CHAPTER 41.

GENERATIVE AI SHOULD BE USED SIMILARLY ACROSS WRITING COURSES ✨ *SINCE WRITING COURSES AND CONTEXTS VARY, GENERATIVE AI USE SHOULD BE SITUATIONALLY INFORMED*

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For college writing instructors who are open to teaching with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), we often pose or are asked the question: *how should we use GenAI within the classroom, and what examples of effective GenAI pedagogies can we deliver*? A colleague from another institution and I were recently chatting about GenAI, and he asked: *do you have an example of a GenAI assignment that works well*? Those who teach writing want to swap ideas and exchange stories of GenAI implementation within classrooms. Those who teach writing want inspiration and sometimes firm pedagogical answers. Among all of the debates about GenAI policy, ethics, sustainability, and the like, I too appreciate straightforward tips about what I should be doing within the classroom. But it is well-meaning questions like my colleague's that underscore a critical point about GenAI and writing, one worth surfacing for college writing instructors: context matters in discussions about GenAI and writing, and what works well at one institution or within one course will not necessarily work well in another. Situation matters. When writing instructors assume that GenAI writing pedagogy has universal applicability across classroom scenes, they overlook the knowledge(s) and experiences of students and the circumstances we exist within.

A more productive way of framing GenAI within the writing classroom is that its use must be situational and contingent. It must be dependent upon the classroom environment and students. This framing is aligned with writing studies approaches that recognize the rhetorical nature of writing—the way that is shaped by specific physical, social, and cultural contexts and the interactions and

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expectations between readers and audiences (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015; Ball & Loewe, 2017; Palmquist, 1994/2024). Affirming that GenAI should *not* be used the same way across writing courses not only reflects key theories about writing and values within the teaching of writing but it also better attends to students' and faculty's needs with the acknowledgement that teaching must be adapted for context.

Although teachers of writing are no strangers to the fact that context matters when discussing the practice and pedagogy of writing, the truth is that this simple fact is not always so self-evident. For example, the all-too-familiar complaint that students do not know how to write is based upon the belief that writing is a universally applicable skill that can be effectively executed within any situation (see also Babb, 2017). But as Elizabeth Wardle and Douglas Downs (2014) remind us, "there is *no easily transferrable set of rules* from one writing situation to another. What transfers is not *how to write*, but *what to ask about writing*" (p. 3). The assumption that writing and writing instruction are stable and unchanging disenfranchises students by placing unattainable expectations on them. No writer knows how to write for every situation, genre, medium, and audience, and the belief that they do especially affects students who have had less exposure to different types of writing or who are less prepared to tap into rhetorical knowledge. Much in the same way that today's students are often wrongly assumed to be "digital natives" who are proficient with using technology across platforms (see MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing an AI, 2024a; Tugend, 2023), students are often thought of as being "good" or "bad" writers regardless of the fact that writing is not universal nor are classrooms.

When students are thought of as technologically adept, and writing is often treated as "a one-time writing inoculation that will extend across all settings"—as Jacob Babb (2017, p. 31) dispels—it is not hard to grasp a concomitant belief that GenAI should be used similarly across writing courses. And this belief becomes trickier because, although misguided, it is often well-intentioned: instructors are looking to meaningfully embed GenAI within their classrooms rather than thwart its use. But generalizations about GenAI-based pedagogies often result in failure.

Let us pretend that an instructor has a great idea for teaching with GenAI within a first-year writing course. Individually or in small groups, students practice prompting, asking ChatGPT to produce a literacy narrative that meets the course's literacy narrative assignment requirements. Students revise the prompt several times to get more effective outputs (for example, asking ChatGPT to include particular examples of literacy development and to sound more casual—"like a college student") (an example of such a conversation with OpenAI is cited under references). The class then critiques the GenAI writing, which allows students to

reflect upon the assignment requirements and their prompt language as well as the content and style of the ChatGPT narrative. This kind of GenAI activity seems fairly uncomplicated and meaningful and speaks to GenAI activities offered by writing teacher-scholars that push students to critically consider rhetorical choices (see Ranade & Eyman, 2024; Vee et al., 2023). But here lies the problem: an instructor executes this in a co-requisite course in which students tend to struggle with technology and need more writing support. Some students have difficulty navigating the LMS where the assignment sheet is held (as Lisa Bell and Joni K. Hayward Marcum point out in their chapter, not all students are technologically proficient). Other students are nervous about their new college journey or re-entering college and crave more authentic interactions to discuss their own writing. Additionally, although students critiqued the GenAI narratives for sounding impersonal and cliché, their first drafts emulated the GenAI output, which is not so much a failure since the transfer of writing knowledge is complex, and their drafts could present an opportunity to discuss writing as a social act and ethics. Yet by the instructor's standards, the assignment did not go as planned.

A large part of this "failure" could be chalked up to assignment design and lack of adequate scaffolding, but the instructor cannot neglect the student body; the students were overwhelmed by the platform, unsure of authorial agency, and concerned with acclimating to college as a whole. While GenAI can present rich pedagogical opportunities to study writing, it may have an unanticipated impact on students, especially in classes where students are intimidated by new technologies or insecure about their position within the college. Generalizing about the usefulness of GenAI assignments may be harmful because classes and institutions differ widely, especially in terms of resources.

The presumption that GenAI should be used similarly across writing courses also disadvantages instructors who may not have institutional support or faculty development opportunities. Contingent faculty are frequently the instructors of core writing courses, and they often do not have the freedom, time, nor resources to train for GenAI use within their classrooms. Due to institutional models and constraints, some instructors are precluded from adequate preparation with using GenAI tools. Asking contingent first-year writing faculty, for example, to use GenAI assignments similarly to the manner in which tenure-track faculty may use assignments within upper-level writing courses (or even within those same first-year writing courses) places unrealistic and unfair expectations on them and subsequently, can also do a disservice to students.

Let us thus recognize that writing courses can be vastly different both at the institutional level and the program level (taking first-year writing programs as one example, a standalone first-year writing course at a private research university may have different pedagogical approaches, outcomes, and emphases—not

to mention a different staffing model—than a first-year writing course for multilingual writers at a public two-year college), and let us honor these differences when it comes to teaching with GenAI. A more helpful, promising idea about GenAI and writing courses in general is that GenAI activities should be adapted for individual writing classrooms and the needs of students *and* faculty therein. Luckily, teacher-scholars have done an excellent job of offering examples of GenAI writing assignments that foreground learning context. For example, Annette Vee et al.'s (2023) *TextGenEd* features undergraduate-level assignments, and contributors make their "original assignment context" known at the start of their entries. And much scholarship explicitly mentions that instructors should care for the nuances of where and how GenAI writing tasks are assigned (Alexander, 2023; Bedington et al., 2024; Murray & Tersigni, 2023). If instructors are transparent about the practicalities of GenAI activities within particular courses and for specific student demographics, they can help demystify the idea that GenAI teaching and learning are undifferentiated and take undue pressure off instructors and students to use GenAI tools consistently and interchangeably.

And students can learn about the context-dependent nature of GenAI *and* writing too. Students can explore their positionality as it relates to GenAI as well as how GenAI is un/employed across courses. For instance, first-year writing students may chart their experiences (or lack of) with GenAI tools and their perceptions of them within college, analyze several course syllabi policies or assignments for how GenAI is written about (or not), summarize their findings, and evaluate if the rhetoric put forth by the institution or instructors aligns with their own perceptions of GenAI. Perhaps this kind of metacognitive activity—similar to the critical GenAI literacy tasks that Dani Nyikos and Kristie McDuffie describe in the following chapter (see also MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI, 2024b)—is most appropriate for introductory writing courses in which students are trying to come to grips with what GenAI *is* and the disparate, context-dependent expectations that underlie its use across an institution.

Because writing courses and students are not monoliths, we should not take a monolithic approach toward GenAI use within our classrooms. Teaching with GenAI is a versatile practice that shifts depending upon course context. Instead of telling my colleague, *here is how a GenAI assignment can work within your* course, I would first need to ask some questions like:

- What are your course goals, learning outcomes, and assignment aims?
- What prior knowledge and curricular experiences are your students bringing to the course?

- What do you not yet know about your students, and how may these gaps in knowledge affect students' use of technology and GenAI tools?
- How do you foresee GenAI leveraging students' learning and for what ends?

We should think of any GenAI pedagogy in terms of its responsiveness to curricula, contexts, and students and not as a one-size-fits-all method to simply tick teaching-with-GenAI boxes. Afterall, writing and GenAI are rhetorical, always influenced by unique conditions and the humans involved.

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