



Explanatory Metaphor

Heat-Trapping Blanket

A metaphor for the basic mechanism of climate change



The story you're telling:

When we burn fossil fuels for energy, we add more and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This buildup acts like a blanket that traps heat around the world, which disrupts the climate.



Strategically redirects thinking away from patterns such as:

- Change Is Natural/Fatalism
- It's About the Ozone, Isn't It?
- Nature Will Fix Itself
- Nature Works In Cycles
- Solution = Recycling



Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- **The atmosphere is like a blanket that surrounds the earth:** establishing the blanket metaphor early, and making sure it is understood as a metaphor, helps translate the underlying science with fidelity.
- **When we burn fossil fuels like coal and natural gas for energy, we add carbon dioxide to this blanket, which is like thickening the blanket:** corrects the misconception that the problem is caused by the hole in the ozone; reinforces how human activities lead to warming, facilitating solutions thinking.
- **The thicker a blanket gets, the more heat it traps underneath:** establishes the basic mechanism, and paints a clear picture of where the heat gets trapped (under the blanket), as well as the idea that it becomes more difficult for heat to escape.
- **The “blanket effect” leads to warming, which disrupts the climate:** communicates that warming is a problem, not equivalent to the pleasant warmth of a day a little sunnier than others.
- **For example, this extra heat results in:** once you have introduced the metaphor, continue to explain an impact of climate change, so that you don't leave the impression that the increasing warmth of the atmosphere/ocean is a trivial matter or even beneficial.
- **Reducing our emissions of heat-trapping gases is the solution:** focusing on the heat-trapping effect has more powerful frame effects than the alternative metaphors greenhouse gases or carbon pollution.