

The Writing Center and Teaching Writing with AI

AI-assisted writing technologies such as ChatGPT are reshaping how students learn about writing, and many classrooms are responding by reshaping assignments. This document details some effective assignment changes instructors might consider and how the Writing Center can support these alterations. We encourage instructors to contact us with feedback and suggestions.

1. In-class oral presentations

Assigning in-class oral presentations tests student memory of course material. AI can assist students in writing speech drafts, but students ultimately must deliver the material. Requiring students meet one-on-one with a Writing Center tutor as a “first draft” of an oral presentation ensures they get presentation practice and feedback. The Writing Center is equipped with a classroom and projector for presentation practice. Tutors can observe and comment on student practice presentations.

2. Podcast episodes, or other multi-modal assignments

Podcast scripts can be written with the help of AI-writing technologies, but it is currently unlikely students will be able to use AI to fabricate a recorded conversation on a specific topic between two or more people. In addition to performing during a recording, students must understand how to edit episodes (often with music and sounds, while curating the recorded conversation). However, students often lack the technical knowledge and equipment required to record and edit episodes. The Writing Center has a multimedia recording studio students can reserve to record episodes (equipped with 4 microphones and an editing bay). A tutor is available in these reservations to assist with technical challenges.

3. Assignments that seek to build new, local knowledge

AI cannot venture out into the real world and interview people or collect specific, physical artifacts for analysis. You might consider writing assignments that require students to engage different senses (such as a rhetorical analysis of political candidates eating a hotdog, or the business strategy behind the design of a particular fast food chain building, or a user experience analysis of engaging with a company’s physical pamphlet). You might also consider assignments that ask students to interview other people. Requiring students meet one-on-one with a Writing Center tutor as a “interview/client/artifact brainstorm

session” or “coordination support session” helps students through finding generative topics and making effective connections with potential clients and interviewees. These sessions can reduce instructor labor around coordinating these types of student projects.

4. Engagement-based learning assignments

Engagement-based learning focuses on elements of writing process and participation, meaning several separate assignments are established for different aspects of writing the same document and students may collect a series of lower-value points for simply participating in class and the writing process. For example, students might be required to first write a topic description and then meet with a fellow student to discuss in-class, followed by a working outline on the chosen topic and a description on the choices the writer made, and then a required visit in the Writing Center to discuss a first draft, before the submission of a final draft. Requiring students meet one-on-one with a Writing Center tutor ensures students are engaging in learning about writing and building new skills through the student-to-student dialogue research has found to build awareness around writing decisions.

5. Generating papers with AI technologies

Writing Center tutors are trained in best practices around using AI writing technologies with criticality and skill. If you are planning to incorporate technologies such as ChatGPT into your class assignments, our tutors can use the technology to help students to generate the following text elements of a research paper: a list of topics, an outline, a summary of a chosen source, topic sentences, transition, sentences, first draft paragraphs, and auto-generated draft critique. These actions require specific techniques that students will likely struggle to perform without initial direction. The Writing Center is available for in-class workshops and one-on-one sessions to support the use of this technology. We look at this technology helping students build rhetorical and discipline-specific genre knowledge through conversation. Our rationale to incorporate AI into our sessions is further supported by the recognition that this technology will likely be integrated into the future workplace, has the potential (with education toward critical use) to equalize social inequalities around student success, and is difficult to detect and prove (AI-detection technologies are highly fallible and do not constitute proof of use in plagiarism cases).

6. Assigning discipline-specific genres

AI writing technologies lack rhetorical context and nuanced knowledge of genre. Assigning students to produce document types specific to your discipline can deepen their understanding of your field in a way that makes the use of AI writing tools more challenging. Writing center tutors are trained in genre analysis and know how to ask strategic questions around genre and writing situations. Requiring students meet one-on-one with a Writing Center tutor can support students as they learn about the subtleties of a particular document type produced in a particular academic community.