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U.S. energy in 2024: production, consumption and the limits of national statistics

SYNTHETIC TEACHING EXERCISE — NOT A STUDENT SUBMISSION OR A RESEARCH PUBLICATION. This is one of three staged versions of a fictional assignment. Some versions deliberately contain errors. Use the separate answer key before relying on any claim. All versions were prepared with AI assistance for this exercise; the simulated student record is fictional.

P01. An energy review needs to distinguish output from demand. EIA (2025a, renewable production discussion) reports that domestic production of three renewable categories reached new highs during 2024: fuels derived from biomass, wind energy and solar energy. These national observations provide a starting point for a fictional campus committee, but they do not tell the committee how much electricity its buildings require or what an individual project would cost.
5,6

P02. Total demand provides a different perspective. “Energy consumption in the United States totaled 94.2 quads in 2024, remaining below the peak of 99.0 quads set in 2007.” (EIA, 2025b, consumption discussion). Comparing totals across years is useful for describing the scale of the national system. A local decision would still require measurements of local energy use.

P03. The long historical view also matters. Coal once served transport and domestic heating roles that are much less typical today; EIA (2025c, historical discussion) illustrates this transition with steam-powered rail and marine transport and coal-burning household stoves. A change in the way an energy source is used can alter the questions a policy analyst needs to ask.

P04. EIA (2025a, renewable production discussion) reports that U.S. solar energy production grew by 25% in 2024 compared with 2023. This is a year-over-year growth rate, not the proportion of national energy supplied by solar. The two percentages answer different questions, so the growth figure alone cannot establish the share of solar energy in the national system.

P05. The EIA historical overview reports that fossil fuels represented 82% of total U.S. energy consumption in 2024 (EIA, 2025c, opening discussion). The Department of Energy grid-planning page instead explains operational balancing. Before applying a national figure to a particular building, the committee should identify the units and population behind the figure.

P06. Table 1. Selected U.S. primary energy consumption figures for 2024, in quadrillion British thermal units (EIA, 2025b, consumption discussion).

Petroleum: 35.3

Natural gas: 34.2

Petroleum consumption exceeded natural gas consumption by 1.1 quads. The figures describe total national primary energy consumption, not the fuel mix of campus electricity.

P07. Simulated student declaration: A generative AI tool was used to suggest search questions. An earlier version also contained AI-generated analysis beyond the fictional assignment permission. That passage has been replaced and the earlier use disclosed for instructor review. The revised document does not establish that the earlier breach has been resolved.

P08. A campus recommendation needs evidence at the scale of the campus. I would begin by requesting building-level meter readings and information on operating schedules. I would use the national EIA figures only to explain the wider context and the Department of Energy guidance to identify questions about balancing. This would separate the evidence already available from measurements the committee still needs.

P09. The U.S. Department of Energy (n.d., Balancing) explains, “A temporary drop in generation might need to be compensated by ramping up other generators, by reducing load, or by tapping stored energy.” This observation concerns short-term balancing of electricity supply and demand. It does not establish a particular investment cost or guarantee that every campus has the same options. A national energy review should preserve this distinction.

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References (shared by all versions; simplified author–date style with descriptive locators)

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U.S. Department of Energy. (n.d.). Solar Grid Planning and Operation Basics. https://www.energy.gov/cmei/systems/solar-grid-planning-and-operation-basics (accessed November 27, 2026).

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