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Are we past the point where it is acceptable to err on the side of least drama?

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Climate change communication has been and remains to be challenging, even when there is no controversy amongst actual climate science experts anymore. However, it is an uphill battle in cases where the science is less clear or where consensus has emerged only very recently. Exemplified for global and regional (or national for that matter) warming levels to date (with reference to the quasi-preindustrial baseline 1850-1900), I will demonstrate what sci-comm problems we face and which ways there are to resolve it. This includes the discussion of strategies to raise awareness within the expert community as well as suggestions for clear, salient and perhaps emotional communication to the public (or media for that matter). The fact that we get ever close to the 1.5°C warming threshold adds considerable urgency to the issue.

I will first introduce the method(s) to estimate the human-induced level of global and regional warming, i.e. how much of the observed warming of the past 150 years is attributable to anthropogenic climate change. I will then highlight the comms failures along the lines of erring on the side of least drama and ask the question when such tendency to 'remain on the safe side' are bordering on actual (unconscious) misinformation. In the second step, I will present results from a questionnaire where we have sampled the climate change knowledge of school students (age 14-19), with particular regard to the attributable warming fraction of global and regional climate. The results will be discussed in light of the unclear messaging from scientists, followed by what I think are the best long-term strategies to improve the situation.