How to Use ESG Data in Brand Storytelling:

A Practical Workflow



Promise:
turn ESG metrics into credible, audience-relevant stories without overstating the proof

For:
brand content, sustainability communications, data analysts, and corporate trainers

Workflow:
source → verify → select → translate → frame → govern → measure

By role:
claim-supported story drafts, disclosure-aligned claims, claim-source maps, cross-functional reviews

Session norm:
every number traces to a source, a method, and an owner

Why This Matters Now: Regulatory and Audience Context

- EU EmpCo Directive applies from 27 September 2026; vague green claims banned
- Proposed EU Green Claims Directive withdrawn in 2025; misleading claims still prohibited
- US: FTC Green Guides (2012) remain guidance; state laws and litigation fill gaps
- Audiences expect evidence: investors want metrics, consumers want plain language
- Vague claims are a legal and reputational liability, not a wording problem



What Counts as an Environmental Claim

- Claims cover text, graphics, symbols, labels, brand names, product names, company names
- Assessment is contextual: would an average consumer expect an environmental benefit?
- Generic terms like ‘green’ or ‘eco-friendly’ need clear on-medium specification
- Or they require recognised excellent environmental performance (e.g., EU Ecolabel)
- Sustainability labels must rest on third-party certification or public schemes
- Forward-looking and comparative claims need implementation plans and independent verification



Core Concepts: From ESG Metrics to Narrative Building Blocks

- ESG, sustainability, impact, and materiality are not interchangeable terms
- Absolute vs, intensity; baseline vs. target; Scope 1/2/3 carry different story limits
- Quality signals: assurance level (limited vs, reasonable), methodology, boundary, recency
- Frameworks shape claims: IFRS S1/S2 (investor), GRI (impact), ESRS (double materiality)
- Narrative building blocks: proof point, human consequence, action, accountability

CLEARER CONCEPTS
STRONGER STORIES

Absolute vs. intensity



Baseline vs. target



Scope 1/2/3



Quality signals

- assurance level (limited vs. reasonable)
- methodology
- boundary
- recency

Frameworks shape claims

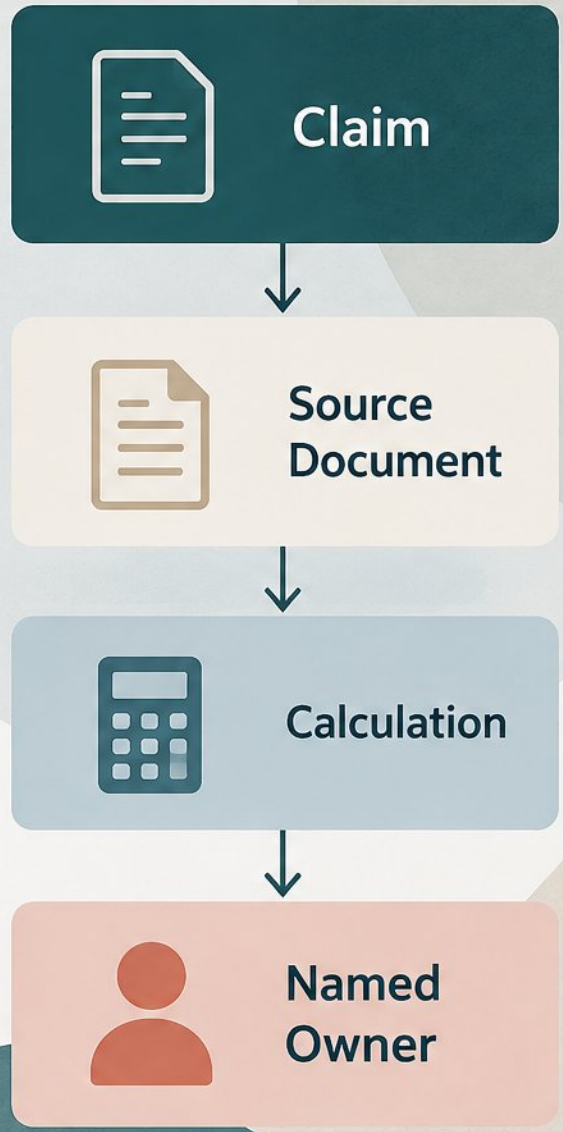
- IFRS S1/S2 (investor)
- GRI (impact)
- ESRS (double materiality)

Narrative building blocks

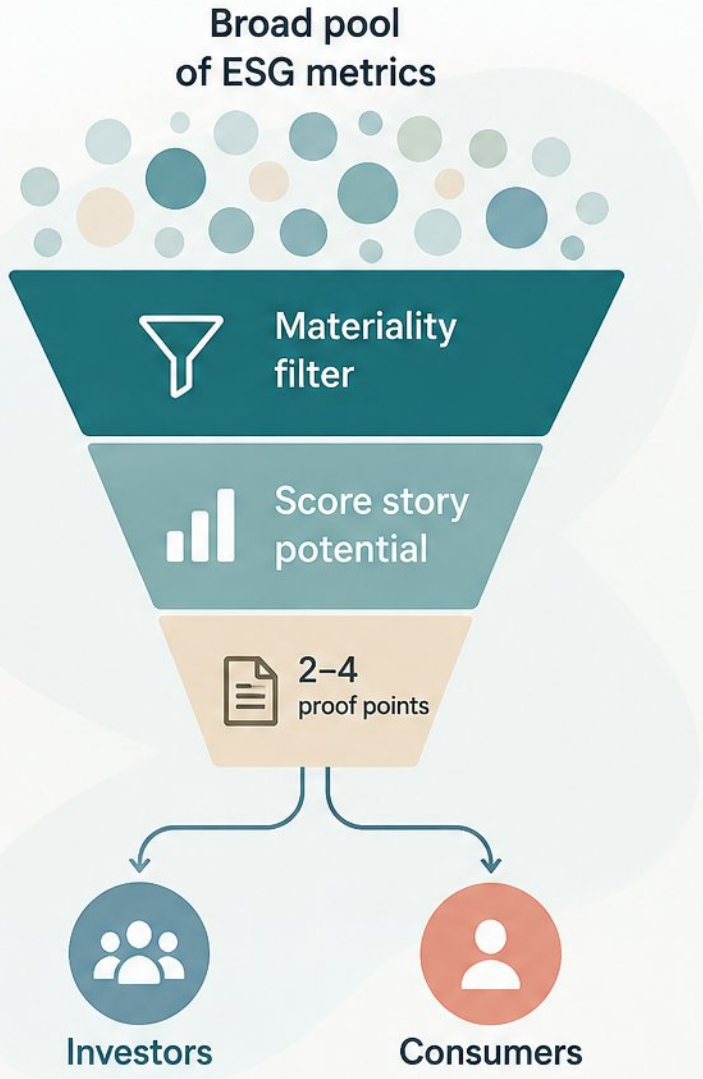
- proof point
- human consequence
- action
- accountability

Workflow Step 1: Source and Verify the Data

- **Authoritative sources:** sustainability report, CDP response, assurance reports, supplier data
- **Verify** boundary, baseline year, methodology, assurance level, and year-over-year comparability
- **Red flags:** unaudited figures, cherry-picked metrics, inconsistent baselines, expired certifications
- **Data lineage:** every claim tied to a source document, a calculation, a named owner
- **Scope 3:** estimates are normal—document assumptions and emission factors for scrutiny



Workflow Step 2: Select Metrics That Can Carry a Story



- Materiality filter: relevance to business model, audience concerns, actual impact.
- Score story potential: magnitude, trend, human relevance, verifiability, differentiation.
- Avoid data dumping: 2–4 proof points per narrative, rest as backup.
- Match audience: verified numbers for investors, product specifics for consumers.
- Prefer precise, product-specific claims over sweeping corporate statements.

Workflow Step 3:
Translate Data into Plain-Language Narrative

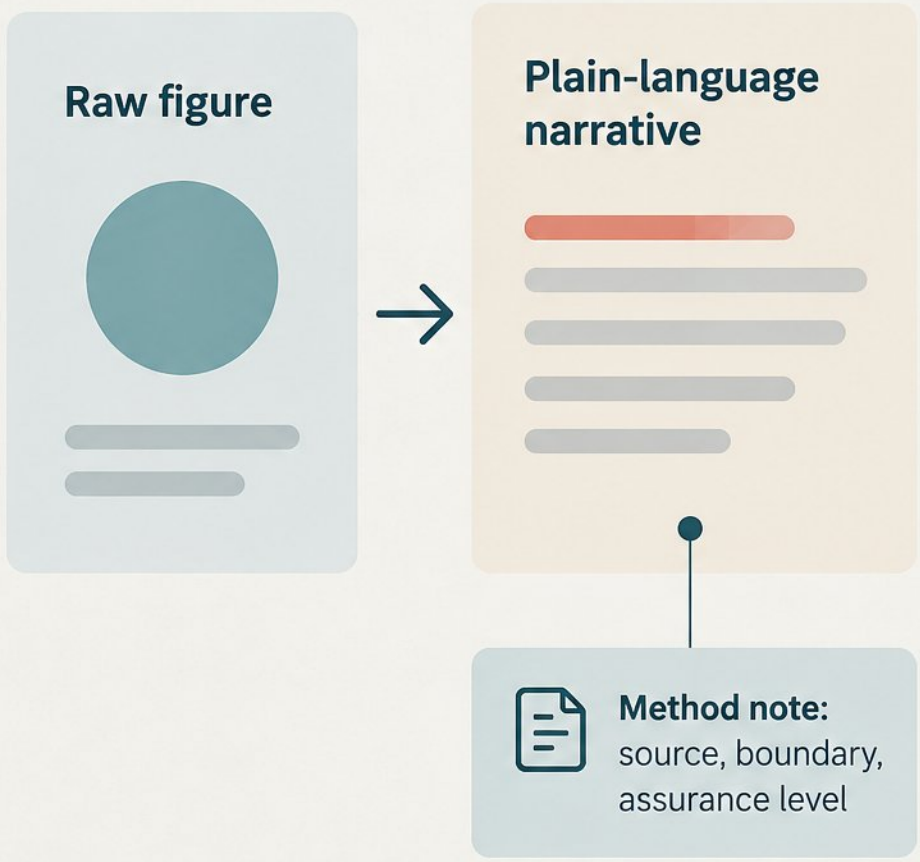
Translation pattern:
percentage of what, compared with what, over what period

Contextualise with baselines, benchmarks, and limitations—never lose the qualification

Use analogies only when they preserve accuracy and scope

Pair every number with a method note: source, boundary, assurance level

Avoid distortions:
truncated axes, cherry-picked baselines, unqualified aggregates



The Internal Handoff: Where Good Data Gets Lost

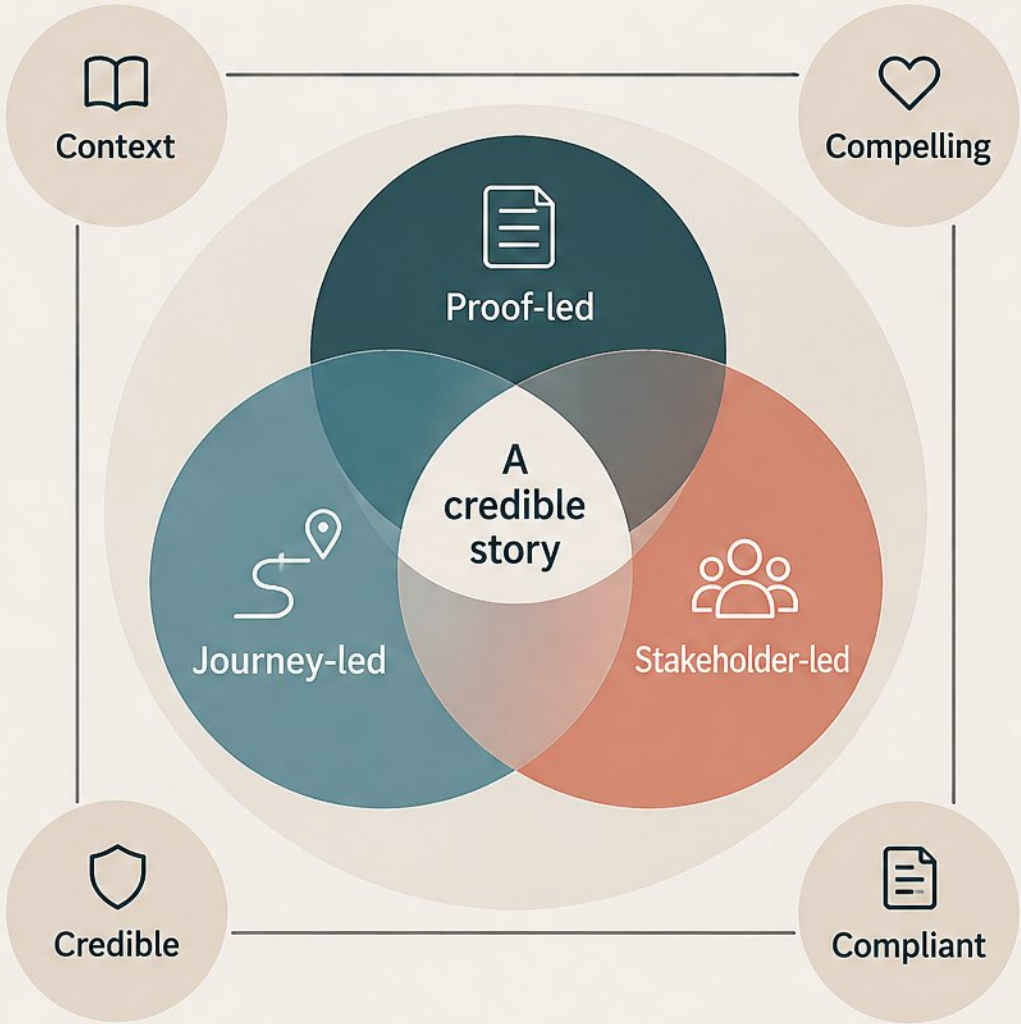
Source · Verify · Select · Translate · **Frame** · Govern · Measure



- Common failure: evidenced themes lose context and limitations during editing
- Fix: co-develop key messages so evidence, scope, and caveats are built in early
- Lead with precise, product-level claims; link short-form claims to accessible evidence
- Use a tiered hierarchy: Tier 1 value proposition, Tier 2 supporting evidence, Tier 3 full methodology
- Maintain a living claims policy covering all spokespeople, including founders and influencers

Workflow Step 4:
Frame the Story for Credibility and Audience Fit

- Choose narrative structure by audience and claim strength: proof-led, journey-led, or stakeholder-led
- Balance progress with imperfection: name trade-offs, not full solutions
- Each channel—report, web, social, deck, packaging—carries different substantiation needs
- Apply the Four C's: Context, Compelling, Credible, Compliant
- Guardrails: specificity, substantiation, comparability, consistency with formal disclosure



Workflow Step 5: Govern, Review, and Approve Claims

Four-corner model



Four-corner model: sustainability, legal, marketing, procurement each own a piece

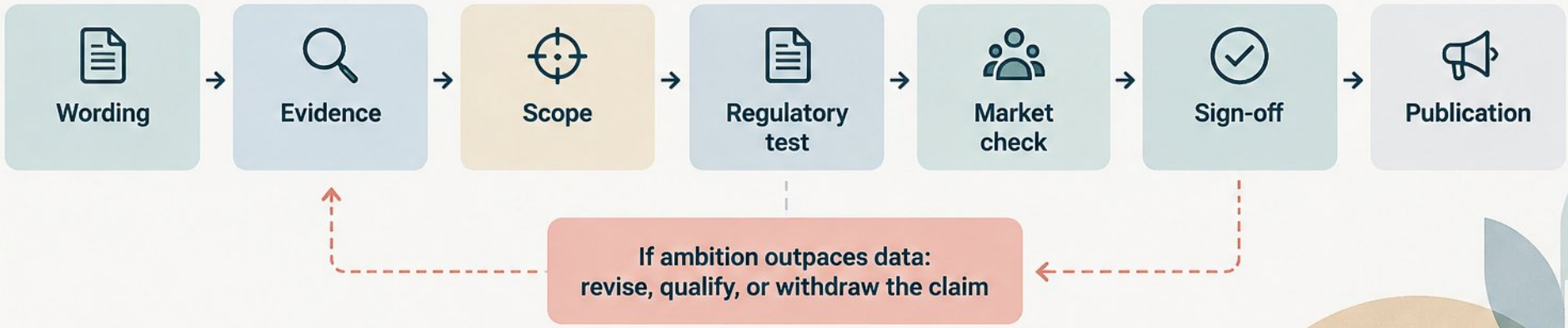
One named claims owner chairs the four corners and signs off

Substantiation file: exact wording, evidence, method, approver, review date, channels

Claim flow: wording → evidence → scope → regulatory test → market check → sign-off

If ambition outpaces data: revise, qualify, or withdraw the claim

Claim flow



Workflow Step 6: Measure Narrative Impact and Iterate

- Track reach, engagement, trust, takeaway, and recall of proof points
- Judge claim performance against business and reputation goals, not vanity metrics
- Build feedback loops from audiences, sales, service, and regulators
- Give every claim a review date; refresh when methodologies or certifications change
- Archive withdrawn claims with date and reason for a clean audit trail

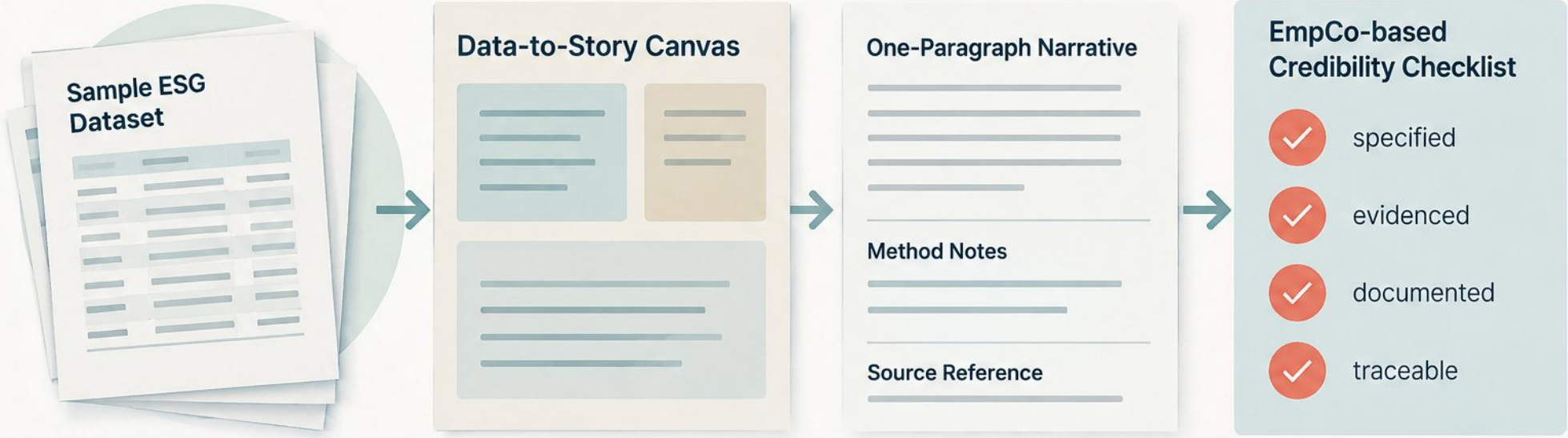


Claims Register

Claim Wording	Evidence	Approver	Review Date

Hands-On Lab: Build a Claim-Supported Story from a Dataset

FROM DATA TO A CREDIBLE NARRATIVE



Exercise: turn a sample ESG dataset into a one-paragraph narrative with method notes and source reference

Peer review against an EmpCo-based credibility checklist: specified, evidenced, documented, traceable

Role variations: brand drafts, sustainability comms checks alignment, analysts verify traceability, trainers facilitate

Take-aways: data-to-story canvas and claim substantiation sheet

Debrief: locate where context was lost and where the evidence chain weakened

Role Action Plans and Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Different roles, a shared responsibility for credible claims.



Brand content

- Brand content: build stories only from approved claims; keep the method note attached

Sustainability comms

- Sustainability comms: maintain the claims register; co-author messages with marketing early

Data analysts

- Data analysts: publish a claim-to-source map; flag estimates and expiry dates

Trainers

- Trainers: rehearse escalation when a strong story lacks substantiation

Avoid:

- greenhushing
- over-claiming
- self-declared labels
- unqualified 'carbon neutral'

Checklist, Templates, and Next Steps

- **Pre-publication check:** claim specified, evidence appropriate, boundary clear, assurance stated, legal review done, review date set
- **Template 1:** data-to-story canvas—proof point, audience, baseline, method note, human consequence, action
- **Template 2: claim substantiation** sheet—exact wording, evidence file, owner, approver, channels, renewal date
- **30-day step:** audit your top 10 consumer-facing claims—compliant, needs qualification, or withdraw
- **Ongoing cadence:** quarterly claims register review and annual training refresh

Template 1:
data-to-story canvas

- proof point
- audience
- baseline
- method note
- human consequence
- action

Template 2:
claim substantiation sheet

- exact wording
- evidence file
- owner
- approver
- channels
- renewal date



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