

Using Artificial Intelligence In English 102

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I began by listing a few things I wanted to gain a perspective on:

- How many of my students were comfortable and already using AI in their writing?
- When allowed, how would they use it?
- What did it do well? What did it do not-so-well?
- Overall, how effective did they find it?
- Were they able to use only AI to produce acceptable writing to submit?

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- Determined most students were familiar with ChatGPT
- Decided to use on Essay #3 in English 102
- 5-7 page research paper on broad academic issue
- Done as a Rogerian argument, looking at both sides of an issue to find a compromise position

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Here's what I asked them to evaluate:

1. The process

- Explain the process you used to create your essay. Did ChatGPT do it quickly in one step, or did you interact with the program to get the result you wanted?
- Did you edit what ChatGPT produced ? Did you add anything If so, explain.

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2. The sources

- Could you locate the sources used by ChatGPT? Where? Library or online?
- Was the material used and cited correctly in ChatGPT?
- Were you able to locate other sources that might have been better than those used or in addition to those used? Give some details.
- How timely or recent were the sources used?

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3. The content

- Did ChatGPT cover the topic adequately or did it miss some key aspect?
- Were the sources devoted to your topic or were they on a broader topic? (In other words, does the program use broad, generic sources or search out specific topic articles?)
- What kind of support did ChatGPT use -- only quotes as support or did it also use paraphrases or summaries?
- Was the essay produced long enough or did you have to add something?
- Was the essay structured well or did you have to adapt it before submitting?
- If the sources used statistics, were they valid?
- Did you find any fallacies?

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4. The tone

- Did AI use a tone and language that seemed appropriate?
- Would you feel comfortable submitting it as your work, or would you change it to sound more like your own writing?

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5. The author

- Were you able to locate the author(s) used or quoted as support?
- Were they well qualified to speak on the topic?
- Did you find sources elsewhere that had more qualified authors?

6. Finally, could you produce a better essay given the time to do so? Explain your answer. If you could use AI in all writing, would you be comfortable with that? Why or why not?

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1. The process

- Getting a good response from ChatGPT often required several steps and very specific instructions to the software. They had to explain the type of essay, the subject, all the requirements. But they were ultimately able to get what they wanted.
- ChatGPT provided a good overall structure although students had to adapt it to what was taught in English 102.

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2. The sources

- Some had trouble finding good sources with AI, had to do some research.
- The sources given them by ChatGPT were totally online.
- They were very recent sources.
- They often were NOT cited correctly. Page numbers were missing. Only one author was given when there were multiple authors.
- Most felt the articles found was good and reliable.

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3. The content

- In most cases, while the content provided was appropriate, it was not outstanding. Several students found what they considered better content by doing their own research. Sometimes the software got off topic
- Most all submissions were paraphrases or summaries, very few – if any – quotes. No signal phrases were used.
- Length was a major problem for most students. Most indicated that they had to add material or make repeated requests to ChatGPT to get to the required length – even though their instructions mandated a five-page essay, ChatGPT would produce three or four page drafts.
- Students found no fallacies in the content.

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4. The tone

- This was a major problem for all students. The tone used by ChatGPT was very academic and to many students, dull. “AI can’t translate human feeling into writing”
- They virtually all had to adapt the writing to their own style, and none said that they could submit the essay exactly as written by ChatGPT

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5. The author

- They were able to locate the authors used by ChatGPT and generally felt they were qualified.
- However, many reported that they found better sources when they did their own research.

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6. Ultimate evaluation

- All students did not feel they could submit the essay produced by AI without changing the writing and some of the elements.
- All but one student said that yes, they could produce a better essay given time to do so.
- While AI was very helpful in locating sources, etc, it still required quite a bit of work to adapt the structure and the sourcing required in this course.

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- Telling students they were not only allowed, but expected to use ChatGPT permitted them to be completely honest about their experience. They learned a lot.
- Requiring them to go back and check their sources is a good fail-safe practice that ensures they didn't submit fallacious material.
- Most came away having learned that while ChatGPT is very good and very quick, it is not perfect and needs a lot of revision to meet the requirements that have been given them in English 102.
- Virtually all said they would have to revise the tone, the structure, and the citations to meet course requirements.

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- The major loss of using ChatGPT is that they don't gain experience in using the academic library or in finding more academic sources
- Does this interfere with long-term linguistic skills – I don't think we know yet. And luckily this essay is followed by one where they must use the academic library and submit sources
- I'm in the process of deciding whether I will use AI in this semester's 102. I'm tending towards doing so because it teaches the students about the pros and cons of AI.