

PREFACE

Drew M. Loewe

St. Edward's University

As anyone reading this knows, writing tools based on large language models (generative artificial intelligence, or GenAI) have put enormous pressure on nearly every area of the field of writing studies. Core ideas about invention, originality, process, source evaluation, voice, assessment, critical thinking, and feedback have all been challenged since the release of ChatGPT in late 2022. The so-called age of GenAI started just a few years ago, but the relentless pace of change has made it feel like a lifetime. As my university's Faculty Fellow for Generative AI in the Classroom last year, I struggled even to keep up with breakthroughs that were announced seemingly every week, let alone to curate and communicate about resources and support for faculty. Few issues are more urgent for those researching and teaching writing than grappling with the challenges and opportunities of GenAI.

Generative AI is the most disruptive literacy technology to date. It challenges many of the foundations of how we educate individuals to be effective, ethical users of discourse. Richard Lanham's "'Q' Question" (1988)—whether rhetorical education cultivates ethical and civic virtue—takes on new urgency when GenAI impinges on rhetorical agency itself. New literacy technologies have historically triggered hype cycles, skepticism about authorship and originality, reactionary responses, and unevenly distributed benefits. The status quo exerts inertia, but upheavals often create the conditions for succumbing to “the politician's fallacy.” Something must be done, this something; therefore, this must be done. Certainly, ed-tech vendors and the teacher-training industry stand ready to sell various forms of doing something, such as GenAI detectors or so-called personalized tutors. While cognitive offloading to GenAI weakens deep learning, outright bans may reinforce common narratives that humanistic liberal education is obsolete. If left unchallenged, those narratives may accelerate the current push for austerity, lessen institutional support for writing education, and worsen already poor labor conditions.

So, what are instructors, students, administrators, parents, and the public to do in the face of what is, in essence, a massive, real-time experiment into which we have all been conscripted by the likes of OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, and Meta? One good answer is to turn to this collection. This collection avoids being all “pro” or “con”; instead, the contributors take warranted positions and create useful dissensus, focusing on what is currently known and what still needs to be explored. Nobody here pretends to write the last word, which is crucial because confident pronouncements

about GenAI have a short shelf life. Instead, the contributors urge us to see many facets of how GenAI might harm or help writing education. They offer concrete suggestions for both resisting intrusions into human-centered learning and exploring its potential to augment teaching where appropriate. They seek not merely to debunk but to provide alternatives—paths forward that are both critical and constructive. In short, they model the habits of mind that we want our students to develop—durable habits that will weather and adapt to whatever technologies emerge.

This collection extends the work of the earlier collection, *Bad Ideas About Writing* (2017), which I had the pleasure of co-editing with the inimitable Cheryl Ball. As in the earlier collection, the contributors reach beyond scholarly circles to offer wider audiences accessible, research-backed arguments about writing instruction from experts in writing studies. As with any academic field, our conferences and journals serve important roles for us as members of a discipline. But parents, administrators, other educators, employers, policymakers, and the public don't read our articles or attend our panels. These groups all continue to have important stakes in writing and writing instruction; what's more, they have also been drawn into the GenAI experiment right along with us and our students. So the spirit and purpose of the earlier collection is well-served by this one. Indeed, many issues the earlier contributors addressed, such as machinic feedback, fixed genres and structures, the role of required composition courses, efficiency's promises and perils, and surveillance of student writing (to name a few) are even more urgent now that generative AI can produce rivers of "good enough" prose on demand.

This will probably not be the final *Bad Ideas* collection, since bad ideas about literacy instruction both endure and evolve. Just as the first book led to this one, later volumes will be needed as writing, technology, policy, and education develop together. Addressing myths and reaffirming human responsibility in making meaning is ongoing work. I hope this collection will have even greater uptake than *Bad Ideas About Writing* has enjoyed and that its open-access format enables contributors, students, and others to build on, challenge, and reframe these arguments as technologies evolve.

Reading this timely, useful collection is a good idea. Sharing it with others and using it to enhance writing instruction in your particular context are even better ideas.

REFERENCES

- Ball, C. E., & Loewe, D. M. (2017). *Bad ideas about writing*. West Virginia Libraries Digital Publishing Institute.
- Lanham, R. A. (1988). The "Q" question. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 87(4), 653–700. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-87-4-653>