

## Teaching with AI: Using Writing Generators in the Classroom

A Proposal for #4C23 by Anna Mills

### Annotation:

This presentation will discuss how AI writing generators can be used in the classroom to help students build a sense of agency and competence as writers. The presenter will share several practice exercises where students apply textbook materials on rhetorical templates as they critique and revise AI output.

### Proposal:

Those familiar with Grammarly may think of artificial intelligence writing tools as helpful for revision. But AI can now be prompted to produce original prose. Writing generators such as Jasper and others based on OpenAI's GPT-3 are good enough that their output is often indistinguishable from what students produce on their own. Of course, this raises fundamental questions about ownership of intellectual work, academic honesty, and plagiarism. We are only beginning to reckon with the implications; clearly, we will need to change our pedagogy to ensure that students are not just auto-generating the work we assess.

In addition to a defensive posture, though, educators should be exploring how these tools can help our teaching. They are not just ways to cheat: they are legitimate writing and thinking assistants that can become part of a student's writing process and a writing teacher's pedagogy.

AI tools replicate language patterns they have gleaned from millions of documents. Yet they lack the sense of purpose that human writers have. Students can learn about the strategic use of language by analyzing and critiquing the AI's output. As they reflect on its mistakes and their own ideas and goals, they may build a sense of agency and competence.

For this to work, students need ways to conceptualize the patterns the computer is replicating. They need a textbook that makes explicit the moves academic writers make and the ways we structure arguments with claims, reasons, counterarguments, rebuttals, and qualifiers. What's more, they need sets of template phrases at hand so they can easily try out these moves themselves.

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, authors of the intensely popular writing handbook *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, have argued that “[f]ar from turning students into mindless automatons, formulas...can help them generate thoughts that might not otherwise occur to them.” Critics have seen value in Graff and Birkenstein’s templates and have also urged them to provide more context for when and how to use them (Wiley in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Fuller and Pence in *Locutorium*, Van Der Heide et al in *Theory into Practice*). In *College Composition and Communication*, Zak Lancaster compares sets of Graff and Birkenstein’s common phrases against usage in a corpus of academic writing and finds disparities. He implies that updates are needed. Yet few have tried to build on this model. The OER text *How Arguments Work: A Guide to Writing and Analyzing Texts in College* attempts to align template phrases with rhetorical moves for common academic writing tasks such as summary, critical assessment, and response.

In this presentation, I will walk through several practice exercises where students use textbook materials to critique and revise the output of AI writing generators. I argue that the combination of AI and rhetorical templates is especially helpful to students who lack cultural capital. Students who read extensively and grow up in educated households have unconsciously absorbed common phrases and rhetorical strategies. AI software has the potential to democratize access to language patterns, and studying rhetorical templates enables students to take charge of how they want to use these patterns. Students build confidence as they begin to notice the ways in which they can write and reason better than AI.

Assigning the critique and revision of AI writing also allows us to teach critical AI literacy and discuss the inherent biases in the writing generator as it draws on a data set of language conditioned by oppressive power structures. Ultimately, AI writing generators do not need to figure as magic machines that spit out text in an otherwise inaccessible elite style. We can incorporate these tools into our pedagogy in a way that boosts students' sense of their own agency as writers.

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