

Pluses And Minuses

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When ChatGPT went live in November 2022, it didn't take long for us to pick up on the heightened anxiety over this new AI tool and the potential impact on writing instruction. As teacher leaders with more than 20 years combined experience teaching high school English, we wanted to test it for ourselves. Right before our holiday break, Amanda and I sat down to explore ChatGPT side by side, and here is what we found:

1. Two users will not generate the same response.

After submitting the exact same prompt (we used a local assessment prompt), we were provided two different written responses. While the nature of both responses was similar, the sentence structure, key vocabulary, and transitions were different. When we requested the tool to add text evidence, the tool provided the same evidence, but embedded it within the response differently. We assume the tool provided the same evidence for both responses (even though they were structurally different) because the tool has a limited bank of texts to cite from. Here's a screenshot of the opening to both of our ChatGPT-generated responses

2. While ChatGPT can produce written responses, it may not be able to address your specific prompt or rubric expectations.

It is important for teachers to consider the purpose of their writing assignment. Is it to assess the mastery of a set of standards? Is it to practice a specific skill? Most likely, ChatGPT is not going to demonstrate mastery on the specific "look-fors" teachers have instructed and reviewed with students. Even when we provided the tool with a specific text, the quality of evidence it selected was limited. It also did not directly cite specific text evidence to support the argument.

3. Prioritizing formative feedback and time to workshop writing is crucial to build student confidence.

Students will look for and often find an easy way out of doing schoolwork. They are kids after all! However, most students do this when the assignment is out of reach. Be it their skills or their confidence, there is often more that contributes to plagiarism than "I don't want to do it." To

mitigate this, we need to prioritize the entire writing process. We know that modeling and feedback are high-impact teaching strategies. We can model and guide students through the prewriting and planning process. Provide feedback during the formative process. We can utilize ChatGPT to provide samples to model the revision and editing process.

4. It can save us time.

Teachers are consistently creating new material, and ChatGPT can take on some of that work for us. For example, I have multiple students who require outlines as a supplementary aid. I asked ChatGPT to provide an outline for the specific prompt the student was answering, and it produced a great product! Similarly, as we model our own writing and thinking, we can use ChatGPT to generate a response that may address the prompt but might be missing the specific skills or concepts we've explicitly instructed.

5. AI and digital study tools will never generate a student's authentic voice.

Writing sounds like the writer! We must show students the difference between these generated responses and authentic writing with a developed voice. This reminds me of a common experience I had early in my career. Students were not completing their assigned reading; they were reading summaries on a popular online study guide. As we were reading *Huckleberry Finn*, I designed a lesson that compared Chapter 19 of the text to the summary provided by a popular online study guide. I asked students to engage with the summary and then engage with the text, side by side. Yes, the summary was more time saving, but the text included rich imagery and characterization about the evolving relationship between Huck and Jim that the summary did not address. Even if students did not eagerly pick up their copy of the text, at least they were aware of the pitfalls of using such resources and the impact on their learning experiences. We can offer students a similar learning experience with responses produced by ChatGPT.

6. The same developer that produced ChatGPT produced a detector for ChatGPT produced responses.

Just as ChatGPT was making waves in classrooms in November and December, [Open AI](#) developers were creating [GPT-2 Output Detector Demo](#). A few other detectors have also gone live since then, including [GPTZero](#). If you have a hunch that the writing was produced by AI, run it through the detector. At the very least, it's an opportunity to talk with the students about what led them to using AI to generate the response and what support they might need to engage with the work on their own. Here's what we saw when we submitted our ChatGPT response through the GPT-2 Output Detector Demo:

Thanks to Susan, Andrew, Elizabeth, and Amanda for contributing their thoughts!

Consider contributing a question to be answered in a future post. You can send one to me at lferlazzo@educationweek.org. When you send it in, let me know if I can use your real name if it's selected or if you'd prefer remaining anonymous and have a pseudonym in mind.

You can also contact me on Twitter at [@Larryferlazzo](https://twitter.com/Larryferlazzo).

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