

Creating more effective assignments

Note

As always, create assignments with accessibility in mind. For example, [from George Mason University](#):

- Avoid actions that over-prioritize "catching/preventing cheating" while placing undue stresses on equity, accessibility, and innovative thinking:
 - Requiring handwritten submissions places additional burdens on students, especially those with some physical disabilities
 - Adopting intensive surveillance tools or processes -- such as requiring all steps of writing to be done under human and technological supervision -- is likely to produce few gains while limiting students' thinking and introducing additional biases and inequities into the learning process
 - Planning out systems to "recognize" "original" writing, either through eyeballing and comparing in-class samples to take-home samples by the same student, or by using an external text-evaluation tool, are likely to cause more problems than solutions, since all of these approaches are subject to bias and error that may reduce equity without significant gains in integrity

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Tactics and descriptions

Washington University in St. Louis

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Learn how ChatGPT would respond to your class assignments.

Try out ChatGPT yourself to understand its capabilities and limitations.

Focus on higher order thinking tasks in Bloom's taxonomy (e.g., analysis over recall).

ChatGPT is best at summarizing from its training data and less good at applying knowledge to new areas. Focus student tasks on the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy, such as creating, evaluating, and analyzing.

Make assignments more authentic and robust.

Authentic assessments ask students to complete complex tasks similar to those they would in a non-academic setting.

Add non-traditional ways of assessing learning (podcasts, oral exams, projects).

Consider other ways of letting students demonstrate the knowledge they've learned in their course beyond the traditional college essay.

Use local or class-based prompts.

One limitation of ChatGPT is that it does not know what happens in your class. Consider designing prompts related specifically to your course. For example, one could ask students to expand upon a particular class discussion or answer questions requiring knowledge from a lecture slide.

Leverage other educational technologies.

Instead of using open-ended questions in Canvas, try social annotation tools that require students to engage with a text or video along with their classmates. WashU supports Hypothesis for social annotation of texts and Annoto for collaborative commenting on videos.

Focus on the good parts of student voice.

Consider how your assignments can allow students to showcase their voice, style, interests, and connection to your class. There are many ways students can show more of their humanity and whole self to learn more about themselves or their peers. Students can even help design prompts or questions in the assignment by discussing what they want to articulate, share, or learn about others in the assignment.

George Mason University

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Increase the specificity of your question or task.

For example, rather than an open-ended writing prompt (“compare X and Y”), ask for specific information or examples (ask students to expand on one point discussed in class, create a scenario and ask for specific resources/sources, or provide an extended reading and have students critique/analyze it)

Require the application of key concepts to specific local cases, problems, or context.

For example, provide students with a reading and ask them to analyze and expand on the topics or issues in order to focus the students’ thoughts and responses on that paper, example, or case study.

Require inclusion, citation, and direct response to specific course texts.

For example, prompt students to cite the textbook or another reading in class, in addition to X number of additional sources that they find in Y database in your field.

Require drafts and revisions.

Multiple, sequential stages of a larger assignment can be useful to help students scaffold their understanding as well as help them produce their own content. For example, credit/noncredit activities can be integrated for topic development (and you can provide time in class on this or with paired peer activities). Low-stakes activities can be useful for writing out outlines of papers (for grading, these can be completion/noncompletion or similar). Peer reviews and iterative development, particularly when combined with a short (one-paragraph) reflection on what changes were made as a result of a first submission or peer review help students continue to frame and develop their learning.

Shift grading criteria.

Shift grading criteria, especially for formative writing such as discussion boards or drafts, to place additional value on how students respond to and/or integrate ideas or feedback from their peers or from you. For example, integrating more specifics in discussion prompts (see above), then having students make peer comments and respond to each other, will help continue the conversation and allow students to develop their thoughts on the topic more fully.

Indiana University

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Avoid simple fact-based questions.

The first step with avoiding AI-generated responses is to avoid prompts with specific, factual answers. ChatGPT, however, still does a pretty good job with higher-order questions (analysis, synthesis, etc.), and it can be pretty creative (see the viral [PBJ in a VCR example](#)). So, aim for assignments calling for more complex cognitive skills, and then layer on some of the other techniques below.

Use class-specific cases and examples.

Tie writing prompts to unique or fictional cases or scenarios in your class, particularly if those cases build over time and draw on in-class activities or group work. Relying on in-class activities as a basis for assignments leaves AI without necessary information, and feeding it all that information would be time-consuming for students. If you use this approach, be ready to have an alternate assignment ready for students who cannot come to class for medical or other legitimate reasons.

Break large assignments into smaller stages.

Giving an assignment in one big chunk can add pressures that sometimes drive students to cheat, while breaking an assignment into smaller pieces can improve learning and writing skills while mitigating these pressures and reliance on AI. Consider breaking larger assignments into multiple stages, giving feedback and grades on each one, and perhaps incorporating peer feedback. This helps in multiple ways: 1) It mitigates the pressure to cheat that emerges from procrastination and feeling lost on a big, high-stakes assignment; 2) It gives you some sense of students' writing styles along the way, especially if in-class writing is added to the mix; and 3) It leads to better learning and writing in general.

Mix in some in-class writing.

This can be anywhere in the writing process—early idea-development stages, syntheses of in-class activities that will be incorporated into the project, or reflections on their work and process. Aside from

being a valuable approach to teaching writing in your discipline, in-class writing can provide a baseline of a student's style that can be used to identify writing that isn't the student's original work. Those of us who have dealt with plagiarism before know that those students rarely know the submitted work well, nor are they able to talk about their writing process. But try to use in-class writing for learning opportunities, not just a policing tool.

Ask for personal connections and examples.

Sure, students can ask ChatGPT to do this—there are already examples of AI generating passable "personal" college admission essays—but adding a personal element like this might reduce the likelihood that students will turn to AI, especially if you have also built personal relationships with them. In general, anonymity makes cheating easier, both functionally and psychologically.

Use very recent sources.

ChatGPT currently draws on a database that only goes through September 2021 (it admitted as such in a 1/15/2023 response about the latest COVID variant), and it would be unable to reference pre-print scholarship that isn't yet online. A student could feasibly feed this into the AI, but this generally is a valuable approach, especially when layered with other strategies.

Use images in prompts.

For now, ChatGPT only takes text input, so having students respond to a unique image or diagram makes the AI unable to answer the question. ChatGPT has solved some pretty good application/diagnostic questions in biochemistry, for example, but it cannot view and interpret an image of a chemical reaction or cell. Further, asking for student responses to be in the form of a diagram or image can take AI text-generators out of the mix. Be aware that using images might be a problem for students with vision impairments, so be ready to provide an alternative assignment for them.

Utilize alternative assignments.

Consider other ways that students could demonstrate their knowledge and mastery of learning outcomes, including "performative tasks." This is a useful practice in general, aligning well with precepts of Universal Design for Learning, but it also avoids AI text generators altogether, or at least relegates them to a supporting role. Could students develop a video, podcast, drawing, or vlog (video blog) to demonstrate their knowledge? Remember that ChatGPT can be very creative in text, so asking for alternate outputs is the key here.

Run your own assignments through ChatGPT.

Curious how well AI answers your assignments? Try running them through yourself to see both how well it does and what markers you see of its work. If it provides solid answers, you might want to keep working on the assignment.

Oakland University

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Keep assigning writing, and build in space for assessing process.

While tech tools get more sophisticated and powerful, these issues have been around for decades. Even before widely available internet access, a student could always hire someone to do their writing assignments. Assessing students' process can deter cheating by having students show you their work. This could be done through students submitting prewriting, reading notes, reflection, and works-in-progress. They could also meet with you to discuss their ideas. These don't necessarily have to be closely reviewed or evaluated, but could be given credit as done/not done. I offer some of these potential checkpoints in Plagiarize-Proof Your Writing Assignments.

Make the writing multimodal.

In the guide Short-term Suggestions for AI Issues Cynthia Alby, education professor and author of Learning That Matters, suggests using "performance tasks" such as speeches, interviews, diagrams, peer instruction, and storyboards. Even if you teach a writing intensive course, writing could be derived from these other modes, such as the transcript for a podcast or interview, and written descriptions or annotations of visual texts. The world of writing is so much bigger than the kind of prose ChatGPT generates - and so much more fun! Writing is digital, multimodal, linked, and networked. It involves words, images, sources, and audio, it's delivered via links and video, and it's colorful and loud. When students are asked to work towards composing dynamic, multimodal writing for a motivating purpose, using an AI Text Generator fades away as even an option.

Consider using ChatGPT in class to discuss its results.

Show students what response it generates to course work, and ask them to analyze the quality of the response. Is it meaningful, or does it simply sound good? What do students offer as human writers that the computer does not? Are there writing tasks well-suited for a computer? (Who of us hasn't benefited from spellcheck?)

If you do have students use and build on the bot's writing in class, make sure you discuss the values and implications of doing so. What does using ChatGPT to write communicate about what the user values, and what our society values as a whole? If many writers used such a program to start their writing, what

are some of the societal implications? What kinds of writing situations might ChatGPT writing be good for? In what kinds of writing situations would it be inappropriate or fail?

It is a rich opportunity to discuss rhetorical concepts such as context and purpose, which make the work of writing far richer than a sentence that sounds good. In their CETL Teaching Tip Beyond “Gotcha!” Proactive Plagiarism Pedagogy, OU’s Sherry Wynn Perdue and Melissa Vervinck promoted using these tools for pedagogical purposes rather than for surveillance.

University Affairs: Rethinking university writing pedagogy in a world of ChatGPT

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Focus on formative feedback.

Writing scholars have long been advocates of providing students more opportunities to receive formative feedback on their work, whether from classmates, instructors, or writing centre tutors. Focusing on the process of writing, rather than the product, not only helps combat ChatGPT, but it helps students develop their writing, thinking, and metacognitive skills. Imagine a flipped classroom where students come to class with a draft paper and engage in a peer review exercise. Students read a peer’s work and provide feedback using a peer review handout that guides their response. Each student, upon receiving their feedback, then assesses the comments and decides what feedback to implement before engaging in revision. The students could use this feedback to expand a shorter paper into a longer work. Currently, ChatGPT has more difficulty replicating the feedback and revision process, including expanding shorter works into longer works. But more importantly, an emphasis on the process of writing is effective pedagogy. Giving, receiving, and implementing feedback develops foundational student skills. The literature on student peer review, for example, has shown that giving feedback improves metacognitive skills more than receiving feedback.

Assign a reflective paper for students to document their research, writing, and learning process.

In addition to having students revise their written work based on formative feedback, there are other ways to overcome ChatGPT while building student skills. To accompany the final paper, instructors could assign a reflective paper for students to document their research, writing, and learning process. Although ChatGPT can generate reflective papers, it has more trouble with prompts that justify writing decisions like: “Why did you decide to integrate feedback regarding ‘x’ but not ‘y’?” Reflective questions like this add another metacognitive component to student learning.