**Using Generative AI for Assignments: A Handout for Faculty  
Elizabeth Cohn, American University, August 2025**

This handout covers five aspects of the use of generative AI (GenAI) for student assignments:

1. General Guidance on AI and student assignments.
2. Assignments using GenAI to enhance learning: examples.
3. Assignments to increase GenAI literacy.
4. Creating a learning environment that discourages the use of GenAI.
5. Sources of more information. See also Appendices A, B, and C to this handout.

**Guidance**GenAI is part of the learning and work landscape so faculty cannot ignore it. However, there are different approaches we can take based on our philosophy of education and course learning outcomes. No one approach is required. But you must provide guidance to your students on what you consider to be appropriate use of GenAI in your assignments.

Course Policies, Academic Integrity, and Citations. Alison Thomas, AU’s Assistant Dean for Academic Integrity, has written and collected excellent resources related to GenAI. See particularly the Office of Academic Integrity AI Guidance, found on the [OAI Sharepoint site](https://american0.sharepoint.com/sites/AcademicIntegrity/SitePages/Resources-for-Faculty(1).aspx?promotedState=0), which includes suggested syllabus language on AI policies and what to do if you perceive improper use of GenAI by one of your students. All faculty should provide a policy for their courses, especially since students will likely face different policies in their courses. However, a policy on your syllabus is not enough; you should also discuss this with your students in class at the beginning of the semester and before they are given each assignment. See Appendix A for one of my GenAI policies.

Remember that GenAI is [not an authority](https://publicationethics.org/cope-position-statements/ai-author) in the traditional sense of how we think of authorship and why we use citations. However, a student must document when they relied on GenAI. For guidance on why and how students should cite GenAI, see [Chicago Style](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/data/faq/topics/Documentation/faq0422.html), [APA](https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt), [MLA](https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/?gclid=CjwKCAjwtuOlBhBREiwA7agf1qGJAqrholcZTc7oQ5qcn1FGV4vl8g1JIChHwLiJyO0wwTDqSM3twxoCaBUQAvD_BwE) and Alison Thomas’s AI citations presentation on her [Sharepoint site](https://american0.sharepoint.com/sites/AcademicIntegrity/SitePages/Resources-for-Faculty(1).aspx?promotedState=0).

Prompts. For any of the assignments described below, note that [the prompt](https://canvas.sydney.edu.au/courses/51655/pages/writing-prompts) given to a GenAI tool is critical to the output you will get. There is a skill to using GenAI, and you might want to teach that to your students. For example, breaking down a query into parts, assigning a role or persona, and giving a tone or context will yield more specific results. See two “cheat sheets” in Appendix B of this handout for guidance.

Choosing Part of an Assignment. Faculty might want to limit student GenAI use to one or two steps in an assignment. Leslie Allison and Tiffany DeRewal (2023) note that GenAI can mimic every step of a research assignment. This includes: brainstorming ideas for a research topic; writing a thesis; identifying methods for finding info; locating and accessing info; synthesizing info; writing and editing text; and evaluating the final product.  
  
It is important to be specific with students about what GenAI use is allowed and at what stage of the assignment. How you make that decision is based on your learning outcomes for the course, or what skills you want your students to learn. Marc Watkins developed a [template](https://www.chronicle.com/article/make-ai-part-of-the-assignment) linked to different parts of a writing assignment, hoping to encourage students to be honest and reflect on their GenAI use. Leon Furze et al. have an [AI Assessment Scale](https://aiassessmentscale.com/) that may also help you decide your level of GenAI use for your students. See also Appendix C for specific examples to help you decide what is acceptable use of AI.

Many articles remind us what we are experiencing: that students are [reading less](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/academics/2024/09/25/students-turn-ai-do-their-assigned-readings-them) than they have in the past. My research indicates that students often use GenAI instead of doing the reading. Is that acceptable in your course? If engaging with the reading is a priority for you, tools such as [Perusall](https://www.perusall.com/) and [Hyphothes.is](https://web.hypothes.is/) can enable students to annotate a text with specific comments or respond to each other or your queries. This provides an alternative assignment to the Discussion Board, which students sometimes treat as busywork and which thus encourages improper AI use.

Asking students to use GenAI with assignments in ways that enable learning may add more work for you and your students, but it can also help students learn how to use AI effectively and responsibly. It may also mean focusing more on a student’s process of learning, and less on the product. This has the advantage of encouraging metacognition, when students reflect on their learning.

Bottom line: Think about what skills and knowledge you want your students to learn and how you can assess whether they have learned them. As you develop policies and assignments, I encourage you to keep your focus on student learning, and not on deterring cheating. Having a clear policy is important so students know what GenAI use is or is not allowed. Given that it is often difficult to determine what was GenAI- or human-produced, and that AI detectors are very unreliable, AI detectors should not be used.

Finally, don’t assume that any assignment is AI-proof just because it’s based on the readings. Students can upload a PDF’d reading into a GenAI tool and ask it to answer a specific prompt based on the PDF. Before deciding on an assignment, you can test this yourself and see what you get. It might lead you to be more creative in structuring the assignment to enhance learning.

**Assignments Using Generative AI to Enhance Learning**

1. One of the main ways faculty have used GenAI as a tool for learning is to give students a prompt and ask them to put it into a GenAI tool, and then ask students to do one or more of the following:

a. investigate the veracity of the output;

b. track down additional sources or check the ones mentioned;

c. add missing points based on the readings or additional research;

d. apply x or y theories from your course;

e. have an argument with the GenAI tool.  
(The last three are easy for GenAI to do, so don’t assume students are doing that thinking.)

2. In fall 2023 and 2024, I specified that students in my First Year Seminar could use GenAI for reading assignments and discussion posts. If they did, they had to show proof of learning. My guidance to the students was:

If you use a generative AI tool for your assignments, you must submit: 1) the prompt you gave the tool and the output you received, and 2) your edited version of the output to more accurately answer the question I asked, based on your reading of the text, or 3) your commentary on how the output accurately reflects the reading, based on your reading of the text.

This policy was effective in that I could evaluate whether students understood the course material based on what they submitted. See Appendix A for my complete GenAI-use policy.

3. SPA professor at American University, Nathan Favero, did a terrific assignment with his students and wrote about it in the Spring 2024 CTRL Beat. He had students ask a GenAI tool to answer two questions and have the students evaluate the output. But in one case, students were to read assigned readings and in the other, they were not. Students realized that without knowledge of a subject, they couldn’t fully evaluate GenAI output. See [Blending Human Knowledge With Generative AI: A Writing Exercise For Students](https://edspace.american.edu/thectrlbeat/2023/12/20/blending-human-knowledge-with-generative-ai-a-writing-exercise-for-students-nathan-favero/).

4. Historian Max Friedman revised his [policy memo](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1S7GJuiq4xTeiqr8IrXIULpq0VkrX4yUp/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110724863327056769838&rtpof=true&sd=true) assignment given the rise of students’ AI use. The assignment was to advise the Secretary of State in 1941 on a U.S. foreign policy crisis. Rather than have students write the memo, he had them critique a GenAI-produced memo, evaluating whether GenAI produced a clear argument and provided sufficient evidence and accurate citations based on the assigned readings. Because he asked for a policy memo as if students were there at the time (1941), he and his students found that in addition to being superficial and conventional, GenAI’s analysis was faulty because, unable to un-know something, it used post-1941 information.

5. Writing professor Jason Guyla has restructured his assignments to focus on process and metacognition. He allows students to decide at what point in the assignment they can use GenAI, requiring them to reflect on why they used AI and how it encouraged their voice to be centered in their work product. See his [Self-Empowering Writing Process](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CqJjlkHWzxdmIKMgbiqJjcKtoRBnWkOS/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=110724863327056769838&rtpof=true&sd=true) assignment for details.

6. WAC Clearinghouse published [*TextGenEd: Teaching with Text Generation Technologies*](https://wac.colostate.edu/repository/collections/textgened/front-matter/table-of-contents/)in Aug 2023 with updates in [Jan 2024](https://wac.colostate.edu/repository/collections/continuing-experiments/january-2024/) and [Aug 2024](https://wac.colostate.edu/repository/collections/continuing-experiments/august-2024/). Together they offer 65 assignments using AI in the context of teaching writing, but some apply to other disciplines. Some examples from Aug 2023 that apply to SIS, SPA, and SOC include: “Using LLMs as Peer Reviewers for Revising Essays,” “Using AI Text as Prompts for Critical Analysis,” “Translating a Policy Document into Plain English,” and “The Paranoid Memorandum: A Generative AI Exercise for Professional Communication.” The exercises, written by faculty throughout the country, are spelled out in great detail so that anyone can adopt or adapt them for their courses.

7. [Harvard MetaLab](https://aipedagogy.org/) is curating a list of assignments faculty can use to teach AI literacy, and you can contribute your assignments too. Same with [Stanford University](https://craft.stanford.edu/).  
  
8. Marc Watkins asks students to write the first draft of an essay, and then submit it to a GenAI tool for the [second draft](https://substack.com/@marcwatkins/p-147484270). You can ask the student to use GenAI for clarification, missing points, or writing help. Students would submit all drafts.

9. Anna Mills, a leading proponent of AI use in academia, recommends having students use [AI for feedback](https://annamills.substack.com/p/getting-the-most-out-of-ai-feedback). Students: write a draft; give and receive peer feedback; put the draft and assignment rubric into an AI tool; compare the peer and AI feedback; and then revise their drafts.

10. A project called Ditch That Textbook, by a “Google-certified innovator” suggests 20 ways to use ChatGPT, copied below and also found [here](https://ditchthattextbook.com/ai#t-1671292150924). Students might like ‘grade the bot’ where students evaluate the bot output and provide a grade based on their knowledge of a subject. This could work if you ask for specific comments. Other suggestions may not enhance learning.

A poster with green circles and black text

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**Assignments to Teach AI Literacy**

AI literacy means helping students understand how AI generates its output as well as its benefits and costs. It means discussing ethical concerns.

GenAI is improving rapidly, and yet it still provides incorrect, biased, or misleading information. To teach AI literacy and critical thinking, Jessica Cail of Pepperdine University performed an exercise with her undergraduate students that is worth duplicating. For the literature review phase of their research papers, Cail asked students to put their research questions into ChatGPT and then verify the sources. As shown in the image below, the students color-coded their sources.   
  
Green indicated the info was accurate, the source exists, and its findings match what the AI says, and they will incorporate it into their paper.

Yellow meant that the info is accurate, the source exists, findings match what AI says, but it’s not relevant to their paper.

Red meant that the info is inaccurate, or the source doesn’t exist.   
  
As Cail wrote on Facebook, students learned that “You can’t trust AI to get anything right. You have to check everything it spits out.” [Making up sources](https://www.chronicle.com/article/no-chatgpt-cant-be-your-new-research-assistant) is a chief complaint about ChatGPT.

A screenshot of a computer screen

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A more elaborate exercise involves students conducting an audit of different LLMs as New Jersey Institute of Technology Daniel Estrada did, described [here](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1i2m1fD55i6TGZ1Ty7__tSiIEtXPNma-NUplbAbq5ePU/edit#slide=id.g286e3788939_0_26). Estrada’s students examined ChatGPT and DALL-E and also found that citations didn’t exist, and that images reflected racist and sexist assumptions. For example, when asked for an image of a CEO, DALL-E produced 12 images: 10/12 were white men, 1/12 were white women, 1/12 were Black men, and 0/12 were Black women. Images of “Europeans at work” were in office or professional settings, while “Africans at work” were all in agricultural or field settings. These kinds of findings are certainly problematic, especially for our students.

We can also hold a conversation with our students on ethical issues related to AI and education. Kathryn Conrad of the University of Kansas wrote on [critialai.org](https://read.dukeupress.edu/critical-ai/article-abstract/doi/10.1215/2834703X-11205245/390864/A-Blueprint-for-an-AI-Bill-of-Rights-for-Education?redirectedFrom=fulltext), in response to the Biden Administration’s [Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights,](https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/ostp/ai-bill-of-rights/) some questions to consider. She argues that technology companies created and released these LLMs, but educators have not been consulted along the way, and thus we are still analyzing many details that impact our lives. Her article is worth reading to understand the complex issues that AI raises. For example, how is privacy violated or protected? Should students be required to use LLMs, or be allowed to opt out if they have privacy or other concerns? The [Trump Administration](https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/2025/07/white-house-unveils-americas-ai-action-plan/) is moving more rapidly to remove any barriers to developing AI.

**Incentivizing Students Not to Use Generative AI or Making Its Use Difficult**Another way to deal with GenAI is to try to persuade students not to use it. This approach requires showing our students 1) the benefits of not using GenAI, and 2) the problems with GenAI-produced content. And remember, [not all students](https://slate.com/life/2025/07/ai-college-cheating-gemini-chatgpt-students-policy.html) want to rely on AI to complete their assignments.

To start, we can create a culture of inquiry where the process is valued and rewarded as much as – or more than – the end product. This may mean rethinking the types and purpose of our assignments, and how we assess them. [Harvard’s Project Zero](https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines#CoreThinkingRoutines) “Thinking Routines Toolbox” helps us focus on the process, with exercises for students to demonstrate their thinking.

We can emphasize the skills students learn by reading a text, researching a topic, and writing an essay. Remind students that watching someone else work out doesn’t make you more fit. You have to do the work. The same is true with learning the skills of reading, research, writing, etc. Be transparent about why an assignment is important and what skills a student will develop.

We can emphasize that while AI may be more efficient in completing tasks, there are other values that we hold in Higher Education and life that are important. These include developing critical thinking and forming connections among people.

On a more practical level, by scaffolding assignments, we can help students with time management, so they don’t turn to GenAI out of panic to finish an assignment by a deadline. By reducing an assignment’s grade percentage, students are less likely to seek out GenAI for a quick fix to boost their GPA.

We can create a supportive learning environment where students can seek out a professor or classmates for help. This may mean holding extra office hours, creating study groups, or providing resources for research projects. Students need to feel good about asking for help – and not humiliated (as a high school student told me he felt when he asked his teacher for help, and that is why he preferred the AI tutor).

Alternatively, some students have told me that using AI weakens their self-confidence in their abilities – since AI can complete a task much faster than they can, and in some cases, better than they can. Mentioning this and finding a common experience among students might boost the confidence of students to engage in the learning process.

We can explain why writing is an important skill for students to develop. Writing is a vehicle for thinking, as Naomi Baron [noted](https://theconversation.com/how-chatgpt-robs-students-of-motivation-to-write-and-think-for-themselves-197875). People write to help figure out what they think, and that practice is part of the creative process where we can express our humanity.

We can let students choose their paper topics so that they research and write about a subject they are passionate about, something they find meaningful. Having choice and interest provides an incentive to engage in the research and writing process.

We can teach the benefits of current research practices and highlight the limitations of LLMs. It is well known that they hallucinate or provide incorrect information. Currently, the major LLMs are not trained on articles behind a paywall, so that means most academic articles. This is a huge drawback for students writing research papers. But the industry is moving rapidly, and that obstacle is being overcome.

We should address ethical issues of AI use, including the [environmental impact](https://hbr.org/2024/07/the-uneven-distribution-of-ais-environmental-impacts), particularly on [water usage](https://mit-genai.pubpub.org/pub/8ulgrckc/release/2) to maintain the data servers necessary to develop LLMs and to store data. Another concern is privacy when LLMs collect information that we input. Another is equity, as not all students can afford the more powerful paid version of LLMs. As for the impact on [job loss](https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/08/business/ai-job-losses-by-2030-intl/index.html), it is still unclear, as AI can more efficiently complete tasks that have been done by humans but may also create new jobs. And perhaps most importantly, what kind of world do we create when we don’t know if content is real or fabricated by AI? As a high school student asked,

In a generation in which [mistrust](https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/29/health/teens-ai-generated-content-trust-wellness) could very well become the default approach to life, what can a person rely on? Or hope for? What’s the point of caring about anything, if it could all be false?... Can you really build a life when you don’t know what is real and what is fake, when you can never trust what you see, what you learn, or how the world works?

Or we can eliminate the opportunity to use LLMs by shifting our assessment of students to assignments that don’t require writing at home. These may include in-class exams, individual oral exams, or group discussions outside of class that students record. All of these have the potential for learning, but I ask you to think about what learning goals you are giving up with these assignments and whether you [can meet your learning outcomes](https://joshbrake.substack.com/p/blue-books-and-oral-exams-are-not-the-answer) with them. Also, we need to consider that students process information in different ways and that an oral exam might be an excellent learning experience for some and anxiety-producing for others.

In short, we can do what we (should) have been doing, as academic integrity scholar [Tricia Bertram Gallant](https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/articles/how-do-we-maintain-academic-integrity-in-the-chatgpt-era) explained: increase intrinsic motivation, support students in their learning, provide meaningful assignments, and make connections with our students. We need to be explicit about the [purpose of education](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/13/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-rebecca-winthrop.html?unlocked_article_code=1.Y08.EqY_.J3R9dWfEQd6D&smid=url-share). At best, we will work with AI, but it will never replace the human interactions that make being a professor in Higher Education, as well as life, meaningful. AI is unavoidable, but it is not inevitable, as [Marc Watkins](https://marcwatkins.substack.com/p/ai-is-unavoidable-not-inevitable?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=1283870&post_id=151595010&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=2kjgpg&triedRedirect=true) says. It may be useful, but the [Center for Humane Technology](https://www.humanetech.com/ai-society), as well as creative writing professor [Meghan O’Rourke](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/18/opinion/ai-chatgpt-school.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare), question its long-term impact on our humanity.  
  
**For more information**Many scholars are writing about GenAI. Authors I find useful are: [Jason Guyla](https://higherai.substack.com/), [Anna Mills](https://www.annarmills.com/), [Tricia Bertram Gallant](https://sites.google.com/ucsd.edu/crafting-a-genai-and-ai-policy), [Marc Watkins](https://substack.com/@marcwatkins), [Ethan Mollick](https://www.oneusefulthing.org/). And [José Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson](https://www.press.jhu.edu/books/title/53869/teaching-ai) *Teaching with AI* is available as an audiobook in the AU library.

**Appendix A**

**Elizabeth Cohn Syllabus Language on Use of Generative AI, FYS, Fall 2024**Use of Generative AI tools. One of the goals of attending college is to learn new skills, and in this course, that means improving your reading, writing, and presentation skills, and developing critical thinking. I question whether generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Google Gemini, and Microsoft Copilot) can help you develop those skills. But, if generative AI (GenAI) tools help you improve those skills, you may use them. And, as your professor, I need to assess your learning, so you must document your AI use so I can evaluate what you have learned.

Please note that using GenAI is never a replacement for doing the assigned reading. But you may use GenAI tools for your Read Think Write (RTWs) and Reading Assignment (RAs) as long as you show proof of learning. That means if you do use a GenAI tool, you must submit: 1) the prompt you gave the tool and the output you received, and 2) your edited version of the output to more accurately answer the prompt, based on your reading of the text, or 3) your commentary on how the output accurately reflects the reading, based on your reading of the text. If you use a GenAI tool and do not follow these steps you will be violating the AU Academic Integrity Code.

You may not use GenAI tools in writing your essays as these are designed to integrate the learning you have done throughout the semester. AI use that is prohibited for your essays includes brainstorming ideas for a thesis, crafting a thesis, generating a draft, or revising your written work. If you want help, come see me or talk with your classmates.

The written work you submit must be your own work product. Presenting writing as your own that was written by AI is dishonest and is a violation of the AU Academic Integrity code, specifically article II.A.4 “dishonesty in papers” and article II.A. 6 “fabrication of data.” From the AU Academic Integrity Code:

Fabrication of Data: Fabrication is the falsification, distortion, or invention of any information or citation in academic work. Examples include, but are not limited to, inventing a source, deliberately misquoting, or falsifying numbers or other data.

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Dishonesty in Papers: Dishonesty in papers covers but is not limited to submitting material obtained from another person or company or purchased from either. All papers and materials submitted for a course must be the student's original work unless the sources are cited.

An AI tool cannot be the author. As the Committee on Publication Ethics [explained](https://publicationethics.org/cope-position-statements/ai-author),

AI tools cannot meet the requirements for authorship as they cannot take responsibility for the submitted work. As non-legal entities, they cannot assert the presence or absence of conflicts of interest nor manage copyright and license agreements.

**Appendix B**

A screenshot of a black and yellow website

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Created by [superhuman.ai](https://www.superhuman.ai/)

A black and gold poster with black text

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**Appendix C  
What is an appropriate use of GenAI and what constitutes cheating?**

If a student said to you they use AI for the following, is that acceptable to you?

  
Alison Thomas and Betsy Cohn, SIS Faculty Workshop, Student Use of AI, February 27, 2025.  
  
  
What constitutes cheating below?

A diagram of a student writing

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