# How to talk to your students about AI

*University of Pittsburgh Writing Institute Workshop on AI and the Teaching of Writing\**

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In this resource, we outline some ways to address AI language models in your writing classes. The key takeaway here is that you *do* need to address them. Don't pretend AI large language models don't exist. They exist and your students know about them. You know about them, too. There are not good ways of detecting student use of language models (such as ChatGPT) in their writing because AI detectors are unreliable. But there are good ways to talk to your students about AI language models and to help them meet the learning goals of your class— despite and even maybe with AI language models.

## Preparing your class

- Be clear what they're allowed to do with AI and what they're not allowed to do in your class. Have an AI policy in your syllabus (see our suggested policies). Students overwhelmingly indicate that they would like clarity about AI use in the policies in their classes. To foster transparency, encourage students to come to you with clarifications about your AI policy in your class.
- Teach them AI literacy. Introduce them to the basics about how these AI systems work, how they use algorithms and huge datasets to produce output. They're not magic and they don't "know" anything. If you would like an accessible explanation, see here: https://www.sciencefocus.com/future-technology/gpt-3/ You may also want to consider sharing a reading with your students that will teach them about how AI language models work.
- Ask your students what questions they have about AI. This technology is relatively new to all of us, and they might have ideas and questions that will help you navigate the context of AI writing in your class.
- Consider alternative grading methods such as labor-based grading or completion-based grading to credit students for writing work rather than writing products.

## To encourage ethical and critical use of AI in your classes

- Talk about the goals of your assignments, and what students are learning by doing them. Academic dishonesty is less frequent when students find intrinsic value in their assignments.

- Design assignments with clear learning goals orienting around the processes of writing primarily, rather than products. A product-only approach is less useful to writing pedagogy, but it also increases exposure of your assignment to AI.
- Stage assignments through smaller, low-stakes formative exercises, drafts, multiple rounds of feedback from you or peers.
- Tell students: Remember that you are responsible for your writing. You cannot give the AI your authority and having AI do the writing will not absolve you of your responsibility to learn the material from this class. See, for instance, *Nature*'s guidelines for AI: https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-00191-1 (they note that authorship implies responsibility and so AI can't be an author)

## Recognizing and responding to AI writing

Despite your best efforts, a student may use AI in a way that's inconsistent with your policy. Be aware that AI detectors such as GPTZero and Turnitin produce both false positives and false negatives, so they provide no definitive answer about whether AI was used. You cannot "ask" ChatGPT if it wrote a passage because it doesn't "know" or retain any of that information. Instead of using AI detectors, some better ways to recognize AI writing are:
- Inconsistency: A student submits assignments that don't match previous ones
- Perfect spelling, grammar and formal structure
- Disembodied or overly formal tone
- Inaccurate quotes and information from the texts
- If it ends with "regenerate response" or uses the phrase "As a language model…" (yes, sometimes this happens!)
- Uses stock sentences and transitions like "Overall," "However," etc.
- Students can't respond with ideas beyond what's on the paper when you talk to them

If you think a student might be using AI in a way that's inconsistent with your policy, first, invite them to discuss the assignment. Responding to potential academic integrity concerns with AI is very similar to responding to academic integrity concerns with plagiarism and contract cheating.
- Ask the student to expand on the ideas they wrote about: "tell me more about…" "what were you thinking when you wrote this?"
- Ask them directly: what technologies did you use in composing this? Did you use AI at any stage of your writing?
- Restate your policies and those of the university. Make sure they understand what's allowed in your course.
- Unless a student says that they have used AI in their writing, it's impossible to prove that they have. AI detectors aren't reliable, you can't ask ChatGPT if it wrote a paragraph, and you can't recreate the original text as you can, say, if a student copies text from a website.
- If you think a student has used AI in a way that's inconsistent with your AI policy, consider letting the student retry the assignment, revise what they've turned in, or otherwise find a way for the student to learn from the assignment as well as get some credit for their work.

- Reach out to colleagues, department chairs, your Center for Teaching and Learning, or Academic Integrity officials.