



Carbon Literacy Certification Marking Guide

The Carbon Literacy Project aims to offer everyone who lives, works, and studies, a day's worth of Carbon Literacy learning. Most participants who apply for certification (more than 90%) do become Carbon Literate at the first attempt. However, we're not always able to pass learners, because sometimes the evidence provided just isn't strong, or compelling, enough. Remember - **all we see to assess whether or not an individual is Carbon Literate is the evidence that is submitted on their behalf.**

With this in mind, we want to provide some insight into what we look for when assessing evidence. This is in order to both help you make sure that your participants make the best of their opportunity to submit evidence that best displays their level of Carbon Literacy, and to maximise our ability to confer Carbon Literacy certification upon them.

The Basics

The most common three reasons participant submissions don't pass are:

1. They haven't completed all the questions on the participant form.
2. We can't read their handwriting.
3. There simply isn't enough information on which to form a judgement or we can't make sense of what they have written.

If forms are incomplete or you can't read or understand what a participant means, we probably won't be able to either. It may save you time and certification budget to scan through forms 'in the room' as they are completed, or immediately after training has finished, so that candidates have a chance to make up any obvious shortcomings. It is sensible practice, and benefits all concerned, to simply choose not to submit forms or evidence that is self-evidently very likely to fail.

Evidence

At a basic level, we look for individuals to evidence their Carbon Literacy in their answers and to *'pledge actions and be able to explain the significance of that action'* in relation to their situation in life, taking account of their age, job role, gender, physical ability, level of agency, etc.

Here are the **core things we look for based on real examples**:

- **Learners are pledging a new action** – They are not continuing to do something that they are already doing.

Why: If we only do the things we're already doing this is business-as-usual which will not help us to reach our global climate targets of limiting global heating to 1.5 degrees. We need everyone to be innovative and bold in action planning to have a meaningful impact.

- X** Cars produce GHG's such as CO₂ and N₂O which contribute to climate change. I walk to school so will keep doing this and not use cars.
- ✓** I already walk to school to reduce emissions, but I will further this action by starting a walk-to-school club, persuading my peers to join me, and indirectly preventing more GHG emissions.

- **Actions are significant** – They make a meaningful contribution to reducing their own, their organisation's, or a product's emissions, allowing for the candidates level of personal agency.

Why: Pledging to do something that most people would, or should already be doing (e.g. recycling, turning lights off, reducing paper use) indicates that the candidate is probably not Carbon Literate, unless they can evidence that this will have a very large carbon or other impact, or be of considerable significance to the individual. (For example, the individual has a disability which makes the physical act of recycling or avoiding car usage much harder to do, or they have responsibility for this activity at a large scale than the personal – they are in charge of waste policy in a corporation).

- X** I'm going to fill the kettle up with the right amount of water to save energy.
- ✓** I'm going to switch to a 100% renewable energy supplier so that none of my electricity comes from the burning of fossil fuels, which contribute to climate change.

- **The learner demonstrates an understanding of the impact of their pledged action (low, medium, or high)** – Broadly, ‘low, medium or high’ impact actions mean 10’s 100’s or 1000’s of kg’s of carbon saved or reduced annually through that action.

Why: It’s not all about only pledging high impact actions. If an individual pledges a high impact action but offers no explanation of why it is of high impact, this is less likely to pass, than an individual that pledges a low impact action but knows it is a low impact action and can explain why, and why they are having to choose it. This criterion is about demonstrating Carbon Literacy, not carbon impact.

X High - I’m going to cycle to work 1 day per month.

✓ Medium - I’m going to bring up implementing a cycle-to-work scheme at the next team meeting. If the facilities are better and people have affordable access to bikes, it makes it easier and improves access to cycling meaning that, hopefully, less people will choose to travel by car. This might not directly reduce emissions by a lot, but it could influence others and indirectly lead to their GHG reductions.

- **Actions are expected to be taken within the context within which the Carbon Literacy training takes place** - If the training is delivered within the context of say a workplace, actions should, wherever possible, be delivered within that same context, sector, or workplace.

Note that whilst two actions (individual and group) are pledged, this is sometimes misinterpreted to mean that an individual action should be a personal action ‘at home’ and only the group action takes place ‘at work’ - this is not correct. The Standard is quite clear: individual action refers to ‘individual agency’ – an action that someone can take without needing the help or permission of another. In normal circumstances both actions should take place in the context where training is delivered, whether that is at work, home or elsewhere.

Why: Carbon Literacy courses are written, and customised to address the specific context and needs of their audience. For example, a course in a hospital is about what that function in the NHS does, a course in a business is about whatever products and services that business does and the way it conducts itself. In training, case studies and examples of action are purposely chosen to inspire ideas and action in that context. It would therefore be odd if participants looked at ‘carbon-saving materials in the building industry’ say, and then pledged to plant more vegetables or turn their domestic thermostat down. If training takes place in a community setting, the actions should take place in that place where people live, if training is in a business, action should be within that business.

This is because:

- Training is purposely designed and criteria-checked for the context where it is delivered. A different context would have a different course.
- Of the collaborative nature of Carbon Literacy – people taking individual actions inspire and are inspired by seeing others around then doing the same, so those actions should be visible to each other.
- If an organisation or community has invested in Carbon Literacy training, it is only right that that organisation or community should receive more of the carbon and financial benefits of that training.
- Within the workplace in particular, this approach avoids the risk of an individual pledging an action that can't be supported, monitored or followed up within that organisation, and therefore forming part of that organisation's low-carbon cultural shift.
- It addresses the situation where, in a small minority of cases, a candidate pledges a fictitious action because it is beyond the observation of peers or the organisation, in order to avoid committing to real action.

X I'm going to drive on holiday this year rather than flying.

✓ I'm going to propose that we embed a policy that all travel needs to be the most sustainable mode possible, and that domestic flights are never to be accepted or expensed as flying is one of the biggest contributors to climate change.

- If an individual really feels they have no agency or can't make any meaningful impact in their job say, or that they could make far more of an impact in their personal life (e.g. at home, with family, or with groups they are a part of or lead) an action pledged out of context will not fail outright, but will attract much more scrutiny, so candidates will need to **explain very clearly why they are pledging an action out of context, and why this is the context in which they can make the most impact** / e.g. why this is the most significant action they can take.

X I don't have much influence at work, so I'm going to turn down the heating in my house, from 21 degrees to 20 degrees.

✓ I don't have much influence at work as I only carry out a single process in a controlled way, but I do have money in various investments (mortgage, savings, pension). I think some of these are with banks or organisations that fund deforestation and mining, as well as other carbon intensive activities, so I'm going to find out who I'm with and swap these investments to more ethical, sustainable options.

- Individuals need to show they **understand the difference between actions which are good for the environment generally vs actions which mitigate climate change.**

Whilst actions involving single-use / plastic reduction, waste reduction, recycling, water issues are good for the environment generally (they are clearly ‘a good thing’) many will have relatively little impact in terms of preventing climate change. We see such actions (recently particularly focussing on single-use plastics) a lot, and they are also scrutinised more closely. These actions are not wrong, but if pledged, an individual will need to explain the process and connection between this action and reducing carbon emissions and climate impact (e.g. referencing oil extraction/processing, emissions and energy consumption, manufacturing and transport, circular economy, etc.).

- ✗ I’m going to recycle all single-use plastics as they can end up outside of the waste-stream, polluting environments and harming animals.
- ✓ I’m going to stop using single-use plastics as they are made from crude oil which is a fossil fuel and the extraction, manufacturing, distribution and waste disposal processes are energy intensive, directly contributing to climate change.

- Individuals that are able to **explain the links/processes between their action and mitigating climate change** are more clearly demonstrating their Carbon Literacy, and so are much easier to certify.

- ✗ I’m going to become vegetarian.
- ✓ I’m going to stop eating red meat as cows and sheep produce methane (a very potent GHG which contributes to climate change) as they digest food.

- The learner must be able to **explain how their action is actively reducing their carbon emissions**, rather than potentially being an excuse to continue with business as usual.

Why: We are referring to offsetting here. This is because, to keep global heating down to as close to 1.5°C as possible, we are already going to have to not just reduce new emissions as low as we possibly can, but also sequester existing carbon already in the atmosphere. This means that carbon offsetting actions (e.g. tree-planting), should only be relied upon when all other carbon reduction actions have already been utilised, or in parallel with direct carbon reduction as a way of taking responsibility for emissions that are currently unavoidable (e.g. from concrete production).

- ✗ I’m going to plant a tree in my garden to store carbon.
- ✓ I will commit to stop flying for unnecessary trips, and offset any that are absolutely vital and not possible by surface transport (e.g. by train) via a gold standard carbon-offsetting tree-planting scheme.

Zero-Carbon Society by_____ Question

We always read the answer to this question closely. On occasions, where we feel that a learner has probably understood the training and is motivated to take action but perhaps has not communicated this to the best of their ability, we return to look more closely at this answer to help us judge whether or not they are Carbon Literate. The depth of understanding expressed in this answer gives us a very good guide to how much the learner now appreciates and understands the scale of the challenge and the level of action necessary to address it, and therefore how Carbon Literate they actually are.

Extenuating Circumstances

We understand that individuals undertaking Carbon Literacy training have widely varying levels of educational attainment, literacy, numeracy, cultural familiarity, and physical and mental ability. Therefore the personal details supplied on and with evidence forms help us in assessing the significance of an action to that individual. We often look at job titles and assess life experience to help us gauge this better, so including this information is really helpful.

If you feel that there are extenuating factors that affect candidates whose evidence you are submitting, or there is extra information that it would be useful for us to have or know about in order to more accurately assess the evidence we receive for individuals or groups, we are more than happy to receive this alongside your formal evidence and the certificate request form.

This might be extra information in the text of an accompanying email, it could be submitted in the form of supporting documents, or, ideally, in the 'Notes' section of the certificate request form. Such extra information might include further information about the learner and their specific circumstances or needs, or further detail about their actions which was perhaps discussed or spoken about with you or their group, but which wasn't recorded in their submitted evidence.

Further Notes

Evidence is assessed, and certification awarded, entirely on a case-by-case basis, and every learner is assessed individually. Awarding of Carbon Literacy certification to individuals and/or organisations remains entirely at the discretion of The Carbon Literacy Trust.

Here's an example of a strong submission of evidence:

Commitments – Your Personal and Group Actions			
<p>Please justify your answers and note that the person reading your form may not be an expert in your particular field. Parts a, b, and c must be completed.</p> <p>We are looking for evidence that you have an awareness of carbon emissions/savings associated with various activities.</p> <p>We have asked you to rate the action with a low (10 s kg's), medium (100s kg's) or high (1000 s kg's) ranking, please make sure that you use this to consider whether your action is significant enough in relation to your position. Your action could also cause others to save CO₂, making it an indirect saving. If you have pledged an action that you think will have a low CO₂ saving, but this action is significant to you, please explain why it is significant in part 2c and 3d.</p>			
2. Your Personal Action (Please write clearly)			
(a). What significant personal carbon reducing action have you committed to as a result of your Carbon Literacy training?			
Switching to a green energy supplier			
(b). Estimated CO ₂ saving per year -	Low	Medium	High
(c). Please outline why you feel your personal action is significant. (i.e. How much carbon do you feel it will save either directly or indirectly?)			
Switching energy suppliers is a relatively easy action, but if more people choose to buy green energy supply, hopefully the percentage of green energy as part of the grid increases, and also puts more pressure on other energy suppliers to decarbonise their supply. I feel that this is an action which I can definitely take to help decrease my personal carbon footprint and save CO ₂ .			
3. Your Group Action (Please write clearly)			
(a). What significant group carbon reducing action have you committed to as a result of your Carbon Literacy training?			
I book a large amount of business travel for other people. I commit to looking at more sustainable ways for them to travel and suggesting video conferencing as an alternative option.			
(b). Group that the action will take place with -			
General Director and various members of the SMT.			
(c). Estimated CO ₂ saving per year -	Low	Medium	High
(d). Please outline why you feel your group action is significant. (i.e. How will this action involve others; who will it involve; how much carbon can be collectively saved, directly or indirectly?)			
Should I be successful in convincing those who travel frequently on business to look at their means of transport and whether they need to take that journey it could be a significant saving. If trains were used more frequently, especially for cross continent travel, it would reduce the carbon emissions from planes/cars. I am also looking at the cost of offsetting the flights that are necessary to understand if this can be adopted as company policy. Reducing flights would reduce the Co ₂ the company is responsible for producing, this harmful gas contributes to global warming. A car with one passenger has the second highest output of greenhouse gasses.			