

## How to draw a connection circle

A connection circle is a quick and easy way of explaining how variables interact with one another. A finished circle represents the systemic structure that lies at the bottom of the iceberg.

We can draw a connection circle to help answer our third question: Why is it changing? This means that we have already identified the main variable (what is changing?) and described and or charted its behavior over time (how is it changing?).

There are three steps to drawing a connection circle.

**Step 1:** We **draw** a circle.

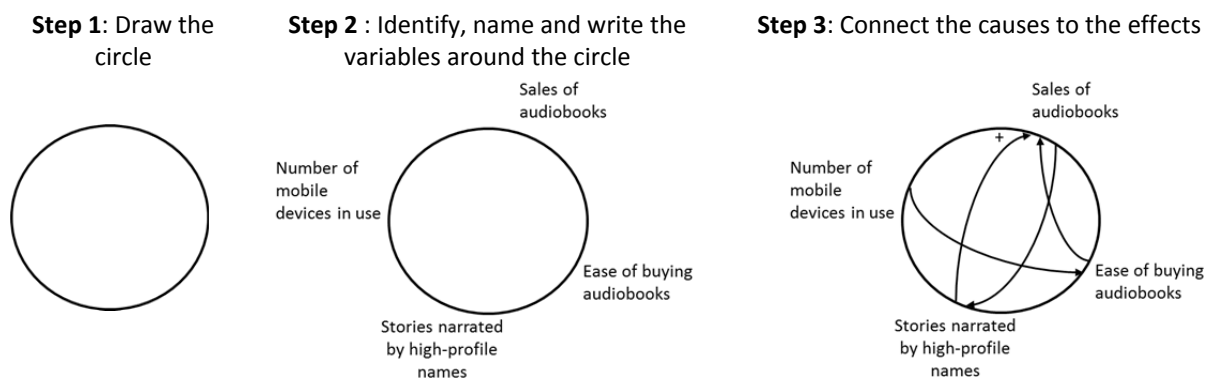
**Step 2:** We **identify all of the variables** that may be contributing to the behavior that you are trying to explain and then **write them around the circle**. As a general rule connection circles have less than 10 variables. We want to keep our story simple and not clutter the diagram. There is no order as to where you place variables around the connection circle. You can put them anywhere you like.

The variables we include around our circle must (1) **contribute to the problem**, (2) **increase or decrease** over the time period and (3) be named using **nouns or noun phrases**.

**Step 3:** We find variables that directly cause another to increase or decrease and **draw an arrow from the cause to the effect**. The causal connections must be direct. It may be useful to ask yourself “what is the most direct cause of an increase in variable A” or “what is the most direct effect of a fall in variable C”.

When you have your finished connection circle, you can use it to tell the systemic story.

**Illustration:** I found an article entitled “Audiobook sales double in five years thanks to downloads and famous faces” on [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk). The article cites several reasons for this increase including the rise in mobile devices and the associated ease of buying audiobooks and the increasing number of high-profile writers and authors narrating audiobooks. Let’s go through the three steps.



You can also **add a plus or minus sign** to describe the direction of cause and effect relationships. This is called a **polarity**. The polarity tells you what would happen if there were a change. For example, if the number of stories narrated by high-profile names increased, what would happen to the sales of audiobooks? It should increase. We have added this polarity to the circle in the last diagram. We can also add polarities to the other cause and effect relationships. We’ll learn more about polarities in chapter 2.

### References

“Audiobook sales double in five years thanks to downloads and famous faces”, The Telegraph, 29 April 2015, [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/11571627/Audiobook-sales-double-in-five-years-thanks-to-downloads-and-famous-faces.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/11571627/Audiobook-sales-double-in-five-years-thanks-to-downloads-and-famous-faces.html)