

# Framing Theory

From <https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/frames-theory/>

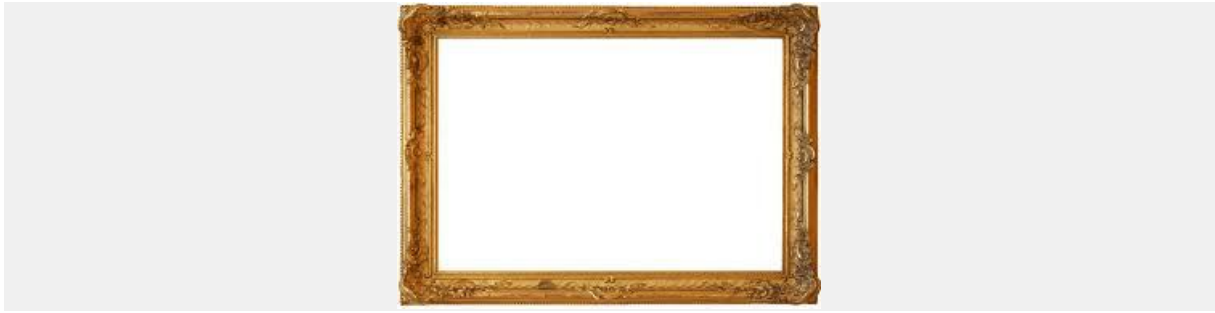
The concept of framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. Framing is an important topic since it can have a big influence and therefore the concept of framing expanded to organizations as well.

In essence, framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called “the frame”) influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning. The most common use of frames is in terms of the frame the news or media place on the information they convey. They are thought to influence the perception of the news by the audience, in this way it could be construed as a form of second level agenda-setting – they not only tell the audience what to think about (agenda-setting theory), but also how to think about that issue (second level agenda setting, framing theory).

The theory was first put forth by [Goffman, under the title of Frame Analysis](#) (link to PDF of article). He put forth that people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework. This framework is regarded as primary as it is taken for granted by the user. Its usefulness as a framework does not depend on other frameworks.

Goffman states that there are two distinctions within primary frameworks: natural + social. Both play the role of helping individuals interpret data. So that their experiences can be understood in a wider social context. The difference between the two is functional.

Natural frameworks identify events as physical occurrences taking natural quote literally and not attributing any social forces to the causation of events. Social frameworks view events as socially driven occurrences, due to the whims, goals, and manipulations on the part of other social players (people). Social frameworks are built on the natural frameworks. These frameworks and the frames that they create in our communication greatly influence how data is interpreted, processed, and communicated. Goffman’s underlying assumption is that individuals are capable users of these frameworks on a day to day basis. Whether they are aware of them or not.



An actual frame.

Framing techniques per Fairhurst and Sarr (1996):

- Metaphor: To frame a conceptual idea through comparison to something else.
- Stories (myths, legends): To frame a topic via narrative in a vivid and memorable way.
- Tradition (rituals, ceremonies): Cultural mores that imbue significance in the mundane, closely tied to artifacts.
- Slogan, jargon, catchphrase: To frame an object with a catchy phrase to make it more memorable and relate-able.
- Artifact: Objects with intrinsic symbolic value – a visual/cultural phenomenon that holds more meaning than the object it self.
- Contrast: To describe an object in terms of what it is not.
- Spin: to present a concept in such a ways as to convey a value judgement (positive or negative) that might not be immediately apparent; to create an inherent bias by definition.

Framing is in many ways tied very closely to [Agenda Setting theory](#). Both focus on how media draws the public's eye to specific topics – in this way they set the agenda. But Framing takes this a step further in the way in which the news is presented creates a frame for that information. This is usually a conscious choice by journalists – in this case a frame refers to the way media as gatekeepers organize and present the ideas, events, and topics they cover.

Framing is the way a communication source defines and constructs a any piece of communicated information. Framing is an unavoidable part of human communication – we all bring our own frames to our communications.

Sources + further reading:

- [Goffman, Erving. 1974. \*Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience\*. New York, NY et al.: Harper & Row](#)
- Fairhurst, G. & Sarr, R. 1996. *The art of Framing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Scheufele, Dietram A. 1999. "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects." *Journal of Communication* 49 (4): 103-22.