



Generative AI in the Writing Classroom

This document is for instructors who are curious and/or concerned about generative AI and its use/misuse in writing intensive classrooms.

What is Generative AI?

Generative AI refers to artificial intelligence technologies capable of generating new content, including text, images, and even music, that resembles human-like creativity. At its core, generative AI learns from vast datasets (large language models or LLMs) to produce original outputs based on the patterns, styles, and information it has analyzed. This technology unavoidably shifts how we approach teaching and learning, particularly in developing critical thinking, creativity, and writing skills in students.

4 Tips for Incorporating Generative AI into Students' Writing Processes

As the panic in higher education around the advent of generative AI begins to diminish and instructional strategies emerge, it's interesting to note how many of these strategies leverage how generative AI gives instructors the ability to make students' writing processes more visible.¹

What follows are four suggested approaches that faculty might use to incorporate generative AI into their students' writing processes.

1. Idea Generation and Brainstorming

During the brainstorming stage of the writing process, generative AI can be incorporated into structured brainstorming activities to assist students in idea generation for their projects. By inputting a topic, students can use AI to produce a range of concepts, questions, and perspectives to explore, encouraging them to think more broadly or deeply about the subject at hand.

¹ See especially the Harvard Bok Center for Teaching and Learning's guidance on [AI and Writing Assignments](#), and the [WAC Clearinghouse](#). Both are excellent resources for strategically incorporating generative AI in the writing classroom.

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You could also ask students to take a more critical approach and interrogate the text that the generative AI creates. What are its strengths, weaknesses, and biases, and why might the biases exist?

2. Outlining and Structuring

When having students work from an outline, you can leverage generative AI to help them structure their writing project after they've narrowed it into a specific topic or idea. This could include help with formulating thesis statements, generating headings for sections, and suggesting a logical flow for their arguments. This step can help students organize their thoughts and ensure a coherent structure in their writing.

3. Drafting, Revision, and Feedback

It's essential to emphasize that AI feedback is a *supplement* to, not a *replacement* for, the detailed feedback students should receive from instructors, peers, and the university writing center. While not a substitute for peer review—which benefits both the student reviewer as well as the student whose writing is being reviewed—generative AI can provide general feedback on grammar, style, and coherence for students as they refine their voice and analysis in later drafts of their writing. The immediate feedback generative AI produces can also allow students to revise their work iteratively before submitting it for faculty review.

4. Research and Citation

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If implemented carefully, generative AI can make the research process more efficient and help students engage more deeply with their source material. While generative AI can suggest sources and summarize key points from literature—and even help with citation formatting—it's crucial that assignments incorporate critical review of the suggestions that generative AI makes *to ensure they're not fabricated*.

It's vital, as a first step, to determine if specific generative AI platforms have ethical safeguards in place to respect intellectual property and other rights. Some tools implement these safeguards through constraints, principles, or "constitutional" rules that are baked into the core architecture and decision-making processes of the AI system. Alternatively, these ethical guardrails may be instilled during the training process through human feedback. Platforms that contain such safeguards are typically transparent about disclosing their presence.

When using generative AI as a research aid, it's therefore important to verify not only the summary content and source materials referenced in the AI's output, but also to evaluate the tool itself. This

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helps ensure the generative AI system has the appropriate ethical guidelines and constraints in place to produce output that both respects and models educational values and principles.

Effective Strategies for Incorporating Generative AI in Writing Classes

When we design assignments leveraging generative AI, it's important to consider the following:

- **Communication with Students:** Have candid conversations with your students about the goals and learning outcomes you have for your writing assignments. Share your concerns about the ways in which generative AI might short circuit your efforts, and, by extension, their learning. If you can share examples of your experiences with generative AI—including when it succeeded, when it failed, when it produced ambiguous results, and why—you'll provide the kind of informed guidance that will help students become critical users of generative AI.

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- **Ethical Use and Academic Integrity:** Educate students on the ethical use of AI, including issues of plagiarism and academic integrity. Ensure students understand how to use AI as a tool for learning rather than a shortcut to completing assignments.
- **Critical Engagement:** Choose and assign activities that highlight the promise and the perils of generative AI. Large language models (LLMs) are, by definition, *convergent* as opposed to *divergent* when they generate output, which is why their output can be biased, misleading, or fabricated and needs to be verified. Have students assess its relevance, accuracy, and how it integrates with their original thoughts. Explore and investigate not only the responses that generative AI produces but also investigate what it has left out or omitted and why.
- **Supplementary Tool:** Position generative AI as a supplementary tool in the writing process. The focus should remain on developing the student's voice, argumentation skills, and critical thinking.
- **Faculty Oversight:** Maintain a level of oversight on how AI tools are used, guiding students on best practices and integrating AI use into your learning objectives.

Conclusion

Generative AI offers exciting possibilities for enhancing teaching and learning, particularly in writing-intensive courses. By incorporating AI thoughtfully into students' writing process, faculty

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can help students harness these technologies to foster creativity, improve writing skills, and engage more deeply with their subjects. As we navigate this new landscape, it's vital to approach these tools with a balance of enthusiasm and critical caution, ensuring that technology enhances, rather than undermines, educational goals.

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