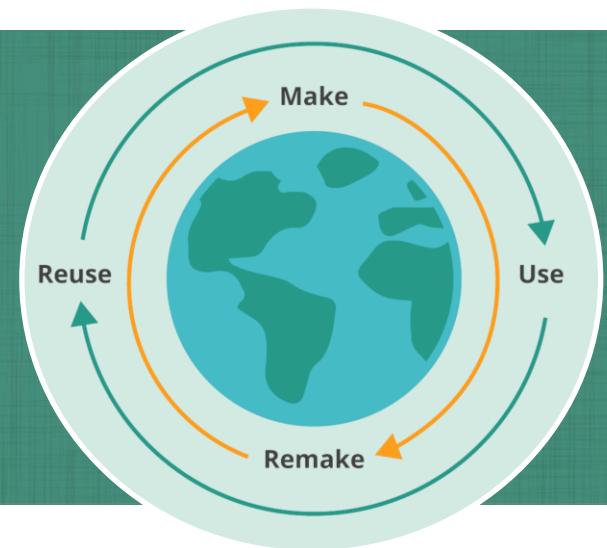


What is a Circular Economy?

#Eco360
Activity
Grade Level: 9-12



Circular Economy is the concept of an economic model that does not generate waste. If we look at our economy today, it largely follows a linear approach. We take raw materials from the natural environment and make different products. Once created, the products are then sold to consumers who use them for a certain period, and then the products are disposed of into the landfill. A landfill is a place for discarding all waste that has no use in our economy.

Linear Economy: Take ► Make ► Use ► Dispose

A linear economy works fine for a small community of consumers. On a global scale with billions of consumers becoming part of our economy, a linear system becomes unsustainable. We are running out of raw materials to create new products for everyone. Landfills are filling up with the massive increase in disposal of waste - products that are no longer in use. This is a challenge that requires changing the way we think of our economy today.

How can we design a better economic

model that reduces waste going into landfills? We can take inspiration by observing our natural ecosystem to design a better system for our economy.

In the natural ecosystem, there is no waste generated that requires disposal to a landfill. Our natural ecosystem works in a circular system, where all raw materials go back to where they came from. Natural ecosystems work sustainably, without creating waste that needs to be disposed of in landfills. This is because the waste generated in one organism becomes food for another organism.

In this way, the natural ecosystem provides an excellent example of a perfect circular system, where there is no waste generated and everything gets recycled. In contrast to a linear economy, the natural world follows a circular model, where all materials flow within the system following a circular cycle of recycling and reusing materials.

A **circular economy** works in a similar fashion, where raw materials and products are used and reused as many times as possible to reduce the extraction of new raw materials. This also reduces the amount of waste going to landfills.

In the wake of all the excess waste, in particular, the plastic pollution harming our environment, there have been calls for an alternative model of an economy. One that does not generate the amount of waste that is currently generated in a linear economy. Learning about circular economy and how it can offer a viable solution to combating waste pollution is a necessary step to moving towards a world without plastic waste ending in the environment.

Here are some additional resources on circular economy:

- <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/concept>
- <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/concept/infographic>
- <https://reports.weforum.org/toward-the-circular-economy-accelerating-the-scale-up-across-global-supply-chains/the-limits-of-linear-consumption/>