

# WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION?



Environmental education may best be defined as ***a process directed at creating awareness and understanding about environmental issues that leads to responsible individual and group actions.*** Successful environmental education focuses on ***processes that promote critical thinking, problem solving, and effective decision-making skills.*** Environmental education utilizes processes that involve students in observing, measuring, classifying, experimenting, and other data gathering techniques. These processes assist students in discussing, inferring, predicting, and interpreting data about environmental issues.

## ***Environmental education is not environmental information.***

Environmental information is providing facts about specific environmental issues or problems. This may be accomplished through news releases, informational brochures, bulletins, videos, or other media techniques. It is often geared toward the general public instead of targeting a specific group or audience. Information can be very useful to the highly motivated individual who is concerned about a specific topic or issue and can be a critical element of environmental education.

***Environmental education is not environmental advocacy.*** Quality environmental education concentrates on the educational process. It is non-biased and science-based. Environmental educators may consider themselves environmental advocates in their personal lives. However, in their role as environmental educator they must remain neutral; there is no room for personal beliefs to take center stage. It is important for environmental educators to remember which role they are in when working with an audience.

Environmental problems and issues are complex and there are not simple answers. Often there are many possible solutions or no obvious solution at all. It is through the processes of quality environmental education that students can sort through the frequently biased, emotional, and propagandized elements of environmental issues, weighing various sides of an issue in order to make informed, balanced, and responsible decisions.

# WHAT IS QUALITY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION?



## Summary of NAAEE's Guidelines for Excellence

**#1 Fairness and accuracy:** EE materials should be fair and accurate in describing environmental problems, issues, and conditions, and in reflecting the diversity of perspectives on them.

- Factual accuracy
- Balanced presentation of differing viewpoints and theories
- Openness to inquiry
- Reflection of diversity

**#2 Depth:** EE materials should foster awareness of the natural and built environment, and an understanding of environmental concepts, conditions, and issues, and an awareness of the feelings, values, attitudes, and perceptions at the heart of environmental issues, as appropriate for different developmental levels.

- Awareness
- Focus on concepts
- Concepts in context
- Attention to different scales

**#3 Emphasis on skills building:** EE materials should build lifelong skills that enable learners to prevent and address environmental issues.

- Critical and creative thinking
- Applying skills to issues
- Action skills

**#4 Action orientation:** EE materials should promote civic responsibility, encouraging learners to use their knowledge, personal skills, and assessments of environmental issues as a basis for environmental problem solving and action.

- Sense of personal stake and responsibility
- Self-efficacy

**#5 Instructional soundness:** EE materials should rely on instructional techniques that create an effective learning environment.

- Learner-centered instruction
- Different ways of learning
- Connection to learners' everyday lives
- Expanded learning environment

- Interdisciplinary
- Goals and objectives
- Appropriateness for specific learning settings
- Assessment

**#6 Usability:** EE materials should be well designed and easy to use.

- Clarity and logic
- Easy to use
- Long lived
- Adaptable
- Accompanied by instruction and support
- Make substantiated claims
- Fit with national, state, or local requirements

*For more on what makes for quality environmental education, please visit:  
<http://www.naaee.org/programs-and-initiatives/guidelines-for-excellence>*