

Trends and Consequences

A future's wheel is designed to examine consequences from the use of technology or a future trend. Students are frequently made aware of climate and energy alternatives and choices, but seldom are required to think about the consequences of those choices. The futures wheel is a good introduction to futuristic thinking in that the students must project possibilities into the future. This activity is best done the first time with the instructors and later in small groups or individually.

Procedure:

1. Near the center of a large piece of paper, write the name of an innovation or trend and draw and circle or box around it.

Sample ideas: Energy Trends

- Gasoline prices rise to \$6.00 per gallon
- Solar heating systems are mass produced cheaply
- Electric cars become cheaper to use than gasoline-powered ones
- Electric consumption continues to rise
- Gasoline-powered cars become more energy efficient

Sample ideas: Climate Trends

- Hardiness zones for plants shift north
- Increase in drought
- Increased number of heat waves in the summer
- Reduced rainfall in the mountains
- Sea Level rise on Coastal areas

Sample ideas: Technology Solutions

- Increase in the use of wind energy
- Reduction in the use of gas-powered vehicles
- Increase in solar panels on homes
- Increase in recycling at homes and businesses
- Increase in use of home gardens and local foods

2. Consider what might happen (good or bad) if the trend were to actually take place. Write each of these effects around the central trend. The initial reactions are called first order consequences. They are indicated by single lines connecting the center trend.

3. Consider the possible effects of each of the first order consequences. Draw and connect each secondary effect proposed with two lines between it and the first order to which it relates.

Continue this process for about for orders of consequences, using three lines for third order and four lines for the fourth order.

4. After the wheel is complete, categorize the nature of the various consequences. Are they social, economic, technological, environmental, or political? These can be colored coded, but be sure to include a key in the corner of the page.

5. Categorize the consequences by whether they affect people individually, whether they impact the United States, or whether they have world-wide impact.

Extension: Have students examine the statements made on their wheel and find credible resources or data that validate the consequences that they have identified. Is there data to back up their idea? If not, how would they change the consequence to make it more accurate?

Extension: Have groups of students take different trends to construct futures wheels and then share the results.

Extension: Have students research the wheel results to see if there have been any studies that verify their ideas.