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# Thinking about the future

Difficult to see. Always in motion is the future.

Yoda, *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*.

In Charles Dickens' famous novel *A Christmas Carol* three ghosts come to visit the miserly and cold-hearted Ebenezer Scrooge. They include the ghost of Christmas past, the ghost of Christmas present and the ghost of Christmas future. The ghost which held the most salience for Scrooge, heralding both hope and fear, was the ghost of Christmas future. That's because the story told by the ghost of Christmas future to Scrooge has not yet come to pass. There is still something Scrooge can do to change the story and change his future. Scrooge heeds the advice of the ghost of the future and radically changes his life. In so doing he brings happiness to himself and those around him. Seeing the future was crucial in motivating Scrooge to change and identify an alternative pathway.

Despite it being a harrowing experience, Scrooge was fortunate to be visited by the ghost of the future. The rest of us are going to have to rely on foresight. We need to think about the future for ourselves. But the future is slippery and hard to grasp. It's a fascinating space where emotion mixes with logic and it becomes difficult to neatly separate imagination from evidence. To think about the future we need a mental model to give structure to our thoughts. That means we need to think, at a deep conceptual level, about the passing of time.

To do this, try to capture a moment in time in your mind's eye. Right now. This very instant you're reading these words. Try to stay in this moment. Did you manage? Try as you might you never will. These words you've just read for the first time ever are now part of history.