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PRACTICE-ORIENTED PRESENTATION

Empowering Educators of Research Writing When Students Have Access to AI Generated Texts

In briefly contextualizing the use of AI tools by students, three socio-educational developments should probably be kept in mind. First, as noted in a very recent survey of students, conducted by the Higher Education Policy Institute, Freeman (2025) finds that over 90 percent of surveyed students use AI tools, especially in the areas of text generation, of text editing, and of language translation (pp. 2-3). In the meantime, in a study that links AI tools and learning, Bai, Liu, and Su (2023) suggest that excessive reliance on AI tools might potentially inhibit the full development of critical thinking skills among students (p. 5). Finally, some educationally related research opens the possibility that some AI detectors that are used to distinguish between machine generated texts and human generated texts might display “detection inconsistencies” (Chaka, 2024, p. 122), thereby potentially harming their ability to accurately distinguish machine produced texts from human produced texts.

Given that broadly framed educationally-related social context, a fundamental challenge for many academic writing teachers is how to structure and to reward the process of putting together research papers in ways that writing machines, if used, work as complementary academic tools – rather than as the primary authors – of student research papers.

Consequently, in an era of pervasive AI tools, my teaching practice aims at helping my students experience a perceptual shift: instead of having AI instruments mostly (if not completely) drive student academic writing – or have AI tools do most of the cognitive work of putting together their research paper – I want my students to see AI tools as complementary assistants, helping them with grammar, clarity of expression, and selected academic research processes. Therefore, my overriding goal is to increase the probability of increased student engagement – and thus the development of student thinking and writing skills – throughout the writing and researching processes, particularly if students want to do well in my class.

While taking advantage of the regularities (the tendencies) and the limitations of most currently generated machine produced texts, three fundamental research writing approaches inform my practice of teaching researched writing. These approaches, in turn, are rooted in my real-world experiences of teaching ESL students during the last few years. More importantly, I develop teaching approaches (or future approaches) only after using prompts with well-known AI writing tools, or after closely analyzing student writing that appears to be either unauthentic student writing or writing that displays a multitude of similarities to AI academic writing. In any event, I implement these approaches within an educational setting in which it is often difficult to ascertain or to penalize unauthorized machine writing embedded into student writing assignments.

Approach #1: Structuring the research project around the expression of the narrow thesis idea of the research paper

Since AI tools often suggest broadly conceptualized ideas, often complexly related to many other broadly complex ideas, I look to approve a narrower thesis idea, one that is relationally and positionally expressed only between two narrowly specified elements, rather than among many factors. Put differently, the narrow relational thesis idea is simplified, narrowly expressed, positionally framed, and set within an existing social context. For instance: The excessive use of water in AI data centers in country X is associated with a specific type of environmental damage in locations that are near such data centers.

Approach #2: Structuring the research project with regard to multiple features of the research essay

Since AI texts often display similar language, similar broadness/vagueness of expression, similar paragraph structuring, and similar paragraph length, I ask students to create writing features that diverge from those features frequently exhibited by many text-making programs that a particular class might be collectively using, or that a similar class has used in the recent past. Indeed, as a result of my assessments of past student writing, I tend to ask my students to incorporate the following elements into their research paper: edit out unnecessary wordiness from their paragraphs; adhere to paragraph length specifications; require the paraphrasing of specialized language into standard written English; demand more evidence and more sources per body paragraph; academic sources are not summarized, but rather, targeted information is requested from sources, such as how the data was collected in a given study, or the paraphrasing of a specific piece of evidence; ask students to counter only one claim in their paper, rather than their overall position; ask students to refute only one counterclaim in their paper; ask students for one narrow/specific topic sentence claim per body paragraph, rather than multiple, broadly expressed topic sentence claims; and ask students for relational or comparative topic sentence claims, rather than descriptive or informationally oriented topic sentence claims.

Approach #3: Structuring the research project with respect to the academic sources used in the research paper

After carefully and repeatedly reviewing machine produced texts, as it pertains to academic evidence and academic sources, I tend to request from my students the following: all in-text attribution of direct evidence needs to be paraphrased and acknowledged with exact page numbers, rather than with page ranges; the reference page needs to contain both functional electronic links and page ranges for every source; and empirically oriented academic articles are favored over theoretically oriented academic articles, given that the former are more highly structured in terms of where their evidence is located.

References

- Bai, L., Liu, X., and Su, J. (2023). ChatGPT: The cognitive effects on learning and memory. *Brain-X*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/brx2.30>.
- Chaka, C. (2024). Reviewing the performance of AI detection tools in differentiating between AI-generated and human-written texts: A literature and integrative hybrid review. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 7 (1), 115-126.
- Freeman, J. (2025). Student Generative AI Survey 2025: Executive summary. *Higher Education Policy Institute*. HEPI Policy Note 61.