Course Title: How to Think Like a Futurist: Improve Your Powers of Imagination, Invention and Capacity for Change
Course Code: WSP 342
Instructor: Jane McGonigal
Course website: canvas.stanford.edu

“In dealing with the future, it is far more important to be imaginative than to be right.” – Alvin Toffler, Future Shock

Thinking about the far-off future isn’t just an exercise in intellectual curiosity. It’s a practical skill that, new research reveals, has a direct neurological link to greater creativity, empathy, and optimism. In other words, futures thinking gives you the ability to create change in your own life and the world around you, today.

Book list:

Required: The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces that Will Shape Our Future by Kevin Kelly

Workshop Outline:

Day 1: Foundations of future thinking

"Any useful statement about the future should at first seem ridiculous." - Jim Dator, futurist.

This day is about powering up CREATIVITY and IMAGINATION.

Level one: Choose your own future

“The future of X”
When does the future begin?
Future orientation – a quick game
Making the future vs. predicting the future
The four modes of futures thinking
“The future is already here. It’s just not evenly distributed yet.”
- William Gibson, science fiction author

**Level two: Playing with signals**
- The story of the Chinese Farmer (video)
- Strong opinions, lightly held
- What’s a signal?
- How to collect signals (Skill #1)
- Combining signals into forecasts (Skill #2)
- A forecast from the year 2026: The future of working and learning
- Positive imagination (Skill #3)
- Shadow imagination (Skill #4)

“The future is dark, which on the whole, is the best thing the future can be, I think."
- Virginia Wolf, writer

**Level three: Divergent thinking skills**
- The 2080 Census: The World as We (Don’t) Know It
- 100 ways anything could be different in the future
- Predicting the past, or counter-factual memory (Skill #5)
- Remembering the future, or counter-factual foresight (Skill #6)
- Hard empathy (Skill #7)

*Well done! See you tomorrow. There is no assignment between class meetings, other than to get as much sleep as you can, to help your brain “lock in” what you’ve learned!*

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Day 2: Making the future real – for yourself and for others

“My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there.”
- Charles Kettering, inventor

“The future has a you-shaped hole in it. In that way you are important. In that way you are called.”
- Tara Sophia Mohr, writer

This week is about powering up your ability to CREATE CHANGE.

Level four: Personal forecasting and autobiographical futures
Why your brain treats your future self like a stranger
Connecting with your future self – First person futures (Skill #8)
Creativity boost! Personal divergent thinking
How to get practical ideas from autobiographical futures (Or, how to ask: What would YOU do in this future?) (Skill #9)

“The human capacity to create mental images of the ‘totally other’ - that which has never been experienced or recorded - is the key dynamic of history.”– Elise Boulding, peace and conflict worker

“Possibilities are for visionaries and activists, probabilities are for spectators and consultants.” – William Connolly, political scientist

Level five: Storytelling and image-making about the future
Where to find images of the future, and what they tell us about our current hopes and fears
Preferred futures – and why they are best described in one ridiculous sentence (Skill #10)
How to create Artifacts from the future (Skill #11)
"Envisioning and making the future must be a massively public endeavor." – Marina Gorbis, futurist

**Level 6: Collective imagination**

- Why games are the most elevated form of investigation
- Foresight boost: Massively multiple futures and collective imagination (Skill #12)
- Foresight engines and how they work
- Let’s play: The future of feeling

**Assignments for the future:**

Congratulations! Even though the class is finished, keep going…

**Read:** If you are so inspired, finish *Inevitable* and check out the list of recommended additional readings at [https://tinyurl.com/morefuture](https://tinyurl.com/morefuture)

**Practice:** Recommended activities to continue practicing the skills you learned can also be found at [https://tinyurl.com/morefuture](https://tinyurl.com/morefuture)

**Connect:** Subscribe to the Institute for the Future’s newsletter *News from the Future* at [iftf.org/iftf-you/subscribe](http://iftf.org/iftf-you/subscribe)

**Grade Options and Requirements:**

- **Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)**
  - A passing grade (for "Credit") requires you to attend both days and participate in all of the in-class activities
- **No Grade Requested (NGR)**
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose Credit/No Credit option.*