

Defining the Domain

Key question: What about the future is worth studying?

Overview:

Choosing a domain is the first step in understanding and influencing the future. A domain is anything that exists today that has a future. Well, what doesn't have a future? Just about everything does. The domains usually chosen are an industry (energy or computers) or an institution (education or health care), but domains also stretch from the smallest (an individual, yourself) to the largest (the whole human population). An easy way to remember what a domain is would be to say, "I am studying the future of X." X is the domain.

Understanding the future of a domain takes a lot of time so we don't want to pick just anything. We should pick a domain that is worth it, something we would really need or like to know about. We won't be able to predict the future of the domain exactly, but we will understand a lot more about its future after doing the forecast than before.

Some domains are important for making decisions and taking actions, such as the future of careers you may be considering or the future of community you are moving to. Others might just be for fun—the future of video games or space commerce or the electoral system.

So the key question is "What do you need or want to know about the future?"

Objectives:

- Select a domain for study
- Develop a key question or issue about the domain

Materials (*below*): Domain worksheet

Instructions:

1. Identify three topics you would like to know about for the future.
2. Assemble in groups and share your topics with your colleagues.
3. Imagine your group had a magical version of Siri or Watson that could tell you one thing about each of the domains you shared. You could ask it one question about the future of the domain. What would that one question be?
4. Share one domain per person with the rest of the class.
5. If you wish, pair up with others who may want to work on the same domain.