CHAPTER 15.

GENERATIVE AI DOES ALL THE WORK FOR THE WRITER

✨ *WRITING WITH AI REQUIRES HUMAN RHETORICAL AGENCY*

Chris M. Anson and Kirsti Cole
North Carolina State University

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini, among other chatbots, are widely assumed to do all the work for the writer, thereby subverting the essential relationships between writing, thinking, and creativity. These assumptions have fueled public and educational paranoia about GenAI—that "the college essay is dead" (Marche, 2022), that ChatGPT "could lead to the displacement of human writers" (Entrepreneurs Herald, 2024), and that using ChatGPT "robs students of the opportunity to expand their minds" (Homeworks Staff, 2023). Other fears include claims that GenAI will cause the "death of student writing" (Lieberman, 2024) or that "soon, we won't need to write much any longer. Artificial Intelligence will do it for us" (AI/News/Design, 2024). However, these fears are misplaced. Based on our observations, experiences, and analyses of research subjects using ChatGPT, GenAI doesn't do all the work for the writer. It often creates more work for the writer and can be less preferable to traditional writing.

GenAI tools require human expertise and revision to be effective. The perception that GenAI can replace the writer—whether through blind reliance or fear of subversion—has significant consequences. These overly optimistic or skeptical views shape how students and educators engage with GenAI, potentially altering the teaching and learning landscape. As noted in discussions from the Center for Humane Technology (2023), perceptions around GenAI can drive consequential shifts in how we understand and use these tools. Let's explore how.

Imagine asking ChatGPT to "Write a for-sale ad for my used ten-speed bike." Here's the actual output:

> **For Sale: Used Ten-Speed Bike**
>
> Looking for a reliable, affordable bike? Look no further! I'm selling my well-loved ten-speed bike, perfect for commuting,

DOI: https://doi.org/1010.37514/PER-B.2026.2777.2.15

fitness, or weekend adventures.

Features:

Brand: [Insert Brand Here]

Frame Size: [Insert Frame Size]

Color: [Insert Color]

Gears: Smooth-shifting ten-speed drivetrain

Brakes: Reliable front and rear brakes

Tires: Durable tires with good tread

Condition: Gently used, well-maintained

Extras:

Comfortable saddle

Water bottle holder

Kickstand

Reflectors for safety

This bike has served me well, but I'm upgrading to a new model. It's been regularly serviced and is ready for a new owner to enjoy. Whether you're a casual rider or a cycling enthusiast, this bike is a fantastic choice.

Price: $[Insert Price] (or best offer)

Location: [Insert Location]

Contact: [Insert Contact Information]

Don't miss out on this great deal! Get in touch today to arrange a test ride or to ask any questions. Happy riding! 🚴 🚲

Is this a usable output? Has it "done all the work" for the writer? Let's back up and consider the decisions people need to make to write effectively. In Figure 15.1, a "text" (the final written product) needs to contain an appropriate amount of the correct (accurate) information. It needs to be written in a proper style for its genre or type of writing and to meet audience expectations of that genre. Those expectations will determine the overall length, types, and complexity of sentences, use of words, length of paragraphs, and overall structure (what comes first, second, and third). Those decisions will depend on their context because writing genres are never static (Bazerman, 2004; Devitt, 2004; Hyland, 2004; Miller, 1984; Schryer, 1994). At the start of all these decisions is the nature and accuracy of the prompt given to the GenAI tool. To understand what writing decisions are needed to use a program like ChatGPT effectively, let's start with the prompt and work through the characteristics in Figure 15.1.

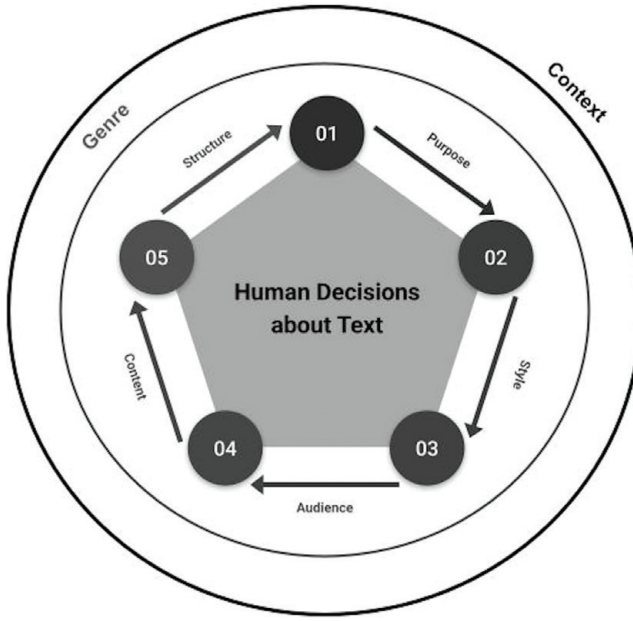

Figure 15.1: Essential human decisions required when using GenAI tools for writing, demonstrating the continued need for rhetorical expertise.

EFFECTIVE PROMPT DESIGN AND GENRE ADAPTATION

Designing an effective prompt for AI-based programs like ChatGPT requires significant rhetorical and linguistic skills, often taking as much time as writing from scratch. Carolyn R. Miller notes, "genres are typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (1984, p. 151), underscoring the need for contextually aware and rhetorically savvy prompts. AI-generated outputs can be plausible but tend to provide generic responses that must be adapted to fit specific genres and contexts. For instance, a human writer would need to adapt the ChatGPT output above quite differently for different platforms. An eBay listing would require cutting the text to bare essentials ("2019 Trek 10-speed, excellent condition, $200 firm"), while a local newspaper ad would need adding personal touches and community context ("Beloved family bike, perfect for neighborhood rides, sad to see it go to good home")—or, if the ad required per-word charges, it might contain only minimal information to be expanded through a buyer's contact with the seller. The adaptability of genres is well-established in genre theory, which highlights how genres evolve to meet audience expectations and adapt to the platform's specific demands (Bazerman, 2004; Devitt, 2004; Miller, 1984). Amy Devitt (2004) explains, "genres are

a nexus of situation, culture, and other genres," emphasizing genres' dynamic and socially-situated nature" (p. 1).

Although GenAI tools effectively mimic various academic, professional, and digital genres, their performance is constrained by the training data and the quality of the prompt. As Cydney Alexis and Theresa Merrick Cassidy (2026) demonstrate, the complexity of human-AI collaboration requires writers to engage in "dialogic, rhetorical meaning-making" that mirrors traditional social dimensions of writing. This social dimension becomes evident in prompt design, where writers must anticipate not only their ultimate audience but also how to communicate effectively with the GenAI tool itself. AI-generated text often reproduces surface-level genre features but cannot make strategic rhetorical choices about real-world contexts. For example, unless the prompt provides specific information, ChatGPT cannot verify if the bike needs new brakes or has a water bottle; unlike the writer, it has no access to any knowledge about the bike. ChatGPT's bike ad lists every possible feature generically, but a human seller would emphasize different aspects based on their actual situation, highlighting the bike's reliability if selling to a commuter, its recreational features if targeting weekend riders, or its bargain price if needing a quick sale. As Charles Bazerman (2015) points out, "genres help us recognize the kinds of messages a document may contain, the kind of situation it is part of and might migrate to" (p. 36), but GenAI tools often fail to grasp these nuances. These tools mirror the common phrases associated with a genre but fail to grasp the nuanced expectations of specific audiences, making human intervention essential to revise and contextualize the output. Prompt design plays a pivotal role in guiding GenAI's performance, yet even with the most expertly crafted prompts, human judgment is necessary to ensure the text aligns with the intended purpose and meets audience needs (Bazerman, 2015; Bhatia, 2004; Schryer, 1993). Catherine Schryer (1993) states that genres are "stabilized-for-now" forms subject to change and requiring continuous adaptation (p. 200).

ANTICIPATING AUDIENCE RESPONSE

Anticipating audience response is a critical aspect of writing, whether it's done independently or with the aid of GenAI. Good writers attempt to address, invoke, and involve their anticipated audience as they write (Ede & Lunsford, 2009). They consider how their intended audience will interpret and react to their words, which involves taking into account the audience's cultural background, knowledge level, interests, and expectations (Flower & Hayes, 1981). This human capacity for audience awareness connects to Steven Engel and Staci Shultz's (2026) point that our emotional responses to GenAI—including

concerns about authenticity and trust—reflect important values about writing relationships that GenAI cannot replicate. When using GenAI tools like ChatGPT or Claude, evaluating the AI-generated content to ensure it aligns with the intended message and tone and resonates with the audience requires a nuanced understanding of human emotions and social cues that GenAI can't figure out (Hyland, 2004). The bike ad output assumes homogeneity (broad and general), prior knowledge (using terms like "ten-speed drivetrain" and "frame size" with no explanation), readiness to buy (the audience might be ready to buy, but the text gives no information on why that bike is preferable), trust (images and maintenance records are not included), and convenience (it offers only one method for contact). A human writer might consider these matters when creating or editing such a text (Bazerman, 2004). In this way, the writer's role is not diminished but transformed to be more critical and evaluative (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011).

SCRUTINIZING STYLE

What if that's the wrong approach for the context, as we considered earlier? Instead, the writer might adopt a factual and straightforward style, delivering clear, objective information about the bike's features and condition without incorporating personal anecdotes or emotional appeal (Ogilvy, 2013). The emphasis would be on concisely providing potential buyers with all the necessary details, allowing them to make an informed decision based on the specifications and quality of the bike alone (Moriarty et al., 2018). Depending on the chosen genre, the AI-generated ad may default to inappropriate stylistic choices, word selections, structural decisions, and conventional patterns (Bhatia, 2004; Swales, 1990). The chatbot cannot assess whether a casual, enthusiastic tone serves the writer's purpose or whether stripped-down factual presentation would be more effective—a determination that requires human understanding of context, audience, and rhetorical goals. This stylistic choice, such as emotional appeal versus factual precision, requires the writer to understand not just the product being sold but the seller's timeline, the intended audience's preferences, and the platform's conventions. GenAI cannot make this strategic determination because it lacks access to the seller's specific context and rhetorical goals.

ASSESSING STRUCTURE AND LENGTH

ChatGPT responses often follow predictable patterns, making them stable but uninspired. This rigidity comes from GenAI's reliance on large datasets to generate generalizable text. While prompt design can vary the output format,

these systems frequently default to simple structures like bullet points, lacking the complexity and flow of human-generated prose. GenAI also struggles to control word count, often deviating from specified lengths, which limits its usefulness when precision is required. For example, the AI-generated bike ad is structured predictably, offering a list of features and benefits that provide clear information but lack the dynamic flow of a more engaging narrative. These deficits result from GenAI's limited rhetorical abilities, which prevent it from crafting responses that vary according to context or audience needs. This limitation reflects what He and Su (2025) explain: GenAI tools operate through "next-word prediction" based on statistical relationships, lacking the recursive, non-linear thinking processes that enable human writers to craft varied, contextually appropriate structures. Human writers, in contrast, excel at adapting structure and style to create compelling, varied narratives—again depending on context—that highlight the subject's unique qualities and resonate more deeply with the intended audience. Where GenAI produced generic bullet points and standard phrasing, human adaptation created the eBay listing's crisp efficiency ("2019 Trek 10-speed, excellent condition") and the newspaper ad's personal warmth ("Beloved family bike … sad to see it go to good home"). This tendency towards structured uniformity underscores a key area where human expertise remains critical, as humans can craft tailored, nuanced responses that GenAI systems, constrained by their design and data, cannot achieve.

READING AND REVISING

As writers navigate the integration of GenAI tools into their writing processes, (re)reading and revising becomes crucial. To use GenAI as an effective tool, writers must draw on long-term knowledge and rhetorical skills to critically assess AI-generated content, ensuring that it meets the intended purpose and resonates with the audience. Engaging in revision allows writers to refine GenAI outputs, enhancing clarity, style, and accuracy. In the context of the bike ad, this means reading the AI-generated draft with a critical eye and making revisions that transform a formulaic list of features into a more persuasive and engaging narrative while also editing out incorrect or deceptive information. By actively revising and enhancing AI-generated text, writers can leverage the strengths of both human creativity and GenAI efficiency to produce compelling content. Long-term knowledge, or expertise that writers develop through education, experience, and ongoing learning, allows writers to craft accurate but also insightful and nuanced content. Rhetorical skills, or the ability to effectively use language and persuasive techniques to communicate ideas and influence an audience, allow the writer to adapt content to different contexts and purposes,

ensuring it resonates with the intended audience. This critical assessment process aligns with Charles Bazerman's (2026) argument that human writers must "transform, select, monitor, evaluate, and edit" what GenAI tools offer. As Bazerman notes, GenAI tools "only collect, remix, and statistically string together existing words," making human judgment essential for ensuring the text serves the writer's specific intentions in specific circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Here's what all of this means: if a simple for-sale ad requires so much consideration—so much rhetorical and linguistic savvy, knowledge of audience, context, and genre, and skill in prompt design—then it becomes clear that using a GenAI tool to produce more complex, information-heavy texts in less common or specialized genres poses even more significant challenges. The assumption that GenAI can help us write anything with the right prompt is flawed. Many issues lie beyond the reach of AI datasets, especially those concerning underrepresented minorities, non-Western cultures, or subjects outside mainstream discourse. These gaps limit GenAI's rhetorical abilities, which are further constrained by its narrow training scope, often reflecting Western rhetorical traditions and mainstream perspectives. This limitation underscores the themes throughout Part 3: whether in J Palmeri's (2026) emphasis on embodied experience or Dana Comi's (2026) call for participatory localization, effective writing requires human connection to diverse lived experiences that GenAI cannot replicate. GenAI tools, as their developers acknowledge, carry built-in biases that can lead to problematic or prejudiced outputs, especially in complex or sensitive contexts. Recent developments in GenAI—including browsing capabilities and agentic behavior—may appear to address some of these limitations, but they fundamentally maintain the same constraints on rhetorical judgment and contextual understanding that our bike ad analysis reveals.

To be effective at using GenAI tools, the writer still needs to be a writer—an expert who can read and make informed decisions about the GenAI's output. The risks are even more significant for less experienced writers, particularly students. The less a user knows about their subject or the less developed their writing skills, the less helpful and potentially more harmful GenAI tools can become. This presents a crucial paradox: while GenAI can be a valuable tool, it is most effective for those already possessing solid rhetorical and critical thinking abilities. In the hands of a novice, GenAI can reinforce misunderstandings, perpetuate bias, or produce subpar work without the writer even realizing it. These findings align with professional guidelines that emphasize the continued centrality of human expertise in writing with GenAI. The *MLA Student Guide to AI Literacy* (MLA-CCCC

Joint Task Force on Writing and AI, 2024) emphasizes that effective GenAI use requires understanding both its capabilities and limitations, supporting our argument that writers must possess strong rhetorical skills to work effectively with these tools. As the guide notes, GenAI tools are "prediction engines" that require human oversight and evaluation. Jennifer Sano-Franchini et al.'s position statement "Refusing Generative AI in Writing Studies" reinforces this point from a different angle, arguing that writing serves purposes far beyond what GenAI can replicate: "We know that writing is something that human beings do, not only to 'write answers,' as text-generative LLM technologies like ChatGPT are primed to do … but also to build connections with others, cultivate relationships, learn and engage in inquiry, develop and grow as thinkers, participate in the embodied act of self-expression" (Premise 2, 2024). As Annette Vee (2023) notes, "Large language models such as ChatGPT will produce good writing. They will not produce challenging, thoughtful, innovative humans, such as good writing instruction helps to nurture" (p. 180). Our bike ad analysis demonstrates exactly this limitation: while GenAI can produce plausible text, it cannot engage in the human processes of rhetorical decision-making, audience analysis, and contextual adaptation that effective writing requires.

And here's the crux: GenAI is not doing all the work.

Writers must guide, assess, and revise the outputs, which requires a deep understanding of writing processes. In instructional settings, teaching students to engage with GenAI critically is essential. This involves helping them develop the foundational writing skills at the heart of learning. By engaging with GenAI as a tool for drafting and generating ideas, students can benefit from its potential while continuing to refine their rhetorical practices. Writing studies scholarship emphasizes that learning is an iterative process where revision, adaptation, and critical evaluation play key roles (e.g., Harris, 2006; Sommers, 1980). This approach supports the development of essential writing skills, with GenAI serving as a complement rather than a replacement.

REFERENCES

AI/News/Design. (2024). *The end of writing: iA on AI.* https://ia.net/topics/the-end-of-writing-ia-on-ai

Bhatia, V. K. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse: A genre-based view.* Continuum.

Bazerman, C. (2004). *Speech acts, genres, and activity systems.* In C. Bazerman & P. Prior (Eds.), *What writing does and how it does it* (pp. 314-346). Erlbaum.

Bazerman, C. (2026). Writing means producing written words that look like they are from educated humans: Human writers can revise AI outputs as they think about purpose, audience, and context. In C. Basgier, A. Mills, M. Olejnik, M. Rodak, & S. Sharma (Eds.), *Bad ideas about AI and writing: Generative practices for*

teaching, learning, and communication. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2026.2777.2.16

Brand, A. G. (1985). Hot cognition: Emotions and writing behavior. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, *6*, 5-15. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20865583

Carillo, E. C. (2017). The evolving relationship between composition and cognitive studies: Gaining some historical perspectives on our contemporary movement. In P. Portanova, J. M. Rifenburg, & D. Roen (Eds.), *Contemporary perspectives on cognition and writing*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2017.0032

Center for Humane Technology. (2023, March 9). *The AI dilemma* [Audio podcast episode]. In *Your undivided attention*. *TED Audio Collective*. https://your-undivided-attention.simplecast.com/episodes/the-ai-dilemma-SHr0xid0

Comi, D. (2026). GenAI replaces technical writers: GenAI augments the capabilities (and responsibilities) of technical writers. In C. Basgier, A. Mills, M. Olejnik, M. Rodak, & S. Sharma (Eds.), *Bad ideas about AI and writing: Generative practices for teaching, learning, and communication*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2026.2777.2.17

Devitt, A. (2004). *Writing genres*. Parlor Press.

Ede, L., & Lunsford, A. (2009). Among the audience: On audience in an age of new literacies. In M. E. Weiser, B. M. Fehler, & A. M. González (Eds.), *Engaging audience: Writing in an age of new literacies* (pp. 42-69). National Council of Teachers of English.

Engel, S., & Shultz, S. (2026). We should ignore our emotions about generative AI: We should examine our complicated emotions about AI. In C. Basgier, A. Mills, M. Olejnik, M. Rodak, & S. Sharma (Eds.), *Bad ideas about AI and writing: Generative practices for teaching, learning, and communication*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2026.2777.2.19

Entrepreneurs Herald. (2024). *How will Chat-GPT change the writing industry?* Retrieved September 12, 2025, from https://www.entrepreneursherald.com/blog/how-chat-gpt-will-change-the-writing-industry

Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, *32*(4), 365-387. https://doi.org/10.2307/356600

Harris, J. (2006). *Rewriting: How to do things with texts*. Utah State University Press.

He, H., & Su, W. J. (2025). A law of next-token prediction in large language models. *Physical Review. E, 112*(3), 035317–035317. https://doi.org/10.1103/5rn3-49lc

Homeworks Staff. (2023, January 10). Chat GPT and AI: The future (or downfall?) of writing. https://homeworksforstudents.com/chat-gpt-and-ai-the-future-or-downfall-of-writing/

Hyland, K. (2004). Genre and academic writing in the northern hemisphere. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *3(2)*, 113-125. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2004.02.003

Lieberman, M. (2024, June 7). AI and the death of student writing: The move away from true hands-on scholarship feels tragic. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/ai-and-the-death-of-student-writing

Marche, S. (2022, December 6). The college essay is dead: Nobody is prepared for how AI will transform academia. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/12/chatgpt-ai-writing-college-student-essays/672371/

Miller, C. R. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *70*, 151-167. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638409383686

MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI. (2024). *Student Guide to AI Literacy*. https://aiandwriting.hcommons.org/student-guide-to-ai-literacy/

Moriarty, S., Mitchell, N., Wood, C., & Wells, W. (2018). *Advertising & IMC: Principles and practice* (11th ed.). Pearson.

Ogilvy, D. (2013). Ogilvy on advertising. *Vintage*.

Palmeri, J. (2026). GenAI can write better than me: Embodied experience is vital for writing (with and without GenAI). In C. Basgier, A. Mills, M. Olejnik, M. Rodak, & S. Sharma (Eds.), *Bad ideas about AI and writing: Generative practices for teaching, learning, and communication*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2026.2777.2.18

Quinlan, T., Loncke, M., Leijten, M., & Van Waes, L. (2012). Coordinating the cognitive processes of writing: The role of the monitor. *Written Communication*, *29*(3), 345-368. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088312451112

Reiff, M. J., & Bawarshi, A. (2011). Tracing discursive resources: How students use prior genre knowledge to negotiate new writing contexts in first-year composition. *Written Communication*, *28*(3), 312-337.

Sano-Franchini, J., McIntyre, M., & Fernandes, M. (2024). *Refusing GenAI in writing studies: A quickstart guide*. *Refusing Generative AI in Writing Studies.* https://refusinggenai.wordpress.com/

Schryer, C. (1994). Records as genre. *Written Communication*, *11*, 85-113. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088393010002003

Sommers, N. I. (1980). Revision strategies of student writers and experienced adult writers. *College Composition and Communication*, *31*, 378-387.

Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.

Vee, A. (2023). Large language models write answers. *Composition Studies, 51*(1), 176-181.