

<https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2022/10/what-can-you-do-about-climate-change-take-this-quiz-to-find-out>

## What can YOU do about climate change? Take this quiz to find out.

Everyone has a special role in the struggle for a stable climate. What's yours? The authors offer some questions to help you find it.

by **KATHLEEN DEAN**

**MOORE** and **SUEELLEN CAMPBELL**

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Two climate writers set out to create a useful, realistic response to all the good folks who ask them how to find their best place in the climate struggle. Street demonstrations aren't for everyone; climate action is not one-size-fits-all. But there is limitless work to be done, of infinite variety. It's just a matter of finding the right match.



The writers, both amateur botanists, remember the simple identification keys they once used to find the names of flowers. What better way to lead people to their special climate calling than to offer a similar pattern of questions about their characters and preferences—a sort of personality quiz, leading not to guilt but to lots and lots of ideas. You can quickly follow your personal thread (about five minutes), or take the time to read every word (about 20 minutes). Then choose your own path to adventure.

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Record numbers of Americans are “alarmed” about climate change, according to the [Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#), publisher of this site. That’s 33% of us who are “very worried and strongly supportive of climate action”—up from just 16% five years ago. Another 25% are “concerned.” Fully 65% of us feel a personal sense of responsibility to help beat the rising heat.

Yet even more people—67%—say they rarely or never even *talk* about what is widely characterized as “the climate crisis.” What gives?

We think lots of folks just don’t know what to do. Whenever we give a talk urging climate action, people tell us, “I really want to help, but I don’t know how.” Or “I can’t think of anything to do that would make a difference.” It’s disturbing how many people are baffled and stymied. So we put our heads together to create this climate action quiz, hoping to help people find their role in what we believe is the most important cause many will ever join.

*Starting with the first pair of options below, decide which best describes you. Your choice will direct you to another pair of options. Go there, choose again, and off you go, until you reach Your Personal Climate Calling. Note the numbers of the final answers you get, we’ll ask you to submit them at the end!*

### (1) How ready are you to act?

- I’m ready to roll! Just point the way. [Go to 2.](#)
- Ummmm, maybe I’m not quite there yet. Give me a little encouragement or a little more time. [Go to 9.](#)

### (2) What motivates you?

- I’m happiest when I’m working FOR something. [Go to 3.](#)
- I’m happiest when I’m working AGAINST something. [Go to 4.](#)

### (3) Do you prefer to work alone or with others?

- I like to act alone, in my own home, making changes on a personal scale, like composting and turning down the heat. [Go to 5.](#)
- I’m ready to join with other people and work for systemic change in the public sphere. [Go to 6.](#)

### (4) How big a challenge do you want?

- I’m happiest when I’m fighting something dangerous and powerful. [Go to 21.](#)

- I'm happiest when I'm fighting something my own size. [Go to 32.](#)

#### **(5) By all means, shrink your own carbon footprint.**

- Doing the right thing is never a mistake. But some personal actions have a lot bigger impact than others. Although the data are mixed, it is likely that the most impactful personal decision you can make is to bear fewer children. One [good list](#) starts with: "Make your voice heard by those in power," "Eat less meat and dairy," and "Cut back on flying." Or to think positively: eat more delicious plants, explore close to home. Rewild your yard: native plants, no poisons. Start electrifying your life—both literally and figuratively!
- Then ratchet up the effects of everything you do. *New York Times* journalist Ezra Klein [suggests](#) we should think of ourselves as nodes for "social, political, and moral contagion." That's an icky way to put it, but the point is right. If you replace your old furnace with an electric heat pump, tell everybody how you did it. Gloat about your cost savings and carbon savings, increased comfort, and general good feelings about investing in your convictions.
- One more "at home" action that can really matter: talk about climate change a lot more, and with many more people. Help break the social taboo on the subject. You'll be surprised who else will be relieved to share their emotions and ideas. [Go to 34.](#)

#### **(6) Do you want to work for social justice or ecological thriving?**

- I'm ready to go public. I understand that the fossil-fuel industry would much prefer that I criticize my own decisions as a consumer rather than criticize theirs as producers and profiteers. What oil company wouldn't rather see me composting in my garden than protesting in the streets? I know that much of the demand for fossil fuels is fed by the industry's on-going, clever, well-funded, and cynical campaigns to encourage (or even require) people to burn gas and oil. The best answer to the question, "What can one person do?" is "Stop being one person!" That said, as for me, I am most engaged when I am working for social justice, [Go to 7.](#)
- I am most engaged when I'm working for ecological thriving. [Go to 7.](#)

#### **(7) Haha. Trick question!**

- You don't have to choose between working for social justice and working for ecological thriving. They require each other. Without the legal restraints and moral ideals of social justice, predatory industries and practices can keep wrecking the water, air, lands, and neighborhoods of vulnerable people. And the other side of the coin: nobody can flourish when their environments aren't healthy enough to sustain them. So you can start with either cause and make significant change in the other. If you want to start by working for justice, [go to 8.](#) If you want to start by working for ecological thriving, [go to 14.](#)

#### **(8) What is your biggest justice concern?**

- My biggest concern is the unjust impact of climate change on poor and marginalized people. [Go to 25.](#)
- My biggest concern is the legacy of racism and colonialism behind the businesses that trample the rights of Indigenous people and people in urban and rural "sacrifice zones." I'm talking about the rights to clean air, clean water, life and health, to control one's own lands, and to assemble and speak freely to defend those rights. [Go to 31.](#)

#### **(9) What's holding you back?**

- Give me a break. I'm already too slammed to take on climate action. [Go to 10.](#)
- After the evening news, I'm too depressed to do anything—starving children in Somalia, bombs near the largest nuclear plant in Europe, heat-stroked songbirds dropping out of the sky? Holy moly. It's overwhelming. I can scarcely rouse myself to save coffee grounds for the compost, let alone save the world. [Go to 11.](#)

#### **(10) Where does your time go?**

- My job or jobs take every minute of my time. [Go to 12.](#)
- It's all I can do to raise my kids and/or care for aging parents. [Go to 13.](#)

#### **(11) Take care of yourself first.**

- Whoa. Sounds like you need more than a hug. First, sign up for the feeds that specialize in good climate news. You'll be amazed and heartened by all the progress the world is making. Renewable energy. Cheaper and greener batteries—finally. Restored mangrove swamps. Empowered tribes. For updates on successful campaigns for renewables, clean water, etc., try the Daily Climate's [Good News](#) and [Harvard's Climate Optimist](#). On TikTok, [@thegarbagequeen](#) debunks a bunch of the doom stuff and tells about climate wins. On Facebook, follow [Not Too Late](#), a climate-progress site run by Rebecca Solnit and Thelma Young Lutunatabua. Or just Google *good news climate*. At least you'll be able to get out of bed in the morning.

- Second, know that you are not alone. It's important to deal with the feelings that are holding you back. [Here](#) is some good advice from a therapist. And we recommend (of course, since one of us wrote it) Moore and Haverluck, [Take Heart: Encouragement for Earth's Weary Lovers](#).
- And third, you'll find that everybody offers the same piece of good advice: the best cure for climate despair is climate action. Even [Men's Health](#) says so! Take good care of yourself, and when you are ready, [go back to 1a](#).

#### **(12) Make your job work for climate action**

- The solution depends on your relationship to your job. If you need it and like it, find out how to help the world as you work (or refuse to work). Multitask!—like mild-mannered Clark Kent, aka Superman. No matter your job (nurse, artist, teacher, plumber, truck driver, accountant, beautician, mortician) just **Google** *[your profession] + climate*. Or go to [Climate Solutions](#) to see how you can turn your job into a climate job.
- If, on the other hand, you don't like or need your job, what are you waiting for? Find work you believe in, a job where not only the grass but also the workplace and its effects are greener. Start at the US Labor Department's [green jobs](#) site.
- [Go to 34](#).

#### **(13) Raise your kids with climate in mind**

- Right. We get it. Mother and climate strategist Mary DeMocker has thought hard about how to raise kids *and* help the cause—without Bud Light! Read her [witty book](#) and check her [website](#), which links to lots of other advice for parents. It's important to talk with your kids about the climate. Or, better, *listen* – ask questions and let them express their grief, rage, and brilliant ideas. Then do something together. Model how to change systems: Make a colorful *END FOSSIL FUELS NOW* sign for your window. Write postcards to voters in swing states. Set up a lemonade stand to raise money for local grassroots climate heroes. Let them cut up dirty credit cards. Action is the only cure we know for climate despair.
- [Go to 34](#).

#### **(14) Do you want to prioritize defending nature or future generations of humans?**

- I am by nature a defender of animals—birds, whales, all of them—and their rivers, forests, ecosystems, city parks, or wilderness areas. There are so many reasons to love and protect the natural world: Because it is divinely created. Because it is often beautiful. Because wild habitats are the greatest carbon collectors in the world. And because all Earth's beings have a right to a good wild time. [Go to 15](#).
- The beautiful wild things who inspire me to act are children and grandchildren. I tremble with grief and rage when scientists tell me that unless all nations take immediate action, by the time our children are middle-aged, the life-support systems of the planet may be irretrievably damaged. Hell no. [Go to 17](#).

#### **(15) Where do you want to do your climate work?**

- I'd like to work locally, maybe even in my own neighborhood. [Go to 16](#).
- I'd like to work globally. You know, polar bears and jungles. [Go to 20](#).

#### **(16) Do you prefer to work for urban or rural areas?**

- I am excited by new imaginings about what inhabited spaces might become: cities filled with gardens and clean air, where the laughter of children and the songs of birds are full-voiced but the machines are quiet. [Go to 18](#).
- I am excited about what domesticated landscapes and their practices might become: agricultural fields that sequester carbon and restore soil, poison-free farms where workers are treated fairly, clean ponds and rivers full of fish. [Go to 19](#).

#### **(17) Fight for future generations.**

- Oh, we get it. When our children were born, we whispered promises to them: "I will always love you. I will keep you safe. I will give you the world." We didn't mean, "I will give you whatever scraps are left after the Great Global Going-out-of-Business Sale." Cripes.
- Powered by love, rage, and worry, moms and dads are getting organized. Look at [Moms Clean Air Force](#) and [Eco Madres](#), or form your own group modelled on organizations like Portland-based [Families for Climate](#). Start with a street party. Pet parades! Cake! And go from there.
- Grandparents are getting super-charged too. Also grand-aunts and grand-uncles and grand-pals! Try Bill McKibben's new organization [Third Act](#), which is guiding the energies of older people to save both democracy and the future. Or try [Elders Climate Action](#). Or heck, here's a list of [grandparents' groups](#) worldwide. Sure, all of

these will ask you for money and give what you can and want to. But they'll also ask you to write letters, host meetings, show up in public actions. Raising a ruckus is lots more fun than watching endless TV. Right?

- [Go to 34.](#)

### **(18) Work for climate justice in your city.**

- Cities aren't just unhealthy. They are unjustly unhealthy. Bad air, freeways, heat sinks, treeless streets, toxins—how come they always end up in the neighborhoods of the poorest people and people of color? How come maps of ill health, red-lined regions, and environmental sickness all stack up neat as a pin? All that sickness comes from the same cause—ongoing legacies of unrestrained extraction, from ecosystems and from subjected people.
- So the work is to align your efforts with local groups who are reimagining what a clean and just neighborhood can be and fighting for that vision. First, educate yourself about the issues. You might start by subscribing to the NAACP's [Environmental and Climate Justice](#) newsletter. Study local newspapers for reports of groups that are doing good work. Listen to local leaders. Ask how you can help.
- [Go to 34.](#)

### **(19) Get involved with land-use in your area.**

- Read up on what's happening with regenerative agriculture and agricultural justice. Maybe start with [HEAL Food Alliance](#), [Regeneration International](#), or [Black Urban Growers](#). Pick up the phone and talk to restaurants, grocers, farmers, change-agents about the opportunities for change. Then invite your friends over for a potluck and think together about how you can empower better practices.
- Get yourselves appointed to the planning board, zoning board, harbor committee, fish and game commission, agriculture board—or whoever makes the land-use decisions. In the grocery store, post signs naming the poisons soaked into the strawberries. Defend urban farms. Persuade your home-owners' association to ban chemicals. Document the fertilizer flow in a river. Put on a gas mask and stand by the poison shelf in the garden store. Pick up dead fish and deliver them somewhere appropriate.
- [Go to 34.](#)

### **(20) Start supporting restoration and natural resilience.**

- So much to protect, so much to restore. If you want to protect wide swaths of the world, you'll love the late E.O. Wilson's plan for [Half Earth](#) – half biodiversity reserves, half for the techno-human footprint. Press your elected representatives to support the "30 by 30" plan to protect 30% of US land and ocean areas for biodiversity. These initiatives need the strong public enthusiasm that you can provide.
- Here's where you can support any number of global and national organizations. We like Rainforest Action Network, Natural Resources Defense Council, Earthjustice, and the Environmental Defense Fund. For many, many more worthy organizations, Google "Global biodiversity organizations." Look under TAKE ACTION or VOLUNTEER.
- And let's put in a word for working locally. There is so much to do here at home: plant living shorelines, control invasive plants, feed starving manatees, stop a mine or clearcut or pipeline or refinery. Plant mangroves or seedling pines or native prairie grasses. The best way to get started is to link up with the countless number of organizations that have projects underway. Search *[your city, county, state] + [restoration or conservation projects or rewilding or preservation or prairies] + volunteer*. Prepare to be amazed at the glee of people mucking around in the mud. And if you want to have real fun, rent a hearse, put up a sign WE GRIEVE FOR OLD GROWTH FORESTS and follow a log truck from the clearcut forest to the mill and back again, all day.
- [Go to 34.](#)

### **(21) Would you rather fight against fossil fuels or for democracy?**

- I want to shut down fossil fuel industries and make way for renewable energy, since mining and drilling and burning coal and oil and gas produce 74% of the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere in a year. The most important step the world can take is to put them on hospice support. [Go to 22.](#)
- I want to fight against the forces that would destroy democracy. Without a functional democracy, how do we think we can save the future? (Ha. You've already noticed that this is another trick question. Good for you! Shutting down pipelines of political dark money into our elections would strike a huge blow for democracy.) [Go to 23.](#)

### **(22) How do you want to push for climate action?**

- My tools for environmental climate action are civil laws, courts, petitions. [Go to 26.](#)

- Hell with that. My tools are boycotts, occupations, worker strikes, blockades of streets and pipelines, and a loud call to the conscience of the streets. We've got to get together in massive numbers and force banks and governments to stop supporting gas and oil mega-industries. [Go to 27.](#)

**(23) How do you want to defend for democracy?**

- My tools for democracy action are civil laws, legal actions, and letters to my elected representatives. [Go to 24.](#)
- Hell with that. My tools are marches, occupations, strikes, blockades, and a loud call to the conscience of the streets. [Go to 28.](#)

**(24) Support voting rights and get involved in politics.**

- Voting rights are local or state issues, and it is on this scale that your work may be most effective. If you support democracy, run for office. You can help local initiatives, or block them if they are cruel and unjust. At the local level, change is often created by one committed person who calls in friends. As one harried official said, "One person is a screwball. Two people are a pain in the neck. Three people are a movement."
- [Go to 34.](#)

**(25) Find the heroes and help them.**

- Brilliant, heroic people all over the world are putting their lives on the line to defend their water supplies, protect and restore their forests, or turn back oil or agricultural development in jungles. Throw a dart at a map, and odds are you will hit near a place where extractive corporations, following the colonialist playbook, are taking what doesn't or shouldn't belong to them. Often the heroes are Indigenous people. Often the wrongdoers are American corporations. Figure a way to help the heroes. Do they need money? Raise it. Do they need someone to tell their story? Tell it. Figure out how to thwart the villains. Take on the extractive corporations here at home by making them pariahs that no one wants to invest in or support. Write news stories. Publish exposés. Organize boycotts. Pass out leaflets at corporate meetings.
- [Go to 34.](#)

**(26) Do you have more money or time?**

- I have more money than time. [Go to 29.](#)
- I have more time than money. [Go to 30.](#)

**(27) Support direct action.**

- With your time, with your money, with your courage, and with all the strength left in your texting thumbs, join and support organizations for nonviolent direct action. Consider, for instance, [Greenpeace](#), [Extinction Rebellion](#), and the [Climate Disobedience Center](#). Sign up for your local 350.org, take their nonviolent action trainings, and show up. Even if you are averse to being arrested, there is much supporting work to be done. Bring soup or sandwiches to the activists; create signs for protests and marches, post bail.
- [Go to 34.](#)

**(28) Organize resources to support democracy.**

- Information about direct action to save democracy can be hard to come by. If you want to tackle an important challenge, create an on-line clearinghouse for groups taking effective action.
- [Go to 34.](#)

**(29) How much can you afford to give?**

- If you have gobs of money, [go to 33.](#)

If you have only a modest amount of money, then by all means, give your money an outsized impact. There are lots of ways: Invest in local climate justice actions, where a little bit of money can go a long way. Buy carefully, buy little new, redefine yourself as a citizen of the planet, not a consumer. Make sure you are not invested in anything you don't believe in. (Beware: a lot of oil-smearing companies hide in mutual funds.) Invest in what you do believe in. You might look into [Raise Green](#) or [Climate Finance Lab](#), or any of the other effective organizations too numerous to list. Lean on banks (and change banks if necessary) and other large financial institutions to invest only in what they believe in. [Go to 34.](#)

**(30) Use your limited time meaningfully.**

- If you have only a modest amount of time, pledge to do one thing for the climate every day of the week. (Sign up with [Citizens' Climate Lobby](#) for some suggestions.) Oh, OK, you can take Sunday off. Actually no.

- That's when you join the congregation to raise a ruckus about climate justice. Has your organization divested from fossil fuels? No? Have they rototilled the toxic lawn for an organic garden? No? Are they supplying solar power to the neighborhood? No? Then there is work to be done. For inspiration and support, consider [Interfaith Power and Light, Laudato Si' Action Platform](#), [Evangelical Environmental Network](#), the [Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life](#), or other faith-based organizations.
- If you'd rather spend your weekends on your hobbies, then join [Protect our Winters](#) for outdoors people or [Conservation Hawks](#) for hunters and fisherfolk. Learn how to garden for climate change and for wildlife. Retrofit your house to save energy. Create a climate organization, for example, for golfers or joggers or pickleball players.
- If you run out of ideas, try [Climate Changemakers](#) or look over this wonderful cartoon of [action items](#) in Yes! Magazine.
- [Go to 34.](#)

### (31) Take legal action.

- One very promising strategy in the climate justice movement involves the defense of human rights in national and international courts. Plaintiffs argue that governments are failing in their duty to protect their citizens' rights to life, health, and security of person, as those are defined in national constitutions and international rights agreements. Climate change, they argue, will create the greatest violation of human rights the world has ever seen. You can join in these suits. For example, look up [Our Children's Trust](#), press TAKE ACTION, and you will find a list of 13 actions you can take TODAY. Or better yet, create your own panel of judges, call in local officials, call in the press, and hold a hearing to learn what they are and are not doing to protect the rights of your community. For instructions, see [Youth Climate Courts](#).
- [Go to 34.](#)

### (32) Talk about climate change.

- OK, deep breath. Invite your cranky uncle to dinner. Ask him to tell you what, if anything, worries him about climate change. Listen to him. At the best, you'll find common ground in shared values like family and health. At the worst, he'll just give you drivel, at which point you give up on him; it doesn't matter what he thinks. Only 9% of Americans think climate change is a hoax, and that's roughly equal to the number of people who think Elvis is still alive. Meanwhile, 87% of Americans understand that climate change is real, dangerous, and upon us. That is a huge majority of citizens, and this is supposed to be a democracy. If you discover it is not, [go back to 24b](#).
- Otherwise, [go to 34](#).

### (33) Use your wealth to save the world.

- Hooray for you—you are a billionaire, one of 2,755 in the world. You have a terrific opportunity; you really can save the world. You are rich enough to buy up a fossil fuel company and close it down. If not that, then here's what we suggest. Choose a cause, invest all your time and money in it, and get it done. Go to the solutions page of [Project Drawdown](#) to see 84 actions needed to save the world. Pick one, any one: abandoned farmland restoration, coastal wetland restoration, electric trains, Indigenous people forest tenure, ocean power. Whatever. Put together your team, including local people, and go for it. You will be a cosmic hero.
- [Go to 34.](#)

### (34). Congratulations! You rock!

And now you know the position you play on the save-the-world team. But the truth is, everything—anything—helps. If 65% of Americans are concerned about climate change, that's a majority, and that's a multitude. We can get this done. Imagine what will happen when all of us are busily building a new civilization, making full use of our agile brains, our sense of justice, and the greatest of all human super-powers—the ability to gather in groups and work for the common good.

**Tell us what answer you got**

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd-6T87m\\_E6U2ajs5PsiDZIFdtJHyFceFSGtdbZkZVZQblvSA/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd-6T87m_E6U2ajs5PsiDZIFdtJHyFceFSGtdbZkZVZQblvSA/viewform)

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**Kathleen Dean Moore, Ph.D.**, is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy Emerita at Oregon State University. She is the author or co-editor of five books about climate ethics, including *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril* and *Great Tide Rising: Toward Clarity and Moral Courage in a Time of Planetary Change*.

**SueEllen Campbell, Ph.D.**, is a regular contributor to Yale Climate Connections.

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