

ChatGPT and the Near Future of Writing Instruction

Brigham Young University College of Humanities AI Task Force * Feb 2023 (*beta*)

Writing has always been a *techne*—a way of making and doing that involves not only ideas but technologies. In November 2022, we were introduced to the power of generative artificial intelligence by the launch of OpenAI’s ChatGPT-3, a text-producer so sophisticated that it responds to a variety of prompts with clear and well-organized writing that cannot easily be distinguished from writing done by a human.

While we’ve experienced writing innovations in the past—the word processor, for example—there is something fundamentally different about generative AI: With the right prompt, ChatGPT-3 can intervene at any point in the writing process, from outlining to proofreading to creating nearly limitless original new text about practically any topic in whatever genre the prompt demands. (It can also produce code.) In the near future, generative AI programs will be integrated into many of the tools we use to produce writing, much like spell check or predictive autofill have been added in the past.

In the context of this rapidly changing communication landscape, BYU’s Writing Across the Curriculum Program affirms that writing is an art, an essential mode of learning, and a fundamental tool for making knowledge. Learning the writing process teaches students how to use intellectual tools to connect with others and influence judgment. Writing leads to significant learning experiences. Writing helps students acculturate to professional communities. If we value what writing does for us and our students, we will need to change how we teach writing as generative AI programs become entangled in the writing process.

engage	make values explicit
experiment with a variety of AI programs	make communication outcomes clear: teach students that writing is a form of thinking and learning; hierarchize what you value most
write your assignment prompts into AI; learn prompt engineering	create writing assignments with clear, specific audiences and purposes
have students use AI—in class and out, and in groups—and compare with their own	express how much you value thinking, style, originality, & other non-AI communication virtues
have students use AI at various stages in the process as “thinking partner” and report back; teach students to be <i>prompt engineers</i>	make sure your rubrics prioritize these non-AI virtues
paste course readings into GPT and ask it to generate discussion questions for the class; ask students to not only answer the questions but also assess the quality of the generated questions	teach the value of <i>struggling</i> through writing tasks
present what AI wrote to the class and ask students to analyze	remind students of the university’s Academic Honesty policy
study strengths & weaknesses of AI & teach students those strengths & weaknesses; better yet, have them teach each other	ask students to make clear when and how they used AI on a project
have students fact check AI generated texts	tell students you do not want them to use AI for x or y
collaborate with students to decide what is appropriate AI use	teach students that they will always be responsible for the content & effects of their writing
have students use your rubrics to assess AI-generated texts	teach students communication ethics in your field; consider the ethical repercussions of using AI (e.g., plagiarism, misinformation, and conflicting interests of corporate sponsors)
ask students to cut and paste GPT responses in a word processor, turn on “track changes,” and revise it to improve it	create assignments that require spontaneous written and oral communication
give yourself some space to experiment with assessments that might fail or lead to grade inflation	

favor context over content	favor process over product, writers over writing
<p>orient assignments & teaching to <i>situations</i> of communication: writers, audiences, media, genres, purposes</p> <p>require students to analyze/target specific audiences for their work</p> <p>ask students to study the “discourse communities” that value certain kinds of writing—to understand, describe, and write to specific specialized audiences</p> <p>do not assign information-heavy “research papers to no one”</p> <p>assign writing that asks students to make personal connections with your class or other classes</p> <p>teach students to develop metacognitive habits. Require students to:</p> <p><i>write about what they hope to learn</i> <i>set goals for projects / course</i> <i>write about professional communities they will join</i> <i>write about communities they belong to now</i> <i>reflect on how content is meant to be applied</i> <i>reflect on what they learned while completing writing projects</i></p> <p>require students to refer to class discussions, lectures, class “inside jokes,” and other live insights in their work</p>	<p>remind yourself: I’m teaching <i>writers</i>, not writing</p> <p>create opportunities for students to experience the creative process (and hold them accountable for it): coming up with ideas, planning a writing task, gathering information, making outlines or initial drafts, getting feedback, revising, and reflecting</p> <p>ask students to talk about their work with others—peers, peer tutors, TAs, you—and explain the decisions they made as writers</p> <p>use peer reviews, teacher-student conferences, presentations, writing center visits, etc to draw out this experience</p> <p>ask students to write process essays to describe the steps they took to produce writing and what they learned as a result</p> <p>scaffold longer assignments into smaller parts and deliverables</p> <p>ask students to use GPT during the revision process and then reflect on the experience</p> <p>get creative about assessment: assign portfolios of curated work; use “ungrading” practices like grade contracts; assign critical reflections that require students to evaluate what they have written</p>
expand modes of communication	treat AI as a <i>multiplier</i>
<p>go beyond the double-spaced word-processed paper</p> <p>stop assigning content-heavy take-at-home short-answer essays that lean more towards <i>knowledge-telling</i> rather than <i>knowledge-transforming</i></p> <p>have students write by hand in class (but consider accessibility concerns); use and collect notecards for fast, informal writing</p> <p>increase chances for students to develop interpersonal competencies, including working with groups, asking good questions, collaborative presenting, etc.</p> <p>assign presentations, multimedia projects (audio, video, web and social media), group collaborations, experiential components</p> <p>require students to interview people, gather and analyze data, or do original research</p> <p>assign impromptu, in-process oral presentations</p> <p>experiment with new genres: storytelling, public writing, case studies, role play</p>	<p>expect more from student writing</p> <p>demand clearer, cleaner, more professional writing (<i>Editorial comment: AI will create linguistic justice—for second-language learners, for example—while simultaneously smooshing creativity</i>)</p> <p>expect students to be more aware of strengths, weaknesses of a text, to know the difference between the rhetorically-beige output of a bot and the creative power of our best writers</p> <p>expect more stylistically; teach students advanced style (specialized terms, sentence variety, transitions and <i>non</i>-transitions, data design, integrating sources creatively, employing humor or metaphors or storytelling, varieties of professional response, etc.)</p> <p>expect students to fact check their work</p> <p>give students examples of professional work to emulate</p> <p>encourage students to <i>compete</i> with AI for the best response</p> <p>reward competencies that have not been mastered by AI</p>