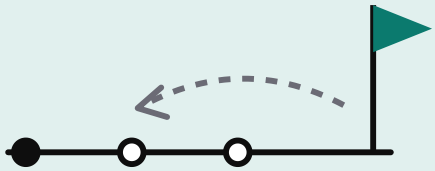
Method

Backcasting

A method that starts by describing a desirable future and, from there, works backward to find which decisions and changes would be needed to reach it.



Origin

Robinson (1982)

Output

A picture of the desired future and the steps to get there from today

What it’s for

It helps you avoid simply extending today's trends when the goal requires a big change.

Key elements

The destination first

Start from how the future should be, not from how it will be if nothing changes.

Backward

From that future, set milestones until you reach the present.

What has to change

The result is concrete decisions, not a prediction.

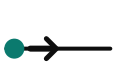
How it’s done

1 

Describe the future you want to reach.

2 

From there, working backward, mark the intermediate milestones.

3 

Decide what to do today to start the journey.

Applications in design

When to use it

When the goal is clear and far away, like a zero-waste service in ten years.

Avoid

Describing the desired future so vaguely that you can't set milestones.

Don't fall for it

It isn't a forecast: combine it with scenarios to see what could knock the path off course.

Connections

Builds on

- Futures cone
- Futures studies

Used by

- Design futures
- Design for policy
- Transition design
- Sustainable design

Related to

- Scenario planning
- Three horizons

Authors and works

1982	**John B. Robinson**	He proposed it as a method for analyzing energy policy, starting from desirable futures instead of forecasts.

Sources

Original sources

- Robinson, J. B. (1982). Energy backcasting: A proposed method of policy analysis. Energy Policy, 10(4), 337–344.

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

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