

■ SKILLS ■

What it means to teach writing in the age of AI

It is beyond debate that AI has fundamentally changed the way we write. Writing, a skill that once required rigorous and constant practice, is now often being produced by ChatGPT and other generative AI tools. According to one MIT study, using ChatGPT to write essays may lead to lower brain engagement among students. The study cautioned that persistent use of ChatGPT may further hamper the critical thinking skills of learners. So, under the given circumstances, how can teachers foster critical thinking in student writing in an age shaped by AI?

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To promote critical thinking in the backdrop of easily accessible AI tools, writing instructors need to design activities that push students towards critical thinking. For instance, Nur Mohammad Khan, an assistant professor in English at Dhaka University of Engineering & Technology (DUET), designs writing activities in a way that encourages students to show the process of writing rather than just the final product. He says, “I design assignments that emphasise the writing process – outlines, drafts, and reflections – so students can’t just turn in a polished piece generated using AI. I also try to talk openly with them about AI, like how it can be used responsibly as a tool, but never as a replacement for their own thinking. My goal is to uphold integrity while also supporting students in developing authentic, independent academic skills.”

Nur Mohammad’s approach promotes critical thinking as students need to demonstrate how they have developed their ideas rather than merely submitting their assignments. Maintaining a similar tone, Imran Jahan Digonto, a lecturer from the Department of English at East West University (EWU), emphasises in-class discussion and brainstorming to promote originality of ideas. He thinks that class activities can be an incredibly useful tool in the process of promoting original writing.

“We have people with divided opinions on its use, and that’s what is creating obstacles in creating a clear policy on generative AI. Our policymakers might be rigid in their way of thinking, but they need to accept that the use of generative AI cannot be averted. As educators, we need to evolve alongside our students so that the gap is not too wide.”

“I try to begin almost every writing task by inviting students into a communal brainstorming session,” says Digonto. “During such sessions, the energy in the classroom shifts, as students realise that their individual perspectives, shaped by their passions, experiences, and curiosities, are the very responses that no large language model (LLM) can replicate.”

“These sessions jumpstart creativity and promote originality,” Digonto adds. “Then, students move into drafting part of the writing in person without using any



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

tools or gadgets. I ask them to submit a brief outline or a rough draft.”

Both Nur Mohammad and Digonto emphasise keeping track of an initial, original draft of writing, so that teachers can track down the original ideas of the students, demonstrating that their writing process is free of AI influence. However, it is also important to acknowledge the current reality: AI writing tools are widely accessible. It is equally crucial to recognise that using AI effectively is a skill in its own right, one that students also need to develop.

Hence, teachers also find themselves tasked with the need to blend AI usage in the practice of writing. Regarding this, Nausheen Saba Siraj, a senior lecturer from the Department of English and Modern Languages at North South University (NSU), says, “A total ban on AI usage will be unrealistic, as students will use it regardless of a ban. Rather, originality can be promoted by allowing fair and blended use of AI as a tool for critical engagement rather than passive dependence. For example, in-class writing can be done to maintain originality, while the post-feedback version can be modified through an AI tool (like Grammarly), and students can still be asked to submit both versions together. Or, even critical reading can be taught by asking students to annotate, reflect, or critique an essay generated by AI.”

Siraj also emphasised that institutions need to find ways to incorporate AI usage in the educational scenario of the country. As she explains, “At the moment, there are no clear-cut policies on the use of generative AI in writing, especially

at the tertiary level. Since students have easy access to AI through laptops and phones, a complete ban is neither realistic nor enforceable.”

She instead insists that policies should focus on responsible and ethical use.

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Siraj further underpinned that universities around the globe are starting to embrace generative AI, mentioning a post from Oxford University which announced that it is the first British institution to introduce ChatGPT Edu — an education-focused version of OpenAI’s AI tool — for all of its students and staff.

“This step highlights a vision of working with AI responsibly, rather than avoiding it. Therefore, the best course of action is to develop policies around its fair and ethical use,” she concluded.

References:

1. Times (May 30, 2024). *ChatGPT is going to class. What are the downsides?*
2. University of Oxford (September 19, 2025). *Oxford becomes first UK university to offer ChatGPT Edu to all staff and students.*