

CHAPTER 38.

WE MUST ACT FAST TO ADDRESS
AI IN WRITING CLASSROOMS

✦ *SLOW DESIGN CAN BUILD
MORE SUSTAINING CLASSROOM
PRACTICE WITH (OR WITHOUT) AI*

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One bad, pervasive idea for teachers is that we need to “act fast” or lose our chance to determine the direction of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in our curriculum. With debates on using GenAI in education and writing studies, we have noticed a troubling binary: 1) that we must be concerned about academic honesty and “catching” students using GenAI in their work, and therefore must condemn GenAI use in classrooms and begin reactionary and/or protective measures (Ingram, this volume), or 2) GenAI is the marketable technofuture, so we must center GenAI use in classrooms. Because illicit GenAI use is already affecting classrooms, teachers may feel pressured to quickly adopt one of these positions. We find this urgency driven primarily by two forces. The first is teachers’ desire to do good work—to design robust curricula, to adapt to changing technological conditions, to integrate cutting-edge technologies into their classrooms, and to prepare their students for a market in which technological adaptability is valued. The second is pressures from the neoliberal, consumer-focused university to innovate and capture an ever-diminishing market share of tuition dollars.

We argue that expediency can hinder investigating and teaching larger ethical issues that surround GenAI. To reframe teaching GenAI in the writing classroom, and to help teachers decide how to use (or refuse) GenAI with writing, we offer principles from the slow design movement. Slow design, or creating “for long periods of time” (Hallnäs & Redström, 2001), prioritizes sustainability and reflection over efficiency.

BAD IDEA: WE NEED TO MOVE FAST WITH GENAI

There's a looming sense that educators are playing catch-up in their response to GenAI. While GenAI development has been underway for decades, the seemingly sudden leap to user-friendly tools has led to increasing mainstream acceptance. At all levels of education, teachers are caught between contradictory imperatives: we must ensure that students are learning to uphold academic integrity standards; at the same time, we must prepare students for entry into a world and market that will allegedly be shaped by GenAI, which means we must model responsible and ethical use of GenAI.

Writers for higher education news sites ask “whether higher ed can keep pace” with technological development (Swaak, 2024), and the struggle between GenAI development and GenAI-detection has been likened to an “arms race” that “professors are losing” (Beam, 2023; Bogost, 2023). Amid this panic, teachers are often told that the best and perhaps only way to survive the rise of GenAI is to “embrace” it (Nierman, 2024). This technology isn't going away, we're told, and if we don't learn to use it, we will be swept away in a sea of technological change. It's assumed to be a foregone conclusion that GenAI will soon play a major role in education and resisting that fact is a serious pedagogical misstep.

Faculty in writing studies and related fields are under particular pressure to know what the next right move is. With tools like ChatGPT, DeepSeek, CoPilot, and Gemini leading the charge on GenAI's mainstreaming, writers are assumed to become among the first workers displaced in the coming “textpocalypse” (Kirschenbaum, 2023). Moreover, lessons about plagiarism and other ethical issues are already part of many writing courses, so there is an assumption that we can simply extend those discussions to this new issue. With the field's focus on digital rhetoric, digital humanities, multimodal composition, and other tech-forward studies, we often feel harried to lead these conversations. In a 2023 working paper, the MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI cautions faculty against “operating out of fear” and calls for “ongoing open and iterative processes to develop our responses” (2023, p. 10). We argue that slow design allows for iteration, allowing teachers to navigate GenAI and writing instruction in the face of time and external pressures.

SLOW YOUR “ROLE”: USING SLOW DESIGN PHILOSOPHY TO TEACH (OR NOT TEACH) GENAI IN WRITING CLASSROOMS

In their foundational article, “Slow Technology – Designing for Reflection,” authors Lars Hallnäs and Johan Redström offer a design paradigm that promotes

“moments of reflection and mental rest in a more and more rapidly changing environment” (2001) in the face of technological change. Going beyond specific uses and contexts, slow design focuses on the life cycle of a technology, how it will affect and be part of a larger environment, and how designers can incorporate understanding.

We share slow design principles developed by Carolyn F. Strauss and Alastair Fuad-Luke (2008) as a series of questions and practices for writing pedagogy with GenAI. These principles are “highly personal,” “intimate,” and meant to be “careful and continuous” (Strauss & Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 3). The goal for slow design is not to make thinking or processes easier, but instead make space for users to reflect and critically evaluate technology (Hallnäs & Redström, 2001). While slow design has been theorized and applied for over 20 years, its possibilities for GenAI and machine learning are emergent. A slow design perspective on GenAI and writing pedagogy is a rich area that here we only begin to explore as writing instructors reconsider the role they play in the introduction of such tools to their students. We find that slow design is one way to answer the call for more reflective engagement with GenAI tools in the writing classroom, centering the social dimensions and human relationships involved with the writing process (Sperber, this volume). A slow design approach also creates space for instructors to “be situational and contingent” in the use of GenAI (Proszak, this volume), as it focuses on sustainable development and integration of technology.

PRINCIPLES 1, 2, AND 3: REVEAL, EXPAND, AND REFLECT

Slow design advocates for a practice where what’s “often missed or forgotten” is explored in the development and use of technology, as well as how things may be “expressed” beyond their intended use (Strauss & Fuad-Luke, 2008, pp. 3-4). The first three principles of *reveal*, *expand*, and *reflect* center on more careful observations and considerations of how technologies interact with life and environments beyond their perceived functionality.

The principle of *reveal* is the act of making space to investigate GenAI and its use of immediacy. Often, GenAI-generated content is near instantaneous and marketed as magic by its creators (like the ever-present ♠ [unicode=U+2728] used for many GenAI programs). However, intentional slowness can reveal new lines of inquiry: where is the content from? Who or what produced the content? Who is potentially harmed by this content? Such slowness assists with larger understandings of GenAI beyond employment for specific projects—moving from GenAI as a deliverable to part of a larger activity network. To contextualize this principle in practice, Joon-Sung Park et al. (2019)

intentionally slowed a computational algorithm for use with their students. They found that slowing down the algorithm gave students time to better assess its accuracy, and that the intentional waiting period led to new insights about the task at hand, allowing users to “slowly think about the decisions being offered by the algorithm and ponder on its potential biases or flaws” (Park et al., 2019, pp. 102:3).

The principle of *expand* creates space for exploring what is missed with design. With GenAI-generated content, one exercise we’ve used is having students take a paragraph of their own writing and slowly compare it to a GenAI-mediated version of their text (using Hemingway Editor or similar apps), and discuss 1) what the GenAI changes, and 2) whether these changes are positive or feel authentic to the original intent of the message. In class discussions, slow reading prompted students to identify where they felt they lost their own voice in GenAI. With daily writing apps integrating GenAI into how users write personal content (such as Messenger’s new chatbot prompting you to make your text messages funnier), teaching writers how and where to slow down in the composition process will be necessary to identify what gets lost with automated content.

Together, these two principles establish opportunities for *reflection*. Rather than viewing GenAI as a tool to be immediately used or discarded, we argue for demystifying a mystified technology (✦ [unicode= U+2728]). Refocusing GenAI from content generation to individual reflection is one way we can resituate its role in the writing process. For example, “introspective AI” is being developed, which uses an individual’s self-uploaded data to create reflective prompts for journaling (Brand et al., 2021). Ultimately, slowness can contribute to more “reflective consumption” (Strauss & Fuad-Luke, 2008) of technology.

PRINCIPLES 4, 5, AND 6: ENGAGE, PARTICIPATE, AND EVOLVE

Engage and *participate* principles center on process, inviting collaboration, transparency, and accountability. These principles ask designers to consider who joins in the design process and how design can grow in ways that benefit larger communities. When considering teaching with GenAI, these principles can guide in two ways: studying the design of GenAI and its impacts (most notably, who designs, facilitates, and trains the GenAI? Do they do it with consent? Who is impacted by GenAI’s use beyond the user? How does GenAI affect its environments?), as well as thinking through how GenAI is integrated within the classroom, if a teacher elects to do so. When considering the use of GenAI in the classroom, we encourage teachers to ask: do students have a say in how GenAI

is used in the curriculum? Can they choose not to use the technology if they desire? How will the lessons and practices in a course impact students' broader participation in their communities, both inside and outside of the classroom?

Engagement and participation are essential when considering the potential sustained presence of GenAI. The final principle, *evolve*, looks “beyond the needs and circumstances of the present day” (Strauss & Fuad-Luke, 2008, p. 7), to instead consider community stewardship and how a technology will exist over long periods of time. When considering GenAI in pedagogy, it's important to wonder how the technology is positioned in relation to the future. Is it treated as inevitable? Is it sustainable in its current form? How long will these tools be freely available? Are users too focused on present-day demands at the expense of longer, more severe consequences such as environmental impact and labor exploitation? Who has stewardship of this technology? Who will?

CONCLUSION: MOVING FORWARD (SLOWLY)

Discourses surrounding GenAI and writing are full of both fatalistic and techno-benevolent (Benjamin, 2019) talking points. With time pressure on integrating the technology at a peak, it is hard to protect the necessary space for reflection. We ultimately ask: how is GenAI being framed in our classrooms in terms of its inevitability and inescapability? Because throughout writing, designing, and teaching multimodal rhetorics, there is a defined awareness that technology is never fixed. Building questions offered by slow design principles into curricula (and continuously revisiting them) is one way to resist the culture of expediency surrounding GenAI adoption.

Teachers deserve time to interrogate the technology of GenAI and reflect upon how it best fits (or doesn't fit) their pedagogies, classrooms, and practices. Consequences of expediting the adoption of GenAI tools without such space leads to actions such as teachers uploading student work to GenAI-detectors without their consent (e.g., Ingram, this volume) and students losing vital parts of their voice and lived experience in writing due to quick, GenAI revision (e.g., Nyikos & McDuffie, this volume). When the need for this space conflicts with administrative or programmatic demands, a slow design approach can resituate how GenAI gets practiced in the curriculum and how students might learn, interact, and create with this technology. While our chapter explores ways of integrating GenAI slowly within the classroom space, future work might also investigate how a slow design approach can inform writing program administration, design, and assessment. We suggest replacing the bad idea that we're falling behind with GenAI with a more intentional, slow approach to understanding GenAI and its impacts.

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