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## Time Travel in the Composition Classroom

**Kristin Rozzell Murray**

American University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

### **Abstract**

The pedagogical challenge of any opinion essay is that students tend to think critically only about the past and present in connection to a problem. Their ideas about the problem concerning the future often contain no critical thinking: they focus on the simplistic notion that a problem will continue to be a problem and get worse. True, students cannot know the future, but they can speculate about it in a careful and responsible way. By guiding students with a series of questions to look more deeply at the future in relation to a particular problem, students will gain a deeper understanding of a problem. These questions have been developed over the course of five years of teaching an assignment I call “Opinion Essay from the Future.” This assignment fosters students’ critical thinking about the future and can illuminate a problem in the present and the near and distant future. Students need to use logic in their speculating, but speculating in and of itself is also a creative act. The paper concludes that writing about a problem in the future makes students in many ways similar to science fiction writers. Their imaginings about a problem, when encouraged strategically, recontextualize a problem, letting them see the problem through a wider lens, a lens that will show them that looking ahead makes the here and now clearer.

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