

Design, Development, Response: Handling ChatGPT/AI in the First Year Writing Classroom

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This breakout session shares observations, findings, and best practices from First Year Writing faculty to upcycle and scaffold course development, classroom activity, student engagement, and assessment around and in response to the evolving realities of ChatGPT and AI tools.

The Debate

Where we stand on AI and Writing/First Year Writing

The "Aye"s and "Nays"

Statements about triumphant AI

- ▶ "the college essay is dead" (Marche, 12.6.22)
- ▶ "eliminate the required first year composition course" (Nicolas, 11.14.23)

Questioning the value of AI

- ▶ "AI in the classroom is a problem" (Baron, 10.3.23)

Modulate response based on discipline

- ▶ "Writing instructors, and others for whom writing itself is a learning outcome, may not want to take that approach" (Darby, 11.13.23)

First Year Writing in context

In response to Nicolas (reducing FYW to "grammatically correct, genre specific, well cited writing")

First Year Writing and Others

Course objectives:

- ▶ **Writing as practice** = learning how to use writing as a vehicle of thinking; revision, collaboration
- ▶ **Critical/analytical reading** = comprehending complex academic texts/arguments
- ▶ **Critical thinking** = connecting the dots, questioning/evaluating positions
- ▶ **Rhetorical practice**= finding VOICE/position/place in the discourse, finding/creating meaning
- ▶ **Information literacy** = evaluation sources of information, biases
- ▶ **Research practices** = defining research questions, finding search terms, evaluating sources, conversing with sources

Not included:

- ▶ Grammar
- ▶ Discipline specific writing styles
- ▶ Citations???

FYW: undergirding all later classes

- ▶ Critical distance from sources of information
 - <-- information literacy
 - <-- critical/analytical reading
- ▶ Academic research/writing
 - <-- basic research skills
 - <-- evaluating (recognizing/categorizing) sources

AI in our classrooms

Cautious steps forward

Encyclopedic resource

- ▶ Defining complex concepts --> quasi textbook chapter

Result= relatively problem free and usable

[asking AI to explain concepts, using it as a tutor]

Opportunity:

-using AI

- ▶ as a tutor/extension of class explanations

- ▶ as an encyclopedic tool

-be cautious using it as a paraphrasing tool

Categorization and research

A. Collecting categories and evidence for analytical work

- ▶ Groups used Claude AI to develop rhetorical criteria for a political song

B. Learning to read critically

- ▶ Groups used Claude to find similar words, phrases, and concepts in academic readings to find important evidence that could help explain the meaning and structure of the article

C. Collecting search/subject terms for database research

Results= mixed

- A. The students did a good job of selecting criteria that fit the class readings
- B. The students found it useful to learn how connect ideas in the articles
- C. Short circuited the process of immersion/exploration into the research topic

Opportunities:

- ▶ Augment analytical process and resources

Outlining texts—Critical reading and writing practice

- ▶ Students used AI to outline complex readings to understand argument and find evidence from the article to fill in the outline
- ▶ Once the students wrote their papers some used AI to create a reverse outline

Results= Mixed

- ▶ The outlines worked well for those students that followed through with the assignment
- ▶ The reverse outline worked but required extra prompts from the students

Opportunity:

- ▶ Teach techniques of self-directed learning

Document template

- ▶ Creating basic template for formal business letter

Results= mixed

[depends on students' level of writing]

Opportunity=

- ▶ makes learning outcomes transparent --> potential tool of assessment
- ▶ address cornerstones of communication head on (audience, context, relationship to audience, etc.)

Student response to AI

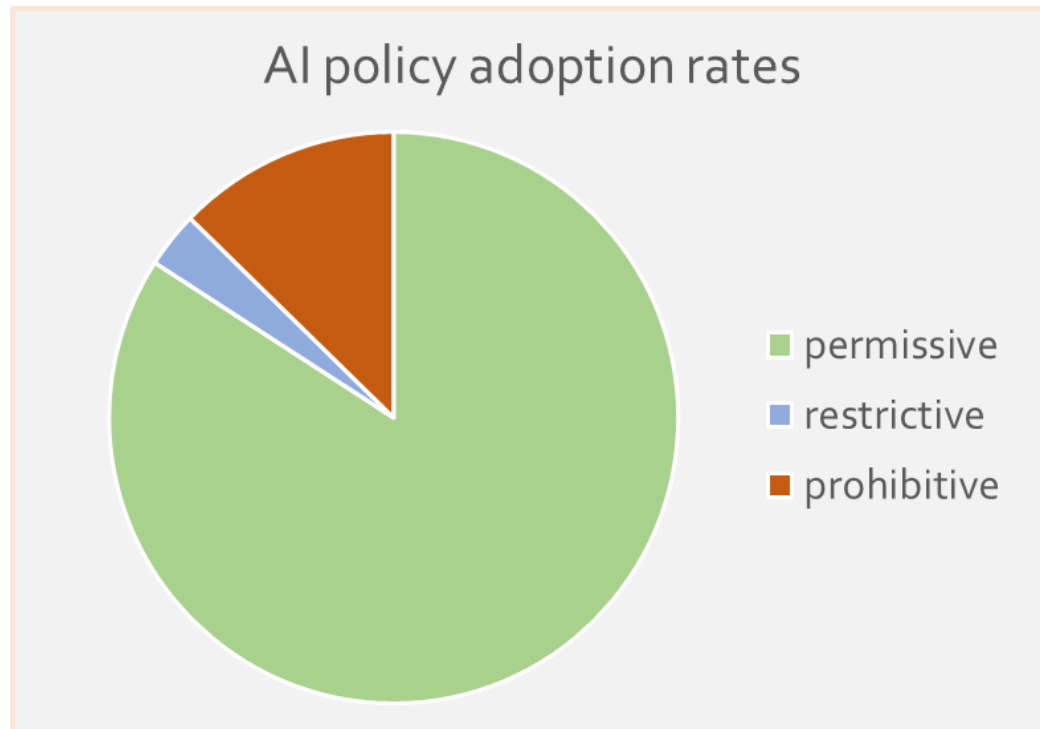
- ▶ "Wooooow, this is great and nothing to add."
- ▶ Guiding force, helps get the process going,
- ▶ "made me question my writing skills"; "I would not have been able to write something as clear in 15 seconds"
- ▶ Involves too much work ("too much work to make it my own")
- ▶ Stifles one's own creativity/thinking ("made me feel obligated to go with what was written")
- ▶ Confusing relationship to source
- ▶ Awareness of ethical and security problems
- ▶ Necessary
- ▶ Anxiety about what is to come in school/at workplace ("leads me to worry that my job *perspectives* are going to be diminished")

Patrolling the boundaries of AI use

The background features a complex, abstract design of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in various shades of pink, magenta, and purple. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a layered, crystalline effect. The colors transition from light pinks on the left to deeper purples on the right.

Comfort with AI in FYW courses

- ▶ Temple's AI policy ("choose your own adventure")
- ▶ Standard syllabus choice
- ▶ Instructor choices



Avoiding Spirals of Suspicion

- Understanding where students are coming from
- Contemplating our expectations
- Using "teachable moments" from our AI suspicions to create robust opportunities for students to develop their voices and engage critically with material

Crowdsourcing from our Peers



r/Professors • 1 day ago
TeacherGuy1980

...

Teacher in High School Here: I am sorry, but we lost against the rise of all these grade inflating policies.

Teaching / Pedagogy

Yes, we know we are graduating kids from high school with "great grades of As" who actually know nothing.

*We are forced to allow anything to be turned in at anytime for full credit. We know they're just copying their friends and no one does anything on time anymore.

*We are forced to allow quizzes and tests to be made up to 100%

*We are forced to find ways to get kids who are chronically absent to graduate

*If kids do fail they get to do a "credit recovery" class which is 5% the work of a regular class in the summer to fix learning grades.

Oh god, it's such a mess. Near universally teachers at the high school level speak out against all of this, but we're shot down by administration. We're told all the new policies help students learn more and is more equitable, but I've never seen students who know and can do so little. We all know the reason this is all happening is to make the school stats look good on the "state report card"

We're Not Just Facing AI...

We're facing:

- Learned Helplessness
- Snowplow Parents (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/29/opinion/grades-parents-students-teachers.html?smid=url-share>)
- Digital Dependence
- “Let Me Speak To Your Manager”

...We're Facing Self-Handicapping

"...the process whereby a person creates or chooses obstacles to behavior or a performance setting for the purpose of protecting self-esteem in response to an esteem-threatening situation. In other words, the choice enhances the opportunity to excuse failure while accepting credit for success."

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/self-handicapping>

Crowdsourcing from our Peers 2



SnowblindAlbino • 2 hr. ago

The nice thing about those AI papers is that they are garbage in terms of content-- I got a couple this fall and they failed on the *merits* using the rubric, which I hope taught the students a lesson. I would have failed them for using AI as well, but settled for a written rebuke and a warning that they'd be reported if they did it a second time.

On the issue of the disappearing students and scaffolded assignments, I set mine up so that skipping a required outline/draft/bibliography is an automatic F for the entire assignment. That pretty much put a stop to the late submissions of half-assed papers, or at least made them very easy to grade.

↑ 23 ↓  Reply  Share ...

Advice on Responding to Student Work

- **Trust your instincts:** the rise of AI has made it *easier* to catch students cheating; the very low-effort cheaters at least used to make some attempt to cover their tracks, but now they just literally copy and paste ChatGPT responses into their papers. It's easy to spot the ChatGPT-style prose, compare it against the output of your own submission of exam questions, and make appropriate choices on grading.
- **Mark on criteria** like "persuasion" and "specificity" ...the trick is not calling them cheaters or accusing them of AI/plagiarism, but instead just cut to the chase... If they write like a robot, then they get graded for writing like a robot. Encourage revision and create a scaffolded process that forces students to invest in their critical engagement and development.

More Advice

- Don't rely on Turnitin to back you up: Turnitin claims that their AI detector has about a 1% false positive rate (I don't actually believe this, but we'll take their word for it for the sake of argument). That means that, theoretically, in a class of 100 students, statistically speaking, Turnitin would flag one of them as a cheater, falsely.
 - Interrogate! Students who use AI without paying much attention to the material won't be able to answer basic questions about their "own" papers. That's a classic indicator of academic integrity violations, and much more likely to be persuasive should you go that route of reporting than the Turnitin report alone.
- Listen to authenticity: Carmen Kynard notes that what AI writes “is often the essence of what school would reward as good writing though: it gives just enough edginess to satisfy the white gaze when it wants to pretend to be inclusive, but it doesn't upset the apple cart of any institution in any way. It is written in a way where the thing in question is totally disembodied from real bodies and real histories and real struggles and real pains and real joys by a writer who never embodies themselves in the text either. It's dull and meaningless.” (<http://carmenkynard.org/when-robots-come-home-to-roost/>)
 - Start thinking about what you want students to be exploring in work that requires robust attention to their own perspective and voice and integrate these expectations into the work.

Conclusions



Our conclusions for using AI in FYW classes

For instructors:

- ▶ Practice ample **caution**
- ▶ Careful **preparation** of students for tasks
- ▶ Strengthen **awareness** of the novice writer/thinker/researcher

For students:

- ▶ Develop skills of **curation and control = AGENCY**
- ▶ Develop **defense and immunity** (critical thinking/distancing toward the tool)
- ▶ "Works if you work it" (it takes effort to get useful results)

Opportunities

Instructional

- ▶ Address rhetorical issues head on
- ▶ Use AI tasks as assessment tools

Program wide (FYW)

Potential to redefine

- ▶ **course goals/outcomes**
- ▶ **mission** of program/courses
- ▶ **relationship** to other courses

Selected References

Grose, Jessica. "Snowplow Parents Are Ruining Online Grading." *The New York Times*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/29/opinion/grades-parents-students-teachers.html?smid=url-share>.

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