

# TACTIC BLOCKADE

A human chain or physical barrier that shuts down something bad (a coal mine or Shell meeting), protects something good (a forest or home), or makes a purely symbolic statement.

## CONTRIBUTED BY

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**“THINK OF THE ACTION AS ‘THE MIDDLE,’ AND EXPECT A TON OF PREP WORK AND FOLLOW-THROUGH — LEGAL, EMOTIONAL, AND POLITICAL.”**

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Blockades commonly have one of two purposes: First, to stop the bad guys, usually by targeting a point of decision (a boardroom), a point of production (a bank), or a point of destruction (a clearcut) (see: METHODOLOGY: Points of intervention); or second, to protect public or common space such as a building occupation or an encampment.

Blockades can consist of soft blockades (human barricades, such as forming a line and linking arms) or hard blockades (using gear such as chains, U-locks, lock-boxes, tripods, or vehicles). Blockades can involve one person or thousands of people, and can be a stand-alone tactic or an element of a larger tactic like an occupation.

Successful blockades can be primarily concrete or communicative. Either way, all participants should be clear on the goals. For example, if your blockade is symbolic, it does not require a decision dilemma (see: PRINCIPLE: Put your target in a decision dilemma). If, however, you have a concrete goal, like preventing people from entering a building, you must ensure that your blockade has the capacity to achieve that goal. In other words, make sure you’ve got all the exits covered.

Whatever the case, it’s important to lead with your goals. Don’t think in terms of less or more radical; think in terms of what is appropriate to your goals, strategy, tone, message, risk, and level of escalation (see: PRINCIPLE: Choose tactics that support your strategy).

## POTENTIAL RISKS

A complex and confrontational tactic like blockade requires meticulous planning and preparation, and should never be attempted without significant preparation, research, and training (see: PRINCIPLE: Take risks, but take care).

## RELATED TOOLS

### Stories

- Battle in Seattle
- Brazil’s Free Fare Movement
- Bring Back Our Girls
- Earth First!
- Justice for Janitors
- Québec Student Strike
- Reclaim the Streets
- Schools of Struggle
- Streets Into Gardens
- Stripping Power in Uganda
- Wisconsin Capitol Occupation
- #YouStink

Here are a few tips to keep in mind, adapted from the Ruckus Society's how-to guide, *A Tiny Blockades Book*:

*Build a crew.* It all begins with a good action team and good nonviolence/direct action training.

*All roles are important.* A good support team is essential.

*Know your limits.* Make a realistic assessment of your capacity and resources.

*Scout, scout, scout.* Spend a lot of time getting to know your location.

Know your choke points. These are the spots that make you the most secure and pesky blockader. Choose a spot that your target cannot just work, walk, or drive around.

*Practice, and prepare contingency plans.*

*Don't plan for your action; plan through your action.* Think of the action as "the middle," and expect a ton of prep work and follow-through — legal, emotional, and political.

*Have a media strategy.* Make sure your message gets out and your action logic is as transparent as possible (see: THEORY: Action logic). Don't let communications be an afterthought.

*Eliminate unnecessary risk.* Make your action as safe as it can be to achieve your goals (see: PRINCIPLE: Take risks, but take care).

*Do not ignore power dynamics within your group or between you and your target.* Race, class, gender identity (real or perceived), sexual identity (real or perceived), age, physical ability, appearance, immigration status, and nationality all affect your relationship to the action.

*Dress for success.* Make sure that your appearance helps carry the tone you want to set for your action. Dress comfortably. Ensure that support people bring water, food, and extra layers.

*Be creative. Have fun.*

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## LEARN MORE

Resources for Organizers

Praxis Makes Perfect

<https://joshuakahn russell.wordpress.com/resources-for-activists-and-organizers/>

A Tiny Blockades Book

350Seattle.org, 2005

<https://350seattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/a-tiny-blockades-book-1.pdf>

## Tactics

- Artistic vigil
- Banner hang
- Cacerolazo (noise-making protest)
- Civil disobedience
- Distributed denial of service (DDoS)
- Eviction blockade
- Flotilla
- General strike
- Gherao (encirclement)
- Mass street action
- Occupation
- Phone blockade

## Principles

- Anger works best when you have the moral high ground
- Choose tactics that support your strategy
- Choose your target wisely
- Define "hardcore" strategically
- Don't expect a concrete outcome from a symbolic action
- Escalate strategically
- Follow the lead of the most impacted
- Maintain nonviolent discipline
- Put your target in a decision dilemma
- Show, don't tell
- Take risks, but take care

## Theories

- Action logic
- Comunalidad (communality)
- Direct action
- Environmental justice
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Neoliberalism
- Revolutionary nonviolence
- Revolutionary reform
- The commons
- The Global South

## Methodologies

- Action star

- Points of intervention
- Power mapping

### **TAGS**

Action design, Climate justice,  
Colonialism, Direct action,  
Energy, Environment,  
Nonviolence, State violence,  
Street protest