

## What to do About Students' Use of AI in Our Classes: Suggestions, Guidelines, and Best Practices

All of us have had to work hard to figure out what to do about the number of students who are using Artificial Intelligence to complete writing assignments. We've talked about this topic repeatedly in our teaching circles, and I'm sure that we'll continue to do so. It's a large topic with no easy answers. But we want to take some time to write out a few guidelines and best practices that teachers can use to help them formulate some strategies to deal with AI in their writing and literature classes.

We've divided these notes and suggestions into three categories: how to detect AI use in student writing, how to create assignments that make unethical AI use less likely, and how to use AI as part of your class.

### 1. Detection

This is probably *not* the most useful approach to the problem of AI. Detection isn't foolproof, and it's hard to prove even if you're fairly certain that it's not the student's work. Moreover, AI use is widespread, and it's probably not productive to put yourself in the position of hunting down and punishing it. That being said, here are some things to consider:

- As of this writing (early 2025), AI detection sites are absolutely not reliable. *Don't use them.*
- If you're looking for a "tell," you can *learn to recognize AI language*, particularly open-source platforms.
  - This is especially true when a chatbot is given a prompt that asks it to summarize or analyze writing or literature. You'll see the same vocabulary and the same phrases come up over and over again.
  - **Note:** In the past, I've had students submit writing done with AI which contains vocabulary that it's pretty clear the student doesn't know. In some cases, I've simply asked students the next day in class if they know the meaning of a word that they've used in a paper. If they don't, that's a pretty definite indicator that they haven't written the paper.
- If you must address a student's potential AI usage in your courses, please do so with compassion.

- **Note:** AI is now built into many word processors, online editors (e.g., Grammarly, QuillBot), and translation software that our students utilize. Thus, it is possible that they may not be aware that they've engaged AI in ways that are unethical. At the same time, we might accidentally flag a student's work for unethical AI usage, when this is not the case. We recommend approaching potential AI usage as a teaching moment and not an accusation of wrongful behavior. In other words, as opposed to addressing the issue as punitive, think of it as a way to educate the student on productive usage of this new and still developing this software as well as an opportunity to safeguard them against accusations of plagiarism in the future by providing some strategies (e.g., saving old and unedited drafts of work, promoting academic honesty by being up front about usage with their instructors, ensuring they know to inquire about course policies regarding AI usage, including online editors and translation software, in all of their classes.)

That said, if you do not want students taking advantage of the editing/translation assistance certain digital tools, such as Grammarly and/or QuillBot, might provide, we recommend that you make this language clear and up front in your syllabi.

## 2. Prevention

It's best to start out by saying that there's *no absolute way to prevent unethical AI use*. The best that we can do is think about how we can design our classrooms, and particularly our assignments, in a way that makes unethical use of AI less likely. Here are some things to consider:

- Create scaffolded assignments where a series of shorter, low-stakes assignments builds towards a longer, graded one.
  - Most of us do this anyway as a part of good writing pedagogy, but it's worth emphasizing. Students are more likely to cheat when they feel anxious, pressured, and pressed for time. Scaffolding a series of smaller assignments that build to a larger one makes cheating less likely. It also helps to allot at least some class time for students to write and share what they've written.
- Writing prompts that ask students to analyze some elements of readings that you assign are particularly likely to invite unethical AI use.

- These types of prompts require analyzing and summarizing texts, which are tasks that AI is very good at and that students are not very good at—or at least *think* they're not good at.
- On the other hand, giving prompts and assignments that ask students for their own experiences and reactions are less likely to lead to them using AI.
  - This is particularly true if the prompts ask them for their questions and reactions rather than summary or analysis.
  - **Note:** For example, don't ask them to pick out the themes or main ideas. Instead, ask what was most puzzling to them. Or ask them to find a passage that they want to discuss in class and have them write a few sentences about why they chose that passage.
- Ask students to do the first stages of an assignment collaboratively.
  - This works particularly well when they're reacting to a text.
  - **Note:** For example, you could put them in small groups and then have them write back and forth to each other in a Google Doc. Tell them that this “dialogue” is their very rough draft and require them to use parts of it in their next draft—quoting themselves and each other and building off of this material. You could jump into the middle of this dialogue and prompt them with questions. You can also ask them to go over the dialogue when it's finished and pick out or summarize some of the most interesting points.
  - Having them do at least some of this writing in class also makes it less likely that they'll resort to AI. They can then use some of this collaborative writing as the basis for a later assignment.
- If you've used the Discussion area of Blackboard, or if you've done in-class writing or short homework assignments, you can require students to use some of this writing (e.g., either their own posts or their classmates' posts or both) when they submit revised drafts.
  - **Note:** You might tell them that one of the requirements for the paper is to incorporate and react to this previous writing.

- Create a sequence of assignments that creates a paper trail (or at least an electronic paper trail).
  - Develop assignments that require lots of rough writing, and then ask students to create revision plans. Have them account not only for the final product, but for the steps it takes them to get there.
  - **Note:** It may help to have students begin each new draft as a separate document so that you and they can later use the “compare documents” feature to see changes. (But *be aware that AI is also capable of generating these steps*. Students can feed a paper into a chatbot and ask it to come up with a revision plan.)

### 3. Using AI as a Part of Your Class

This may seem crazy. After all, we’re trying to get students to do their own work and not use AI as a substitute for their own thinking. But it’s clear that AI is increasingly going to be a tool that writers use in their jobs, and it’s worth teaching students how to use it productively and ethically. *AI can be a useful tool and can help students think about information and/or about their own writing*—if it’s a supplement or a stimulus for their thinking and not a substitute for it.

Here are two ways that AI might be used to stimulate more writing and thinking. They’ll work best if students have already done a bit of writing and thinking and are using AI to help them with the next step in the writing process.

- Have students use AI to create a revision plan or to analyze their rough drafts (or each other’s rough drafts).
  - **Note:** The nice thing about this is that you can give the chatbot a few specific criteria to analyze. This is a great way to emphasize and remind students what the purpose of the assignment is. Then, when AI gives them an answer, you can put them in groups or have a class discussion where they analyze that answer. You can also ask the student to submit their own analysis and compare it to the one generated by AI.
- Have students give AI a short, rough draft or a freewrite, and ask it to use that draft to come up with a dozen possible topics that might come from their writing.

Then use class time to discuss those possible topics, either in small groups or as a class.

- **Note:** You might also ask students to select a few of these topics to write about for an upcoming assignment. Then, as a low-stakes activity, ask them to provide a brief written reflection on why they might want to explore each of these three topics in their upcoming essay, ultimately utilizing writing as a thinking tool to narrow down to one topic.

Based on these two suggestions, you'll probably be able to come up with your own ideas. Also, I encourage everyone to come to our monthly teaching circles and share their successes and their problems!