

CHAPTER 19.

**WE SHOULD IGNORE
OUR EMOTIONS ABOUT
GENERATIVE AI ✦ WE SHOULD
EXAMINE OUR COMPLICATED
EMOTIONS ABOUT AI**

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The public release of ChatGPT 3.5 sent many writing instructors into an emotional tailspin. Access to this powerful generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tool came on the heels of a pandemic and amid social-political unrest and efforts to undermine the value of higher education. If writing instructors weren't already reeling, this new tool signaled for many a potentially catastrophic shift in how we understood our profession.

The headlines from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* following the release of ChatGPT 3.5 capture the intense emotions many instructors experienced. There were concerns that college writing was dead (Shatten, 2022) and proclamations that ChatGPT was a “plagiarism machine” (Keegin, 2023). At the heart of this whirlpool of emotions was the panic that the emergence of GenAI would destroy writing instruction forever.

Since then, many of us have been able to pivot away from that initial panic toward inevitability, acceptance, even enthusiasm for GenAI's potential to transform writing instruction. We have taken a collective deep breath, revamped our syllabi, attended professional development sessions, and reassured ourselves that we have met other challenges in the past—and survived. This was just another moral panic about a new technology. While we appreciate the efforts people have taken to work through these changes, we think it's a bad idea to dismiss our complicated emotional responses to GenAI. It is vital for writing instructors to stay attuned to our reactions to this seismic shift in writing technologies. These

emotions aren't a weakness but rather a warning, and our complicated reactions highlight the threats associated with GenAI as well as clarify what is important to us—like issues of academic integrity and authorship.

In *Panic Now?: Tools for Humanizing*, Ira J. Allen (2024) persuasively argues that panic is the reasonable response to the current polycrisis of climate change, the AI revolution, a sixth mass extinction, and the novel chemical threat. He believes that it is through panic that we can move toward practical wisdom. While Allen is focused on the larger picture (no less than the downfall of our current societal structure), it is still important that we attend to the affective side of our own microcosm of the classroom. We cannot ignore the panic, fear, and anger in response to GenAI. Indeed, this kind of deep reflection and invention might be long overdue.

We have found the ongoing literature about plagiarism to be particularly helpful for modeling how to identify complicated emotions and use these responses to launch meaningful conversations about writing instruction. Both GenAI and plagiarism challenge our understanding of authorship and academic integrity. Following the lead of the plagiarism scholarship, we lean into our affective responses to the intersection of GenAI and writing to explore the fear and anger surrounding these core concepts.

FEAR

Fear can arise when confronting something unknown, and for many writing instructors, right up to 2022, GenAI was mostly a science fiction plot. So, it makes sense when ChatGPT 3.5 was released, the initial reporting reflected the fear that faculty felt. Tools that we thought we knew (even if we didn't like them) were now supercharged. For instance, Grammarly (2024) began to market its GenAI-assisted writing tools as able to “[i]nstantly generate clear, compelling writing while maintaining your unique voice.” What was once a long-term objective for our courses could be achieved with a couple of mouse clicks. Faculty already discouraged about the gap in skills left by the pandemic now feared those skills might never be recovered if students could just turn to GenAI. Students could cheat with amazing speed and adequate results. This was not the world we imagined when we first started teaching, and it felt scary.

Plagiarism can elicit similar reactions. When we encounter plagiarism in the classroom, we initially feel annoyed, disappointed, or even betrayed. However, our discourse about plagiarism often reveals a deeper-seated sense of fear. We use metaphors of war, disease, sin, and crime to emphasize plagiarism's danger and highlight the importance of our efforts against it. These metaphors are things to be afraid of, not just annoyed by. Our metaphors influence our thoughts and

actions, even if we don't immediately recognize it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For instance, the term plagiarism comes from the Latin *plagiarius* meaning "one who kidnaps the child or slave of another" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d.). This is a loaded term; no wonder it inspires fear.

One useful response to plagiarism is to recognize the fear and then reframe the story that we are telling ourselves. For instance, reframing plagiarism as a literacy practice (Valentine, 2006) rather than a disease or a sin reduces the emotional remnants of the charged language and positions plagiarism as another way people use language rather than something that can harm us. This can productively change the tone of the conversation faculty have with students about their writing practices.

Similarly, the metaphors surrounding the discussions about GenAI reveal a sense of fear. In Scott Latham's (2024) warning about AI, he advises faculty, "Do not feed the AI *monster*" and argues that "[n]o field will be *immune* from AI's reach" [emphases added]. While we agree with many of Latham's concerns, it is important for us to first recognize our fear and then find a way to articulate it without being consumed by it. Talking about the various uses of GenAI as literacy practices—as ways people do things with language—rather than monsters or disease or crimes can help.

ANGER

Anger often arises when we feel threatened, and both plagiarism and GenAI can feel like threats. Plagiarism scholar Amy E. Robillard (2007) argues that the anger instructors feel about plagiarism highlights how plagiarism impacts us as readers; plagiarism violates the relationship among the reader, the text, and the author. Similarly, our anger around students using GenAI isn't just limited to our concerns about who "wrote" the text or whether the text is original, but also how it effects our role as the reader. As readers, we enter into a relationship with the writer in good faith with certain expectations: I'm putting effort or labor into interpreting this text that you have claimed you have created on your own or within the constraints of academic integrity. Both AI-generated content and plagiarism can violate this trust and cause suspicion.

Thus, our pedagogy can seem driven not by our students' learning but by our own discomfort. Plagiarism scholars have long advocated that policing adherence to academic standards, especially with plagiarism detection software, runs counter to the relationship many of us want to have with our students (Howard, 2001) and provides us with a false sense of security (Vie, 2013). Many of our initial attempts to thwart student use of GenAI don't actually get at the problem—and, in fact, they may prevent us from dealing with our emotional

responses. We are desperate for solutions, but we're missing the bigger questions. We need to figure out why we're so suspicious.

Likewise, ChatGPT and other chatbots have unsettled many fundamental concepts in writing studies, which has caused confusion: What is writing and what is required to be a writer? When students use GenAI, are they engaging in collaborative writing or a kind of double plagiarism? What constitutes "original" work? These issues of academic integrity, citation, and originality have long concerned plagiarism scholars, but now they challenge the very foundations of our field. The confusion around authorship has become particularly salient. At the very least, institutions have had to rewrite their academic integrity policies to include unauthorized use not just of *someone's* work but *something's* work. In addition, we see that different disciplines' understanding of the relationship between authors and GenAI are varied, and at times, contradictory.

Once again, we can look to plagiarism studies for a way to acknowledge our confusion and work toward a more productive stance. Robillard and Rebecca Howard (2008) argue that plagiarism isn't just *one* thing and our understanding of it must be pluralized. There are multiple acts that fall under plagiarism's unwieldy definition from Howard's (1999) delineations of citation errors, patchwriting, and fraud to a range of irresponsible authorships (Engel & Johnson, 2021). There are many ways to work with texts; some of our confusion stems from the different kinds of authorship; if we see it only as one thing, then we risk tying ourselves up in knots.

Similarly, there are different instances of using GenAI in the writing process. Writers can use GenAI to help brainstorm ideas or generate entire essays whole-cloth. It seems natural then that each of these different practices should elicit a different emotional response. We suggest that instructors might take a similar approach to students' use of GenAI-powered writing tools, talking in clear terms with students early and often about how to effectively use GenAI in the writing process and then fine-tuning our responses accordingly. Just as some literacy practices that might fall under the category of plagiarism are better seen as something that requires a pedagogical intervention rather than a punitive action, some GenAI-assisted literacy practices are best seen as teachable moments rather than signs of illegitimate authorship. This kind of reframing can ultimately lead to vital conversations with students about writing in the GenAI era, but only if we are first willing to sit with the complicated feelings. *The MLA Student Guide to AI Literacy (2024)* offers some helpful language to understand some of the underlying principles and pitfalls of GenAI as a literacy practice. It provides a framework for students "to build skills and habits for using GenAI ethically and effectively." We would add that it is also important to avoid glossing over the emotional components that

students, teachers, administrators, and others might experience as they adapt to this new literacy practice.

As with cases of plagiarism, our reactions to students using GenAI can highlight what is important to us as writing instructors. We need to pay attention to our emotional reactions to the changes this new technology brings. Our fear and anger around GenAI are valid because this moment is significant, pedagogically and emotionally, and we need to approach it with critical eyes. We need to continue our conversations about GenAI in the classroom by making space to investigate our experiences, both positive and negative. As Noël Ingram (2026) observes, “We’re at a pivotal moment in education. We can succumb to fear and distrust, or we can, using a pedagogy of trust and joy, partner with our students in pursuit of deep, meaningful learning aligned with students’ strengths, community memberships, and reflective use of tools and technologies.” It is a good idea for us to flag negative emotions and think about the consequences of what they tell us about larger questions of academic integrity and authorship.

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