

Note-Taking Tool

In 1972, a team of young scientists led by Dennis and Dana Meadows published *The Limits to Growth*. This study explored what would happen to human civilization if people kept pursuing endless economic growth on a finite planet.

Think about what you've learned about *The Limits to Growth*. Then, examine contemporary sources to consider how questions raised by the study continue to be debated today.

Source

"Can the Economy Grow Forever?" by TED-Ed in collaboration with the World Economic Forum (August 11, 2022)

This video frames an ongoing debate among economists about whether economies can continue to grow while reducing their use of natural resources and their environmental impact. Watch the video and take notes in the first part of the chart. Then, consider the question in the second part of the chart to reflect on your understanding.

Viewing Notes

Why do many economists believe that continued economic growth is necessary?

What problems or challenges can continued economic growth create?

Why do some economists think technological innovation can allow economies to keep growing while reducing their environmental impact? What reasons or examples does the video provide?

Why do some economists think technological innovation will not be enough to make continued economic growth sustainable? What do they propose instead?

Reflection Notes

How does the debate described in this video connect to the debate over technology and growth raised by *The Limits to Growth*?

What questions do you have about this debate?

Source

"Could humanity be sustainable? It's not as hopeless as you think" from ***TED Radio Hour*** (January 12, 2024)

As you read or listen to Zomorodi’s interview with Ritchie, take notes about the argument Ritchie makes and how she supports it. Then, use the second part of the chart to reflect on the interview.

Reading/Listening Notes		
Summarize Ritchie’s main argument. What kind of future does she believe is possible – for humans and the planet? Take notes below to track how Ritchie supports her argument.		
	According to Ritchie, what has changed?	How does Ritchie use this data to support her argument?
U.K.’s carbon dioxide [CO ₂] emissions and Gross Domestic Product [GDP] <i>(GDP is used to gauge the health of an economy, with increases indicating growth and decreases signaling contraction.)</i>		
Renewable energy and batteries		

Air pollution		
Food production and land use		
What challenges does Ritchie acknowledge as she makes her argument? How does she respond to them?		

Reflection Notes

What questions do you still have about Ritchie's argument? What additional data would help you answer those questions or evaluate her argument?

Source [“Child labour, toxic leaks: the price we could pay for a greener future”](#) by Robin McKie for *The Guardian* (January 3, 2021)

As you read Robin McKie’s article, trace where the resources needed for green technologies come from and the environmental and human costs associated with them.

Reading Notes			
Material or green technology	What is it needed for?	Where/how is it produced?	What environmental or human impacts does McKie connect to its extraction or development?
Cobalt			
Lithium			
Copper			
Nuclear energy			
Deep-sea minerals			

Synthesis & Reflection

In Episode 10, journalist Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo investigates the economic relationships connecting African producers and countries with corporations and consumers in wealthier parts of the world. Ugochi's reporting suggests that these present-day relationships continue the power dynamics of the colonial past.

How does this article deepen or complicate your understanding of these relationships?

Reflect on all three sources and their relationship to *The Limits to Growth*

In *The Limits to Growth*, the MIT scientists' models suggested that technological innovation could address particular environmental problems but might create new pressures elsewhere. They concluded that technological innovation alone could not make continued economic growth sustainable.

- How do the arguments and evidence in the three sources support, challenge, or complicate this conclusion? Consider the possibilities of technological innovation and the resources required to develop and use new technologies.
- What, if anything, do these sources suggest about the scientists' conclusion that economic growth cannot continue indefinitely on a finite planet?
- What questions remain unresolved? What else would you need to know or consider to answer them?