



Language

Mini Guide

Mini Guide Series

This guide is part of Animal Think Tank's series on **persuasive communications** for animal freedom.

Each guide draws on the **latest research** in psychology, public opinion and movement strategy.

This edition is about language:

how the words we choose do more than describe the world — they shape how people understand it, and whether they take action.

Language can reinforce the harmful idea that other animals are objects or resources — or it can **build connection** with them as individuals with families, feelings and a longing for freedom.

Because **if we want a different future, we have to tell a different story** — and it starts with the words we choose.



Contents

Language essentials	4
<hr/>	
Language top tips	8
<hr/>	
Language guidance	17
<hr/>	
Key takeaways	23

What You'll Learn From This Guide



How language shapes public perception

Discover how words can reinforce harmful beliefs or help shift thinking in more positive directions.



How to build connection

Learn how to centre other animals as individuals and avoid language that objectifies.



How to challenge normalised violence

Understand how industry language hides harm — and how our language can expose it.



How to communicate a hopeful vision

Explore how values-based language can make animal freedom feel part of a better future.



How to speak across different issues

Find out how pro-animal language aligns with inclusive communication in other movements.

A Guide Not Gospel

This guide is a habit-building tool to help animal advocates use language more intentionally.

Strategic language use is about **closing the divide** between humans and other animals – challenging harmful narratives, reframing issues, and building a bigger sense of 'us'.

This guide is here to expand our language toolbox, rather than 'correcting' existing terminology or suggesting there's 'one right way' to describe something. It's about framing our messages in ways that can **help audiences focus on what matters.**

Because new ways of talking about animal issues can lead to new ways of thinking about them.

© Jack Hamilton



Evolving Language

© Aaron Burden



Evolving society's language has always been a key strategy for social justice movements.

Like culture, language is always evolving. Across diverse social justice movements, **changing the way people speak has been a key part of changing the way people think.**

For example, terms like 'chairman' have become 'chair' or 'chairperson', highlighting that leadership isn't gender-specific. Shifts like this seem small, but they help **reshape norms** and **challenge assumptions.**

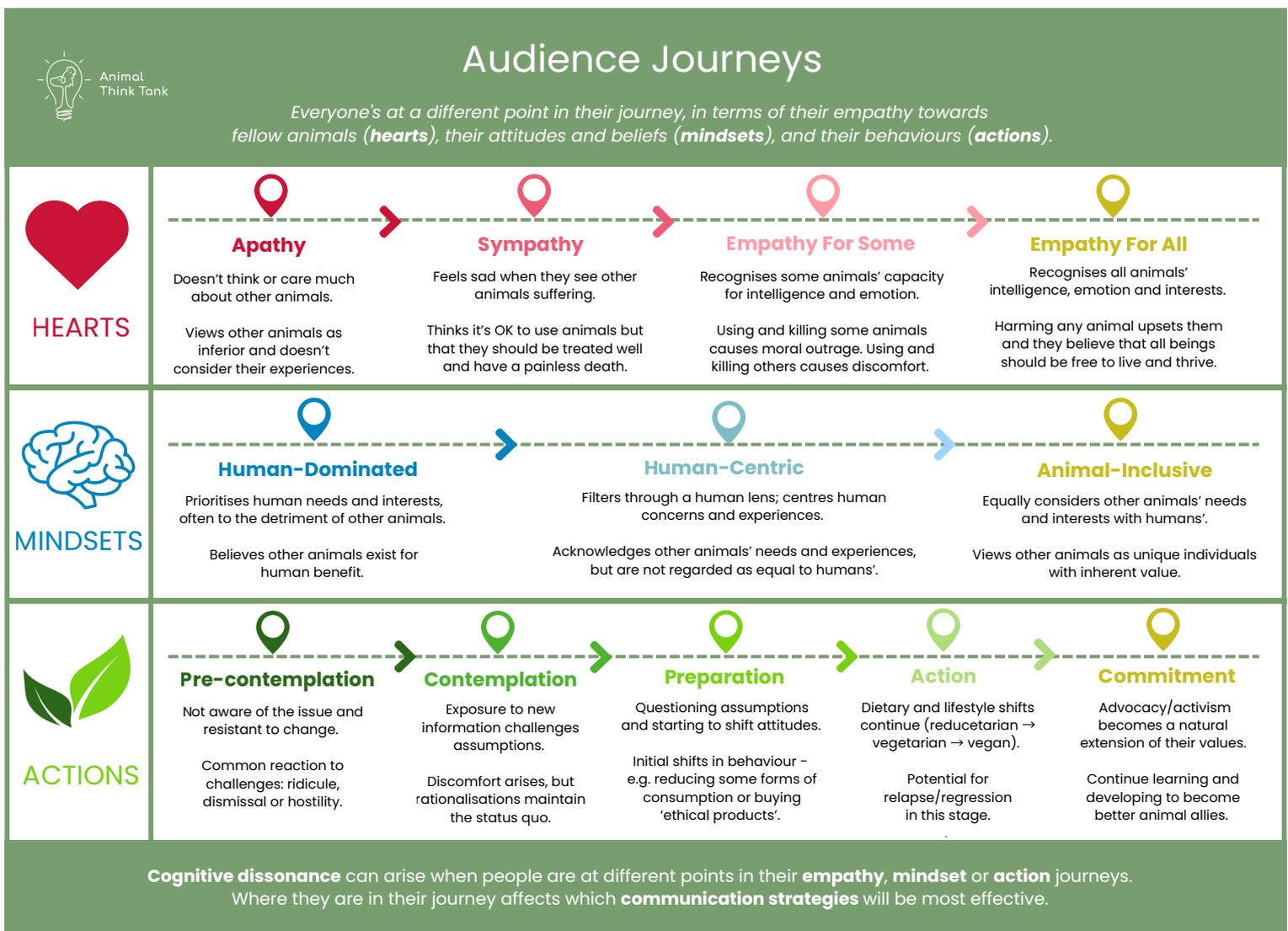
The same is true for how we talk about animals. Something as simple as replacing 'it' with 'he', 'she' or 'they' can provoke a cognitive shift and, if adopted widely, a broader cultural shift towards **connection and respect.**

Tailoring Language to Audiences

Everyone is at a **different point of their journey** and there is no 'one' audience that we're communicating with.

If someone is further along their journey, they may be **open** to more progressive language and frames, whereas someone further back on their journey might be more **resistant**.

Our goal, as animal freedom communicators, is to use language that can **encourage new ways of relating to other animals** and nudge people further along their journey, in a way that doesn't jar.



Language Top Tips

1

Lead with positive frames

E.g. 'animals are someone not something' rather than a purely negative frame like 'animals are not products', which risks reinforcing an 'animals are products' frame.

2

Use inclusive language

- 'Our animal cousins' conveys a bigger *us*; 'non-human' is othering.
- Like humans, other animals 'talk' – they're not 'voiceless'.
- They're part of 'families' and 'communities', not just 'populations' or 'species'.

3

Connect with people's identities and create a 'bigger us'

E.g. use inclusive identities like 'caring people' or 'animal lovers', rather than divisive identities like 'vegans', 'meat-eaters' or 'activists'.

4

Avoid reinforcing industry terms

- Use 'chickens', 'cows' or 'animals who are farmed' rather than 'broiler chickens', 'beef cows' and 'livestock', which objectifies other animals.
- Use truthful terms like 'killing' and 'mutilating' instead of 'culling' and 'tail-docking', which obscures what's being done.

5

Use animal-first language

- 'Horses forced to race' rather than 'race horses', which implies they're doing what they were supposedly born to do.
- 'Animals confined in zoos' rather than 'zoo animals', which implies a zoo is where they belong.

6

Use active language

E.g. 'farming animals' not 'animal farming'; and 'testing on animals' rather than 'animal testing', to emphasise that something harmful is being done.

7

Use values-based language

E.g. freedom, kindness, fairness, dignity, truth more than abstract terms like 'rights' and 'justice', which are less likely to move or resonate with people early on in their journey.

Language Top Tips

1 Lead with positive frames that say what we're for

Highlighting a **vision** of the future we want can **inspire change** and help people feel **part of something hopeful**. It can also help people connect with shared values, plus feel a sense of belonging and possibility.

Framing that focuses only on what we're against can leave people feeling **criticised, defensive or helpless**. Negative frames – even those stating what we reject – can unintentionally reinforce the ideas we're trying to challenge. Research shows that after being exposed to a negative frame, people often recall the frame, rather than the negation.

Instead, we can name the **truth we want to make visible** – that other animals are someone, not something; that freedom and compassion are possible and worth fighting for.

Replace	Frames it evokes	Embrace
Anti-speciesism	Jargon, moral binary, negative framing	Animal freedom; creating a world where everyone matters – no matter their species
Stop supporting animal cruelty	Accusatory, directive, causes defensiveness	We can be the generation that ends animal cruelty.
Animals are not products	Reinforces “animals are products”	Animals are someone – not something



Paint a **vision, not just a problem**. The most powerful framing combines **critique** with a sense of **possibility**.

Language Top Tips

2

Use inclusive language that connects

Activate **connection** – not **separation**.

Language shapes how people relate to other animals and whether they are seen as part of a moral community or outside it.

When language creates distance or implies hierarchy, it reinforces the belief that humans are separate from – or superior to – other animals. Inclusive language counters this by emphasising **connection**, **similarities** and **shared experience**. It helps people see other animals as part of a **'bigger us'** – individuals with relationships, communities, and lives and desires of their own.

Replace	Frames it evokes	Embrace
Non-human animals	Humans are the norm; other animals are deviations	Other animals, fellow animals, our animal cousins, our animal neighbours
Pets, companion animals	Certain animals are there to be petted, or are defined by their 'role'	Animal family members, animal companions
Species, populations	Scientific detachment, objectification	Individuals, families, communities



Emphasising connection helps people feel **closer** to, rather than separate from, other animals.

Language Top Tips

3

Connect with people's identities

Language can divide – or **invite people in**.

How we refer to people in our messaging influences how open they are to it. **Labels that divide** people into opposing groups can trigger defensiveness – or imply people who take action for other animals are somehow 'different'.

Whereas using terms that signal **shared identity and values** can allow people to locate themselves within the message or story. This helps reduce reactance and builds common ground, making it easier for people to consider change.

Replace	Frames it evokes	Embrace
Meat-eaters	Other animals as food, majority identity	People embracing kinder food choices
Non-vegans	Othering, moral binary	People who care about animals
Vegans	Ideological, extreme, identity-based	Animal lovers, people who care about animals
Activists	Confrontational, fringe, not like 'normal people'	People/the public/local communities speaking up and taking action



Persuasive framing uses language that can create a sense of a **'bigger us'** and reduce negative reactance.

Language Top Tips

4

Avoid reinforcing industry framing

Language used by exploitative industries intentionally **hides harm**, **normalises** what is being done, and **devalues** other animals. Industries use strategic frames to **reduce moral concern**.

Using industry terms – even critically – can reinforce their frames. And **the more a frame is activated, the stronger it becomes in people’s minds**.

Industry term	Frames it evokes	Reframing
Raising animals	Family care, nurturing, natural process	Farming / confining animals
Housing cows	Providing shelter, comfort, a home	Confining cows in sheds
Livestock	Animals = resources/ property	Animals who are farmed
Dairy cows / egg layers	Animals = producers	Cows used for their milk / chickens used for their eggs
Culling, depopulation, population control	Neutral management	Killing healthy animals
Tail-docking	Routine procedure	Cutting off animals’ tails



If using industry framing is unavoidable, use quote marks to **highlight this is problematic** language.

Language Top Tips

5

Use animal-first language

Centre **who other animals are** – not their supposed 'role'.

Language that defines animals by their enforced 'function' reinforces the idea that they exist for humans. It frames other animals as belonging in the systems that exploit them, hides the harm being done, and **erases their individuality**, agency and freedom to live on their own terms.

Animal-first language **interrupts these norms** and **flips the focus**. It exposes what's being done to them, and **invites empathy** by focusing on who they are – not what they're supposedly here for.

Industry term	Frames it evokes	Reframing
Racehorses	Born to race, love to entertain	Horses forced to race
Zoo animals	Belong in captivity, exist to entertain	Animals confined in zoos
Lab animals	Scientific tools, disposable	Animals tested on in laboratories
Farm animals	Belong on farms	Animals who are farmed
Companion animals	Exist to provide companionship	Family members, animal companions



Animal-first language helps guide audiences into seeing other animals as **someone rather than something**.

Language Top Tips

6

Use active language

Certain frames neutralise harmful practices into nice activities or necessary methods, rather than things **done to animals without consent**.

A slight re-order of words can change a frame, turning an accepted noun into an uncomfortable verb. It **makes the action visible** – and the perpetrator. Suddenly, someone is doing something to someone else.

This subtle shift pulls the industry into the frame. It reminds audiences that these are **choices being made, not natural or inevitable systems** – and it keeps animals where they belong: individuals at the centre of the story.

Industry term	Frames it evokes	Reframing
Animal agriculture, animal husbandry, animal farming	Pastoral, natural, traditional	Farming animals
Horse racing, dog racing	Sport, entertainment, animals doing what they love	Racing horses, racing dogs
Animal testing	Scientific necessity, progress, saving lives	Testing on animals
Pest control	Hygiene, safety	Killing animals
Animal breeding	Expertise, care, natural	Breeding animals for profit



Active language makes harm visible – and reminds audiences that someone is **doing something** to someone else.

Language Top Tips

7

Use values-based language

Having values as the main thread in our messaging ensures we're speaking to **what matters** – not just what's happening.

Facts matter – but without values, they often fail to move people. Values **connect emotionally** and can **open space for new thinking**. People vote, act and align with what they care about, not just what they know.

Framing around shared values – like freedom, kindness and truth – helps people make **moral sense** of an issue. It gives them **a reason to care** and **a story they can belong to**. Values-led language affirms what we stand for, not just what we oppose, and helps build common ground with those who may not yet share our conclusions but could **share our concerns**.

Movement term	Frames it evokes	Reframing
Sentient beings	Clinical, scientific, creates distance	Someone who feels joy, fear, love... etc
Animal rights	Legalistic, abstract, politicised	Animal freedom, freedom to live and thrive
Welfare breaches	A transgression in an otherwise working system	Animals being harmed, animals denied the freedom to...



Let values set the frame. If it doesn't speak to something **people already care about**, it's less likely to move them.

**“Our words are not without meaning,
they are an action, a resistance.”**

bell hooks



Language Guidance

Framing our issue		
Replace	Embrace	Why
Anti-speciesism	Animal freedom	Connects to core values , communicates vision and avoids movement jargon.
Rights Justice Welfare Personhood Disinformation	Freedom Fairness Wellbeing/best interests Dignity Truth	Research shows values connect more than abstract terms, making the issue more relatable .
Exploitation Oppression Comparing speciesism to other -isms	Tearing families apart Denying others freedom Destroying lives Psychological trauma	Makes the issue as urgent and relatable by focusing on the experience.
Animal farming Dog/horse racing Animal testing	Farming animals Racing dogs/horses Testing on animals	Active language emphasises something is being done to animals.
Cruelty-free research * <i>*It's fine to use this framing if positive framing is also used in a message.</i>	Human-relevant research	Focuses on positive impact and human benefits , not just what we oppose.
Humane Inhumane	Compassionate/kind Heartless/cruel/unethical	Doesn't exclude other animals by framing compassion as unique to humans.



Use **values**-based, **active** language that shows what's being done to other animals and what we stand for. Avoid abstract or technical terms – connect with the **heart**, not just the head.

Language Guidance

Framing industries and their actions		
Replace	Embrace	Why
Animal agriculture	Big Animal Ag / Big Ag	Frames a corporate industry , driven by greed.
Humanewashing	Welfarewashing	Inclusive – doesn't centre humans.
Abattoir	Slaughterhouse	Centres violence .
Culling / depopulation	Killing	Truthfully exposes industry violence .
Tail-docking De-beaking / de-horning	Cutting off tails Mutilating	Exposes industry violence and avoids euphemisms.
Calf weaning	Mother-baby separation Separating families	Exposes cruelty rather than seeming natural.
Veal crates	Calf cages	Centres the experience of animals who are farmed.
Dairy milk	Cow's milk/calf's milk	Names who it's taken from.
1.2 trillion animals die every year	1.2 trillion animals are killed by Big Ag every year	Active language that names who is doing what .
Raising animals	Farming/confining animals	Emphasises what's being done .
Hatcheries	Chick factories	Exposes industrial reality .



Highlight industry harm. Avoid reinforcing industry euphemisms. When unavoidable, use **'scare' quotes** to emphasise the term is problematic. e.g. 'spent' hens or 'enrichment' objects.

Language Guidance

Framing other animals		
Replace	Embrace	Why
Non-human animals	Other animals / Our animal cousins	Builds connection and a bigger sense of 'us' .
Pet Companion animal	Animal companion Family member	Emphasises relationship ; rejects 'role'.
Lab / farm / zoo / circus / racing animals	Animals used in... / forced to race	Puts the individual before their exploitation.
Dairy/beef cow / broiler / layer / poultry	Mother cow / chicken	Individualises and avoids 'product' framing.
It / that	She / he / they / who	Pronouns individualise .
Rescued / rescue animals	Survivors / adopted	Emphasises agency and dignity .
Game	Animals who are hunted	Active , descriptive language.
Moos / barks / voiceless	Language / communicating / ignored	Highlights communication and shared traits .
Fur / paws / behaviour / sentience	Hair / feet /actions / emotions / intelligence	Inclusive – reinforces similarities not difference.



Centre who animals are, not just what's been done to them. Emphasise their relationships, emotions and agency – not the 'roles' industries force on them. This helps **builds connection**.

Language Guidance

Framing humans		
Replace	Embrace	Why
Animal rights activists / vegan activists / vegans / consumers	Animal lovers / people who care / animal allies / concerned citizens	Inclusive – creates a bigger ‘us’ rooted in shared values , not identity labels
Owner / carer / caregiver / rescuer	Family / adoptive family / friend / companion	Builds connection and respect – avoids framing animals as property or projects.

Framing ‘conservation’		
Replace	Embrace	Why
Conservation	Protecting homes/ communities/lives	Relatable and values- based .
At-risk populations	Badger communities threatened by [xx]	Specify what (or who) is threatening animals.
Endangered species	Tiger communities threatened by [xx]	Specify what (or who) is threatening animals.
Invasive animals/species	Animals introduced by humans/introduced species	Avoids villainising other animals.
Pack/flock/herd/species Habitat Mate Offspring/young Gestation Rearing	Family/community/group Home/homeland Partner Children/babies Pregnancy Motherhood/parenting	Highlights similarities rather than differences.

Language Guidance

Reframing harmful sayings	
Replace	Embrace
Underdog	Unlikely winner
Can of worms	Can of beans
Off the hook	In the clear
More than one way to skin a cat	More than one way to stroke a cat
Kill two birds with one stone	Feed two birds with one scone
Be the guinea pig	Be the test tube
Wild goose chase	Wild gooseberry chase
Flogging a dead horse	Feeding a fed horse
Rat race	Treadmill
Pig out	Enjoy a feast
Let the cat out of the bag	Reveal the secret
Herd mentality	Group thinking
Scapegoat	Fall guy

Credit to PETA for many of these examples.



Challenge speciesist idioms creatively or humorously to provoke reflection and lower defences.

Language Guidance

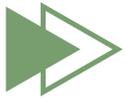
Framing for other social issues		
Replace	Embrace	Why
Minority groups	Marginalised groups	Actively highlights something is being done.
The homeless	People experiencing homelessness	People-first language; fluid not fixed identity.
Refugees/asylum-seekers	People seeking refuge/asylum	People-first language.
Disabled toilet/parking	Accessible toilet/parking	Inclusive , respects difference without othering.
Special needs	Individual needs	Inclusive , normalising difference.
Illegal immigrants	People who are undocumented	Respects dignity ; avoids criminalisation.
Convict, ex-offender / criminal	Person with a conviction	People-first language
Victim (of violence/abuse)	Survivor	Empowering; agency .
Transsexual	Trans person	Self-defined term.
Addict / drug abuser	Person with substance use issues	People-first language, reduces stigma .



Reframe language to be **people-first, inclusive** and **empowering**, focusing on **agency** and **dignity** while avoiding labels that define people solely by their challenges or past.

Language

— Key Takeaways —



Create a bigger 'us'

Use inclusive language that builds connection with animals and invites people in, using terms like 'people who care about animals'. Avoid terms that divide or 'other', like 'non-human' or 'livestock'.



Lead with vision and values

Frame messages around what we stand for – like freedom, kindness, community and dignity – not just problems or cruelty. Uplift the vision of a better future for all of us.



Centre agency and individuality

Talk about other animals as individuals with feelings, relationships and desires. Describe them as resisting harm, seeking safety or living joyful lives – not as 'voiceless' or only as 'helpless victims'.



Expose harm without reinforcing it

Be clear about who is causing harm and how. Use 'scare' quotes around industry terms to expose their normalisation and invite people to question them. Avoid casting industries as beyond change – instead, show that they're capable of transformation.



Use language that moves and sticks

Choose words that are emotionally resonant and easy to remember, rather than technical or detached language. Avoid abstract or overly scientific terms when simpler language can connect more deeply.

Want to find out more about persuasive communications for animal freedom?



© Ray Aucott



Get more tips and insights in our **Mini Guides series**



Explore the data in our **Research Reports**



Get the latest research via our **Newsletter**



Contact us

✉ narrative@animalthinktank.org.uk

🌐 animalthinktank.org.uk/narrative