8 Ways to Create AI-Proof Writing Prompts

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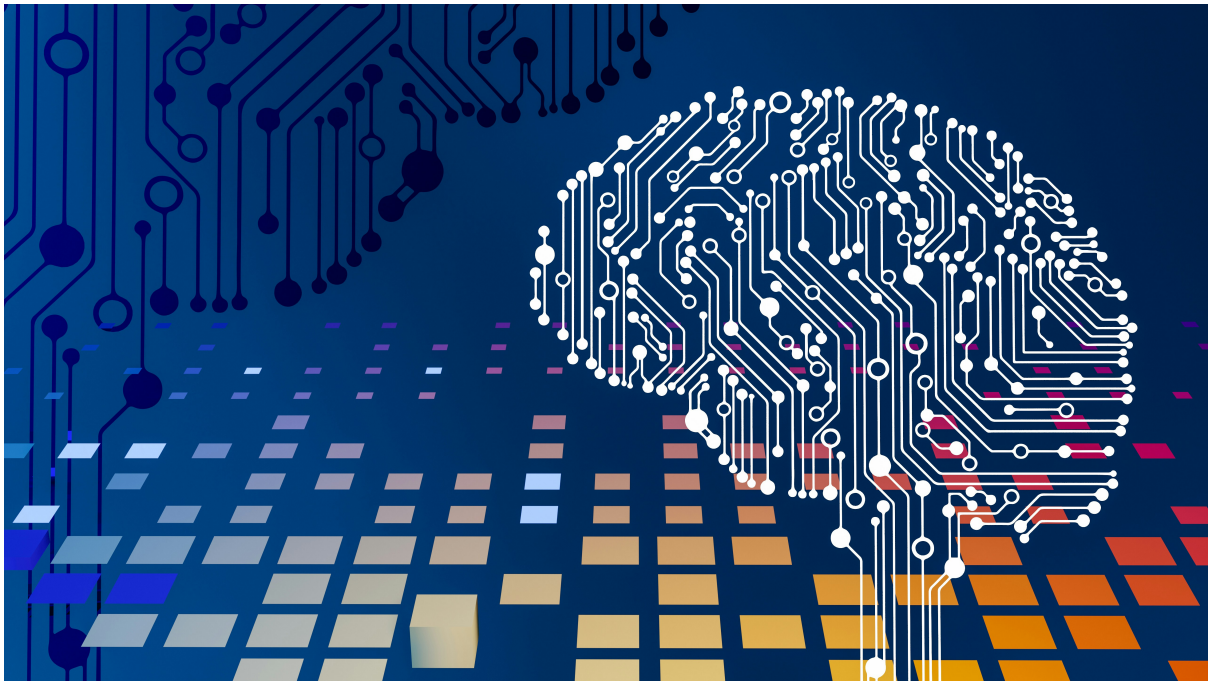
1. How-to

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ChatGPT and other AI tools are smart but I'm smarter ... okay maybe not, but these are strategies for writing AI-proof writing prompts that I've used effectively in my classes.

(Image credit: Photo by Steve Johnson on Unsplash)

Creating 100 percent AI-proof writing prompts can often be impossible but that doesn't mean there aren't strategies that can limit the efficacy of AI work. These techniques can also help ensure more of the writing submitted in your classroom is human-generated.

I started seeing a big uptick in **AI-generated work submitted in my classes** over the last year and that has continued. As a result, **I've gotten much better at recognizing AI work**, but I've also gotten better at creating writing prompts that are less AI-friendly.

Essentially, I like to use the public health Swiss cheese analogy when thinking about AI prevention: All these strategies on their own have holes but when you layer the cheese together, you create a barrier that's hard to get through.

The eight strategies here may not prevent students from submitting AI work, but I find these can incentivize human writing and make sure that any work submitted via AI will not really meet the requirements of the assignment.

1. Writing AI-Proof Prompts: Put Your Prompt Into Popular AI tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, and Bard

Putting your writing prompt into an AI tools will give you an immediate idea of how most AI tools will handle your prompt. If the various AI chatbots do a good, or at least adequate, job immediately, it might be wise to tweak the prompt.

One of my classes asks students to write about a prized possession. When you put this prompt into an AI chatbot, it frequently returns an essay about a family member's finely crafted watch. Obviously, I now *watch* out for any essays about watches.

2. Forbid Cliché Use

Probably the quickest and easiest way to cut back on some AI use is to come down hard on cliché use in writing assignments. AI tools are essentially cliché machines, so banning these can prevent a lot of AI use.

Equally as important, this practice will help your students become better writers. As any good writer knows, clichés should be avoided like the plague.

3. Incorporate Recent Events

The free version of ChatGPT only has access to events up to 2022. While **there are plugins to allow it to search the internet** and other internet-capable AI tools, some students won't get further than ChatGPT.

More importantly, in my experience, all AI tools struggle to incorporate recent events as effectively as historic ones. So connecting class material and assignments to events such as a recent State of Union speech or the Academy Awards will make any AI writing use less effective.

4. Require Quotes

AI tools can incorporate direct quotations but most are not very good at doing so. The quotes used tend to be very short and not as well-placed within essays.

Asking an AI tool for recent quotes also can be particularly problematic for today's robot writers. For instance, I asked Microsoft's Copilot to summarize the recent Academy Awards using quotes, and specifically asked it to quote from *Oppenheimer's* director Christopher

Nolan's acceptance speech. It quoted something Nolan had previously said instead. Copilot also quoted from Wes Anderson's acceptance speech, an obvious error **since Anderson wasn't at the awards**.

5. Make Assignments Personal

Having students reflect on material in their own lives can be a good way to prevent AI writing. In-person teachers can get to know their students well enough to know when these types of personal details are fabricated.

I teach online but still find it easier to tell when a more personalized prompt was written by AI. For example, one student submitted a paper about how much she loved skateboarding that was so non-specific it screamed AI written. Another submitted a post about a pair of sneakers that was also clearly written by a "sole-less" AI (I could tell because of the clichés and other reasons).

6. Make Primary or Scholarly Sources Mandatory

Requiring sources that are not easily accessible on the internet can stop AI writing in its tracks. I like to have students find historic newspapers for certain assignments. The AI tools I am familiar with can't incorporate these.

For instance, I asked Copilot to compare coverage of the first Academy Awards in the media to the most recent awards show and to include quotes from historic newspaper coverage. The comparison was not well done and there were no quotes from historical newspaper coverage.

AI tools also struggle to incorporate journal articles. Encouraging your students to include these types of sources ensures the work they produce is deeper than something that can be revealed by a quick Google search, which not only makes it harder for AI to write but also can raise the overall quality.

7. Require Interviews, Field Trips, Etc.

Building on primary and scholarly sources, you can have your students conduct interviews or go on field trips to historic sites, museums, etc.

AI is still, thankfully, incapable of engaging in these types of behavior. This requires too much work for every assignment but it is the most effective way to truly ensure your work is human- not computer-written.

If you're still worried about AI use, you can even go a step further by asking your students to include photos of them with their interview subjects or from the field trips. Yes, AI art generators are getting better as well, but remember the Swiss cheese analogy? Every layer

of prevention can help.

8. Have Students Write During Class

As I said to start, none of the methods discussed are foolproof. Many ways around these safeguards already exist and there will be more ways to bypass these in the future. So if you're really, really worried about AI use you may want to choose what I call the "nuclear option." If you teach in person you can require students to write essays in person.

This approach definitely works for preventing AI and is okay for short pieces, but for longer pieces, it has a lot of downsides. I would have trouble writing a long piece in this setting and imagine many students will as well. Additionally, this requirement could create an accusatory class atmosphere that is more focused on preventing AI use than actually teaching. It's also not practical for online teaching.
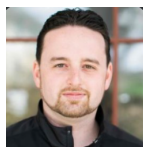
That all being said, given how common AI writing has become in education, I understand why some teachers will turn to this method. Hopefully, suggestions 1-7 will work but if AI-generated papers are still out of hand in your classroom, this is a blunt-force method that can work temporarily.

Good luck and may your assignments be free of AI writing!

- **7 Ways To Detect AI Writing Without Technology**
- **Best Free AI Detection Sites**
- **My Student Was Submitting AI Papers. Here's What I Did**

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Erik Ofgang is Tech & Learning's senior staff writer. A journalist, **author** and educator, his work has appeared in the *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and Associated Press. He currently teaches at Western Connecticut State University's MFA program. While a staff writer at *Connecticut Magazine* he won a Society of Professional Journalism Award for his education reporting. He is interested in how humans learn and how technology can make that more effective.