

Making energy make sense



How to explain megawatts, power purchase agreements and energy projects to the people who live next to them, without turning it into engineers talking to engineers.

PART 1

How people
actually learn

PART 2

The DECODE
method

PART 3

Decoded: MW &
PPAs

PART 4

The power of
infographics

PART 5

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& web



Your audience is new here.

Psychologists call it **the curse of knowledge**: once you understand something, it gets very hard to remember what it was like not to. That's why a project team can say "a 20 MW facility with a 25-year PPA" and think it's clear. To most people, it's noise. The fix isn't watering it down. It's working with how brains take in new information.



1. Short-term memory is small

People can only hold a handful of new ideas at once, roughly three to five. Pile on more and the first ones fall out.

DO THIS: one idea per post, slide or graphic.



2. New ideas hook onto old ones

We learn by linking the unfamiliar to what we already know: kettles, car speedometers, mortgages, the rink down the road.

DO THIS: lead with an everyday comparison, then add the technical term.



3. Words + pictures beat words alone

People learn more from words paired with a relevant visual than from words alone, as long as the visual explains something and isn't just decoration.

DO THIS: pair every key idea with a simple diagram, icon or photo.



4. Stories stick, statistics slip

A farmer in Pictou County leasing land to a wind project is easier to remember than "\$X million in local economic benefit."

DO THIS: put a real person and a real place next to the number.



5. "What's in it for me?" comes first

People decide in seconds whether something is relevant to them. If the answer isn't obvious, they scroll on.

DO THIS: open with the local impact (jobs, bills, roads, views), then explain how.



6. Repetition builds understanding

People rarely get it the first time. Hearing the same idea several times, in different formats, is what makes it stick.

DO THIS: say the same core message on your website, socials, open houses and podcast.

PLAIN LANGUAGE RULES

- **Aim for a grade 8 reading level.** Busy experts prefer it too.
- **Short sentences.** Try for 15 to 20 words. One idea each.
- **Everyday words first.** Write "about" instead of "approximately" and "use" instead of "utilize."
- **Define every acronym,** every time it's a new audience.
- **Active voice.** "We will build a road," not "a road will be constructed."

MYTH CHECK

"We process visuals 60,000× faster than text."

You'll see this stat everywhere, but no one has found a real study behind it. Skip it. The actual research on pairing words with visuals ([see Richard Mayer's work on multimedia learning](#)) is strong enough on its own. Being accurate is part of earning trust.



The DECODE method

Six steps for turning any technical topic into something your community understands. Below, we run a real example through all six: **explaining a battery storage project**.

THE STEP	EXAMPLE: BATTERY STORAGE
D Define the one thing If people remember only one sentence, what should it be? Write it before anything else.	<i>"This battery stores extra wind power so we can use it later."</i>
E Everyday comparison Link it to something already familiar. Test your analogy on someone outside the industry.	<i>"It works like a rain barrel: fill it up when there's plenty, use it when things are dry."</i>
C Chunk it Break it into three steps or fewer. Put the rest on your website for people who want more.	 1. Charges when it's windy  2. Holds the electricity  3. Releases it when demand peaks
O Offer a picture Choose the visual that does the explaining, like a flow, a comparison or a map. Decoration doesn't count.	A three-step icon graphic (like the one above), plus a photo of what the site will look like from the road.
D Deliver the "so what" Answer "why should I care?" in local, personal terms. Be honest about the trade-offs too.	<i>"More of the wind power made here gets used here, including on cold winter evenings when everyone's cooking and heating at once."</i>
E Echo it Repeat the same core message across channels and over time. Keep the wording consistent.	Website FAQ, a LinkedIn carousel, a 45-second video, an open-house poster, a podcast episode. Same sentence every time.



The Kitchen Table Test

Before anything goes public, ask: **could a neighbour understand this in 30 seconds over a cup of tea, without once asking "what does that mean?"** If not, go back to **D** and **E**.



What is a megawatt, really?

Most confusion comes from mixing up two different things: **power** (how fast electricity is being made or used) and **energy** (how much gets made or used over time). Get these two straight and everything else falls into place.

POWER · WATTS (W, kW, MW)

It's the speedometer

How fast electricity is flowing **right now**. A wind turbine's size (say, 4 MW) is its top speed: the most it can produce at any moment.



ENERGY · WATT-HOURS (kWh, MWh)

It's the odometer

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How much electricity has been used or made **over time**. It's what's on your power bill (kWh), and what a project produces in a year (MWh).

The power ladder


1 W

A small LED night light


1 kW

1,000 watts: roughly
a microwave running


1 MW

1,000 kW: about 670
kettles boiling at once


1 GW

1,000 MW: the scale of a very
large power plant

Each step up is **1,000×** bigger. Kilo = thousand · Mega = million · Giga = billion.



Worked example: one 4 MW wind turbine

REAL-LIFE MATH

4 MW × **8,760** × **~35%** = **~12,300 MWh**

Divide by what a typical home uses in a year (we used **~11,000 kWh**; get the current figure for your area from your utility), and you get **about 1,100 homes' worth of electricity**.

*Capacity factor: the wind doesn't blow at full strength all the time. This is how much a project actually produces compared to running flat-out 24/7. Use the real estimate for your site.

× ENGINEER-TO-ENGINEER

"The 4 MW WTG will generate 12.3 GWh/yr at a 35% NCF."

✓ KITCHEN TABLE

"Over a year, this one turbine makes about as much electricity as **1,100 homes** use."

Watch the word "powers." "Powers 1,100 homes" suggests those homes run on the turbine around the clock. "Makes as much electricity as 1,100 homes use in a year" is accurate and just as easy to picture.

Bring it home: the kilowatt-hour on your bill



A 1.5 kW kettle running for 40 minutes uses **1 kWh**, the same unit you pay for on your power bill. A megawatt-hour (MWh) is 1,000 of those. When people can connect a project's numbers to their own bill, the numbers stop being abstract.



What is a PPA?

A **power purchase agreement (PPA)** is a long-term contract. A buyer, often the local utility, agrees to buy the electricity a project produces at a set price, for a set number of years (commonly 20 to 25).

It sounds like a financial detail, but it's usually the reason a renewable project gets built at all. Banks and investors want proof that the project will earn steady income before they lend the money to build it.

EVERYDAY COMPARISON

It's like a farm share

With a farm share, you pay a local farmer up front for a season of vegetables. You get a fair, predictable price. The farmer knows the harvest is sold, so they can afford seed and equipment. A PPA works the same way, except the harvest is electricity and the season lasts 20+ years.

How a PPA gets a project built



Buyer gets...



A predictable electricity price for decades. That helps protect against swings in fuel prices.

Developer gets...



Steady, reliable income. That's what makes a bank willing to finance the project.

Community gets...



A project that can actually be built. Depending on the deal, that can mean local jobs, land lease payments, and community or First Nations ownership and revenue.

Contract terms, decoded

Term	How long the deal lasts. Often 20 to 25 years.
Price (\$/MWh)	What the buyer pays for each unit of electricity delivered.
Escalator	A small, pre-agreed yearly price increase, if there is one.
Delivery point	Where the project's electricity enters the grid and changes hands.
Corporate PPA	When a business, not a utility, is the buyer. It's often used to meet climate goals.

Clear up the mix-ups

- **It doesn't send power to specific houses.** Electricity goes into the shared grid. The PPA is about who *pays for* it, not whose lights it runs.
- **It doesn't set your power bill on its own.** Your rates also depend on many other costs, plus decisions by the provincial regulator.
- **It's not a grant.** It's a business contract. The buyer pays for electricity actually delivered.

✗ ENGINEER-TO-ENGINEER

"The project has executed a 25-year PPA with the offtaker at a fixed \$/MWh with a 2% escalator."

✓ KITCHEN TABLE

"The utility has agreed to buy this project's electricity for 25 years at a set price. That long-term deal is what lets the project get built."



The power of infographics

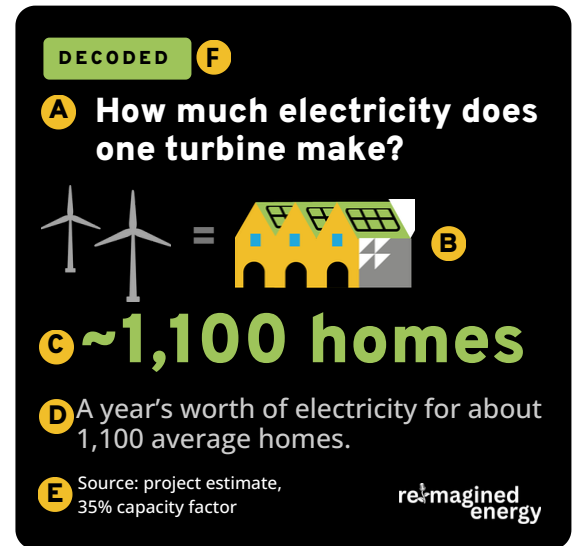
A good energy infographic isn't a poster crammed with every number you have.

It's **one idea, made visible**. Here's what separates graphics that teach from graphics that get scrolled past.

Six rules for graphics that teach

- 01 One graphic, one message.** If you need a paragraph to explain the graphic, split it into two graphics.
- 02 Compare to the familiar.** Use homes, kettles, hockey rinks and highways. Avoid abstract units on their own.
- 03 Big number, small context.** Lead with one bold figure, then a short line explaining what it means.
- 04 Label directly.** Put names right on the chart or diagram instead of in a legend people have to decode.
- 05 Be honest about scale.** Start bar charts at zero, show the source, and don't round numbers to flatter the project.
- 06 Design for a phone.** Most people will see it on a small screen. Use large text, high contrast and plenty of space.

ANATOMY OF A GOOD ONE



- A** A question as the headline
- B** A familiar comparison (homes)
- C** One big number
- D** Plain-language context line
- E** Source shown
- F** Consistent brand & series badge

Match the graphic to the job

12K Big number For one headline fact	 Side-by-side For before/after, this vs. that	 Process flow For "how it works"	 Map For "where" and "how close"	 Anatomy For labelling the parts of something	 Time line For project milestones
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Make it accessible. Write **alt text** that states the takeaway, not just "infographic." For example: "One 4 MW turbine makes about as much electricity in a year as 1,100 homes use." Never rely on colour alone to carry meaning, and **add captions to every video**.

Real life beats stock photos

Show scale with people. A crew member standing at the base of a turbine says more about size than any spec sheet.

Show the land still working. Hay being cut or cattle grazing between turbines answers "what happens to the farm?"

Show distance honestly. A simple map with drive times from town to site. Be specific, e.g. "the nearest home is 1.2 km away."



Educating on **social** & **your website**

Social media starts the conversation. Your website is where people go to check the facts. You need both, and they should point to each other.

PLATFORM	WHO YOU'LL REACH	WHAT WORKS FOR EDUCATION
LinkedIn	Partners, government, media, industry, investors	A recurring DECODED carousel series (one concept, 5–8 slides), short leader commentary, project milestones with the "so what."
Facebook	Local residents, community groups, rural audiences	Open-house events, short captioned videos, plain Q&A posts. Answer questions in the comments. That's where trust is won or lost.
Instagram	Younger locals, students, future workforce	Reels from the site, carousel explainers, "meet the crew" stories, before/after construction.
YouTube & TikTok	Curious learners, searchers	30–60 second explainers that answer one real question, e.g. "Why do turbines sometimes stand still?"
 Podcast	Engaged listeners, decision makers	Long-form conversations that put a human face on the project, plus short clips for every channel above.

One explainer, many pieces

Don't create from scratch every time. Build one strong explainer, **then break it into smaller pieces.**



1 core explainer

- A web page / FAQ entry
- A LinkedIn carousel
- A 45-second captioned video
- 3 quote or big-number graphics
- A newsletter item
- An open-house poster or handout

Build a project hub on your website

- **"At a glance" box:** size in MW *and* homes' worth, location map, timeline, benefits.
- **A real contact person** with a name, photo, email and phone. Not just a web form. (Efficient responses)
- **A plain-language FAQ** built from questions people actually asked at meetings and in comments.
- **A glossary** and downloadable one-page handouts.
- **A dated updates log** so people can see what's changed.
- **Headings that match real searches**, e.g. "How loud is a wind turbine?"

Answer fast

Aim to reply to comments and messages within a business day. Silence gets filled with rumours.

Name the trade-offs

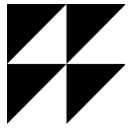
Talk openly about noise, traffic, views and shadow flicker. Being upfront builds more trust than a polished spin.

Questions = content

Every repeated question is your next post. "You asked, we answered" is a series that writes itself.

A simple monthly rhythm

WEEK 1 DECODED explainer One concept, one graphic.	WEEK 2 People story A landowner, worker or partner.	WEEK 3 Project update What changed, and what's next.	WEEK 4 You asked, we answered A real community question.
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Your plain-language toolkit

INSTEAD OF...	TRY...
Capacity (MW)	The most it can produce at full speed
Generation (MWh)	How much electricity it actually makes over time
Capacity factor	How much it makes compared to running flat-out all year
Interconnection	Plugging the project into the grid
 Transmission	Electricity highways: big lines, long distances
 Distribution	The local roads that bring power to your street
Load / demand	How much electricity everyone is using right now
Variable / intermittent	Output rises and falls with the wind or sun
Dispatchable	Can be turned up or down when needed
Curtailement	Asking a project to produce less when the grid can't use it all
Offtaker	The buyer of the electricity
Decommissioning	Taking the project down and restoring the land at end of life

WORDS TO HANDLE WITH CARE

- **"Powers X homes"**: say "makes as much electricity as X homes use."
- **"Clean" or "green"**: be specific about what's avoided, and how you measured it.
- **"No impact"**: every project has some. Name them and explain how you'll manage them.
- **"Free energy"**: the wind is free. Building and maintaining the project isn't.

Relatable-units bank

Handy comparisons for graphics and captions. These are rough figures, so check local numbers before you publish.



Electric kettle $\approx$ 1.5 kW. Running for 40 minutes uses about 1 kWh.



Average home $\approx$ 11,000 kWh a year. Use your utility's figure, since homes with electric heat use more.



Electric vehicle $\approx$ 18 kWh per 100 km, so about 3,600 kWh for 20,000 km of driving.



Phone charge $\approx$ 0.015 kWh. Tiny, and that's a useful point too.



NHL hockey rink $\approx$ 61 m $\times$ 26 m. Great for showing land area.

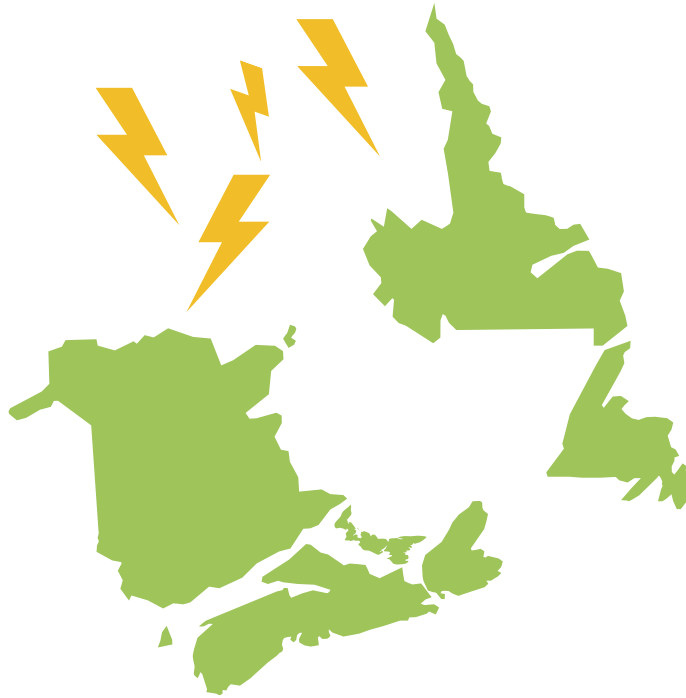
BEFORE YOU HIT PUBLISH

- ✓ Is there one clear message?
- ✓ Is the "so what" in the first line?
- ✓ Is every acronym spelled out or swapped?
- ✓ Is there an everyday comparison?
- ✓ Does a visual do real explaining?
- ✓ Are the numbers sourced and honestly framed?
- ✓ Does it read well on a phone, with alt text?
- ✓ Does it pass the Kitchen Table Test?

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**Let's help people understand what
you're building – before uncertainty
does the talking for you.**

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