

OBSERVATIONS THAT GUIDE PRACTICE!! ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM: KNOW IT WELL SO IT CAN BENEFIT, NOT DESTROY

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“Artificial Intelligence”—those two words have led to confusion, horror, anxiety, disillusionment, concern, and frustration for the distance learning instructor. Its partner in all this is ChatGPT, an AI network that can process and generate human-like text. Ben Dickson, software engineer, writing for PC Magazine, sums it up nicely:

People have put the chatbot to all kinds of creative uses, including writing articles and emails, designing websites, and writing software code. But concerns have arisen about potentially nefarious uses, such as facilitating the spread of misinformation, phishing emails scams, and allowing students to cheat on tests (2023).

It is that last part of the quote—“allowing students to cheat on texts”—that has online educators worrying. There are students looking for shortcuts to less time doing school work yet better grades; AI seems to be a gift giving both of these. But the sky is not falling! Notes the

Harvard University Graduate School of Education ,

But while academic integrity remains a concern for both adults and teens alike, many study participants highlighted positive academic experiences they’ve had with generative AI. AI was called “the modern approach to learning,” while other teens surveyed pointed out that “not all kids use it to cheat in school (Nagelhout, 2024).

These are items to consider with the added tool of AI in the classroom:

- **Don’t begin any class with the biased attitude all students will use AI to cheat.** Many online faculty members go into a classroom with the thought, “I know my students will cheat with AI,” and while this true for some it is not correct for the overwhelming majority. In fact, a report from Education Week (Prothero, 2024) found that Turnitin—

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the similarity checker software used by many colleges and universities—reported only 3% of all students recorded in 2023 had writing of 80% or more by AI writing. This is hard evidence that students are still aware of how important it is to do their work and why it matters.

- **Post a message on Day One of class indicating how AI can and cannot be used.** Many schools that fabricate syllabi for their instructors now include a section on the use of AI. But we also know that students often only read the schedule of weekly readings and assignment in a syllabus. Thus, it is important to also post a Day One announcement—and immediately sent to the class via email—of your policy on AI, including how it can be used, how it should not be used, and consequences for using it to take shortcuts in creating assignments.
- **Ask students for their input on the use of AI.** An online instructor gets a better sense of a class mindset on using AI when students give their take on how or if they have used it, why they used it, and how they intend to use it—if at all—in the class. This not only presents the instructor with more info on the class and AI but also perhaps will allow for follow-up by the instructor on AI to the full class and/or individual students.
- **There is AI detection software—use it, but know none are 100% accurate.** AI detection software comes in many varieties; just type in “best AI detection software” in a browser, and several will come up. Yet their use can be detrimental, even hurtful, to students if considered “yes” or “no” answers. Consider this from Phrasely.AI (2024): “A troubling aspect of AI detection tools is their inherent bias against non-native English speakers. A study conducted by Stanford computer scientists found that several AI detectors incorrectly flagged writing by non-native speakers as AI-generated a significant 61% of the time.” And how

about this: I took three of the paragraphs from this column and put them through four different AI detectors; two indicated the writing was 100% human, but the other two said my writing was 100% and 90% AI written, respectively!

- **Do not punish a student for a first-time use of AI to fully or almost fully create.** There will be times when a student’s writing or a project is so out of contrast with what the instructor thinks it should be that a run through AI detection software is warranted. If the result is, yes, it was AI generated do what I do. I have a stock email I send to the students giving the results, and asking how they can explain this. When they acknowledge its use I give them the opportunity to rewrite and resubmit. But don’t let this detract from your teaching: AI-generated text will slip by and, ultimately, the student loses, not you.
- **#1: Remind students of how excellent knowledge of AI can help in the professional world.** Again, per Education Week (Prothero, 2024): “Use AI as an aid to understanding concepts rather than a fancy plagiarism tool.” While students using AI to cheat in school can result in failed grades—or, in some instances, getting expelled—in the world of professional employment such use can result in being fired from a job. Thus, its use should be limited to understanding concepts, searching out ideas, and—at best—receiving input on overall project structure.
- **#2: Remind students how creating their own works translates into confidence, knowledge, and a professional asset.** There is a certain pride one feels in knowing something that person created—from a flower growing from a seed planted to a finished project that began as an idea—is the person behind it, not a computer, not artificial intelligence. Most students in school do wish to learn, do want their brains to do the work, rather

than putting their brains on a shelf while AI does all the work. And a great thing to tell an employer in an interview is, “I know how to use AI to generate and enhance ideas, but all work, all creation is always done by me.”

- **Keep a running record of reasons students give for using AI—and how they used it.** Keeping records of anything can prove helpful, and where AI is involved it can help the teacher and students immensely. For the online educator it can be a running tally of how many students cheated with AI, how many admitted to using it for only ideas and input, excuses given for using AI, and the instructor’s decisions on students using AI. Students can also benefit by instructors simply having more peace of mind going into a course knowing that, “Wow, overall I can feel pretty confident that most students will be doing their own efforts.”

A nice summation of AI’s use in the classroom comes from Forbes (Singh, 2024): “As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and digital ... students must be equipped with the skills and knowledge to thrive in this new environment. AI offers a solution that can address these challenges, providing personalized, flexible and accessible learning experiences.”

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