

Educators' Notes

Primary & Secondary



**Young Reporters
for the Environment**

Introduction

About Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE)

Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) is an environmental journalism programme and competition that gives young people aged 8 to 25 an opportunity to speak on environmental issues through writing, photography, or video.

We know that young people care deeply about the environment and believe in the importance of channelling that concern into actionable solutions.



Through YRE, young influencers become powerful advocates within their communities, inspiring all those around them.

Like its sister programme [Eco-Schools](#), YRE is based on a set of Elements: grounded in **Project-Based Learning**, an approach where young people take the lead in identifying a problem, investigating its causes and impacts, and developing solutions. YRE also makes links to the Sustainable Development Goals.

About these lessons:

These lessons will guide young people through the process of deciding on an environmental topic to report on, starting with investigating issues, researching good sources and creating and sharing their work.

Each lesson has a goal and consists of a short video input, a discussion and a short activity for pupils to complete. By the end of the six lessons, pupils will have created a report to enter to the YRE competition.

Note: although the plans consist of six lessons, the amount of time you take for this is up to you and what works best for your class.

These six lessons are based on the Elements of the YRE programme.

Investigate



Research



Report



Share



YRE Supporting A Curriculum for Excellence:

The report format of Young Reporters for the Environment can fit well within subjects and qualifications across the curriculum including but not limited to:

- National 3 Geography: Global Issues
- BGE: English, Gaelic (Learners), Gàidhlig, and Social Subjects.
- National 4 English: English Creation & Production
- Higher and Advanced Higher English
- National 4, National 5 or Higher Media
- National 5 Gàidhlig: Component 4: Obair shònraichte–sgrìobhadh
- National 4 Gàidhlig: Creation and Production
- Higher Photography
- Skills for Work: Creative Digital Media
- Skills for Work: Creative Industries

In addition, YRE can support learning in colleges as part of qualifications such as:

- HNC or HND Media & Communication
- HNC or HND Photography

YRE and Skills Development:

Participating in Young Reporters can support the development of [Meta Skills](#) including:



Curiosity: in looking for a solution to an environmental problem or wanting to learn more about a project already happening.



Sense Making: in explaining a solution and presenting a convincing justification.



Creativity: creating an interesting report – whether it is an article, photograph, video, or podcast, requires strong storytelling and content creation skills.



Critical Thinking: independent research, considering different perspectives and finding relevant information.



Communicating: Creating a persuasive and engaging report requires strong communication skills. Additionally, sharing your report and participating in discussions requires strong public engagement and advocacy skills.



Leading: Creating a powerful report will motivate others to act for the environment.



Collaborating: Connecting with a diverse network of like minded-young people around the world. Group entries are also welcomed and can foster collaboration skills.



Initiative: Gathering independent information to answer the questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? and confidence in public speaking when presenting a report, or interviewing members of the community to understand their perspectives.

In addition, YRE can also support the development of **Information Literacy** in learning to distinguish credible sources, find biases, and analyse information objectively to avoid [disinformation](#).

Lesson 1: Investigate

**Goal: Think about environmental issues and choose one to report about.
Link to what is happening in your own community.**

1. A Clean Environment is Your Right

We'll start our journey into environmental advocacy with a discussion about rights. Many pupils will have heard about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) through work on programmes like Rights Respecting Schools, but what many people are not aware of is that these rights include the right to a healthy environment.

Where this comes from:

Article 12 guarantees the right to be heard, and

Article 24 guarantees the right to the best health possible, which depends on a healthy environment

In addition to this, Article 29 guarantees the right to education with the aim of developing respect for the natural environment

If your class is not already familiar with the UNCRC, you might want to first have a quick discussion of what rights are and why they are important.

For Secondary Schools: In 2023, the United Nations published a comment with a special focus on climate change and children's rights. This comment not only outlines how children's rights are threatened by climate change, but also steps governments across the world need to take to protect them.

Have a look at the child-friendly summary of CRC/C/GC/26: General comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change.

Have a short discussion about how climate change has the potential to affect young people's rights.



Watch Video 1: The Environment & Your Rights

Discuss: What does a clean environment look like to you? After discussing as a class or in groups, ask pupils to draw a picture or write a description in their workbooks.

Further Information:

UNCRC: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

CRC/C/GC/26: General comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change).

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crcgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights>

2. Our Environment Needs a Voice

We know that Scotland is facing a climate emergency, a litter emergency and a biodiversity emergency all at the same time. This might be frightening to some pupils (and some adults too!) so you might want to leave a bit of time to discuss this anxiety.

The good news is that there is a lot young people can do about it like speaking up about these issues.

These lessons focus on the three areas of our work at Keep Scotland Beautiful: Climate Change, Litter & Pollution and Biodiversity Loss, but pupils are not limited to these areas in their reporting.

Have pupils take some time to choose an issue to report on. This might be something they are interested in personally, something your school is working on for Eco-Schools, or an issue affecting your community. You might also want to use these lessons to focus on a specific topic your class is learning about.

Discuss: How does this environmental issue affect your school community? Talk about nearby places: parks, your school grounds, places you visit.

Think of news articles you may have heard. Talk to family and friends. How does this issue affect your community/people you care about. For example, a litter problem might stop you visiting your favourite park.

Further Information:

2025 Scottish Litter Survey:

<https://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/media/htjkfn4v/scottish-litter-survey-final-311025.pdf>

A Nature Positive Scotland: <https://www.gov.scot/news/a-nature-positive-scotland/>

Scotland's Net Zero Ambition: <https://netzeronation.scot/>

3. Journalism & the Environment

News about environmental problems makes a lot of people (anxious and) wondering what they can do to help. Can journalism even make a difference? Ask pupils what they think and then watch video 2.

**Watch Video 2: Constructive Journalism**

Constructive journalism is different because it focuses on solutions instead of problems and on curiosity rather than outrage. This is something that is missing from most news stories we see every day, which focus on problems and create a steady stream of bad news.

Constructive journalism spreads awareness of issues and encourages others to take action. This is a good way to combat the anxiety we might feel about environmental issues.

Discuss: Ask pupils to think about what is missing in news stories that focus on problems. Things like: curiosity, hope, positivity, and people's voices. Constructive Journalism wants to include these things in stories, so that people everywhere will feel empowered to help solve environmental problems together.

Further Information:

Constructive Institute: <https://constructiveinstitute.org/why/>

Constructive Journalism & YRE: <https://www.feeacademy.global/>

Change Mental Health: Climate Anxiety:

<https://changemh.org/resources/climate-anxiety/>



Lesson 2: Research

Goal: Find two good sources of information to make your report. Learn how to cite sources and why this is important.

1. Good Sources

Making a good report will mean finding sources of information to support arguments. Introduce the two ways pupils can find sources of information:

Primary Research: interviews, surveys or observations.

Secondary Research: looking at sources that already exist like books, journals, or films. Often called 'desk research' because you can do it from your desk and it doesn't require you to go out and collect any new data yourself.

Discuss: Are all sources good sources? Can everything we read online be trusted?

To determine whether a source is trustworthy, we use the SIFT Method, developed by digital literacy expert, Mike Caulfield, from the University of Chicago. Other models are available, but this one is particularly clear.

SIFT stands for Stop, Investigate, Find and Trace. You can change the words in the acronym for younger pupils if that is useful, but the main point is that pupils should not accept what an article, study or post says at face value, but should rather use critical thinking and scepticism to ensure they're drawing from good sources.

Watch video 3 to see how to use the SIFT method.



Watch Video 3: Good Sources

Discuss: Ask pupils to name some sources they trust. Depending on ages, ask them to describe how they know these sources are trustworthy. An interesting comparison to make with secondary pupils could be the changes in the way we consume news over the last 50 years.

The world is more connected now than ever before, which means that news is constantly available and we can tune in whenever we like. The days of waiting for the news broadcast at 11pm, or for morning editions of newspapers to be printed are long past. The downside of this however is that we are now constantly bombarded with headlines and updates, and this can be overwhelming.

Further Information:

Interview methods: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-K6CJellzY>

SIFT Method <https://guides.lib.uchicago.edu/c.php?g=1241077&p=9082322>

2. Gathering Facts

Set some time aside for your class to find two facts about the environmental issue they would like to report on from the library, a teacher, the news, or a trusted website. Remind them to check that sources are trustworthy and that they can use both Primary and Secondary sources.

In the next chapter, we will discuss how to cite a source in a Source List, so make sure pupils write down where their information is coming from.

Once they have found facts from two good sources, have pupils decide what action they want their audience to take. i.e. Pick up litter, or drive to school less. Have them think about how taking these actions will help.

3. Citing Your Sources

It's important for pupils to be able to tell everyone where the information in their report has come from. Please ask pupils to create a Source List in their workbook. YRE uses MLA format, which is demonstrated by the example in the workbook.

Citing sources might seem old fashioned, particularly in this age of AI tools and internet archives, however it is an important step in combating disinformation which we will learn about in the next chapter. It's also important to acknowledge the work you're drawing on to create your own report.

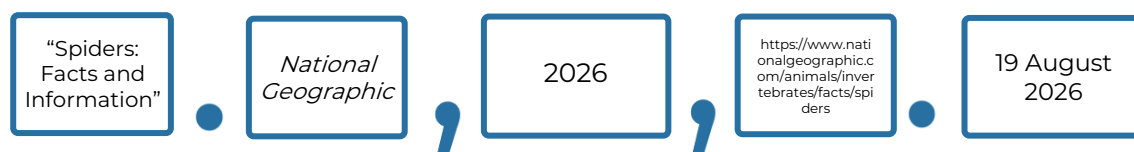
To cite a website, find the title, author, the date it was written (only if you can find it), the URL (website address) and the date you found the source.

Like this:



Let's take a look at an example.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/facts/spiders>



"Spiders: Facts and Information". *National Geographic*, 2026,
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/facts/spiders>. Accessed: 19 August 2026.

Try writing a citation for a source together as a class, and then ask pupils to write one for one of the two sources they found earlier.

Further Information:

MLA Format: <https://columbiacollege-ca.libguides.com/MLA9/websites>

4. For Secondary Schools – Disinformation.

Talking about disinformation with young people can be tricky because developmentally, they're forming their own individual identity, and peer social dynamics will heavily influence how they consume information.

Disinformation is exciting because it often evokes strong emotions, which means it's watched more often. Social media algorithms push posts with lots of views and teenagers will often share popular content to fit in.

Today's young people have grown up with technology so might feel they are naturally media-literate and can spot disinformation or scams without guidance. While it's true that young people are better at spotting use of AI and altered photographs, they are still vulnerable to disinformation that uses real footage with hidden motives.

We'll start with a basic definition of what **dis**information is: False information that is meant to manipulate, cause damage, or guide people in the wrong direction. i.e. scams, hoaxes, or radicalisation.

This is in contrast to **mis**information, which is also false, but is not meant to cause damage. i.e. satire, mistakes or misprints, or parody.

Watch Video 6 to hear about five ways to spot disinformation.



Watch Video 6: Disinformation

Five ways to spot disinformation:

- Clickbait Headlines: A sensational or bizarre claim, not supported by facts.
- Emotional Triggers: Posts designed to provoke strong emotions
- Anti-Expert Energy: Claims that "all mainstream experts are lying "or "here's what they don't want you to know".
- Missing References: Does not list any sources, studies, data sets, or quotes. Contains opinions and speculation put forward as facts.
- Funding Sources: Studies or articles funded by sources interested in climate change denial.

Discuss: You might wish to provide examples of various disinformation for your class to discuss, or ask when they might have seen some themselves. Ask: What might happen if a lot of people believe and share disinformation? Emphasise that if pupils are unsure about a fact or a source, to use a factchecker like fullfact.org or BBC Verify.

Further Information:

Webinar: Fake News and Media Literacy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5HNZgHwUu4>

Fullfact.org: the UK's independent fact checking agency fullfact.org

BBC Verify: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/bbcverify>

Project Real: A free collection of teaching resources on misinformation, digital literacy, and online safety. <https://www.projectreal.co.uk/>

Skeptical Science: Characteristics of Science Denial

<https://skepticalscience.com/graphics.php?g=227>

UNICEF: Quick Guide to Spotting Misinformation

<https://www.unicef.org/eca/stories/quick-guide-spotting-misinformation>

YoungScot: Understanding Misinformation and Disinformation

<https://young.scot/get-informed/understanding-misinformation-and-disinformation/>



Lesson 3: Report I

Goal: Identify your audience and craft a clear Call to Action for your report.

1. Know Your Audience

Ask pupils to think about who they want to read their report and what is the best way to get their attention. What do they want their report to make people feel?

Watch Video 4: Good Reporting for a description of the different kinds of reports to choose from and then have pupils decide which they would like to work on.

You might already have a type of report in mind for your class to work on and it is probably easier if the whole class works on the same type of report, either in groups or individually. If this is the case, you need only use the part of Video 4 that talks about the type of report you want to focus on.



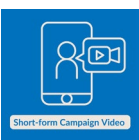
Watch Video 4: Good Reporting

2. Choose how you will make your report

Although there are five categories in YRE in Scotland, these lessons support three: Photo Story, Written Article and Video Campaign.



Photo Story: A set of 3-5 photographs with descriptions.



Video Campaign: A short < 1 minute video filmed vertically.



Written Article: A piece of writing 1,000 words or less. Can include pictures or graphs.

There are resources to support each type of report at the end of these notes.

3. Craft Your Message

When crafting a Call to Action remember the 4Rs

Your Call to Action should be:

Realistic: something most people can do

Repeatable: something that can become a new habit

Relatable: try to share your personal experience

Remember-able: something easy to remember

Watch Video 5 to explore this in more depth. Then give pupils time to craft their own Call to Action.



Watch Video 5: A Call to Action

Discuss: Keep Scotland Beautiful has a long history of environmental campaigns. You might wish to discuss some examples with your class, or ask them when they have seen a good Call to Action in a campaign or advertisement.

Next, ask pupils to decide how they will know if their Call to Action is successful. What criteria could they use to measure this success. This question draws on the Element of Measuring from the Eco-Schools programme, and asks pupils to think beyond their report.

Further Information:

Eco-Schools Seven Elements: Measuring:

<https://www.keeptscotlandbeautiful.org/eco-schools/seven-elements/measuring/>

Keep Scotland Beautiful Campaigns & Innovations:

<https://www.keeptscotlandbeautiful.org/about-us/our-campaigns-and-innovations/>



Lesson 4: Report II

Goal: Craft your report, starting with the basics, then using tools like mindmaps, and storyboards.

1. Planning Your Report

Now that pupils have carried out all the groundwork, it's time to craft their reports. We start by answering five basic questions, then move on to mindmapping or storyboarding. The tools you use with your class will depend on what type of report they will create.

This section might require more than one lesson period in the case of filming videos: one for storyboarding or mindmapping and one for filming and editing.

2. Start with the basics

Start by asking five questions:

- Who are you speaking to?
- What do you want them to do?
- When do you want them to take action?
- Why do you want them to take action?
- How can they find support to take action?

From there, pupils can build a mind map or storyboard laying out their ideas.



Lesson 5: Feedback

Goal: trade feedback with a peer and use that feedback to improve your report.

1. Give Feedback to a Peer

Now that pupils have completed their reports, have them share them with their classmates, either by trading with a peer or by presenting to the class as a whole. Have them trade workbooks with a classmate to offer feedback on each others' reports.

Who is giving feedback?

★

★

✦

For Primary Schools: Use the two stars and a wish format to offer feedback.

Ask pupils to first find **two things** they think have been done well (stars) and then kindly describe **one way** the report could be even better (a wish).

For Secondary Schools:

Feedback is based on criteria set out by the Foundation for Environmental Education for the international YRE competition.

Ask pupils to think about the five yes/no questions, and then describe one thing that was done well and one change that would make this report even better.

Reviewer's Name: _____

Is this report ...

Relevant to the environmental issue chosen?

Evidence-based i.e. are facts and interviews cited?

Clear in communication?

Creative in approach? Does it catch your attention?

Impactful (includes a call to action)?

Describe one thing you think this report does well:

Describe one change you think would make this report even better:



Lesson 6: Share & Reflect

Goal: Get your report out into the world and then reflect on what you've learned.

1. Get Your Message Out There!

The final Element of the YRE programme is Share. Getting the message out there to your audience is the last step!

In order to enter the YRE competition, you must share your report in three places. This can be as simple as a presentation to your family, friends or class, or something more involved like publishing it in a school newsletter or sending it to your MSP or local authority.

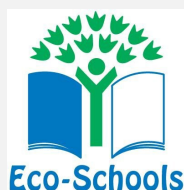
Discuss: Ask pupils to think of ways their report could be shared and write down three they would like to try. Is there anyone who could help share? Perhaps a Parent Council, local business, or community group.

2. Time for reflection

Take a few moments to think about your experience of Investigating, Researching and creating your report.

Discuss: Ask pupils to think about what they have learned over the last few lessons. Perhaps a fact about the environmental issue they investigated, or a new skill like video editing. Did receiving feedback help improve their reports?

Finally, is there one action pupils would like to continue to help the environment? For example, joining or starting an Eco-Committee at school, creating another report for YRE or helping a community group.

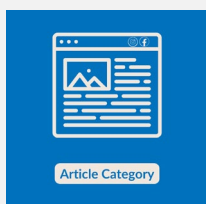


This is a good opportunity to link YRE to your Eco-Schools Action Plan. Sharing your report also supports the Community Element of the Eco-Schools programme.



YRE Competition

Competition Criteria



Written Article

- Describe a solution to an environmental issue
- Maximum length of 1,000 words.
- Write in any language you like but please provide an English translation.
- You can include up to three images (photos, illustrations, or diagrams) with captions of no more than 20 words each.
- List your sources for images and facts.
- Tell us three places you have shared your article.
- Use of AI or ChatGPT is not permitted.

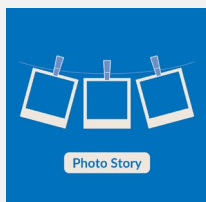
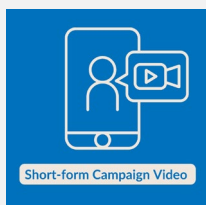


Photo Story

- Take 3 to 5 photos to tell the story of an environmental project or issue.
- Your photos should be candid (not posed or staged).
- Send your photo in .JPG format with a resolution > 150-300 dpi.
- Include a description of no more than 100 words.
- Give your Photo Story a title (max 140 characters).
- List any sources of statistics or quotes in a source list.
- Tell us three places you have shared your Photo Story.
- Basic editing is allowed but AI is not permitted.



Video Campaign

- A clear Call to Action to help keep Scotland beautiful.
- Film in portrait for a maximum of one minute (like TikTok or YouTube Short).
- You can choose any language you like, but please include English subtitles.
- Your video should be 70% your own footage.
- List any other footage or quotes in a Source List.
- Tell us three places you have shared your video.
- No AI or copyrighted music please.

Resources for Creating Reports

Perry's Picture Pointers Videos

Professional Edinburgh-based photographer, Andrew Perry, takes us through some of his smartphone photography hints and tips in these short videos.



Episode 1: Smartphone Photography

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWIVSOUpq7s>

Your smartphone contains a lot of tools to help take good photos.



Episode 2: Composition

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWC70jTGoiI>

How to position your camera to get the best shot.



Episode 3: On Location

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcz8ApwCb3I>

Tips for taking a photograph outdoors.

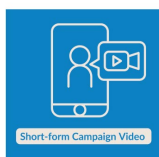


Episode 4: Editing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiTmEgqfKv4>

How to use editing tools to get the most out of your photos.

Roles for creating video reports. Not everyone in a group video project needs to appear on camera. Here's how help encourage pupils to participate in a group video project.



Roles for Video Reports

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiTmEgqfKv4>

Everyone has a part to play in making a good Video Campaign or Video Report.

10 TIPS TO TAKE A GOOD PHOTO



Young Reporters
for the environment

- 1 Choose a focal point or interaction as the main subject.
- 2 Apply the Rule of Thirds and place your subject off-center.
- 3 Find your photo's visual balance: look for symmetry or asymmetry.
- 4 Focus on one subject at a time.
- 5 Change up your angles and find different perspectives until you get THE shot.
- 6 Learn to use light! Golden hour, dramatic shadows...
- 7 Avoid zooming in, to not make the photo blurry or pixelated. Instead, try to go closer.
- 8 Capture small details.
- 9 Don't be afraid to edit and crop. Use the tools you have.
- 10 Ask for feedback. Share with friends and mentors, and see what people react better to

*However, photography is not all about formality.
A lot of it is instinct and pure storytelling.*

1st Place Photo 2023-2024 YRE
International Competition by
Emma Lynch Cauchi (YRE Malta)





10 TIPS TO Short-Form Campaign Video



- 1** Research your topic fully. Focus on key points, you only have 1 minute
- 2** Hook viewers in the first 3 seconds by using a striking image or fact to stop the scroll
- 3** Keep text overlays short and bold. Add a few words on-screen to reinforce your message
- 4** Create a bold title in under 140 characters to grab attention. Tie it to your environmental message
- 5** Film in portrait mode (vertical) so it fits in with social media layouts (TikTok, Reel)
- 6** End the video with a clear and positive call to action. Inspire your viewers to act and make it direct, and tied to your campaign goal
- 7** Use 70% original footage for authenticity. Shoot live images yourself, and do not forget to cite any extra sources
- 8** Connect local issues to global environmental crisis like climate change
- 9** Make it readable by using short paragraphs and subheadings
- 10** Stay organised by using log notes on your phone for easy research access





10 TIPS TO WRITE A GOOD ARTICLE

- 1 Write a striking title (attention grabbing headlines work!)
- 2 Highlight positive community action to inspire real change.
- 3 Talk to locals fixing environmental problems for authentic articles.
- 4 Pick a passion: sports, music, maths, you name it! Uncover its environmental link
- 5 Use reliable stats and always cite them clearly
- 6 Quote experts you've interviewed to boost your article's credibility.
- 7 Include sceptical POVs for a balanced and well-rounded perspective
- 8 Link local issues to global crises like climate change
- 9 Make your article reader-friendly with short paragraphs and subheadings
- 10 Log notes on your phone to organise your research easily

