Negotiating the Impact of AI on University Students' Research Assignments: Mitigating Unethical Use and Enhancing Academic Writing

Dr. Wisam Khalid Abdul Jabbar
Canada

Introduction:

This research paper explores the challenge posed by the growing influence of artificial intelligence (AI) on university students' writing, mainly focusing on research-based assignments and final papers. How can instructors effectively negotiate the impact of AI on research writing assignments by discouraging unethical use and deterring students from relying on AI to generate their assignments for them? How can instructors prevent students from using AI in their research and essay writing? In response to this question, the research proposes developing and implementing a specific rubric for research paper assignments. This rubric is designed not only to guide students in developing the contents of their writing but also to create a structure that is inherently challenging for AI to emulate with precision. Moreover, the study suggests embedded programs that offer preventive services to detect plagiarism, streamline grading processes, ensure academic integrity, and filter out AI-generated research assignments. The aim is to equip educators with tools to combat unethical uses of AI in academic writing, knowing that it cannot be entirely eliminated. Again, this study does not assume that AI should be wholly removed or prohibited. Such a stance is not the focus of this research. Instead, the study addresses the question of how to ensure that students submit their research writing assignments with minimal unethical use of AI. By combining a student-oriented rubric with instructor-led preventive strategies, this multifaceted approach is expected to contribute to the ongoing discourse on maintaining academic integrity in the face of evolving technological advancements. This study aims to offer a blueprint for writing that steps students into a prescribed act of research writing, which helps students write and reasonably hinders pseudo, machine-generated writing. It contributes to curriculum development and instructional strategies.

Addressing the Training Gap in Research Writing: A Pedagogy in Practice:

I start my first day of classes by asking the students: what is the difference between a research paper and an argumentative essay? I usually get shrugged shoulders or some decent answers that come across as guesswork. I explain that this ice-breaking activity shows a lack of training and understanding of what constitutes research. This is significant because students resort to AI and perhaps ghost writers not necessarily because they are slackers or unwilling to carry out the task but probably because they lack the training and, therefore, the capacity to prove equal to the writing task. This needs to be remedied if we want to succeed in disallowing students to use AI as a readily available means to achieve what may seem like an impossible task.

It is worth noting, therefore, that students sometimes tend to conflate essays with analytical writing in the sense that some produce a research paper that ends up being a well-supported and moderately researched argumentative essay; that is to say, an argumentative essay with lots of quotations to support its initially decided premise.

In retrospect, my first classroom activity was to divide the students into groups of three or four and have them explain the difference between argumentative and critical writing, naming two differences in each group, and then share what they discussed with the whole class. Because the students are English language learners, I would make sure that they summarized their answers or comments in points, and then read those answers in order to ensure precision and avoid rambling, which may cause confusion and deter participation. (Abdul-Jabbar, 2023, p. 55)

I explain that an analytical essay is based on the writer's original topic instead of a chosen topic that invites the student to take one side of the argument. The second difference is that a research paper includes interpretation and analysis on the writer's part instead of just providing evidence and textual support to prove a point. Finally, the findings of the paper are not something that you have already known at the beginning of your task; otherwise, you will be just asserting an assumption, and that attitude is peculiar to argumentative essays. The argumentative essay "settles for either or," while a research paper "provokes what if."

Other instructions to be included in the assignment description might also help the students address the required analytical rigour. The topic, for example, needs to be worth pursuing. It should be significant, researchable, controversial, and specific. I also recommend not choosing a topic that is too broad, such as

cyberbullying in Canadian schools. Topics such as how many children Lady Macbeth had could be unresearchable simply because we would never know the answer. Such issues are controversial, significant, and yet unattainable in scope and potential. Students choose topics that are challenging and unresolved. A topic like Why is Perennial philosophy the best approach to education does not qualify as researchable because this is more like a persuasive essay. In what ways can perennial education reconcile itself to multiculturalism? The idea here is to offer the students some guidelines to adhere to as they develop the contents of their papers. So, there is an expected structure to follow. This is by no means conclusive in the sense that this is the only way to do it.

I attempt to offer a roadmap that has informed my instruction and directed the selection of materials for my courses. This strategy addresses the training gap, which showcases how to infuse critical thinking into academic writing. George Hillocks (2010) similarly observes that "the most advanced secondary textbooks for English and most state rubrics for judging writing do not deal with what is involved in critical thinking in writing" (p. 24). Hillocks argues that although many textbooks claim that "persuasive arguments," and for that matter "argumentative essays," appeal to the use of reasoning and logic, these textbooks do not necessarily "explain what logic entails or provide an explanation of how we might recognize logic when we see it" (p. 24). Likewise, Kinneavy (1993) explains that persuasive writing is not necessarily conducive to critical thinking since its "purpose is to persuade, not to prove by logic. In a persuasive essay, you can select the most favourable evidence, appeal to emotions, and use style to persuade your readers. Your single purpose is to be convincing" (p. 305). In order to achieve that purpose, I share a document with my students.

The document provides guidelines and essential writing tips for writing a research paper. It emphasizes the importance of demonstrating knowledge in a particular subject through writing a research paper rather than just writing essays as instructors require. The document outlines the five fundamentals of writing a research paper, including revising and editing, dividing the paper into sections, writing a thesis statement and outline, selecting main points, and choosing a controversial subject. It also provides general guidelines for selecting a topic for research, conducting research, and outlining the paper. Additionally, the document details the components that should be included in a research paper, such as introduction, historical background, past research, methodology, discussion, and conclusion.

Furthermore, the document provides preliminary thoughts for writing a research paper, including determining the purpose of the paper, identifying the audience, selecting techniques or conceptual frameworks, and explaining the significance of the research. It also includes guidelines for writing the introduction, including creating a title, topic sentence, thesis statement, research questions, and discussing the significance and purpose of the research. The document also covers historical/educational/philosophical background, past research, methodology, discussion, and conclusion sections of a research paper, detailing what should be included in each section and how to approach the writing process. Overall, the document serves as a comprehensive guide for writing a research paper, from selecting a topic to outlining and drafting the paper. This paper proposes that a return to the basics helps students and hinders an AI's complete takeover of the act of writing.

An orderly introductory paragraph divided into specific components steps the students into a well-structured writing plan. It serves as a roadmap for the rest of the essay, setting the tone and building blocks. It establishes coherence to outline the main points and provides a clear direction. The proposed paragraph starts with a general topic, a sentence that introduces the overall topic of the proposed essay. It sets the scene and addresses the broad landscape of the subject matter. After introducing the topic sentence, the introductory paragraph should transition into a more specific, focused topic sentence. It narrows the scope of the discussion and provides a more specific insight into what the reader expects to read more about and explore in-depth over the upcoming few pages. For example, an essay about the challenges of teaching a Shakespearean play should start with a sentence like: "With the growing diversity in today's classroom, teaching canonical literature has fast become a challenge for most teachers." This sets the stage for narrowing the discussion within the specific context of teaching a Shakespearean play in high schools: "Teaching or not teaching the Bard in high school has become highly controversial." By starting with a general topic sentence to be narrowed to a specific, well-defined context and setting. The aim is precision in thought and the ability to grab attention in the most effective way possible.

Offering building blocks to the students renders the art of writing more structural and cohesive. Having introduced a general sentence that captures the landscape of the subject to be discussed and moved into a more narrowed-down specification, providing a relatable and relevant example becomes paramount, considering the need for

clarity. The example needs to be related to real-life situations in the world today. In the context of teaching Shakespeare, as mentioned above, the student can add, "For example, some scholars argue that Shakespeare's works are to be seen and not read" (Bloom, 1998). Notably enough, AI does not have the ability to access specific quotations.

Following the example, the introductory paragraph should include a thesis statement and a concise assumption describing a point of contention or controversy. The thesis statement captures the assumption or the claim. It explains the controversial aspect of the research that needs to be resolved. The following example, for instance, captures the conflict embedded in the sentence: Although many students resist the unfamiliar language, among other obstacles, Shakespeare's study can and should be active, intellectual and energizing. The next building block is working further on what has been developed and prescribed to students, generating a research question. The question needs to be answerable and clear and implies a controversy, such as: In what ways can reading a Shakespearean play be approachable and pedagogically interactive? After the research question, I ask my students to include a sentence that explains the significance of the subject under investigation. Why does it matter? Considering that correlation is not causation, the fact that the topic is about Shakespeare does not render it significant. In layman's language, Shakespeare is important, but it is not necessarily your topic! Stating, for instance, that Shakespeare's plays are required reading for high school English students in Alberta demonstrates the urgency of offering an interactive pedagogical approach so that students can appreciate reading the required play. It stresses the need for further research to facilitate a better understanding of Shakespearean drama. Another significance-driven sentence may contextualize the relevance of the topic to the perplexed reader, setting the stage for the specific objective of the study. The last component asserts what the study seeks to do: This study aims to introduce the best pedagogical practices in teaching Shakespeare, such as performance, soundscape, and the collaborative model.

Following this pattern of components as building blocks serves twofold purposes: first, it constitutes a blueprint for students, helping them formulate their ideas into a solid structure. Second, it serves as a deterrent to an AI-generated abstract or paper. It impedes the students' reliance on the CHATGPT technology and urges them to engage critically with the assignment's requirements. While AI can still help generate sentences and assist with grammar and syntax, it may not

capture the nuances of the suggested structure and the predetermined formatting. Students will find themselves in a position where they have to actively engage in the writing process to ensure the clear and concise implementation of the required logic. This rubric is not set in stone; students can modify and add their personal touches as long as they adhere to the intended format. The purpose is to offer a form that ensures students are actively involved in academic writing and does not enforce uniformity.

Verification Programs as a Deterrent

Turnitin is a program that detects plagiarism when submitting assignments and research papers. It helps maintain academic integrity by using a vast repository of existing references, published literature and resources. It identifies similarities and compares the submitted material to existing material online. Universities tend to offer faculty members access to the program to use it freely in their courses or when their students submit their theses and dissertations. Almost every submitted assignment is subject to this kind of scrutiny. There are other plagiarism detection tools and programs, such as Grammarly and Copyscape, which, like Turnitin, detect similar patterns among students' submissions. Once integrated into a university system and becoming available for faculty members, such platforms serve as a deterrent to AI-generated cases of academic dishonesty. Indeed, Turnitin, for instance, cannot detect all kinds of AI-generated cases, but it is enabled with a degree of capacity to make AI writing a precarious business. Using such programs aims to uphold high academic expectations regarding research writing and submitted assignments. Since they are effectively reliable and widely recognized for their ability to catch similarities across online databases, unethically copying content becomes undesirable, thoughtfully considered, and dreaded by students and researchers alike. These tools serve as a means of verification and a proactive measure ensuring that students adhere to the university regulations or at least render any plagiaristic attitude quite risky and undermining.

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