



**Young Reporters
for the Environment**

Step 1: Investigate

Follow your curiosity and uncover a story
where you live.

Name: _____

School/Organisation: _____



About this guide

This guide is for young people taking part in Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE). It will help you investigate an environmental issue in your community and decide how to tell it in your own voice.

Along the way, you will find questions, activities, and examples to help you choose what to investigate, check what you find, and reflect on what you discover. Use the guide as you go. You can return to earlier sections, rethink your ideas, and adapt your plans as your investigation develops.

You can work on your own or with others. Start with the tools available to you: paper and a pencil can help you ask and narrow down questions, sketch a place, and record what you notice. You do not need your own smartphone or a reliable internet connection to begin. You can plan in the language you use most confidently.

What does it mean to be a young reporter for the environment?

Being a Young Reporter for the Environment starts with curiosity. It means paying attention to the environmental issues around you, asking questions, and being willing to look beyond what you first see or think. You do not need to be an expert or already know the answer. As a Young Reporter, you investigate, listen, question what you read and hear, and stay open to what you discover.

Throughout your YRE journey, you make the decisions. You choose what matters to you, decide which questions to ask and whose experiences and views to explore, and use your creativity and voice to communicate your story. Your reporting can help people understand local issues and contribute to making your community greener. Let what you find shape your story; you may even change your own mind!

Being a young reporter helps you build skills as a:

● **INVESTIGATOR**

● **LISTENER**

● **CRITICAL THINKER**

● **STORYTELLER**

● **COMMUNITY LEADER**

● **CONTRIBUTOR**

The YRE four-step methodology

How does a YRE journey work?

Every YRE project follows four main steps. The practical actions below show what you can do within each step.



STEP 1. INVESTIGATE

Understand what is happening.

Start with an environmental issue that matters to you. Observe it closely, ask questions, look for evidence, and begin exploring who or what is affected.

Choose an issue that matters.

Ask why it matters and who or what is affected.

Gather and check evidence.



STEP 2. RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

Understand different perspectives and what could change.

Go deeper. Find reliable information, speak with people connected to the issue, and investigate existing or possible solutions. Good reporting is not only about describing a problem; it is about understanding it from different angles. Ask what evidence shows that a solution works, who it helps, and what might limit its effectiveness.

Listen to people and gather different perspectives.

Explore what is being tried, what works, and what could change.



STEP 3. REPORT

Decide what story to tell, who it is for, and how to tell it.

Use what you have learned to develop a clear, accurate story.

Think about who needs to hear it and what you want them to understand.

Could an article, photograph, video, comic, creative media, game, or podcast help you tell it?

Choose a format that suits your story, your audience, and the tools available to you.



STEP 4. DISSEMINATE

Help your story reach people.

Share your work with people connected to the issue. You could use a local notice board, a community meeting, a local newspaper, social media, radio, or an online channel.

Who could respond or act on what you have discovered?

Afterwards, consider what happened and reflect on what you learned.

Share your story with the people you want it to reach.

Reflect on its impact and on what you learned. Impact can be a useful conversation, a new way of thinking, or a change in local practice.

Your YRE story does not need a huge audience to matter but think of your audience in a meaningful way.

Note:

Your YRE journey may not be a straight line

Real investigations change as you learn. An interview might make you reconsider your original idea. New evidence might lead you to ask another question. Talking to your audience might make you realise that a different communication format would work better. You can go back, rethink, ask more questions, and change direction.

Good reporters respond and adapt to what they discover.

Ready to begin your YRE journey?

This first guide will help you move from noticing something that matters to developing an investigation, turning your curiosity into a research question, and collecting evidence to help answer it.

You will work through the first three actions of the YRE journey:



By the end, you will have a question to investigate, a record of what you found, and ideas about whom to speak to.

STEP 1: INVESTIGATE

Start with something that matters

① **CHOOSE:** What catches your attention?

Look around the places where you live, learn, or spend time.
What catches your attention?

Start with something you can investigate safely, using observations, information, or conversations available to you.

A local issue can help you understand a much bigger story.

What makes you...



CURIOUS

I wonder why...



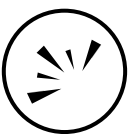
CONCERNED

I have noticed that...



FRUSTRATED

I think more
attention should
be given to...



SURPRISED

I didn't expect...



HOPEFUL

Something positive
that happened here
is...

My first ideas

Write, sketch, or discuss up to **three** things you have noticed or would like to understand.

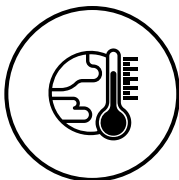
1

2

3

Connect your local story to a bigger, perhaps even global issue.

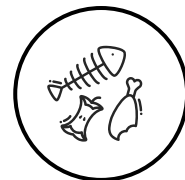
For example, these could be important wider topics that your local investigation might connect to.



Climate change



Biodiversity loss



Food waste

Choose one question about a place, a change, or an activity you can explore.

For example:

SOMETHING I NOTICE LOCALLY

For example: I have noticed few insects around where I live...

SOMETHING I CAN INVESTIGATE

For example: What makes my local area a good or difficult place for pollinators to live and feed? What might explain what I have noticed?

BIG TOPIC

For example: Biodiversity and the habitats living things need

BIGGER CONNECTION:

For example: Pollinators are animals that carry pollen between flowers, helping many plants produce seeds. In this example, we are investigating insect visitors.

② **ASK:** Why does this matter?

Turn your curiosity into an investigation question.

Before deciding on your investigation, look more closely at your ideas.

For each one, ask:

What exactly have I noticed?

Why am I interested in it?

Who or what might be affected?

What don't I understand yet?

Could I observe or gather evidence about it myself?

Who could help me understand it?

Can I investigate this safely with the time, support, and tools available to me?

Why is it important?

Now, look back at your three ideas and choose something you are genuinely curious about and can realistically investigate.

The issue I want to explore is:

I chose it because:

Who or what might be affected?

What I don't know yet and want to find out:

My investigation question

I want to find out:

A useful question includes something specific and leaves room for discovery.

MIND MAP:

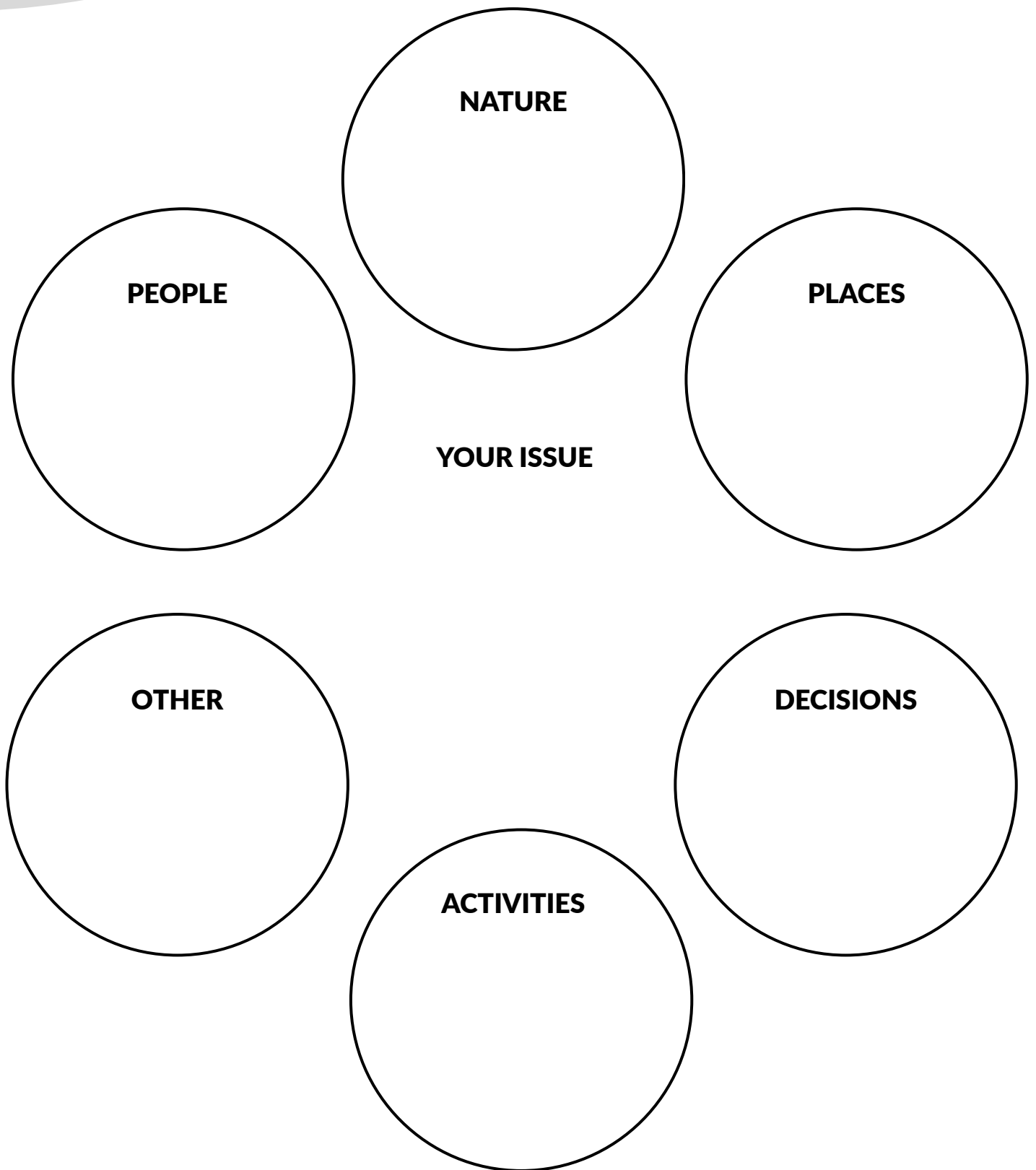
What is connected to your issue?

Take a wider look at your investigation. Think about the people, nature, places, decisions, and activities connected to what you have noticed. Create a mind map with the connections you spot.

Ask:

- What was here before?
- What is here now?
- What has changed?
- Why might it have changed?
- How do the people and living things involved depend on each other?
- Who makes decisions that affect this situation?

Add to it as you learn; you do not need all the answers now.



*You can draw lines to show connections
between the different circles.*

Before you move on

- ☐ I have chosen something I am genuinely curious about.
- ☐ My question is specific enough for me to investigate locally and safely.
- ☐ I know why I think it matters.
- ☐ I have identified some of the people, places, or parts of nature connected to it.
- ☐ I have a question I do not already know the answer to.

You now have a starting point.

Next, gather and check evidence to explore your question.

③ Investigate

Gather and check evidence

Evidence is information you can use to answer your question, such as observations, measurements, records, and people's accounts. Keep track of where it comes from and what it can tell you.

You have chosen an issue, developed an investigation question, and mapped some of the connections around it. Now it is time to investigate and gather evidence.

Your goal at this stage is to build a clearer picture of the issue based on what you can see, document, and verify.

Plan your investigation

Start with your investigation question.

My investigation question:

Now think about what you would need to find out to answer it.

What do I need to find out?

What evidence could help?

How/where can I find it?

For example:

I need to find out: *whether food waste is left regularly after lunch at my school*

→ **Evidence:** amount of food left after lunch

→ **How:** record or measure leftovers over one school week

Gather different kinds of evidence

Use more than one source and, where possible, different kinds of evidence.

WHAT YOU OBSERVE:

What can you notice, count, measure, sketch, photograph, or record yourself?

WHAT YOU FIND:

What can reliable reports, research, statistics, maps, archives, or other sources tell you?

WHAT PEOPLE KNOW:

Who has experience, expertise, or another perspective that can help you understand what is happening?

Start with what you can observe and record

What can you find out first-hand?

Depending on your investigation, you could:



Observe a place at different times



Take photographs, make sketches, or take field notes about what you observe



Count or measure something



Conduct a simple survey



Map where something happens



Compare different locations



Look at how something has changed over time



Record examples



Record things that seem to be improving the situation, including positive practices as well as the problems

MY FIELDWORK PLAN

Where will I investigate?

What could I observe, count, compare, or document?

What support or permission do I need to investigate safely and respect people's privacy?

Plan with a teacher or trusted adult. Stay in places you are allowed to access and avoid dangerous waste, polluted water, or situations that feel unsafe. Ask before interviewing, photographing, or recording people, explain how you may use their contribution, and respect their decision if they say no. Seek adult guidance before sharing names, faces, or exact locations.

Research what is already known

Your own observations can tell you a lot, but they may not explain the whole issue. Look for information that can help you understand what you are seeing, such as:

- Scientific research
- Reports and statistics
- Maps
- Historical information
- Government or local authority data
- Information from universities, research institutions, or reputable organisations

You can also use library books, printed information, local radio, and records shared by community groups. Ask a teacher, librarian, or local organisation to help you find material if needed. Check these sources just as carefully as online information.

Use these sources to add context to your own investigation.

Note: Pause. Check before you use or share.

A short video, screenshot, headline, or message can give you a story idea. Before treating it as evidence, look for the original source, date, place, and full context. Popularity does not prove that a claim is true. When you find a fact, statistic, image, or claim, ask:

- Who created it?
- Where did the information come from?
- When was it published or collected?
- What evidence supports the claim?
- Why was it created?
- Could the source have a particular interest or point of view?
- Can I confirm it against another reliable source that did not simply copy the first?
- Does this information apply to my location and question?
- Could an image or recording be edited, generated, or shown out of context?
- If I cannot verify an important claim, I should say so and avoid presenting it as a fact.

Using AI while keeping your own voice

AI tools are optional. If your teacher and the rules for your project allow them, they may help you explore unfamiliar words or consider questions. Start by noting your own ideas. Then ask whether an AI suggestion helps you investigate something you actually care about.

An AI answer can sound convincing and still be wrong. Check important claims and any suggested sources yourself. Never invent interviews, quotations, observations, or results, and never present generated material as a record of a real event.

Keep your own notes, creative choices, and wording at the centre of your work. Do not upload other people's personal information or private interview material. Record which tool you used, what you used it for, and what you checked or changed. Before submitting, check the current YRE rules with your teacher or national coordinator.

Quick source check

Choose one important fact you have found.

- ☐ The claim/fact I want to check: _____
- ☐ Where did it come from? _____
- ☐ Who produced the information? _____
- ☐ When and where the information was published or the evidence collected? _____
- ☐ What evidence is it based on? _____
- ☐ Can I confirm it with another reliable source? _____
- ☐ Would I feel confident using this as evidence in my communication? Why or why not? _____

Look for patterns and connect your findings to the bigger picture

ASK:

What connections or patterns can I see?

Is there another possible explanation?

Is something similar happening elsewhere?

Is my local issue connected to a wider environmental challenge?

What can my local evidence help others understand about that bigger issue?

Keep your local investigation at the centre. The wider context should help you understand why your findings matter, rather than turning your project into a general report about a global problem.

Be clear about the limits of your evidence. Seeing fewer insects on one visit does not prove that insect numbers are falling. Weather, season, or the time of day may help explain what you noticed. Finding two things together does not show that one caused the other.

What do I know, and what am I still missing?

Now return to your investigation question.

My strongest evidence so far is:

Together, my evidence suggests:

Something that surprised me:

Something I still cannot explain from my evidence:

Something I need to understand better:

Your observations and research help you explore what is happening.
People's experiences and knowledge can deepen your understanding.
Their experiences and knowledge can help explain your findings, raise new questions, and suggest solutions to investigate. Check factual claims and make clear when someone is sharing an opinion or personal experience.

For example:

- Why is a particular decision being made?
- How do people experience the issue?
- What challenges might not be visible in your data?
- Who has the power to change something?
- What is already being tried?

These questions will help you decide who you need to listen to next.
Include people who experience the issue, as well as people with specialist knowledge or responsibility for making decisions. Whose voice might be missing?

PLAN YOUR STEP 2:

One thing I need another perspective on:

Someone who might help me understand it:

Before you move on

- ☐ I have gathered first-hand evidence where possible.
- ☐ I have compared information from more than one source where possible and noted any gaps.
- ☐ I have checked where my important facts and claims come from.
- ☐ I have kept a record of my sources and how I gathered evidence.
- ☐ I have looked for patterns and considered different explanations.
- ☐ I can separate what my evidence shows from what I think or assume.
- ☐ I have connected my local findings to a wider context where relevant.
- ☐ I know what my evidence cannot yet explain.
- ☐ I have identified something I need another perspective on.

You have a clear, evidence-based picture and questions to explore next. You do not need every answer before moving on.

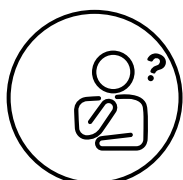
From observation to evidence

REAL YRE JOURNEY



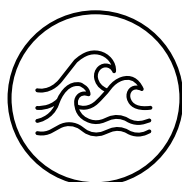
They noticed:

While collecting rubbish in their school playground, students aged 11-12, from EREA Françoise Dolto in Sotteville-lès-Rouen, France, noticed how much plastic waste was around them.



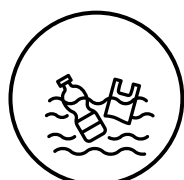
They wondered:

“What happens to our plastic waste if we don't collect it?”



They investigated:

The students followed the possible journey of a plastic bottle from their local environment to the banks of the Seine and towards the ocean.



They discovered:

A piece of plastic discarded locally can travel far beyond where it was dropped, connecting an everyday action in their community to marine pollution and threats to species around the world.

WHERE NEXT?

Keep your questions, notes, and source record ready for the next steps of YRE. You can return to this first guide whenever you need to check something or gather more evidence.

Continue with Guide 2: Research Solutions, where you will build on what people connected to the issue have shared and explore possible solutions.