How can people be expected to take action on an issue when they cannot evaluate or even understand the science?

Climate change is not the only important scientific subject in social and political debates: its company includes evolution, vaccines, and the origin of the universe. Pick one of the subjects you have learned about in your science class that you think people need to understand and **create an explainer** for a general audience. The explainer could be text, images, video, an oral presentation, or a combination of these formats and use accessible language and ideas to break down a complex scientific idea.

For an example, explore the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s website on climate change impacts](#). You will see how the authors break down scientific information into terms that the general public can understand while still referencing scientific sources.

After you complete your explainer, present it to someone who is not in your science class. Can they understand the topic you wrote about?