

#207 — Save Time With AI Chatbots

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SPEAKERS

Paul, Transition

Paul Beckermann 0:01

Welcome to Tech Talk for Teachers. I'm your host, Paul Beckermann.

Transition Music 0:04

Check it out, check it out. Check it out. Check it out. What's in the toolkit? What is in the toolkit? So, what's in the toolkit? Check it out.

Paul Beckermann 0:17

The topic of today's episode is Save Time with AI Chatbots. It really seems like talk of artificial intelligence is everywhere. And you've probably heard some of the speculation about exciting, innovative possibilities. Some thought leaders are already speculating that these new tools may have the potential to revolutionize education. Some have suggested that AI can improve and accelerate learning, while reducing teacher workload and giving educators more time to work individually with students. On the one hand, this is an incredibly exciting time to be in education. On the other hand, teachers have a lot of questions about how it will impact their role. And there's plenty of confusion about how to actually use it in a positive and productive way. Before I address these questions, I think it's only fair to acknowledge that there's a lot more that we don't know about AI than we do know. It's also important to recognize that the field of artificial intelligence is exploding and evolving every single day. In fact, by the time this podcast episode is recorded and released, there's a chance that some of the content will already be outdated. Still, it's important that we move ahead and try to make sense of AI in the classroom and target some practical ways that we can get started using it. That is the intent of this episode. What are some practical ways that educators can use AI tools to make their work lives more efficient, and by doing so, save themselves some time? And who doesn't want that, right? If you're ready to jump, or maybe tiptoe into the world of AI, here are three ways you can get started.

Transition Music 1:59

Here is your list of tips.

Paul Beckermann 2:03

Even before you can try out any of the suggestions that I'm going to offer, you'll need to choose a tool. So, for this conversation, we'll focus on the three popular, generative, large language AI platforms. You've probably heard of ChatGPT, Google Bard, and Microsoft Bing chat. Microsoft Bing chat when it's used in the more creative mode in an Edge browser offers arguably the best free option. It takes advantage of the larger GPT 4 platform and a free environment that's also connected to the live web. That said, the tips suggested here can work to some degree on any of these platforms. If you want to learn more about all of these platforms, be sure to check out the article on AVID Open Access titled "Get Started with the Big Three Chatbots: ChatGPT, Bing and Bard. For our purposes today, I'm going to be using Bing chat in the more creative mode.

So once you've chosen your generative AI tool, consider these three time-saving suggestions. Suggestion number one: generate lesson plans. These tools are great at brainstorming lesson plan ideas. While you might not get results that you use exactly as delivered, they're often really close. With a little editing and revision, you can generate lessons in a whole lot less time than it would take normally. AI can give you the basic concepts and foundational structure, saving you a lot of time generating those ideas from scratch. To do this, you'll want to first define AI's role. It works well to begin a prompt by typing something like this. You are a second grade teacher with 28 students. Three students speak English as a Second Language. You have worked with these students for two months, so far. This initial description gives the AI context and helps to produce a response that will more accurately fit your needs. But your prompt is far from finished. Next, provide details about the lesson you want it to produce.

For instance, you might type something like: Create a 40-minute lesson to teach Minnesota State ELA Standard 2.1.1.1. Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text. So that text is taken right from the state standard and put into the prompt. When I pose this prompt to Bing chat in the more creative mode, the Chatbot politely responded with, "Sure, I can help you with that." And then proceeded to provide a lesson outline, complete with objectives, materials, procedures, and even possible extension ideas. While this gave me a great start, the key to success is in the asking of follow-up questions. For instance, if you don't like this lesson, you can simply ask for another example. Or you might ask for a version that integrates technology if this one doesn't. You could also follow up by asking for assessment options. If you want a rubric you can ask AI to develop that for you, as well. Simply provide the criteria along with the standard and ask for the tool to generate a student-friendly rubric in table format. Just like that, you'll have a rubric.

When I was following up on this original response, I asked for creative assessment options and Bing Chat provided four great ones that included options ranging from writing to designing a food truck to creating a song and a comic strip. When I asked it for an assessment rubric, I got a nice starting point that included descriptions for four levels of proficiency: exemplary, proficient, developing, and emerging for three different criteria: content, creativity, and explanation. With a little revision, I would have my assessment tool that was flexible enough to be used with a variety of creative assessment options. This has the potential to save me a lot of time, even if I have to do some revisions.

All right, the second idea is to use AI to create student learning activities. So it's a little bit related to the lessons. But sometimes we have a lesson that we plan to use, and we need additional materials for that lesson or maybe another learning activity. Maybe you're creating stations and need activities for those. Or maybe you need interventions for students who are both struggling and mastering the content moving ahead. Again, AI can save you time here. One way you can do this is to simply ask the AI for ideas, much like you did with the initial lesson. Another option is to ask the AI to generate content that you can integrate into other tools. For instance, maybe you know that you want to do a Quizlet live activity, where students will work collaboratively in teams to answer questions. To help you create this, you could ask the AI for the questions and answers that aligned to your learning objective, then you can input those ideas into the Quizlet Live platform. You don't have to come up with the ideas yourself. They're generated for you. Or perhaps you want a practice story for students to interact with. You could ask the AI to generate a short story that aligns to your learning standard. You'll want to be sure to tell it what grade level it should be written in. Then, you could also ask for a certain number of comprehension questions and perhaps some full class discussion prompts, as well. Oh, yeah, and be sure to ask for an answer key, too. You could even ask for three versions of the story written at three different reading levels to help you differentiate. You can even put in an existing story and ask it to rewrite that story at different levels. The options are nearly endless here. The key is to think about what you need, and then ask the Chatbot for a specific product that will help you meet those needs. The more specific you are asking for help, the better the results you will get. And even if you don't get a great response, remember, the key is in asking great follow-up questions to refine the final product you receive.

The third option you might want to try is to have AI assist you with writing tasks. These large language AI platforms are excellent writers. I'm a former English teacher, and I'm impressed constantly with the writing it produces. After all, they do analyze billions of samples of the best writers of all time and integrate those styles and techniques into its own writing responses. So I guess it's not that surprising, but they are really good. There are several ways you can ask AI for help in your writing. On one end of the spectrum, you can provide it with your writing need and the relevant details, and then ask it to draft the text for you. One popular use of this approach is to get help writing email responses. You might ask AI to compose an email to a parent of a seventh grader. You could tell it that the student has not turned in her last six assignments after performing well on the first 10. Tell it the tone of the letter should express caring and concern for the student. And the main message is to ask the parent for help getting the student back on track. Then be sure to include the student and parent names so those can be included in the draft.

When I presented this prompt to Bing Chat, I got back a well-written, six-paragraph email letter. While I would refine this a little bit to meet my specific wishes, it was very well composed and largely usable. This first draft would have saved me lots of time. If I wanted a shorter response, I could simply ask the AI to provide me with the shorter version. There are many other writing applications, as well. Teachers have used these AI tools to generate examples to use in class. Some have copied in the draft of student writing and asked for analysis and feedback. Others

have used it to revise and improve their own writing. For example, you can paste in some text and then ask AI to review it, and provide suggestions for improvement. I have found that you'll get the best results for this if you ask for one or two specific things at a time.

For example, you might type in: Review this text and provide a new draft that improves the overall fluency of the writing. On a related note, when I asked Bing Chat for examples of writing requests that teachers have made, it gave me a nice list, and then added this: Bing Chat AI can help teachers with these writing requests by generating content that is relevant, coherent, and fluent. However, Bing Chat AI is not a perfect writer and may make mistakes or produce inaccurate and inappropriate content. Therefore, teachers should always review and edit the content generated by Bing Chat AI before using it for their own purposes. Teachers should also use Bing Chat AI responsibly and ethically, and not rely on it to do their work for them. Bing Chat AI as a tool to assist teachers; not to replace them.

I love that response, and they're good reminders, too. So, the three examples that I've presented here are really just a scratch on the surface of what you can do with generative AI tools. That said, they're good places to start. As you play around with these tools, you will gain your own insights about how you can use them and what works best. However you choose to use these tools, remember what Bing Chat AI told us about itself. It can make mistakes and provide content that we won't want to use. So, in that light, think of it as a human assistant who can give you ideas and save you time. But you'll still need to do the work of reviewing, reflecting, and revising to turn it into something that you feel genuinely good about using.

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