AFTERWORD.

TEN DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING AND LEARNING IN THE AGE OF AI

Traci Gardner
Virginia Tech

When the editors and chapter authors of this collection began work on *Bad Ideas about AI and Writing*, they took inspiration from *Bad Ideas about Writing* (Ball & Loewe, 2017), a book that brought scholarly insight about writing to a broad audience. That earlier collection didn't just correct misconceptions—it worked to reframe thinking about what writing is and why it matters.

This volume enters a moment of equally urgent reframing. In the wake of rapid advances in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), headlines and hallway conversations alike have been filled with sweeping predictions: that GenAI will make writing obsolete, replace human skill, or effortlessly correct the biases and inefficiencies of human communication. In reality, as the chapters in this collection show, GenAI's role in writing is far more complicated. It is full of possibilities, but also risks, limits, and trade-offs.

The conversations we have about GenAI now will shape the norms, policies, and habits that will be hard to change later. That is why it matters to articulate our ideas not as quick do's and don'ts or absolute rules, but as adaptable principles for sustaining human creativity, critical thinking, and equitable access to learning in the age of GenAI.

To that end, I offer ten directions, not commandments or permanent solutions, but guideposts for where we might go from here. Each direction captures a value or concern that emerges from both writing scholarship and the lived realities of classrooms, workplaces, families, and communities. Together, they provide a way to think beyond panic, hype, and misconceptions and to, instead, imagine more thoughtful, humane, and sustainable practices for writing in the age of GenAI.

TEN DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING AND LEARNING

1. Keep Writing Social

Writing has always been more than the words a single person produces on a page or a screen. It is a social act: a way of shaping meaning for others, participating in

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communities, and joining larger conversations. Even when technologies change—from pencils to word processors to GenAI—the social nature of writing persists.

GenAI risks obscuring this truth. Its output often arrives as polished text that looks finished, ready to be copied and pasted. If we treat this as "writing," we erase the audience, the context, and the purpose that give writing life. A generated draft may appear fluent, but unless a writer situates it within a rhetorical situation, it has no real communicative power.

Keeping writing social means continuing to value the practices of dialogue: peer review in classrooms, collaborative documents in the workplace, letters to the editor, comments on civic proposals, and conversations in families and communities. In all of these settings, writing is a way of connecting with readers, listeners, and viewers, not just a product to be produced and filed away.

In short, GenAI can generate strings of words, but it cannot replace the human work of deciding why to write, who to write for, and how best to reach them. Writing is fundamentally a social technology, and that truth endures.

2. Preserve Human Agency

Agency is at the heart of writing. To write is to make choices: what to include, what to omit, what stance to take, what evidence to present, and what voice to adopt. GenAI complicates this fact by producing text so quickly and fluently that writers may be tempted to abdicate responsibility.

But agency matters. Students deserve to feel ownership over their words, even if GenAI helps them brainstorm or draft. Workers deserve to know that their professional writing reflects their knowledge and expertise, not just the averages of a training dataset. Citizens deserve to see their voices represented in public discourse rather than replaced by machine summaries. Preserving human agency means asking writers to use GenAI with intention, making conscious choices about when to seek machine assistance and how to critically evaluate what it produces.

Further, recognizing agency is not only about how we use GenAI but also about knowing when to set it aside. There are domains of writing where machine assistance is inappropriate or even harmful, situations that call for distinctly human judgment. Ethical decisions, expressions of lived experience, and arguments that carry personal or communal responsibility cannot be outsourced without losing something essential.

We must resist framing GenAI as a replacement for human judgment. Instead, we need to see AI as one tool in a larger process—useful for generating possibilities, but always subordinate to the human voice and purpose that make writing meaningful.

3. Teach AI as Literacy, Not Magic

Too often, GenAI is presented as if it were magic: type in a prompt, and a finished product appears. But this illusion hides the real work that writers must still do. Just as reading, research, and critical thinking require practice, so does the effective and responsible use of GenAI.

GenAI literacy means knowing how to question and evaluate what the tool produces. Where did this output come from? Whose perspectives are represented or missing? What assumptions shape its phrasing? Whether in classrooms, offices, or public life, people need to approach AI-generated text with the same skepticism and care they apply to any other source.

This literacy also involves understanding the limits of AI. GenAI does not know facts; it generates plausible sentences based on patterns. Writers who treat its output as authoritative, therefore, risk errors, misinformation, and bias. By contrast, approaching GenAI as one resource among many allows writers, students, workers, and citizens alike, to integrate GenAI's strengths while correcting for its weaknesses.

GenAI is not a shortcut to good writing. It is another literacy practice to be learned, alongside the practices of drafting, revising, and reflecting that remain essential everywhere people write.

4. Value Human Feedback

Feedback is central to writing development. When teachers, peers, mentors, supervisors, and editors respond to writing, they don't just point out mistakes. They help writers think differently, discover possibilities, and feel seen as communicators. Feedback is dialogic: it involves a relationship between writer and reader.

GenAI can imitate some aspects of feedback. It can highlight patterns of error, suggest rephrasing, or offer surface-level comments. These functions can be helpful, but they lack the depth and care of human response. GenAI does not know a student's learning history, an employee's goals for a project, or the emotions someone brings to personal writing. It cannot affirm a writer's voice or encourage their growth.

Valuing human feedback means ensuring that GenAI does not crowd out the vital role of response in all writing contexts—classrooms, workplaces, creative communities, and families. It means recognizing the difference between generic machine suggestions and genuine engagement with ideas.

Human feedback is not just better; it is irreplaceable, because it is rooted in relationships and growth.

5. Center Ethics

Writing has always carried ethical dimensions: honesty in citation, respect for audiences, responsibility in representation. With GenAI, these dimensions expand dramatically.

First, there are environmental concerns. Training and running GenAI systems consumes vast amounts of energy and water. Writers cannot treat AI as free when its costs are borne by the planet.

Second, there are issues of bias and fairness. GenAI systems reproduce the inequalities in the data they are trained on, which means they risk amplifying stereotypes, excluding marginalized voices, and perpetuating injustices. Writers in every sphere must be aware of these limitations when they use AI-generated text.

Third, there are questions of labor and profit. AI companies build their systems from massive datasets, often without the consent of the authors whose work is scraped. The profits flow upward, while educators, students, and communities are left to grapple with the consequences.

Centering ethics means weighing these costs, not just the convenience GenAI offers. Ethical reflection must be part of writing education, workplace policy, and public decision-making alike.

6. Protect Critical Thinking

Writing is one of the best ways humans think. When we draft, we are not only recording ideas but generating them by finding connections, testing arguments, and discovering insights.

GenAI can make it tempting to skip this process. Why wrestle with a hard concept when a machine can generate a summary or an argument instantly? But when writers let GenAI do the intellectual heavy lifting, they deprive themselves of the thinking and learning that come from struggle and revision.

Protecting critical thinking does not mean banning GenAI. It means shaping environments where AI is used to extend thinking, not replace it. For example, GenAI might help brainstorm multiple perspectives, but humans still must decide which are valid. GenAI might generate a draft outline, but writers still must revise it to fit their own reasoning.

Writing must remain a site for cultivating curiosity, skepticism, and creativity. Machines can assist, but they cannot do the thinking for us.

7. Honor Multilingual and Multimodal Practices

Writing does not come in one standard form. Around the world, people write in diverse languages, dialects, and genres. They use multiple modes (images,

sounds, gestures, and digital formats) to communicate effectively.

AI tools, however, are often built on dominant forms of English. They frequently flatten out difference, "correcting" diverse voices into a standardized style. They may also fail to handle cultural references or rhetorical strategies that fall outside their training data.

Honoring multilingual and multimodal practices means resisting the idea that AI output is the benchmark. Instead, writers should be encouraged to use GenAI critically, adapting it to their own linguistic and cultural contexts. Our varied backgrounds should be seen as resources, not deficiencies.

GenAI may be a global technology, but writing is always local, cultural, and embodied. To honor difference is to ensure that GenAI supports, rather than erases, the richness of human expression.

8. Adapt with Flexibility

Technologies change quickly, but the core principles of writing instruction (like practice, revision, feedback, and reflection) remain. The danger with generative GenAI is twofold: either to overhype it as revolutionary or to dismiss it as irrelevant. Both extremes miss the point.

Adaptation means updating practices with openness while keeping a steady grip on what we know works. Educators may redesign assignments, workplaces may rethink communication practices, and families may reconsider how they use GenAI for everyday writing—but in every context, the essentials of writing remain the same.

Flexibility is key. We should not lock ourselves into rigid positions—whether pro-AI, anti-AI, or somewhere in between. Instead we should adjust thoughtfully as contexts shift. What seems "bad" today may prove useful tomorrow; what feels novel today may soon become routine. Writing has always evolved alongside new technologies, and it will continue to do so.

9. Sustain Pedagogy and Labor

Writing instruction, workplace communication, and civic discourse all depend on sustained human effort. GenAI does not reduce this labor; in many cases, it increases it. Teachers must guide students through responsible use, managers must help teams adapt, and communities must weigh policy and ethical concerns.

Without careful attention, GenAI risks deepening burnout and inequity. Some institutions may adopt GenAI tools as cost-saving measures, cutting back on human support. Some of us may feel pressure to rely on machine feedback instead of investing time in conversation and mentorship.

Sustaining pedagogy and labor means resisting these shortcuts. It means valuing the intellectual and emotional work of teachers, tutors, supervisors, mentors, and administrators. It also means designing policies and practices that are humane by giving people the resources and time to adapt, rather than demanding instant expertise.

Writing in all its forms has always been labor-intensive, but that labor is precisely what makes it valuable. GenAI should not be an excuse to devalue it.

10. Build Shared Responsibility

Finally, decisions about GenAI in writing cannot be left to individual choice. These are collective issues that affect classrooms, organizations, the workplace, and society as a whole.

Shared responsibility means involving students in policy discussions, rather than imposing rules from above. It means administrators working with faculty, managers working with employees, and policymakers listening to citizens to design fair approaches. It means recognizing that writing practices are shaped not just by specialists but by everyone who participates in communication.

GenAI will shape writing practices for decades to come, but how it does so is not inevitable. If we leave decisions to the government or corporations or we act in isolation, we risk losing control of what writing can and should be. By working together across roles and communities, we can ensure that GenAI supports human creativity, responsibility, and learning.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

These ten directions are not meant as fixed solutions but as invitations. Like writing itself, they are provisional and open to revision. I see them as starting points for dialogue, as ways to push back against both the hype that GenAI will revolutionize writing and the fear that it will make writing and writers obsolete. If the history of writing scholarship shows us anything, it is that tools change, but the deeper human work of making meaning, thinking critically, and communicating ethically remains. The task now is to carry those commitments forward, adapting as needed, so that GenAI becomes part of a more thoughtful and equitable future for writing.

To do this, we need to keep asking questions rather than rushing to answers. We must consider questions such as these:

- What kind of writing practices do we want to protect, even if GenAI can mimic them?

- How do we preserve the value of struggle, revision, and discovery in an age of instant text generation?
- Who benefits from the widespread adoption of GenAI writing tools, and who may be left out?
- What responsibilities do we carry for the environmental, social, and cultural costs of GenAI?
- How can students, educators, and communities share in shaping policies and practices, rather than having them imposed from above?

The answers to these questions will not be uniform. They will depend on context: on local classrooms, disciplinary norms, institutional priorities, and community needs. That variability is not a weakness but a strength, because writing itself is always situated. If we hold fast to that principle, we can navigate the shifting landscape of GenAI without losing sight of the enduring purposes of writing: to make meaning, to connect with others, and to imagine better futures together.

REFERENCES

Ball, C. E., & Loewe, D. M. (2017). *Bad ideas about writing*. West Virginia Libraries Digital Publishing Institute.