

The Future is *Wild*

It could take several decades, or perhaps many thousands or millions of years. But we can be sure of one thing: sooner or later, the human species as we know it will no longer be here. There's plenty of evidence evolution is still shaping our kind today. Europeans are getting taller. Northern Europeans are becoming more resistant to disease. And although it's controversial, there's some evidence we're getting smarter.

Still, we are also 'devolving' -- getting worse at certain things. Our limbs have become feebler. Our bodies are getting stiffer, and less agile. Our senses, and especially our nose, have deteriorated big time. There's evidence our sperm is getting worse.

That's because evolution is not about improving living things -- but simply, about adapting to the circumstances. And we're adapted to walking, and thinking, and working with our hands. The cost is that we have become lousy tree-swingers, and bad monkeys. Try eating a banana using only your feet, and you'll see what we mean.



Where will this take us in another million years? It all depends on the circumstances. Perhaps our brains will continue to grow, giving us ridiculous, enormous heads. Perhaps our planet will one day be inhabited by sentient brains sitting in a wheelchair. We're already tinkering with the evolution of our species, for example by healing the sick. Say for some reason we are forced to live underground. This could, in theory, yield humankind with no eyes! This is what happened to certain species of cave-dwelling fish.

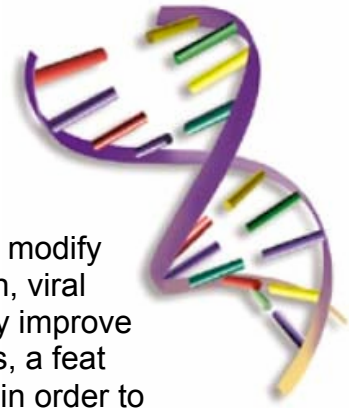
Experts agree on one thing, though. Our kind could transform a lot quicker than you think. Roughly speaking, there are two possible scenarios for significant evolutionary change in humans: major environmental change or gene tinkering.

Major Environmental Change - Small Groups, Different Places

Right now, humans thrive in nearly every environment on the planet. But what if that changed? What if there was some type of major catastrophic environmental change that wiped out most of the 6 billion humans on the planet? What would be left are isolated groups of human--stripped of their technology and global infrastructure--living in environments very different from one another. Only those with the "best" physical characteristics would survive in these environments, and these characteristics would continue to change and develop over time.

Gene Tinkering - We could upgrade our DNA

At this very moment, we're entering the age of genetic modification. Already, we're upgrading the DNA of certain plants and animals -- and we, humans, are next. We could improve our genetic code, just like you would upgrade an outdated piece of computer software.



At first, this will lead to new cures for certain diseases. We will modify our DNA to fight off hereditary conditions, and in the longer run, viral infections and cancer. But it should also be possible to actually improve our bodies. Athletes will alter their DNA to make more muscles, a feat already accomplished in animals. Others will tweak their DNA in order to lengthen their lives, or to become smarter. Why not grow yourself wings, enhance your vision or make your body solar powered, so you can do without food? In principle, it's all possible. Just think of our bodies as computers, the DNA being its software. We're about to upload software from other species. Almost every trick nature has ever programmed into DNA software in other species, could be running on our bodies soon. It's Mother Nature's open source, and we know the code!

Your Challenge

Create an artistic rendition that depicts what humans will look like many years in the future given one of the above scenarios. This could be something hand drawn, an image manipulated in Photoshop, a computer generated graphic, or any other piece of original artwork.

You Should Include

- ❖ A Title for your artwork that includes the scientific name of this new species
- ❖ Detailed artwork that portrays this new species in it's environment
- ❖ A list (or label your image) with specific adaptations with an explanation of why they are advantageous
- ❖ A separate paragraph that explains:
 - How did those adaptations happened, environmental pressure? Social pressure?
 - What were the steps that lead to these changes- this could be a labeled series of drawing or in written form- who were your creatures predecessors?
 - Are any of these traits advantageous for reproduction?

Title/name/date	5 pnts
illustration	15 pnts
list	5 pnts
Paragraph	15 pnts
On time?	5 pnts