AI Literacy Instruction in my First-Year Writing Course

First-year writing students engage in the creative, ethical, and pragmatic uses of generative AI as they learn critical academic literacy skills.

**Brief Summary**
Throughout the semester, a variety of AI-generated texts are brought to class for workshopping and discussion as students explore best practices for integrating generative AI into academic writing processes. They contemplate when, where, and how the tools can support their development as academic writers.

**Learning Outcomes**
- Writing Processes
- Reading Comprehension
- Research Skills
- Information Literacy

**Category**
Writing assignments, Developing AI literacy

**Instructor**
Tracy Hamler Carrick,
Senior Lecturer

**Department**
John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines
College of Arts and Sciences

**Course(s)**
WRIT 1370/80: First-Year Writing Seminars

**Discipline**
Writing

**Course-level**
First-Year Undergraduates

**Course size**
12 students

**Implemented**
Spring 2023/4, Fall 2023

Scan the QR code for an unabridged version of this case study
Context
When first learning about generative AI, instead of seeing it as a problem or something to be afraid of, the instructor saw it as another tool to help students. For example, she had been using QuillBot and Grammarly with her students for years. Using ChatGPT seemed like a logical extension of this work. Working together, students explored the capabilities of generative AI in the classroom. As a group, they determined how generative AI can be useful to writers with specific writing projects and when transitioning into new writing contexts as they move more deeply into disciplines and professions.

Implementation
In the classroom, two types of activities and assignments guided students in understanding the effective and collaborative use of generative AI.

**AI-Free Zones assignments** focused on ensuring students developed learning and writing practices without the use of AI. Some strategies included in-class assignments emphasizing “writing to learn,” writing with and about proprietary material, one-on-one conferences and peer review workshops with low-stakes drafts, and assignment guidelines that discourage AI use.

**Generative AI Integration and Writing Instruction assignments** focused on how generative AI can be used as a reading and writing assistant in ways that help meet learning goals. Students experimented with generative AI in class at different stages of the writing process; for example, they used it when figuring out the language for a research question/topic, as a research assistant by directing generative AI to compile relevant source materials, as an outlining tool, as an invention tool to spark ideas or highlight critical questions, and as an editing tool to find alternative ways to compose sentences. Students also experimented with generative AI as a reading assistant; for example, by putting prompts into ChatGPT to generate a summary of a reading assignment.

Reflection and Future Directions
Not getting caught up in the hype can be a challenge, but the instructor and students found that generative AI cannot replace traditional writing instruction. If anything, it is now even more necessary. To Carrick, generative AI’s greatest benefit in a writing classroom is its capacity to reinforce and reinvigorate writing instruction. Generative AI has proven, so far, to be a useful instructional tool for helping first-year students learn how to write with greater agility, confidence, and stylistic force.

**How to Implement This in Your Class**
Provide spaces for students to experiment with and have conversations about generative AI. For example, take a stage in the writing process and for homework have students complete a task using their typical methods, such as coming up with a research question or finding scholarly resources in the library. Then, come together as a class to talk about their process. What go-to strategies do they use organically? Finally, in class introduce a prompt for students to learn new strategies, some “analog” and some using tools such as generative AI. For example, have students use generative AI to find different ways of phrasing a research question or finding search terms to use on the library website.