CHAPTER 8.

# AI-GENERATED READING SUMMARIES ARE ENOUGH

## ✨ *AI TOOLS CAN RHETORICALLY SUPPORT BUT NOT REPLACE READING*

**Christopher Eaton**
University of Toronto Mississauga

A convenience of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is that we now have summaries at our fingertips. Have something to read? Drop it into a pdf summarizer (like Consensus, PopAI, ChatPDF, or Adobe) and voilà! A summarized version of that reading appears. Google's new NotebookLM podcast feature takes this one step further, offering to summarize and synthesize texts (e.g., PDFs, YouTube videos, slides) into a podcast. But using the summary to speed up or replace reading altogether is a mistake. Reading is not a task that writers must simply complete. Reading is the means through which writers make connections between new ideas.

I learned about GenAI summaries through experiences with former students, including 35 interviews and seven focus groups (see Eaton, 2024). I also put the connections between GenAI and reading into practice in projects with four other students. And, in recent semesters, I have seen these ideas evolve in my classrooms as students apply GenAI summaries in novel ways.

These interactions taught me two things about how GenAI summaries affect student learning. The first is that GenAI summaries provide only a fragmented understanding of the reading in the sense that it provides a highlight of major points but may miss some of the nuances that lead to those points, such as important methodological procedures, useful engagements with the scholarly conversation, or unique applications of a concept and why they differ from previous uses. This can undermine the reason for reading in the first place: making connections. The second is that, despite this risk, GenAI summaries can be a remarkable complementary tool to support reading practices. When used judiciously, GenAI summaries can help writers engage rhetorically with readings

DOI: https://doi.org/1010.37514/PER-B.2026.2777.2.08 

and make deeper connections with concepts. Students can maximize their use of GenAI-generated summaries if they understand how to avoid potential pitfalls. On the flip side of the pedagogical relationship, teachers who understand how GenAI summaries can promote rhetorical reading practices can develop teaching practices to help their students become better readers, writers, and researchers.

The best way to think about using GenAI summaries effectively is this: readers must read the text first. Familiarity with a text is the best starting point for making connections. Rather than replacing reading practices, GenAI summaries are most useful when they add a layer to how one reads. This added layer can formulate connections that allow writers to join and contribute to the conversations they read. In doing so, they put themselves in a position to build knowledge in their disciplines.

## BAD IDEA

Students who use GenAI summaries walk a fine line between using the summary to support their learning and having it fragment their understanding. GenAI summaries have also emerged at a time when reading practices were already challenged. Annie Del Principe and Rachel Ihara (2016) found that student engagement with reading and implementing research for writing was fragmented. Sandra Jamieson and Rebecca Moore Howard (2013) found that students were often drawing source information from the first two pages of a reading. They questioned whether learners understood the value of reading the entire source. Scholarship from Geoffrey Desa et al. (2020) and Thomas W. Bean et al. (2018) noted a decline in the amount and depth of student reading practices.

Time is often a motivation for generating GenAI summaries. Running short on time in a busy week? Get a summary of class readings so you at least have an idea going into class. Have a paper deadline looming? Summarize some articles so at least you can include source material. The desire for a shortcut is understandable. But reading well and making meaningful connections has no shortcut. If reading is to be more productive, adding a GenAI summary into one's reading practices should increase how long it takes to read a source. It adds a dimension to reading, and readers need to lend the reading and the summary the time and space they require.

Another use of GenAI summaries is to simplify language. On the surface, this approach seems promising because it can make complex academic ideas more accessible. This is somewhat true. However, this is where the accuracy of GenAI summaries comes into question. The summaries, by design, are broad and general. Many disciplinary concepts are nuanced and complex. For example, one of my projects with students involved comparing GenAI summaries to their

underlying contexts. One article we compared was Elizabeth Wardle's (2004) discussion of authority in discourse communities. The GenAI summaries generated all captured important points: authority is bestowed by the community, it can just as easily be removed by the community, and it is continually negotiated. The summaries did not explain how much authority depends upon connecting discourse and action: authority is not simply advancing in a hierarchy; it involves the ability to speak and be heard and apply the discursive practices of the community. Without this context, learners cannot properly apply authority as a concept in their writing.

Relying on GenAI summary means nuances can get overlooked. In turn, someone's ability to apply a concept will be hindered by a spotty understanding of the concept itself. Moreover, because AI summaries are isolated from other parts of the research conversation, simplifying a concept could mean missing conceptual connections to other readings.

Some writers use GenAI summaries like an expansive abstract. For example, my first-year writing classes require research on genre and transfer for our final project. The summary can help readers gauge how these terms are addressed in the article. If the summary does not emphasize these terms or presents them in a way that does not align with the assignment context, writers could opt to look elsewhere. If the summary makes these connections, writers would know that the resource warranted a deeper look. This approach sounds logical. However, it assumes that the GenAI summary targeted or represented keywords in the way the reader/writer required. Because GenAI summaries are disconnected from social contexts, there is a risk that using the summary this way may not work.

## GENERATIVE IDEA

So how can GenAI summaries be used well? A deeper understanding of why writers read and the connection between reading and writing can offer a starting point for using GenAI-generated summaries productively. To model how the connections a reader makes apply to building new knowledge through writing, I'm going to connect what I've read to make my own contribution to the conversation around reading practices.

Reading and writing are interconnected practices. Patrick Sullivan et al. (2023) highlighted how intertwined reading and writing are for knowledge making. Ellen c. Carillo (2017) noted that students who learn to read and write simultaneously become better writers. Jennifer Baird Giordano et al. (2023) emphasized how student readers must move beyond the basic features of a text. When a writer reads an article or chapter, they join the conversation with the ideas in the article. They process the ideas, ask questions, react to the readings,

and formulate their own ideas. They then connect these reactions, questions, and ideas to other readings. This allows them to synthesize ideas and apply them in new ways for the context in which they write.

With this knowledge, it becomes easier to think about how GenAI summaries can be applied to make reading more effective. The most beneficial reading practices emphasize the link between reading and writing. As Angela Laflen (2026) and Leslie Allison et al. (2026) outline, engaging rhetorically with sources can help evaluate their credibility and make connections between their ideas. Strong reading practices can help readers formulate connections with what they read that move beyond the surface level idea of the text. These connections can also help them make associations between different texts so that readers can recognize and join the wider conversation. Ideally, a reader will include GenAI summaries in their reading practices to help them reinforce their understanding, facilitate connections, and move beyond a surface-level understanding of what they read.

Below are two ways that GenAI summaries can accomplish these goals.

## GENAI SUMMARIES FOR TRIANGULATION

GenAI summaries can serve as a triangulation tool. A GenAI summary alone can create a fragmented understanding of a text. But, when used in conjunction with one's own reading, GenAI summaries can add a useful dimension that enhances reading practices. Two examples highlight this approach in action. The first is clarifying jargon. Depending on a GenAI summary alone can lead to a surface-level or an incorrect understanding of key concepts. If a reader reads through an article first, they develop an understanding of how concepts and terms are used; they grasp the context and general argument around the concept. GenAI summaries can complement this reading because they can simplify the language. Readers who have a grasp on the text will be better positioned to recognize moments where the summary captures the context well and where it misses the mark. The summary does not replace reading or mitigate the necessity to re-read. Rather, the GenAI summary supports understanding by helping readers triangulate with other dimensions of their reading, such as the abstract, the keywords, their own knowledge of the text, and knowledge gained through prior reading.

## GETTING INTO CONVERSATION

AI summaries can also facilitate rhetorical reading. Bean et al. (2018) emphasized the need for writers to get in conversation with what they read. Rhetorical reading could help readers develop a deeper understanding of a text. For example, readers

may generate a summary of an article after their initial reading of the text. Instead of generating a summary of the whole text, they could generate a section-by-section summary of the text. Taken one step further, they could develop summaries of individual sections and then develop summaries of those sections combined to see what is gained/synthesized and lost in the summary process. They could also capitalize on the generative components of some AI tools to ask questions about how sections relate to each other. For example, they could ask the following questions of an academic article: how do the source engagements in the literature review relate to the article's findings and discussions? How do these findings advance the scholarly conversation on this topic? How do the findings relate to the article's research question(s)? What gaps in the scholarly conversation remain, and how might future research build on the findings in this article to address those gaps?

In doing so, readers begin to weigh GenAI output with their own understanding of the text. They may adopt the AI output as a complement to their own understanding. They may equally reject that output. Even in these cases, readers are enhancing their knowledge because their own understanding guides how they engage with the text. The process of formulating and asking questions of GenAI summaries helps readers build knowledge and formulate connections with what is read.

## CONCLUSION

AI summaries can be a remarkable complementary tool to support reading, so long as they do not replace the reading practices that encourage connections. Summaries are most beneficial when they are used as another avenue to develop a deep understanding of a text. When used as a shortcut, AI summaries can hinder learning. When used as an element to encourage connections between ideas and between parts of the conversation, these summaries can help readers connect what they read to what they write.

## REFERENCES

Bean, T. W., Gregory, K., & Dunkerly-Bean, J. (2018). Disciplinary reading. In R. F. Flippo & T. W. Bean (Eds.), *Handbook of college reading and study strategy research* (3rd ed., pp. 89-97). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315629810

Carillo, E. C. (2017). Reading and writing are not connected. In C. E. Ball & D. M. Loewe (Eds.), *Bad ideas about writing* (pp. 38-43). West Virginia University Libraries. https://textbooks.lib.wvu.edu/badideas/badideasaboutwriting-book.pdf

Del Principe, A. & Ihara, R. (2016). "I bought the book and I didn't need it": What reading looks like at an urban community college. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 43*(3), 229-244. https://doi.org/10.58680/tetyc201628374

Desa, G., Howard, P., Gorzycki, M., & Allen, D. (2020). Essential but invisible: Collegiate academic reading explored from the faculty perspective. *College Teaching, 68*(3), 126-137. https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2020.1766406

Eaton, C. (2024). The AI reading conundrum and its implications for pedagogy. *Double Helix: A Journal of Writing and Critical Thinking, 12*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.37514/DBH-J.2024.12.1.03

Giordano, J. B., Hassel, H., Heinert, J., & Phillips, C. (2023). *Reaching all writers: A pedagogical guide for evolving college writing classrooms*. Utah State University Press. https://upcolorado.com/utah-state-university-press/reaching-all-writers

Jamieson, S., & Howard, R. M. (2013). Sentence-mining: Uncovering the amount of reading and reading comprehension in college writers' researched writing. In R. McClure & J. P. Purdy (Eds.), *The new digital scholar: Exploring and enriching the research and writing practices of nextgen students*. Information Today. https://sandrajamieson.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/jamieson-sandra-rebecca-moore-howard-newdigitalscholar-ch5.pdf

Sullivan, P., Tinberg, H., & Blau, S. (Eds.). (2023). *Deep reading, deep learning: Deep reading volume 2*. Peter Lang.

Wardle, E. (2004). Identity, authority, and learning to write in new workplaces. *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, And Culture, 5*(2). https://www.enculturation.net/5_2/pdf/wardle.pdf