Strategy

What are we commenting for?

Before typing, it can be helpful to think about what you are trying to achieve through engaging in conversation online. There are different types of conversations to be had, and different ways in which these can contribute to the overall aims of the movement. Here are a couple (although there will be others):

• **Telling the truth.** This is core to both XR and the purpose of this group. While a single comment might not result in someone who isn't facing up to the climate emergency doing an instant u-turn, it may chip away at these views. Perhaps more importantly is the effect it could have on others viewing the conversation.

• **Amplifying action-specific messages.** If people are discussing an action and its effects, if at all possible, we can try to bring the conversation around to the intended message of the action.

• **Explaining and defending the movement itself.** XR does not need everyone to agree with our tactics - previous successful social movements have attracted criticism. However, if we alienate too many people, this could undermine our message so it is worth listening to people's concerns and explaining the reasoning behind our actions.

Where are we commenting?

To actively look for people on social media to respond to, you can search for Extinction Rebellion or #ExtinctionRebellion on social media. If there are action-specific hashtags (eg #ChangeIsNow #MakeHistory #CitizensAssembliesNow) search for these. On X (Twitter) some people mis-spell rebellion with one 'l' (i.e. #extinctionrebelion) so try this too.

You can also create new social media content. However, the focus of this guide is largely on responding to existing comments as this is a way of engaging with people who are already discussing climate change and XR.

The comments sections of newspapers are also very important for Rebel Responders Online Outreach. These can have a lot of comments and very large numbers of people reading them. Sometimes comments are very negative - especially in articles about disruptive XR actions - and a few positive comments can really change the overall feel of a thread.

For news articles, you can search for ‘extinction rebellion’ in google news or in any news site's search.

Personal vs Official Social Media Accounts

Most people involved in Rebel Responders are using their personal social media accounts. There are of course ‘official’ XR accounts for geographical areas and interest groups. But the intended audience for this guidance document is people who want to help the movement using online engagement without necessarily having an organising role. Often it is a way of contributing to actions for people who would love to attend but can’t. If you are speaking on behalf of XR, using an official account, it’s important to be respectful to the range of views; but when responding as an individual we can be more personal and only have to represent ourselves.

XR news on Facebook

New Outlets As XR activists take action they’ll get featured in local and national media. Many outlets have a Facebook page where they post their stories. These attract comments we can engage with.

Ads When XR use Facebook ads people can, and will comment. These ads are reaching a large audience, so adding positive comments is really useful if you see XR ads.

Local Media Finding who your local media are can be exhausting and frustrating, but local newspapers are still a good place to start as they will have a web presence.

Local Media Works is a good UK wide directory that will give you the names and contact details for local newspapers; you can use this to search for on-line versions of the same.

Public Interest News lets you search using a map that also includes some local radio.

The BBC Directory of Partners Is another list of local news organisations with links to BBC news.

How should we go about responding to comments?

Social media does not always bring out the best in us. Don’t lose your cool, we are not necessarily aiming to win the argument, we want to win the person. Social media is usually not a private conversation so what really matters is how XR supporters come over to all the people reading the thread later on.

Take a breath. Take three breaths. Walk the dog. Then respond with truth and respect even if the other person shows none. Surprise people with stories, wit and charm. Nobody ever changed their mind because of a Facebook response from a stranger beginning “Well, actually…” -- remember

that people operating with incorrect information are victims of media gaslighting. We've provided some ideas and information below, but don't just cut and paste things, speak truthfully in your own voice. Listen to the story of the other person, if possible, and find points of agreement.

If you are very new to XR, please read key parts of the website, including the demands and our Principles and Values. Try putting these into practice, for example thinking of: 'We welcome everyone and every part of everyone'. Speaking from personal experience and showing the different backgrounds and stories of those involved might be as important as the discussion itself. The climate crisis is an issue for every single person on Earth and no individual is responsible for it.

Engage with people

Be friendly, polite, and witty. This is important for everything else to work. Having a curious and open attitude are key. Genuinely listening to people and their concerns about change with curiosity is helpful. People find it hard to accept change about things that are widely accepted to be harmful even when misinformation is not a widespread issue (think smoking in western countries) let alone an issue where ignorance, fear and misinformation from key figures are widespread. It also can help you to empathise with them.

Listen

Genuinely listening means holding space. It means not formulating a response until the person has said what they need to say, then deciding how to respond when they are done. Open questions such as 'what is important right now?' 'how should these issues be addressed?' 'how can the way we address things improve?' (you never know, you may come across some helpful ideas)

Be reflective

Acknowledge that this is a difficult reality to face for a lot of people. Simple reflection involves stating a person's concerns back to them e.g. Them: What is the point? You: 'you don't believe we can address this?'.

Click to see more examples...

More complex would be:
E.g. You are concerned that we're in a situation that we cannot deal with for our future so would rather focus on what is important here and now

The point is to infer the rest - they will let you know if you are mistaken, but if you're right they will carry on the conversation.

Educate but don't keep trying to force people to accept your reasons for change

Plenty of people know smoking can be harmful to their health, but if you keep telling them why they should quit they will automatically take the other side of why they should/want to keep doing it/can't stop unless they are already motivated to make changes (however they are most likely ambivalent about this because they're not sure how). Same with engaging with climate activism (and that involves many changes at individual and system levels), not just one by an individual).

What could this conversation look like?

It can be better to ask 'what positive social changes would you like to see', 'if we were to have a magic wand which addressed these issues what changes would have happened, in your view', ask for an elaboration.

Whatever changes they suggest, try to link what they want to XR demands or any current campaigns/training/events we have. e.g. 'politicians are rubbish' might lead to talking about Citizens' Assemblies. Or 'my river is polluted' might lead to joining the Restore Nature Now event, or highlighting the work of Dirty Water campaign. Even if you can't link to something specific, then acknowledge their concerns and leave room for more discussion about taking action in some way. Not everyone is ready or motivated, but you've opened that door to further engagement. And you have hopefully had a positive conversation in what might be a very negative environment.

We have some ideas of what can make change difficult so use that. Ask the person, what they feel are the 2 most difficult obstacles then say something like 'you want to see positive change happening in xyz area and ABC makes that tricky' (do not use the word "but" in place of "and", as people will not listen to anything before that word). A "pros and cons" list of change can be helpful to acknowledge ambivalence (but not too long!). Then ask for a bit more elaboration on what desired change looks like.

Even if they say 'xyz makes it difficult', they're imagining it. Ask them what would help. Gain permission before you provide any suggestions and find out what, if anything they know about your suggestion before elaborating on it.
E.g. can I make a suggestion about what might help?
Them: okay.
You: The UK has a lot of wind power available, which you might have heard about before. Can I ask what you might have heard about this before
Them: rattle it off
You: Fill in gaps, address misinformation etc

Then you, this is what we would like to achieve with our movement. Would you like to ask me any questions about this and what we do/why we do it this way?

This is a more digestible and collaborative way to share information

Ask people what they value

Most people value their security, family, ambitions etc. Then link what you are aiming for to those values. Also talk about what XR values to build their empathy towards you, e.g. a safer and healthier future for everyone, particularly younger generations.

Also ask if they prefer subsidies going to fossil fuels or building more sustainable infrastructure for example. Most people want that. Building empathy for others including younger people may also help. Remember to show that you are concerned for everyone's welfare including theirs and that we are open to doing things better to achieve change. Remind people of what we want to achieve. Sometimes people will not want to listen though and it can help to check in with yourself to be able to sustain efforts.

Example from Apple training

Apple stores have scary training on how to deal with customers, but a really important bit is about empathy. For example;
Customer: This Mac is just too expensive.
Apple store staff member: I can see how you'd feel this way. I felt the price was a little high, but I found it's a real value because of all the built-in software and capabilities.

Some key reminders

Invalidating someone’s feelings and experience means they won’t listen to anything you say. They may have badly incorrect information but there’s a lot of it out there and we can help with that, if we show respect and empathy even for people with very toxic views. Don’t give people the argument they want.

Don’t insult people even if they are very very wrong or mean. Don’t always feel the need to reply, trolls are in this for fun - often responding to a troll with a reasonable comment and then not engaging in an argument will look excellent in the eyes of other people reading your interactions.

Sometimes it might be easier to link to a blog or youtube video and say “this explains it much better than I can”.

Note for XR social media moderators

While this chapter is aimed at people commenting, and responding to comments on any platform, some of those platforms are ones where XR has moderation powers.

When in doubt, just follow the guidelines in this doc. As moderators we often have to distance ourselves from our personal opinions and in a way totally ignore the topic itself to just focus on whether or not the "rules" are being followed. So even if you don’t like someone’s comment or the way a thread is developing, if it doesn’t violate our guidelines, just let it be.
