

Coping with climate anxiety

1. Introduction

This activity introduces the concept of climate anxiety and explores how the academic skills you learn at university can help you manage your feelings about climate change.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity, you will be able to:

- define the term "climate anxiety"
- describe your response to climate change
- use digital and information literacy skills to manage climate anxiety.

You will need to allow approximately 15 minutes to complete the activity.

2. Introducing climate anxiety

Climate change refers to long-lasting changes in temperature and weather (United Nations, no date; BBC, 2025; NASA, 2024).

Climate change might make you feel upset or worried.

The charity **Mental Health UK** (2023) refer to this "fear, worry, or tension linked to climate change" as climate anxiety, or eco-anxiety.

It is understandable to feel this way.

People whose lives are directly impacted by climate change (such as flooding, wildfires or drought) are likely to feel particularly distressed.

In this activity you will explore ways that the digital and information literacy skills you learn at university can help you to manage these feelings.

Digital and information literacy skills enable you to:

- find and use information
- communicate, collaborate and work together online
- manage your e-safety and digital well-being
- think critically
- evaluate resources, online information and digital tools.

3. Your personal response to climate change

You will now be presented with three questions about your own response to climate change.

Please select the answer that most closely reflects your personal response.

Please note we do not collect any data from this survey.

Question 1 of 3

How certain are you that climate change is happening?

- Extremely certain
- Very certain
- Moderately certain
- Slightly certain

- Not at all certain

Question 1 feedback

A survey by the London School of Economics (Crawley, Coffé and Chapman, 2020) showed that 74% of the UK public are certain that climate change is happening.

Question 2 of 3

How worried are you about the impact of climate change?

- Very worried
- Somewhat worried
- Neither worried nor unworried
- Somewhat unworried
- Not at all worried

Question 2 feedback

A survey by the Office for National Statistics (2023) asked adults in Great Britain about their worries about climate change. This survey found 20% were very worried, 44% somewhat worried, 21% neither worried nor unworried, 4% somewhat unworried and 11% not at all worried.

Question 3 of 3

To what extent have you made changes to your lifestyle to help you tackle climate change?

- I have made a lot of changes
- I have made some changes
- I have made no changes

Question 3 feedback

A survey by The Office of National Statistics in 2023 found that 7% of respondents had made a lot of changes, 64% had made some changes and 29% had made no changes.

We each have a personal response to climate change.

This quiz is designed to help you investigate what your response is.

Most people feel a level of anxiety about climate change.

The rest of this activity explores how you can use the skills you learn at university to manage that anxiety.

4. Avoiding information overload: search tips

There is a lot of information available about climate change. The search tips below will help you avoid getting overwhelmed.

- **Make sure you are clear about the information you require.** For example, are you looking for information about a particular country or social group?
- **Choose your search terms carefully.** They should accurately reflect your information need. Change your search terms if you are not finding what you need.
- **Consider why you need the information.** This will inform where you search. Google is useful for personal information. Use a specialist database such as Google Scholar or those provided by your university library for academic information.

- **Think about how you format your search.** For example, enter phrases in inverted commas e.g. "United Kingdom". Putting a phrase into inverted commas tells the search engine to only return results where those words appear together in that order.
- Scan your search results and **don't waste time reading any that don't meet your needs.**

The **effective searching pathway** contains more useful tips.

5. Avoiding information overload: adapting a search

This example demonstrates a search for an academic assignment on how UK universities are helping to fight climate change.

As the search progressed, we changed where we searched and the words we used. We also changed how we searched. As a result we found fewer results, but they were more useful. This helped us to avoid getting overwhelmed with information.

Select each of the three searches to see how we adapted our search.

Search 1

1. Google search for the terms: university climate change United Kingdom

This search returned nearly 200 million results including lots of marketing information about undergraduate environmental courses, which is not what we need for our assignment.

We decided to change where we were searching.

Search 2

2. Google Scholar search for university "climate change" "United Kingdom".

We changed to searching Google Scholar and added some phrase searching.

Google Scholar provides access to academic literature so is a good source for university assignments. Another good source would be the university library catalogue.

Using phrase searching helped to target our search.

The search results included many academic journal articles. This is the type of information we are looking for.

However, our results only discussed university research on climate change so we felt that we might be missing useful information.

We decided to change our search terms.

Search 3

3. Google Scholar search for "higher education" "climate change" "United Kingdom"

For the final search we stayed in Google Scholar.

We thought about alternative terms for university. After a bit of trial and error we found that including the phrase "higher education" improved our search results.

6. **Avoiding information overload: evaluation skills**

Reading about climate change is important as it helps you to stay informed and make environmentally sound decisions. However, it can be difficult to navigate and know what to engage with. This can contribute to feelings of anxiety and stress.

The information you read might be written by people with an agenda who use language to play on people's emotions. Information comes from a variety of sources including social media, newspapers, friends, family and scientific research articles. With so many different sources you will find a number of different opinions and perspectives. Some sources will be less reliable or well-informed.

By evaluating what you read and engaging positively with the sources it might help you to feel less overwhelmed.

Who?

When reading about climate change it is worth considering who produced the information. Ask yourself:

- Are they an expert in the subject?
- Who owns the source of the information e.g. do they have an agenda or are they a pressure group?
- Is the spokesperson speaking about their own research or have they been chosen to put forward someone else's view? e.g. actors are used and read

scripts rather than the people who know about the subject. Their charisma and acting skills may affect how you react to the message.

Newspapers may present information in a sensationalised and one-sided way. It is helpful to look out for sources reporting on the same issue in a more balanced way.

Why?

Think about the purpose of the information. Why was the source created?

You will find a whole range of information on climate change with different purposes. Some information is specifically created to elicit a response such as a donation through manipulating emotions. Other information might be there to inform. Consider the type of information you are reading and if you feel you are being overwhelmed by the content and the way it is presented, try seeking a more objective opinion. Consider the evidence used to support the claims in the information. Does that also come from reputable sources? Peer-reviewed research papers whilst more technical might provide more insight and use less emotional/emotive language.

When?

There is lots of information available on climate change and it continues to generate research and news stories daily. Some older information might still be relevant, but this is a fast-changing subject. Checking information is up to date with the latest thinking will help decrease the amount you are reading and potentially lower the sense of overwhelm. It is worth noting that higher quality information e.g. **peer reviewed research**, will always have a published date. If

you cannot find a published date for what you are reading, it might be worth putting it to one side.

PROMPT

The 3 Ws is a quick way of evaluating a source. The PROMPT framework can be used for evaluating sources in more depth. To learn more about it and how to apply it try **Evaluation using PROMPT**.

7. What's in a headline?

Read the newspaper headline and answer the questions. You will be able to find the answers from the headline and the full reference provided. Then click the 'check' button to see what we thought.

Climate change is spiralling out of control: Damning report reveals how records were smashed for greenhouse gas emissions, global temperatures and sea level rise in 2024 – with consequences now 'irreversible'.

Hunter, W (2025) 'Climate change is spiralling out of control: Damning report reveals how records were smashed for greenhouse gas emissions, global temperatures and sea level rise in 2024 – with consequences now 'irreversible',

The Daily Mail, 19 March. Available at:

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14511443/Climate-change-consequences-irreversible-study.html> (Accessed: 27 May 2025).

1. Who produced the source?

2. When was it produced?
3. Why was it produced?
4. Does the language used play on the reader's emotions?
5. Would you trust this source?

Feedback

1. The source can be found in a newspaper. They are referring to a research report but do not name it in the headline.
2. The article was written in March 2025 and this feedback was produced in July 2025 so it would be considered quite recent.
3. As a newspaper article you could assume it has been written to inform people of the findings of a report. You would need to read the full article to find out the source of the report and whether the findings match the headline.
4. This headline uses powerful language. For example the phrase '**spiralling out of control**' and words such as '**damning**' and '**irreversible**' are impactful.
5. It might make you ask how the newspaper has reached this conclusion e.g. where has the research come from? Is it believable? Is it from a reputable source? Can the research be supported by others?

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Some people might not question the information but others might think they need to investigate another source. The language in general may have contributed to the feeling of climate anxiety along with the sense of not knowing what to trust.

This is just one example of how information about climate change can affect your emotions. Using your evaluative skills might help to reduce these feelings and seek out more objective information on the subject.

8. Summary

In this activity you have considered your personal response to climate change and learnt the meaning of the term **climate anxiety**.

There is a lot of information available on climate change from a variety of sources. Using the **digital and information literacy skills** you have developed will help you to create strategies to avoid being overwhelmed.

If you are looking for information on climate change, try applying effective search techniques. This will help to reduce the amount of information you need to deal with.

When you find information on climate change issues, evaluate it and choose what to engage with carefully using a framework such as the **3 Ws of Who?** **When? Why?** This can help to cut down on information overload. All of which will hopefully contribute to positive individual action to help deal with climate anxiety.

Next Steps

Interested in finding out more?

- The **Greener online study** activity provides practical tips on how you can reduce the environmental impact of your online activity.

- The **Sustainability of Generative AI** activity explores the carbon footprint of Large Language Models and generative AI tools.
- The **Sustainability at the Open University** page on the OU website provides further information about the actions that The Open University is taking to promote sustainability and reduce its impact on the environment.

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