Future for All handbook

A simple step-by-step guide to designing and facilitating a Futures Literacy Laboratory for groups of the elderly and youth.

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Introduction

This guidebook gives you everything you need to plan and conduct a Futures Literacy Laboratory for groups of youths, seniors and mixed groups of youths and seniors.

You will learn how to plan and execute a workshop based on the Futures Literacy Laboratory (FLL) method, and how to follow up on the results.

Along the way, you will get **tips** from us at Fremtenkt, suggestions on how to conduct an FLL workshop, and snippets of a script that you can use when facilitating.

You will also find **three reframing scenarios** within these pages. A reframing scenario is a description of a possible future that is different to how you usually imagine the future. We also explain when and how to use these scenarios during the Futures Literacy Laboratory.

If you want to know **why** you might want to conduct a Futures Literacy Laboratory, and when a workshop using this method would best fit in with other work, we address this towards the end of the handbook.

The first part of the guidebook is a brief review of **what Futures Literacy is**, why it is important, and how the Futures Literacy Laboratory method can be said to enhance Futures Literacy.

The second part is a **quick start guide**, showing you how to plan and conduct a Futures Literacy Laboratory. The third section contains three reframing scenarios for use with groups of youths, seniors, and mixed groups of youths and seniors.

The fourth part is a collection of **further resources** for facilitators planning a Futures Literacy Laboratory and references to further reading and other useful materials for those who want to dive deeper into the topics and methods described in this handbook.

Finally, the fifth part answers the question of **why and when** you might want to conduct a Futures Literacy Laboratory, and goes into more detail about what Futures Literacy is.

What is Futures Literacy? A very brief introduction.

Futures Literacy is about:

- exploring what might be possible **in the future**
- in order to discover opportunities for positive change **in the present**.

Being proficient in Futures Literacy is something that UNESCO, the EU, and international innovation communities consider crucial for navigating an increasingly uncertain world and successfully achieving the green transition:

"Futures Literacy has become an essential skill in the context of the unprecedented crises we are confronting, and where we come to realise that the future of humankind will depend on the kind of decisions we take today. Using Foresight and Futures Literacy, we can question the current way we understand the world, move out from our comfort zone and expand our imagination."

– Gabriela Ramos, Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO

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Precisely the ability to "question our current understanding of the world" is a core aspect of Futures Literacy. As such, Futures Literacy can be seen as a variety of critical thinking:

Rather than simply accepting that "this is the way things are", we pose the question "Does it have to be so? What are the alternatives?" And then together, playfully and seriously, we try out different possible answers. What distinguishes Futures Literacy from other kinds of critical thinking, however, is the role played by the future: By imagining how the future might be (radically) different to the present, we effectively open up a space to discover and discuss ways in which we might **do things differently**.

And because we are, in a sense, "merely" playing with different possible futures, the threshold for imagining alternatives is lowered, making it easier to entertain ideas that might seem far-fetched (or even ridiculous) when presented as serious proposals for the present.

This emphasis on the exploration of possible futures distinguishes Futures Literacy from other kinds of future-oriented methods that are more concerned with trying to predict what will probably happen.

Futures Literacy is not about predicting the future: It concerns the way our images and **ideas about** the future frame our perception of what is **happening around us right now**. Training Futures Literacy is training the ability to notice these images, examine their impact on us, and challenging them with alternatives that let us see other possibilities than those we are commonly aware of.

This is where the Futures Literacy Laboratory (FLL) comes into the picture. As a workshop method, it is designed to give people room to think and talk about their images of the future, and then to explore unfamiliar but possible futures as a way of challenging assumptions and expanding what they consider possible.

What is a Futures Literacy Laboratory?

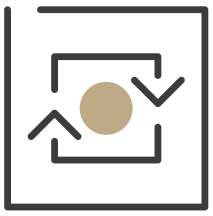
A Futures Literacy Laboratory (FLL) is a workshop method designed to promote Futures Literacy. An FLL has 3 or 4 phases, depending on the desired outcome:

Phase 1: Reveal

Reveal is about getting participants to think and then talk about their images of the future.

Phase 1 typically uses two "frames" to solicit participants' thoughts on a given topic when considering it at some point in the future: what they think is **desirable**, and what they think is **probable**. These frames are employed because most people already think about the future in terms of **planning** for what they want to happen (desirable), and making **preparations** for what they think will probably happen (probable). By beginning with these two familiar frames of thought, one can both solicit specific ideas, and give participants a sense of how different frames prompt different thoughts when they try to imagine the future.

This is an important first step towards increased awareness of how images of the future shape our perception of the present.



Phase 2: Reframe

Reframe is about giving participants an unfamiliar frame within which to think about the future.

Doing so helps them rethink assumptions they may otherwise take for granted, and provoke new ideas about what is possible. Reframing is achieved using a **reframing scenario**. A reframing scenario is a description of a possible future that is different to how we usually imagine the future. Since we are used to thinking about the future in terms of what we would like (desirable, planning) and what we expect (probable, preparation), a typical reframing scenario is a description of a possible future that is neither entirely desirable, nor entirely probable.

In this way, a reframing scenario nudges participants to think about the future in a third, less commonly employed mode: **to explore** what is possible.

Phase 3: Reflect

Reflect is about giving participants further space to consider how different frames affect how they think about the future, and then how different thoughts about the future shape how they think about the present: what is possible, what is important, and so forth.

Phase 4: Act

Acy is about taking ideas that have come up during the workshop and turning them into plans for actions that participants can take in the present and near future.

Tip:

- **Combining phases 1 and 2 (Reveal and Reframe)** should be considered a core component of any workshop based on this method.
- **Phase 3: Reflect** is important for giving participants space to reflect on and learn from their experience during the workshop. Reflection can also be made a part of phases 1 and 2.
- **Phase 4: Act** is geared towards having participants turn thoughts and ideas into plans for action. If you want participants to leave the workshop with something concrete that they themselves can use as follow-up, it is important to allow sufficient time for this phase.

Studio Interior, Alvar Cawén, 1559. Providing institution: Finnish National Gallery, Finland - CC0. https://www.europeana.eu/item/2021012/_3B19F5124D-12590CA2927BB73C3F4D83

Futures Literacy Laboratory

quick start guide

Plan

Topic and timeframe:

Select a topic for the workshop. The topic can be almost anything, from very general ("education") to more specific ("interaction between youth and the elderly"). One way of figuring out whether a topic will work is to try and put it in the following form: "The future of X". Does that make sense? Does it sound interesting? If so, you may have a good topic.

By timeframe, we mean the year in the future that you will ask participants to use as a frame when trying to imagine what the topic of the workshop is like in that future. The year you select can be a round one, such as 2040, 2050 or even 2100, or can be something specific like 20 years from now (which at the time of writing would be 2044). The timeframe you select should be sufficiently far into the future to give your participants space to imagine freely.

If you select a year that is too close to the present, participants may struggle to free themselves from expectations of being correct when guessing what the future will be like. However, if you select a year that, from your participants' point of view, is too far away, people may also struggle to come up with something they consider "useful". We find that 2040 or 2050 works quite well.

Abstracte compositie, Greet van Amstel (1903-1981), 1976. Providing institution: Jewish Historical Museum, Netherlands - Public Domain https://www.europeana.eu/item/270/resource_document_jhm_museum_M011494

Tip:

Different people will react differently to whatever timeframe you select. Some think 25 years is nothing, and that nothing major can happen in this time. Others think that 25 years is ages, and have no problem coming up with radical ideas.

We also find that people tend to imagine a future year in one of two ways: either by thinking about what age they themselves (or their children) will be in that future year, or by thinking more abstractly in terms of structures or people in general. There is no right or wrong way of doing this, but it is useful to be aware of this difference.

Landschaft: Perspektivische Ansicht, Ludwig Spangenberg (1824-1893). Providing institution: Architekturmuseum der Technischen Universität Berlin, Germany - CC0. https://www.europeana.eu/item/08535/item_ZMMZFF7VUHH7D3D7MYOARUOT4JRKPLBO

People:

There are no hard limits on the number of participants. Somewhere between 10 and 30 gives a good balance of lively discussion and easy management. If you have a particularly engaged group, you can manage with fewer people, and if you have co-facilitators, you can engage more.

Time:

You need enough time to get through the phases. A workshop can be conducted in as little as two to three hours, or over several days. More time gives more room for reflection, and for participants to discuss and learn from each other. Less time makes the workshop more intense.

Tip:

A good starting point would be about 3–5 hours, including breaks. Shorter timeframes can be made to work, but usually only by leaving out some of the phases.

Space:

You need a suitable space to conduct the workshop. Almost anything can be made to work, but it is useful to have smaller tables or separate rooms for smaller groups to work together, as well as a space large enough to gather all participants for plenary sessions.

Materials:

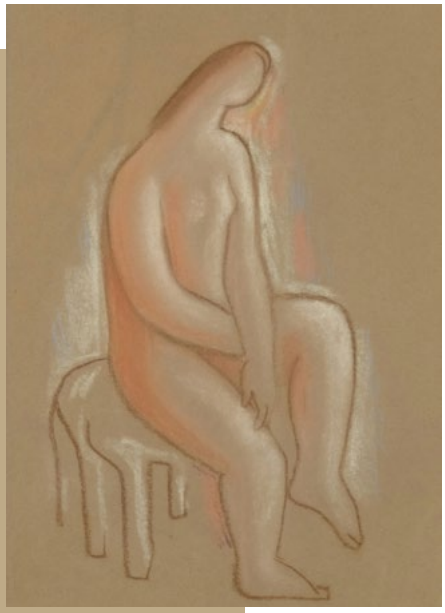
Participants typically write their ideas on Post-it notes, one at a time. During group discussions, these Post-its are collected and organised onto flipcharts by designated co-facilitators, and then used as the basis for plenary presentations.

Tip:

We have found that notepads, sheets of paper or anything else that participants can use to jot down their ideas will work.

Also, rather than proper co-facilitators, we often have one person per group acting as group "secretary", responsible for taking notes from group discussions, either on a large sheet of paper or on a laptop.

Taking digital notes makes collecting and organising results into a report much easier, but reduces the spontaneous creative freedom that writing and drawing on paper affords.



Seated Woman, Galanda, Mikuláš, 1925-1935. Providing institution: Slovenská národná galéria, Slovakia - Public Domain. https://www.europeana.eu/item/07101/K_13913

Conduct

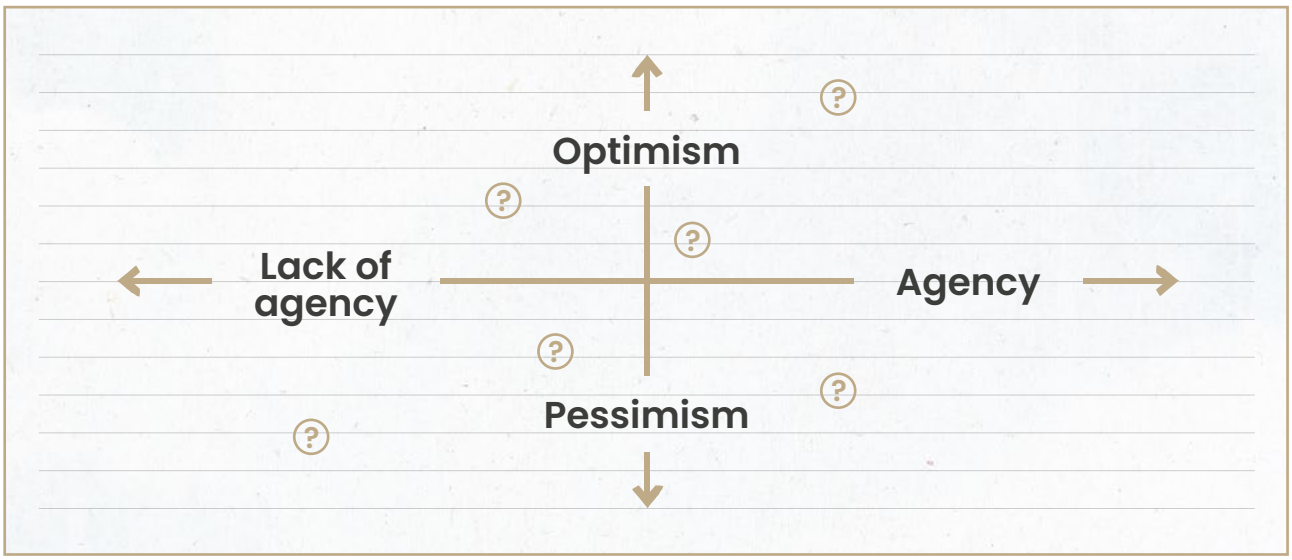
Warm-up exercise

If you have time, it can be a good idea to start the workshop with a warm-up exercise. There are myriad exercises that can serve this purpose, but consider using one that both helps participants warm up towards one another, and gets them thinking about the future.

Two useful exercises in that regard are:

The Polak game

Where do you stand?



You need:

- **A room that is big enough and sufficiently empty to allow participants to stand up and move about.**
- **Or: sheets of paper that groups of participants can use to draw on as a substitute for moving about.**
- **In the following, we will presume that your participants are moving about. Adapt the instructions as needed.**

The optimism-pessimism axis

First, ask participants to stand in a line across the middle of the room, all in a row, facing you. Place yourself at some distance from the line of participants, approximately facing its middle. Then tell participants:

- If you are **optimistic** about the future, take one or more steps **forward**, towards me. The more optimistic you are, the more steps you can take.
- If you are **pessimistic** about the future, take one or more steps **backwards**, away from me. The more pessimistic you are, the more steps you can take.

Sample script:
"I have a question for you, and I will ask you to answer by moving. The question is about your expectations for the future. When you cast your imagination one generation forward, say 25 years from today, do you expect the world to be better than the one we live in—better as defined by you—or do you imagine it as being worse? If you feel optimistic in your expectations for how the world will look in 2042 [as of 2017], then when I say "go", you should step forward, and the stronger that feeling is, the further forward you should step.

If on the other hand, you feel pessimistic or doubtful in your expectations about the state of the world in 2042, then when I say "go", step backward, and again, the more strongly you feel that way, the further you should move. There is a subjective judgment at play here, which is fine—that's what we want. Go! Move as far forward or as far back as you like."
(Peter Hayward & Stuart Candy, 2017, p. 11)

The agency-lack of agency axis

Once all participants have found their place, tell them to keep their position along the front-back/optimism-pessimism axis. For the next question, you want them to move to their right or their left, depending on how they want to respond. Tell participants:

- If you **believe you can** help shape the future, you can take a step to the **right**, keeping constant your position front to back. The more influence or agency you think you have, the more steps you can take.
- If you **doubt your ability** to help shape the future, you can take a step to the **left**, keeping constant your position front to back. The more doubtful or pessimistic you are about your influence or agency, the more steps you can take.

Sample script:
Now I have another question for you, and it is about your agency; your personal capacity to influence change at the global level over the next 25 years, in directions you personally consider to be positive. If you feel that you do have agency and can shape the world, when I say "go" please step to the right, and the more strongly you feel that way, the further you are invited to move. If on the other hand, you have your doubts, if you are sceptical or pessimistic about your capacity to shape things on that scale, over that time period, then when I say "go" move to the left, commensurate with your level of doubt. Go!"
(Peter Hayward & Stuart Candy, 2017, p. 11)

After this, participants will be spread out between the four quadrants, to a greater or lesser extent. At this point, invite some participants to share their reasons for having placed themselves where they are, making sure to ask participants from different quadrants.

As an additional exercise, you can invite participants who are located in one quadrant to comment on what they think about those in the other quadrants, or even, if the mood permits, to playfully put labels on each other as a way of starting a debate.

Reference: Peter Hayward & Stuart Candy. (2017). The Polak Game, Or: Where Do You Stand? Journal of Futures Studies, 22(2). https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.2017.22(2).A5

Kauffman's Metaphors

Riding on a train

Kayaking down a river

Rolling dice

Sailing on the sea

In this exercise, ask participants to think about which metaphor best aligns with their relationship to the future.

Is moving into the future like riding on a train, kayaking down a river, sailing on the sea, or more like rolling dice? You can also invite participants to invent their own metaphors, if they find that none of these four fit.

Once everyone has had a few minutes to choose, invite participants to share what they chose and their reasons for choosing this metaphor. You can also invite participants to comment on each other's choices and discuss differences in interpretation.

Reference: Adapted from Kauffman, D. L. (1976). Teaching the future: A guide to future-oriented education. ETC Publications.

Phase 1: Reveal

> **Phase 1 has two parts, desirable and probable futures.**

The lady drummer, c.1890 - c.1910. Providing institution: Rijksmuseum, Netherlands - Public Domain. https://unsplash.com/photos/a-statue-of-a-person-Rp7NNv9PKX4

Tip:

We usually lead with desirable, and follow with probable futures. You can change the order of the two frames. The results may be quite different, but not necessarily better or worse.

For each question in each phase, have participants jot down their thoughts in silence first, then share in smaller groups, and then have the groups present in plenary. Have one person per group take notes during the group discussion and collect these notes for later use in the follow-up.

Breathing exercise:

Before each question, it may be useful to conduct a small breathing exercise:

> **Sample script:** "Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths at your own pace. With each inhale, take note of the sounds in the room around you. With each exhale, let go of any lingering thoughts you might have from this morning, yesterday, the weekend... when you hear the snap of my fingers, we will all open our eyes, and we will have landed in [insert future year]. [snap fingers]." (From the UNESCO Playbook, p. 68*, see references at the end)

Then present the first task:

- **Question 1.1: Desirable** - What is TOPIC like in YEAR? Emphasise what you think is desirable / what you would like.
- **Example:** How do youths and seniors interact in 2050? Emphasise what you think is desirable.
- **Or:** How would you like youths and seniors to interact in 2050?

> **Sample script:** "We are asking you to imagine the preferable future of (insert lab topic): your own desirable future. It could be desirable for you, for your close community, for society—any level you choose. But focus on the aspect of desirability. This future is the embodiment of our hopes and dreams, so it does not necessarily have to be realistic. Take some time to jot down your ideas. "This is not about the road to [insert future year]; it's about describing as it is already. You are there. Describe things in the present tense." (From the UNESCO Playbook, pp. 68, 74)

Ask if there are any questions.

Instruct participants to first jot down their ideas individually, in silence, one idea at a time. Then, when a certain amount of time has passed (for example 5-10 minutes), tell them to share and discuss their ideas within the group.

For group discussions, suggest that participants present their ideas one at a time, and that for each idea others in the group with similar ideas share them and contribute to the discussion. When one idea has been discussed, present a new idea and repeat the procedure, making sure all group participants are given the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas.

After a sufficient time has passed for group discussion (anywhere from 10 to 40 minutes), bring any participants who have left the main room back in, and invite groups to share (some of) their main topics of discussion.

If there is time, you can allow questions and discussions between the groups during the plenary session.

Tip:

If you notice some participants listing all their ideas at once, you can give a gentle reminder to share one at a time, and to allow everyone around the table to speak. Depending on your group of participants, you can do this individually, or else remind everyone of this during the plenary session before the next group discussion.

Gezicht op de haven van Napels, Marco Ricci 1772/1800. Providing institution: Rijksmuseum, Netherlands - Public Domain. https://www.europeana.eu/item/90402/RP_P_1890_A_15263

When the round of sharing is over, present the second task:

- **Question 1.2: Probable:** What is TOPIC like in YEAR? Emphasise what you think is probable / what you think is likely.
- **Example:** How do youths and seniors interact in 2050? Emphasise what you think is probable.
- **Or:** Do you think youths and seniors interact in 2050? How?

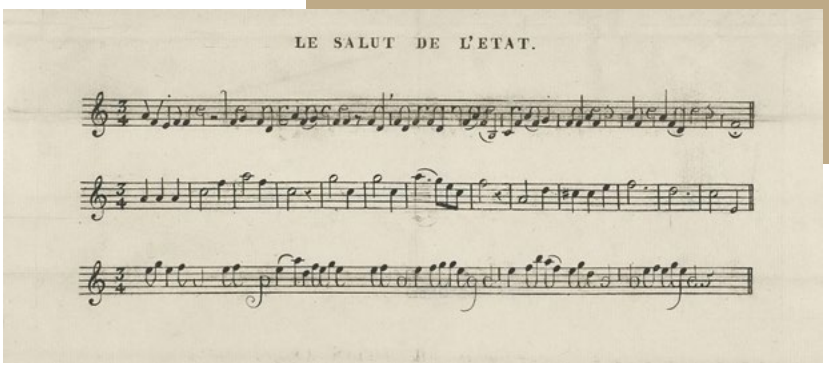
And repeat the procedure from part 1.1, including, if you want, the breathing exercise.

> **Sample script:** "Now, I'm going to ask each of you to take a few minutes to jot down what comes to mind when you think of all the probable futures for our topic on [insert lab topic]. Describing probable futures is about painting a picture of a world you would bet on, what you most expect. Probable futures are about trends, statistics, things that you might have seen or experienced that have led you to bet on this future. We are talking about the most realistic future you can think of, the one that is most likely to happen. This is not about the road to [insert future year]; it's about describing as it is already. You are there. Describe things in the present tense."
> (Adapted from the UNESCO Playbook, p. 68)

Tip:

Crafting effective questions for these phases may take some practice. Even if you're pleased with your questions, participants might raise issues you hadn't anticipated or highlight ambiguities. You can turn this to your advantage by asking participants for their interpretations.

One of us (Sveinung) has a tendency to try to answer any question that is posed to him. The other (Ragnhild) had to work quite hard to get him to see the usefulness of letting participants answer their own questions. Now, unless the question is purely practical, we try to let participants answer their own questions whenever they arise. This is a simple way of engaging the collective intelligence of the group, while also bringing participants into the design of the workshop.



Lied op de kroonprins, 1830. Providing institution: Rijksmuseum, Netherlands - Public Domain

Phase 2: Reframe

> **Sample script:** "We are now in phase 2, which focuses on reframing. The reframing scenario is not probable nor desirable. It's a scenario that is meant to challenge our anticipatory assumptions. For this next phase of the Lab, we will stay in this scenario and imagine societies, lives and even traditions, based on this new reality."
> (Adapted from UNESCO Playbook, p. 78)

Present your reframing scenario (see below for reframing scenarios that are ready to use, and tips for how to create your own). **Ask if there are any questions.**

Present the task:

- **Question 2: Reframe**: What is TOPIC like in this version of YEAR?
- **Example:** How do youths and seniors cooperate in this version of 2050?

Ask if there are any questions.

Instruct participants to first jot down their ideas individually, in silence, one idea at a time. Then, follow the same procedure as for Phase 1, ending with each group sharing their reflections in a plenary session.

- Make sure you have enough time in this phase to present the reframing scenario and to allow participants to ask questions before starting silent reflection and group work.
- Since the reframing scenario describes a future that is (radically) different to what participants are used to thinking about, there is likely to be some confusion about what you are asking them and how you expect participants to go about answering your questions.
- For example, we sometimes get questions about whether one should think about what is desirable in this future, or about what is probable. We either ask participants what they think (ref. tip above), suggest that they may do either or both, or just say "you decide".
- The goal of the reframing exercise is to "inhabit" for a time the alternative future described in the scenario, and look at the topic of the workshop from this perspective. Whether participants emphasise the positive, the negative, a bit of both (or something else entirely) is less important than taking seriously the premises described in the reframing scenario. We say more about the function of a reframing scenario in the section on Creating your own reframing scenarios, below.

Phase 3: Reflect

There are many ways to prompt participants to reflect on their experience. Consider asking them how the reframing scenario challenged assumptions they made about the future in the first two phases.

Sample script: „Another time travel: we are back in [current year]. Now that you have explored different projections and images of the future, take a moment to reflect on our journey together."
(Adapted from the UNESCO Playbook, p. 88)

You can also ask participants to revisit their desirable and/or probable futures in light of their thoughts and discussions during the reframing phase:

- Is there anything they would like to change in the image of the future they desire?
- Has anything changed in what they consider probable?
- What assumptions did they base their images of the future on?
- Are any of these assumptions questionable?
- What happens if we change one or more of these assumptions?

Sample script: "I would like you to discuss the following questions in subgroups, and then we will come together to share:

- What might you have taken for granted?
- What is new, the same, or changed?
- In Phase 1, what were the sources and influences of the images? Why were the images created?
- Did the journey through phases 1 and 2 generate any insights that nurture further questions?
- Are there any different roles within "lab topic" that you did not think of before?
- What are things that you thought were important for the future of the [lab topic] before the exercise but now seem less important in light of exploring other images of the future, and vice versa?"

(From the UNESCO Playbook, p. 89)

Tip:

This kind of reflection can also be encouraged during the first two phases. To do so, consider asking participants during plenary sessions what their experience was of answering each question: Was "probable" harder or easier than "desirable"? What about the reframing scenario?

Some people find that thinking in terms of what is probable is easiest, while others are more used to thinking about what they want to happen. Getting participants to talk about these differences is a useful way of illustrating the fact that each person has their own way of approaching questions about "the future", and hence when we talk about the future, we may not always be talking about the same thing.

Many people find the Reframe phase to be challenging. This is good: it shows that they had to engage their imagination in new ways, rather than relying on existing assumptions. By getting participants to talk about this experience, you create a learning opportunity: this is what Futures Literacy is about, and now they have experienced it firsthand.

Landscape, Kuru, Werner Holmberg 1830. Providing institution: Finnish National Gallery, Finland - CC0. https://www.europeana.eu/item/2021012/_B68368A8683794628ECDF88F050B0DB0

Phase 4: Act

Sample script:

- "If you could summarise the whole day in one word, what would it be?"
- "What are the main takeaways and calls to action you want to share?"
- "What would you like to set up as actions across the 3, 6, 9, 12 months as a small group? These should be implementable by you! Feel free to use the questions and ideas from other groups too."

(From the UNESCO Playbook, pp. 92, 94)

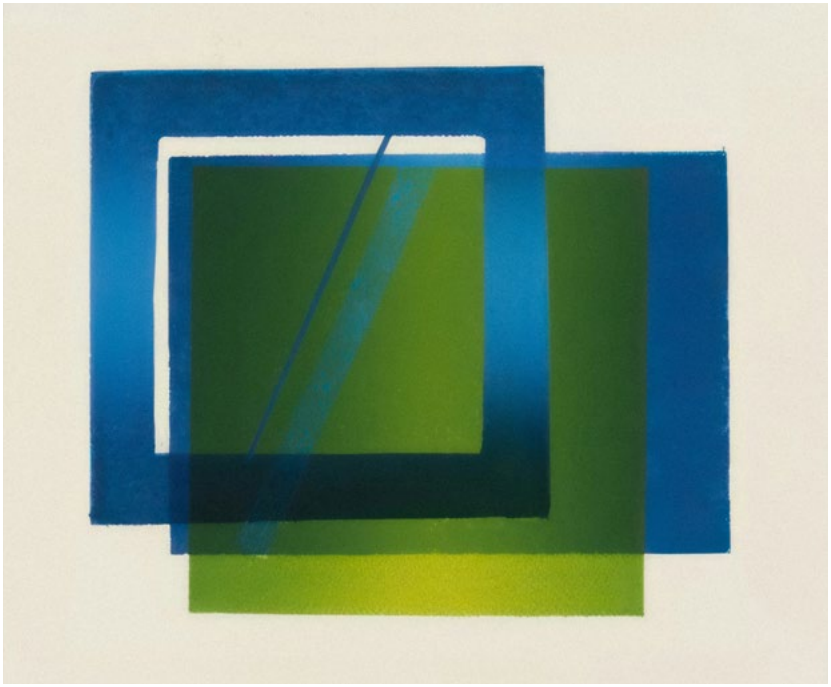
Translating ideas into action can be achieved in a number of ways.

One possibility is to have participants revisit their desired future, and then move backwards from this future to the present, describing some of the steps they took along the way. Another possibility is to ask participants to list one, two, or any number of specific things that they will do, alone or together with others, to move in the direction of a desirable future.

You can also encourage participants to work together to implement these plans.

If you used a warmup exercise, such as The Polak Game at the start of the workshop, you can run the exercise again, and use that as a starting point for discussions about what, if anything, has changed in the way participants perceive the future.

The Act phase can also be conducted at a later date, using the collected results of the first three phases as material. You can invite the same participants, or select a different group to work on implementation.



Kompositsioon geomeetrilise kujundiga IV, Avo Keerend, 1983. Providing institution: Tartu Art Museum, Estonia - CC0. https://www.europeana.eu/item/401/item_PWVAEFNU7UYHUZN5BO5APFO47ECQGYT6

Tip:

If you want participants to translate their ideas and insights into action, consider having them formulate "implementation intentions", using the following general form:

- IF [situation], THEN I will [behaviour], or: "I will do X. If Y gets in the way of doing X (as I know from experience it may do), I will first do (a certain amount of) X."
- For example:
  "I will meet people who are much younger/older than me without prejudice. If I notice myself judging them, I will stop to consider that I know very little about this person, and should not be so quick to judge."
- Or:
  "I will learn a second/third language. If I am tempted to use TikTok or watch TV instead, I will first spend 20 minutes learning this language." Merely formulating implementation intentions has been shown to increase people's ability to follow through on their intentions.

Gollwitzer, P. M., & Oettingen, G. (2020). Implementation Intentions. In M. D. Gellman (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine (pp. 1159–1164). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39903-0_1710

Dessin de collection de l'hiver 1949-1950, Marie-Louise Carven, 1949-1950. Providing institution: Palais Galliera - Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, France - CC0. https://www.europeana.eu/item/966/europeana_fashion_500058856

Follow-up

What kind of follow-up you do depends on your aims and the needs of your group of participants.

Workshop protocol/Report:

If you had participants or groups take notes during the phases, you can collect these notes and turn them into a report that you share with participants and other interested parties. This is a nice way of giving participants and others something concrete. If you want to do more with the data collected, you can draw out insights and highlight suggestions for further steps. These can be used as the basis for future work with your group or with other groups, for example to follow up on plans for action formulated in Phase 4.

Further workshops

A second option is to run a series of several workshops, with the results from one workshop feeding into the next.

Other outputs

Many kinds of output can result from a workshop: drawings, games, a play, plans for a festival, poetry, planting seedlings, and so forth. Although the workshop method itself relies on the use of written and spoken language, there is no reason why you could not design a workshop to result in very different kinds of output. If so, you should take the kinds of output you want into consideration when formulating questions and tasks for participants in each of the workshop phases.

Tip:

The most important result is perhaps nevertheless what happens in the minds of participants during the workshop.

If you have regular interactions with the group of participants, you may notice that they spontaneously refer back to things discussed there.

You can also prompt such reflections by using things that came up during the workshop to inform discussions in other contexts.

Suggested agenda for 5 hour Futures Literacy Laboratory – in one go or split in two.

Duration:	5 hours in one day, including breaks: 10:00–15:00 2+2 hours, not including lunch break. For example: 10:00–12:00 day 1, 10:00–12:00 day 2, or 13:00–15:00 day 1 and 10:00–12:00 day 2.
10:00–10:15	**Brief Introduction** A brief introduction to Futures Literacy, what it is and why it is important. Present today's agenda.
10:15–10:30	**The Polak Game or another warm-up exercise**
10:30–11:15	**Phase 1a Desirable futures (45 minutes)** • Breathing exercise and presentation of task (5 minutes) • Participants jot down their thoughts in silence (5–10 minutes) • Group discussion (15–20 minutes) • Plenary discussion (15 minutes)
11:15–11:30	**Break (15 minutes)**
11:15–12:00	**Phase 1b Probable futures (45 minutes)** • Breathing exercise and presentation of task (5 minutes) • Participants jot down their thoughts in silence (5–10 minutes) • Group discussion (15–20 minutes) • Plenary discussion (15 minutes)
12:00–13:00	**Lunch break (60 minutes)**

Tip:

If you want to spread the workshop out over two days, this is a good place to split the FLL in two.

13:00–13:45	**Phase 2 Reframe (45 minutes)** • Breathing exercise and present reframing scenario (10 minutes) • Participants jot down their thoughts in silence (5–10 minutes) • Group discussion (15–20 minutes) • Plenary discussion (10–15 minutes)
13:45–14:00	**Break (15 minutes)**
14:00–14:20	**Phase 3 Reflect (20 minutes)** • Participants jot down their thoughts in silence (5 minutes) • Plenary discussion (15 minutes)
14:20–14:50	**Phase 4 Act (30 minutes)** • Working in groups (15–20 minutes) • Plenary presentations (10–15 minutes)
14:50–15:00	**Finishing up (10 minutes)** • Takeaways from today • Next steps • Any questions?

Suggested agenda for 3 hour Futures Literacy Laboratory

Duration:	**10:00–13:00**
10:00–10:15	Introduction
10:15–10:45	Phase 1a: Desirable futures
10:45–11:00	Break
11:00–11:30	Phase 1b: Probable futures
11:30–12:00	Phase 2: Reframe
12:00–12:15	Break
12:15–13:00	Phase 3/4: Reflect, Act.

Three Futures Literacy Laboratories

This part contains plans for conducting three different Futures Literacy Laboratories, one for youths, one for seniors, and one for a mixed group of youths and seniors.

Each plan includes tasks and questions for phase 1, suggestions for a reframing scenario and questions for phase 2, suggestions for questions for phase 3, and further steps for phase 4.

Combine these with the quick start guide and the suggested agendas above to create a complete plan for your workshop.

Youths: My life (in 2040/2050)

Phase 1: Reveal

Phase 1a: What is your life like in [2040/2050]? Emphasise what you want.
Or: What would you like your life to be like in [2040/2050]?

Phase 1b: What is your life like in [2040/2050]? Emphasise what you think is likely.
Or: What do you think your life is like [2040/2050]?

Phase 2: Reframe

Select one of the reframing scenarios below. We suggest 1, 3 or 5.

Phase 3: Reflect

Suggested questions for reflection:

- Did the reframing scenario change your perception of the future? How?
- Is there anything else you are taking for granted when thinking about your/the future?
- Is there anything you would like to change about the way society or the world works, something that affects you and the future you see for yourself?

Phase 4: Act

Suggested tasks for acting. Singly or in groups:

- Identify at least one thing that you – alone or together with others here today – can do to move in the direction of the future you want.
- Make a plan for how will you do this thing.
- Present this plan to the others.

Seniors: An aging-friendly Warsaw

Phase 1: Reveal

Phase 1a: What is an aging-friendly Warsaw like in [2040/2050]? Emphasise what you desire/want.
Or: If you could decide, what would an aging-friendly Warsaw look like in [2040/2050]?

Phase 1b: What is an aging-friendly Warsaw like in [2040/2050]? Emphasise what you think is likely.
Or: In what ways do you think Warsaw will be more/less aging-friendly in [2040/2050]?

Phase 2: Reframe

Select one of the reframing scenarios below. We suggest 2 or 4.

Phase 3: Reflect

Suggested questions for reflection:

- Did the reframing scenario change your perception of the future? How?
- Is there anything (else) you are taking for granted when thinking about your/the future?
- Is there anything you would like to change about the way society or the world works, something that affects you and the future you see – for yourself, for society, for younger people, for the world?

Phase 4: Act

Suggested tasks for acting. Singly or in groups:

- Identify at least one thing that you – alone or together with others here today – can do to move in the direction of the future you want.
- Make a plan for how will you do this thing.
- Present this plan to the others.

Youths and Seniors: The Future of Communication

Consider having mixed groups of youths and seniors working together. Either throughout the entire workshop, or some of the phases.

Phase 1: Reveal

Phase 1a: How do we communicate in [2040/2050]? Emphasise what you desire/want.
Or: If you could decide, how do we communicate in [2040/2050]?

Phase 1b: How do we communicate in [2040/2050]? Emphasise what you think is likely.
Or: How do you think we most probably communicate in [2040/2050]?

Phase 2: Reframe

Select one of the reframing scenarios below. We suggest 3 or 4.

Phase 3: Reflect

Suggested questions for reflection:

- Did the reframing scenario change your perception of the future (of communication)? How?
- Is there anything else you are taking for granted when thinking about the future of communication?

Phase 4: Act

Suggested tasks for acting. Singly or in groups:

- Identify at least one thing that you – alone or together with others here today – can do to move in the direction of the future you want.
- Make a plan for how will you do this thing.
- Present this plan to the others.

In groups:

- Describe a way of communicating that you would like to see people use more often.
- Present this to the others.

Reframing scenarios

Reframing Scenario 1: Super Organisers

Vanad esemed, Avo Keerend, 1964. Providing institution: Tartu Art Museum, Estonia - CC0. https://www.europeana.eu/item/401/item_345ZSDA-DBUPVSTDOJT7IAO5VEJR2QK5K

The year is [2040/2050], the setting: Central Warsaw

After a collapse in state services, small groups of inhabitants have organised themselves into people-to-people networks that share information, provide aid, and distribute food and resources.

Some of these groups are recognised as "super-organisers" for their ability to reach and help lots of people. Your group is one of these super-organisers.
What is [topic of workshop] like in this version of the future?

Further questions:

- Describe a day in your life.
- What gives you meaning?
- When do you feel useful?
- What is easy?
- What is difficult?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of being a super-organiser?
- Who do you rely on to help you?
- Who can you trust?
- How do you get others to trust you?

Reframing Scenario 2: Park City

The year is [2040/2050], the setting: Central Warsaw

The Warsaw municipal government have decided to gradually turn city streets, squares and the roofs of buildings into parks.

This will increase the city's resilience in the face of increasingly extreme heatwaves and regular flooding, while also enabling more of the food consumed in the city to be locally produced. The planning of this "park city" will be delegated to its inhabitants, drawn at random from a citywide lottery. (Once these committees have presented their plans, all inhabitants will be expected to contribute to putting these plans into action).

You have been selected as a member of the committee for designing and planning the greening of your district. (And to plan how the necessary work, which will be undertaken communally – by all inhabitants together – is to be organised.)

What is [topic of workshop] like in this version of the future?

At the French Windows. The Artist's Wife, Lauritz Andersen Ring, 1897. Providing institution: Statens Museum for Kunst. Denmark - CCo. https://www.europeana.eu/item/2063604/DEN_280_016

Further questions:

Draw / sketch how you propose to turn your district / the city into a park.

- Which elements should the park include?
- How?

Make a plan for how to organise the work that will be necessary for implementing your plans.

Optional:

- How do you motivate youths to join in the work?
- How do you motivate other seniors to join in the work?
- What does this work teach you?

Reframing Scenario 3: New Art of Communication

> The year is [2040/2050], the setting: Central Warsaw

More and more people are putting away their phones and computers in favour of talking to people face to face.

A vibrant new "art of communication" arises, with different styles of expressing oneself, listening to others, and interacting in person and in large groups. Each style is based on a different set of ideas about what communication is for, and what values are most important.

There is something of a national obsession with creating, promulgating and critiquing different styles of communication, engaging people of all ages and backgrounds.

You are a member of one (particularly innovative/marginal/weird/popular) group of people advocating a (highly popular/challenging/absurd/funny) style of communication. (Pick the adjectives you want.)

> Or, simplified: **You are a member of a group of people advocating a particular style of communication.**

Graafika. Kaheksa variatsiooni ruudule V, Avo Keerend, 1986. Providing institution: Pärnu Museum, Estonia. https://www.europeana.eu/item/401/item_JDXVSECUJQ7P6DRQ5SGNMVBUYDPUOBUV

What is [topic of workshop] like in this version of the future?

Further questions:

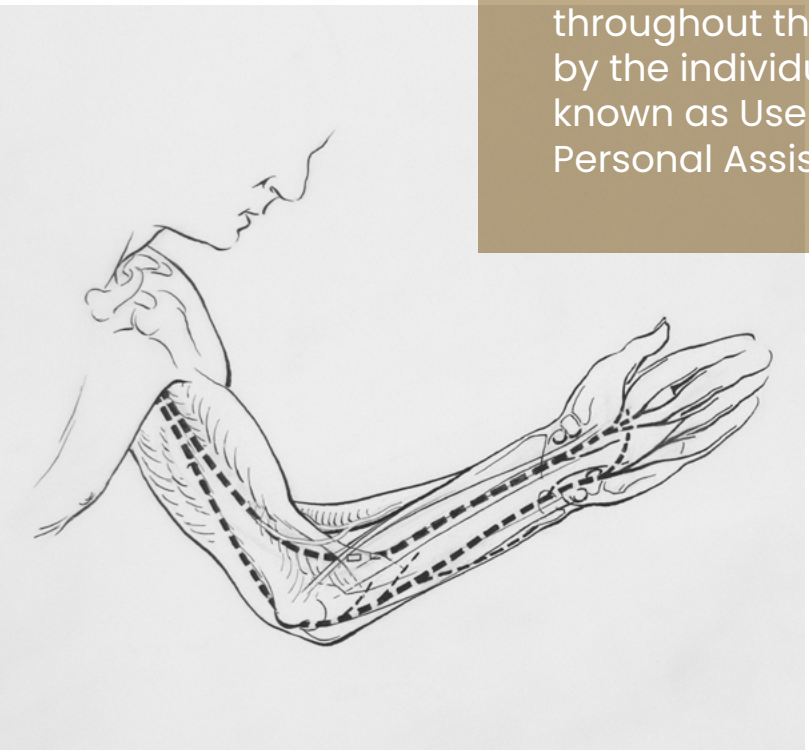
- Describe the main aspects of your style of communication.
- What are the basic ideas and values informing this style?
- What is the name of the style?
- How does this style handle communication across large age gaps?

Optional:

- How do you show the person you are talking to that you respect them?
- How do you communicate efficiently?
- How do you listen?
- How do you express your compassion/care (in writing, when talking?)

Reframing Scenario 4: User-Directed Lifelong Personal Assistance (UDLPA)

In this version of the future, all residents of Poland have the right to personalised assistance throughout their lives, as directed by the individual themselves (also known as User-Directed Lifelong Personal Assistance, ULPA).



Circulatory system of the arm, J. Tinkelenberg, 1950/1990. Providing institution: Leiden University Libraries, Netherlands - Public Domain. https://www.europeana.eu/item/744/item_3462258

From the moment you acquire your Polish citizenship to the moment you lose it, you can choose which care services you want to receive, and who will provide you with these services. At the same time, all citizens are obliged to provide lifelong assistance to others.

The traditional family structure has completely dissolved. Most people aged 15-85 are responsible for assisting a certain number of younger, similar-aged, and older individuals. The same applies to the age groups 0-15 and 75-120, adjusted according to individual assessments of their ability to assist.

What is [topic of workshop] like in this version of the future?

Further questions:

- What services do you request?
- Who do you select to provide these services?
- Who selects you to provide services for them?
- What services do you provide for these others?

Reframing Scenario 5: Constrained Choices

Abstracte compositie, Greet van Amstel (1903-1981), 1975. Providing institution: Jewish Historical Museum, Netherlands - Public Domain https://www.europeana.eu/item/270/resource_document_jhm_museum_M011495

> In this future, the state has introduced limited choices for all citizens.

The structures of society have been altered to reduce the number of decisions individuals face, while promoting stable social structures that enhance feelings of belonging and unity.

After a seven-year basic education that is the same for everyone, individuals are assigned a future career and residence based on models predicting regional labour needs. Following this assignment, they join a "flock", a social group determined by profession and residence, which replaces the family as the central social unit. All further education happens within the flock.

Every citizen has the opportunity to switch flocks – and thus their career and residence – **once in their lifetime**.

What is [topic of workshop] like in this version of the future?

Further questions:

- What is your life like in this version of the future?
- **Optional:** What are the positives? What are the negatives?

Creating your own Reframing Scenarios

> **The point of a reframing scenario is to let participants consider the topic of the workshop from the perspective of a possible future that is, in some important way, different to how they themselves imagine the future; to allow them to play with different ideas than they normally would.**

Put in other words: the point of a reframing scenario is to challenge one or more of your participants' assumptions about the future.

So, how do you create a reframing scenario?

1. Find something you think or even know that your participants take for granted and assume will always be more or less the same.
2. Describe a future where this thing is no longer true or changed in some important way.

For example, if the topic of your workshop is education, a useful reframing scenario might ask participants to imagine how education is organised if there are no longer any schools or universities. Does that mean that we have stopped learning? Probably not. Then how do we learn?

The assumption you challenge here is the assumption that learning will continue to be organised much as it is today, in formal institutions of learning. The way you challenge the assumption is by describing a future where this is no longer the case. Here, we simply say that there are no schools or universities.

You could also go further and describe some alternative way of organising learning. Both of these approaches would challenge participants' assumptions about how learning is organised. If you do not describe an alternative, you let participants come up with their own. If you describe an alternative, participants will explore this instead. Both can be valuable.

As an illustration of this, consider Reframing scenario 4: User-Directed Lifelong Personal Assistance. This scenario starts with three basic principles that are likely to be endorsed by most inhabitants of a liberal, democratic welfare state: 1. Personal autonomy, that you can make most decisions about your own life yourself; 2. Individual rights, that you have certain rights as an inhabitant of your country, including the right to certain welfare goods; and 3. that Rights come with duties.

Instead of removing any of these principles, their scope is extended. Your rights are expanded to encompass any kind of assistance you might want, and your autonomy is expanded to including commanding whoever to deliver that assistance to you. However, your duty to do the same for others extends equally. The result is a future that is both attractive and repellent, and neither very likely nor very desirable. And while it works by adding, rather than subtracting, it leaves plenty of questions unanswered.

For example, if the topic of your workshop is education, you might ask participants what knowledge or skills you would need in a society that works according to the principles of User-Directed Life-Long Personal Assistance. Or, if the topic is communication, you might ask what new kinds of language this would give rise to.

In other words, the reframing scenario need not directly address the topic of your workshop in order for it to work as a reframing scenario.

Lesendes Mädchen, Isabella von Parma (Künstler_in). Providing institution: Albertina. Austria - Public Domain. https://www.europeana.eu/item/15508/13636

Why and when to conduct a Futures Literacy Laboratory

> **The Futures Literacy Laboratory workshop method is suited to facilitate conversations among individuals and groups of people about the future.**

Why might you want to create such a conversation? There are two main reasons for why you might want to host a workshop on the future.

First, you may want to gather insights and ideas from a group of people about a specific topic, and how they think this topic might look in the future.

Second, you may want to raise awareness about the future as something that we can help shape through our actions today, and inspire your participants to imagine alternative futures that they can help turn into reality. A Futures Literacy Laboratory will let you do both at once. However, the topic you choose, the questions you pose, and the way you emphasise reflection during the workshop would be influenced by which of the two aims are most important to you.

For example, if you want to gather insights and ideas about a specific topic, you will need to consider how to formulate the questions you pose to participants in such a manner that they encourage specific answers. The topic you choose may also be narrower and more specific than it would otherwise be, in order to ensure that the results are useful to you. You should also make sure to have mechanisms in place that allow you to document participants' ideas and insights, taking notes or even recording discussions.

If, on the other hand, the main point of your workshop is to gather a group of people to discuss how something they care about might look or be done differently in the future, inspiring them to act on these ideas, you will want to make sure that the topic you pick is something these people care about, and formulate questions in such a way as to maximise their engagement with imagining possibilities for this topic in the future. With less concern for capturing specific ideas or insights, you can relax your demands on documentation, and possibly allow discussions to be more roaming or less structured. In practice, most Futures Literacy Laboratories will want to achieve a little of both.* Finding the right balance and designing a workshop that fits your needs and the needs of your group will be a matter of practice. We hope and believe that this hand book will help guide you to achieving this practice.

As for when you conduct a Futures Literacy Laboratory, that again depends on what you want to achieve. We find that a workshop using this method can serve as a useful starting point for a new project, allowing you and your participants to broaden your horizon before embarking on something. However, a Futures Literacy Laboratory can also be used as a tool to step back, challenge and reassess plans that have already been made or projects that are already underway.

If, for example, you want to host a Futures Literacy Laboratory with students, you may want to do so as the first step in a longer project, where the students take ideas that come up during the workshop and continue working on them. This is a natural way of extending the last, "Act"-phase of the Futures Literacy Laboratory. Or, if your group of potential participants is already working on something, you can introduce the future as a further dimension to this work by employing the Futures Literacy Laboratory method to encourage thinking and discussing the work in light of the kinds of futures that your participants imagine for the topic they are working on.

In either case, you should be aware that a Futures Literacy Laboratory creates a space apart from everyday life. The method creates a space that you and your participants can enter into and use to address ideas and concerns that might not fit easily into the near-term thinking and task-solving mindset of a regular day. This can be a very liberating experience, and we almost always find that participants enjoy the exercise. However, it does require that you and your participants take the setup of the workshop seriously: by accepting the structure and logic of the method, you enable a lot of free and creative thinking, which at the same time – and no less importantly – is fun!

*There is a third possibility, for which the FLL was originally designed: to do research on people's anticipatory assumptions, i.e. the assumptions they make when imagining the future. This is more relevant to researchers than to practitioners, but we write something about anticipation and anticipatory assumptions in the section on Futures Literacy below.

More about Futures Literacy

> **In the introduction, we gave a loose definition of Futures Literacy as:**
> - **exploring what might be possible in the future**
> - **in order to discover opportunities for positive change in the present**

Another way of putting the first point is to say that Futures Literacy trains us to use the future as a tool to explore what is possible.

The idea of "using the future as a tool" might seem strange at first. However, the theory behind Futures Literacy claims that this is in fact something all of us already do all of the time. And not just us humans: all animals that act purposefully in the present to achieve some aim in the not-yet-present are in fact making assumptions about what will happen, and acting on these assumptions. As such, they are in effect using the future as a kind of tool to decide what to do in the present.

For us humans, it is perhaps easiest to recognise this behaviour in our use of clocks and calendars: We use the clock to plan all kinds of actions throughout our days. Knowing I need to get up at 08:00 tomorrow, I set an alarm and expect that it will wake me to a world that looks pretty much the same as it did yesterday. Planning what I have to do to complete a project at work or school before a set deadline, I assume that all the structures and stuff I rely on to do my work will be available, like access to the internet or a reliable power source for my computer.

In this and myriad other ways, we rely on assumptions about things that have not yet happened, in other words about the future, to make choices and orient ourselves in the present: we plan for what we want to achieve and, to a certain extent, prepare for what we expect along the way (like bringing an umbrella when it rains, or packing lunch so we don't go hungry during the day).

This is so obvious that you may wonder why we would need to invent a new, weird way of talking about it as "using the future". The answer, we think, lies in how our assumptions can limit what we are able to imagine.

We mostly assume that tomorrow will be like today and next year like last year. This is perhaps particularly true for the kinds of big structures that we are part of and depend upon, but feel little control over: the education system, the national economy, food production, and so on.

This is also true when we explicitly try to imagine the future. Even if we imagine big changes in one aspect of reality (flying cars!), we tend to leave most other aspects untouched (there will still be cars, there will still be private transportation, we will still be able to move around freely, there will still be reliable energy available, and so on).

Because of this, we easily end up imagining futures that are only slight variations on the present. This means that we miss out on the opportunity to imagine what the future might be like if there were bigger, more radical changes. And by missing out on imagining this, we make it very difficult for ourselves to imagine how we might work today to create a different, better society tomorrow.

This is part of what Futures Literacy is about: challenging our assumptions about the future in order to expand the imagination, and using our expanded imagination to discover opportunities for positive change in the present.

There is a technical term for the sets of abilities that allow us (and other animals) to use the future in this way: anticipatory systems.

The corresponding term for the assumptions we make when using the future in this way is anticipatory assumptions. You do not have to learn these terms. However, it may be useful to know that researchers and practitioners often talk of Futures Literacy as becoming aware of our anticipatory assumptions so that we can question them, and, second, creating new anticipatory assumptions as a way of exploring what might be possible.

For more on this, see Miller, R. (2018). Introduction. In R. Miller (Ed.), Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century (pp. 1–12). Routledge.

Flowers from Normandy, Rijksmuseum, 1887.
Providing institution: Rijksmuseum.
Netherlands - Public Domain.
https://www.europeana.eu/item/90402/SK_A_2895

Interieur van een ijzergieterij,
Rijksmuseum, 1880-1906.
Providing institution: Rijksmuseum.
Netherlands - Public Domain.
https://www.europeana.eu/item/90402/SK_A_3673

In the introduction, the second part of our loose definition of Futures Literacy was:

- **exploring what might be possible in the future**
- **in order to discover opportunities for positive change in the present**

We should stop here to recognise that this is but one aspect of Futures Literacy, and one that not all advocates of Futures Literacy are equally comfortable with.

The reason, briefly, is this: too much emphasis on what we can do today to create a better tomorrow may, even if it is aided by critical thinking, perpetuate a false sense of our ability to control what happens.

This illusion of control can be dangerous because it blinds us to the inextricable complexity of the world, and how much things may change from one day to the next, not to mention one year to the next. The main danger is not that we may be shocked by the unexpected – we most certainly will be! – but that we will miss out on developments and, yes, opportunities that are difficult to spot using our ordinary frames of reference.

Therefore, Futures Literacy is also about training ourselves to be open to the unexpected, to what may emerge out of the chaos of the world. Practicing Futures Literacy is thus also practicing a certain humility about our ability to control what happens. It trains us to focus not only on what we want to achieve, but also on how we can reduce our negative impact on the future.

This openness to what may happen has another, perhaps equally important aspect, pointed out to us by the futures researcher Sari Miettinen at the Finland Futures Research Centre: the future is uncertain, and this uncertainty cannot be eliminated. However, we can learn to live with this uncertainty by learning to talk about it together with others.

Recently, The Lancet Psychiatry Commission on Youth Mental Health published a report stating that the ongoing mental health crisis among young people is tied to uncertainty about the future, brought on by "[climate change,] new technologies (most notably in AI), geopolitical insecurity, and the serious socioeconomic consequences of unrestrained neoliberal economic policies".

In light of this, Futures Literacy can also be seen as an important tool, and promoting it could help us deal with this uncertainty.

The future is not a given, and the uncertainty this creates can be managed if we talk about it with others. And because the future is not a given, we can imagine and give shape to better futures – if we work together.

Further reading, references

For a comprehensive introduction to Futures Literacy and overview of Futures Literacy Laboratories, we recommend the open access book Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century:
Miller, R. (Ed.). (2018). Transforming the Future: Anticipation in the 21st Century. Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/oa-edit/10.4324/9781351048002/transforming-future-riel-miller

If you want more inspiration and advice for how to design and conduct Futures Literacy Laboratories, we recommend the very thorough UNESCO-developed FLL Playbook, available for free:
Futures literacy laboratory playbook. An essentials guide for co-designing a lab to explore how and why we anticipate (UNESCO). (2023). UNESCO. https://doi.org/10.54678/KSWO4445

For more exercises that you can use as icebreakers or other tools that leverage futures thinking, we suggest Sitra's library of tools (there are a number of these libraries available online):
https://www.sitra.fi/en/archive/?_case_types=8437

Future for All
handbook