TO AI OR NOT TO AI: THAT IS THE QUESTION IN WRITING CLASSES

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Setting the stage

The big reactions in academia because of ChatGPT and similar AI: ban it, create assignments that can't be done using it, and use it to transform the learning experience.

This semester I experimented with different types of writing assignments:

Some were devised in ways to make it extremely difficult for students to use ChatGPT or similar AI

Others actually required students to use ChatGPT or similar AI

Some used AI in assignment prompt generation

ChatGPT for feedback was explored but dropped (without using students' papers because of privacy concerns)

What were the results of these different approaches?

What work best in terms of enriching student learning and forecasting the future of university-level writing?

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- **ASSIGNMENT 1**: Old school pen and paper: timed in-class summary and paraphrase (article about how ChatGPT is causing waves in higher education)

Summarize the article "Professors Turn to ChatGPT to Teach Students a Lesson" by Douglas Belkin. Don't forget to include citation. Remember that a good summary must be written in your own words and should only include the main point and key ideas (not details). In other words, it should be MUCH shorter than the original. Worth 50 points.

Paraphrase the following excerpt from the article. Don't forget citation. Remember that a good paraphrase involves remaining true to the original meaning while properly rewriting in your own words (not patchwriting):

Students need to learn to write well for themselves because the writing process teaches them to think critically, said Johann Neem, a history professor at Western Washington University and the author of "What's the Point of College?"

"Just because there is a machine that will help me lift up a dumbbell doesn't mean my muscles will develop," said Dr. Neem. "In the same way just because there is a machine that can write an essay doesn't mean my mind will develop." Worth 20 points.

What is your personal response to this article? What do you agree with and why? What do you disagree with and why? What thoughts do you have to add to this discussion? And how does this discussion relate to you? Worth 30 points.

- You will be assessed based on your:

- Ability to summarize correctly

- Ability to paraphrase correctly

- Ability to respond insightfully with depth

- Language mastery and writing style

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- **ASSIGNMENT 2:** Super Bowl 2023 food ads comparison and contrast analysis essay (focus on current multimedia content)

Write a comparison and contrast analysis about the Super Bowl 2023 ads listed below.

All the ads are about food or are food related.

- Great Acting or Great Taste? Ben Stiller
- Dunkin' 'Drive-Thru' Starring Ben
- Jack's New Angle
- Pringles Best of Us
- Bush's Beans
- We Get Groceries
- Sanders Family Reunion

- Instructions, Walk Though, Rubric….

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- **ASSIGNMENT 3**: ChatGPT essay analysis (multimodal essay- script, slides, video + choice of 4 essays generated by ChatGPT + strengths, weaknesses, and improvements on content, research, language/style level + reflection)

- In this assignment, you will critically analyse ONE of the 4 essays below (all are generated by ChatGPT), pinpointing strengths and weaknesses and suggesting improvements on a content level, research level, and writing/style level.

- Topic 1: "Is influencer advertising an effective marketing strategy, or is it overhyped and ultimately ineffective in driving consumer behavior?"
- Topic 2: "Films and series and EQ"
- Topic 3: "Gen Z: A Progressive and Empowered Generation, or a Group of Entitled and Fragile Individuals?"
- Topic 4: "Fast fashion has a devastating impact on the environment and society, and consumers have a responsibility to make more sustainable choices when it comes to their clothing purchases."

- What are the strengths of the essay?
- What are the weaknesses of the essay? Don't forget to consider the accuracy of the info and whether the evidence included is real or fake.
- What improvements can be made on a content level?
- What improvements can be made on a research level?
- What improvements can be made on a writing/style level?
- Wrap up with a conclusion that adds your own reflection on this experience and your own thoughts on whether or not you'd use ChatGPT and how you'd use it.

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- **ASSIGNMENT 4: Argumentative essay** on teachers or student using ChatGPT (ChatGPT used to generate example claims for prompt)

- Formulate an argument about one of the following topics:
- *Teachers using AI to give feedback on students' essays
- OR
- *Students using AI to work on assignments

- It's up to you to narrow things down, find an angle, and create an original claim within the topic you selected.
- Here are some claims generated by AI (ChatGPT) to inspire you (don't simply copy and paste…but let these options help you come up with your own claim):
- Teachers using AI (10 claims shared):
- "AI-powered grading tools are a threat to effective writing instruction in the classroom."
- "AI-powered grading tools can provide more objective and consistent feedback than human grading."
- "AI-powered tools are an essential component of effective writing instruction in the 21st century."
- "AI-powered grading tools have the potential to reduce grading bias and increase equity in writing assessment."
- "The use of AI in grading essays raises ethical questions about the role of technology in education and the future of teaching."

- Students using AI (10 claims shared):
- "The use of AI in education raises questions about privacy and data security for student information."
- "AI-powered tools can help reduce academic dishonesty by detecting plagiarism and other forms of cheating."
- "AI-powered tools can help students develop critical thinking skills by providing opportunities for analysis, synthesis, and evaluation."
- "AI-powered tools are an essential component of preparing students for the future of work, which is increasingly reliant on technology and automation."
- "The use of AI in education raises ethical questions about the role of technology in the classroom and the potential impact on the human relationship between teacher and student."

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Instructor's Reflection

- This 'old school' approach encourages academic integrity and assesses students' abilities but in real life students won't be engaging in the writing process this way.

- Including the analysis of ads, videos, and other media engages students. Many articles, websites, and resources suggest that it's harder for students to resort to using ChatGPT to write the entire essay for them.

- Making students analyse content generated by ChatGPT prompts students to grasp the use and limitations of AI, encourages fact checking (and source checking), and informs how AI can be used as a tool to promote learning and enhance performance.

- The argument essay is a standard genre students have done many times before. Integrating claims generated by ChatGPT makes it easier to check if entire essays or chunks of essays were generated using ChatGPT. Using ChatGPT to assist in developing prompts can save time and is worth exploring. There was evidence of a few students taking "shortcuts" but the vast majority didn't.

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<u>Students' Feedback (survey)</u>

- **All assignments**: Majority- An effective way to let students showcase their true skills and abilities. Closely followed by- An effective way to reduce the chances of cheating and plagiarism (students letting AI like ChatGPT do the work for them)

- **Summary**: Seemed not to mind it despite the stress of having to perform on the spot

- **Ads analysis**: Majority claimed they didn't feel the need to use AI. Majority said this was the assignment they liked the most: "[...] even though it was stressful it was the most fun. It had me discover cool ads and think in a different way. Took me out of my comfort zone."

- **ChatGPT essay analysis**: Majority said they didn't feel the need to use AI. Majority said this was the assignment they learned from the most:
"I learned more about ChatGPT and its capabilities which helped me look at it in a different light and change the way I use it."
"It taught me how to use [ChatGPT] in the right way rather than using it to copy and past information."
"I gained more knowledge reading about AI and it was very useful as it helped me understand how and when to use it."

- **Argumentative essay:** Majority expressed that this was the assignment they were most comfortable with as it was familiar. They also stated that they learned a lot because of the required research component. Many used AI for this assignment to brainstorm, generate ideas, and eliminate English language issues but many found it ineffective for research given requirements in prompt and new understanding of "hallucination" and fabricated sources.

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ALL ASSIGNMENTS: emphasis on process, group discussion, peer review, and one on one conferencing)

ASSIGNMENT 1: Exploratory essay- students picked topic from the past year (current). Selected since it involves multiple layers of reflection and personal response.

Choose a question, problem or issue that genuinely perplexes you.
The question can be related to any field/discipline or topic. The only restriction is that it must be about something from the past 12 months (i.e. something current in science, technology, literature, film/series, economics, marketing, society, art etc.).

Examples of Exploratory Essay Topics:
- What business lessons can be learned from Elon Musk's Twitter takeover in 2022?
- What are the implications of the December 2022 breakthrough in nuclear fusion?
- How does the film, The Menu, reflect the service industry and socio-economic divide?

ASSIGNMENT 2: Argumentative essay that builds on exploratory essay. Students were encouraged to use:
- The library alongside elicit.org to track down credible sources.
- explainpaper.com to help understand challenging journal articles so they can actually engage with parts of the article itself and not just the abstract.
- ChatGPT to help brainstorm and outline. But since it "hallucinates" and invents info/sources not as a research tool. Not to write the essay or parts of the essay either.

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ASSIGNMENT 3: Critique/Evaluation essay (recent documentary= audiovisual + current)

Write a critique about ONE of the documentary options below (your choice):
- The Elephant Whisperers (available on Netflix)
- All That Breathes (available on OSN+)
- Halout (available on The New Yorker's website)
- My Octopus Teacher (available on Netflix)

Important: The critique should follow the instructions and walk through.

Remember that a critique is:

- A thoughtful evaluation that includes-

- part summary

- part objective analysis

- part evaluation

- part responding to ideas and drawing on other sources

- It is not like the reviews found on blogs or random websites. It is far more complex than just stating your opinion without evidence or explanation.

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Instructor's Reflection

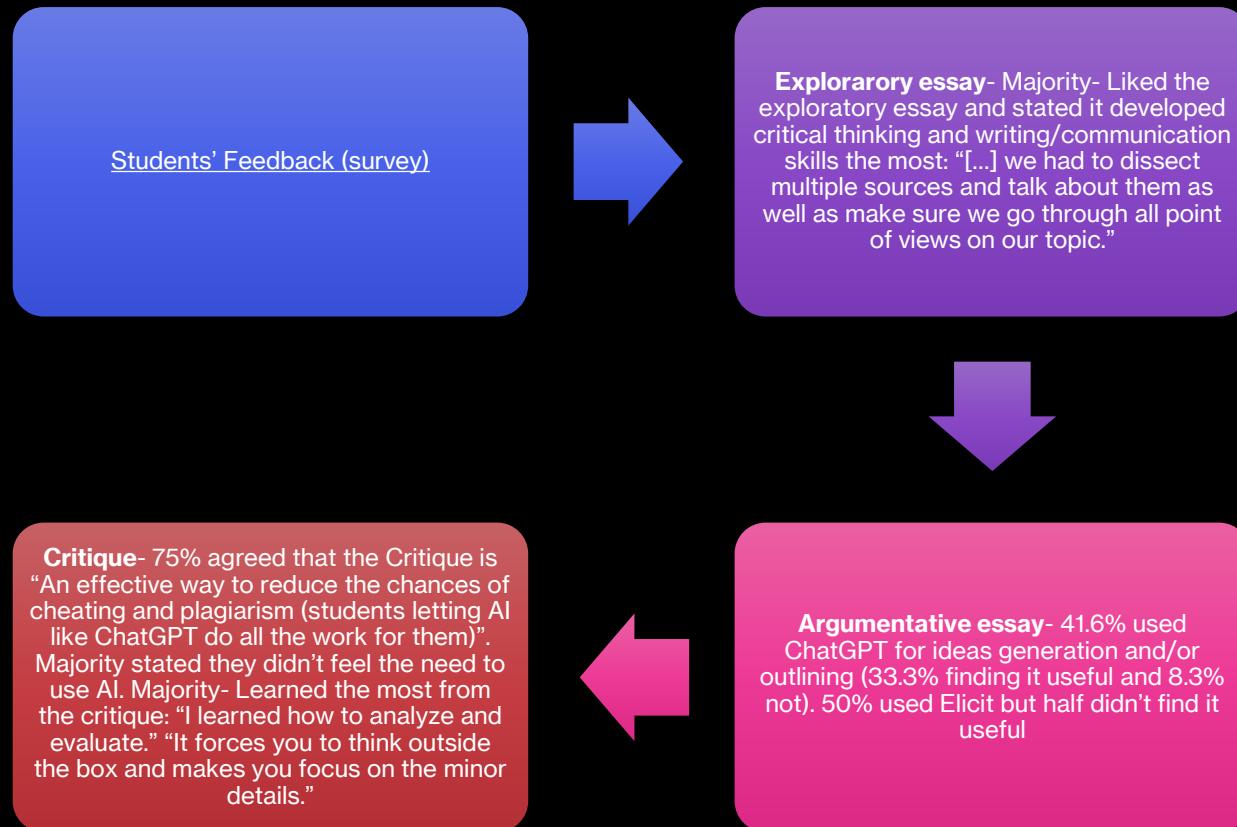Limiting to the past year is easier said than done. Issues with topic selection and finding peer reviewed journal articles. Students need help using AI effectively (e.g. navigating Elicit). Assignments that include personal reflection and narrative like the exploratory essay engage students more.

Interesting new film content, giving students the chance to voice their opinion, and stressing analysis and evaluation motivate students.

WRI 102

Students' Feedback (survey)

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Explorarory essay- Majority- Liked the exploratory essay and stated it developed critical thinking and writing/communication skills the most: "[...] we had to dissect multiple sources and talk about them as well as make sure we go through all point of views on our topic."

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Argumentative essay- 41.6% used ChatGPT for ideas generation and/or outlining (33.3% finding it useful and 8.3% not). 50% used Elicit but half didn't find it useful

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Critique- 75% agreed that the Critique is "An effective way to reduce the chances of cheating and plagiarism (students letting AI like ChatGPT do all the work for them)". Majority stated they didn't feel the need to use AI. Majority- Learned the most from the critique: "I learned how to analyze and evaluate." "It forces you to think outside the box and makes you focus on the minor details."

Putting it all together

What motivates students not to cut corners with AI so they can learn:
- In-class collaboration, discussion, peer reviewing, and one on one conferencing
- Focus on process not only product
- The analysis and evaluation of current media content (from ads to documentaries) and AI generated content
- The inclusion of personal reflection and opinion
- Multimodal assignments and Q&A after oral presentations

What shouldn't be done:
- Trying to ban or avoid the use of AI. As a student put it:
- "I wouldn't be concerned about students using ChatGPT or try to ban it because it is a waste of time. Students will always find a way to get around the things."

What should be done:
- Encouraging the use of AI as a learning tool after giving students the opportunity to think critically about its use and limitations
- Rethinking assignments based on new realities and students' needs

Going forward

- Microsoft 365 Copilot and Bard integration in apps (Google Docs etc.).

- Lots of rethinking needed!