Chapter 4
Developing AI-Powered Prompts for First-Year Writing Courses

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores integrating generative AI tools in first-year writing courses, proposing a dual framework for balanced AI integration and AI literacy development. It addresses the challenges that come from the widespread student use of AI tools and presents new approaches to assessment design. The dual framework can help educators create AI-powered assessments that enhance learning outcomes, promote critical thinking, and build student confidence. A case study on thesis development illustrates how AI can be used to teach foundational writing skills while developing AI literacy. The chapter argues for a transformation of writing instruction that prepares students by instilling both discipline specific skills and critical AI skills. This approach turns potential challenges into opportunities for deeper learning, and positions AI as a tool rather than a replacement for human skills. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications for educational practice, curriculum redesign, instructor training, and assessment methods.

INTRODUCTION

Let's start with a shocking headline that is no longer all that shocking: Students are using generative AI to complete coursework. In fact, the tenor of discourse in higher education makes it seem as if students are outsourcing their coursework

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entirely. While a pervasive “detect and report” mentality exists regarding the use of gen AI in many spaces, there is a growing call to explore collaborating with this new technology and incorporating it more fully into the core teaching and learning of courses. If students are using generative AI, an opportunity exists for educators to model a more effective usage guided by pillars designed to ground students in a deeper understanding of the tool and then focus on course-specific assignments and activities.

By cultivating an understanding of generative AI's capabilities and limitations, instructors can thoughtfully integrate these tools to enhance learning experiences. This balanced approach empowers students to blend AI assistance with their own authentic voices, unlocking new levels of creativity and insight.

However, maintaining a commitment to traditional assessment values can cultivate higher-order cognitive skills that machines cannot replicate. Through this balanced synthesis, AI becomes a force that enhances human skill. Educators who adopt this perspective will equip learners with the necessary skills to navigate an AI-augmented landscape, using technology effectively while preserving independent thought and reasoning. This AI-literate approach paves the way for a future where human ingenuity reaches new heights, powered by the collaboration of artificial and human intelligence.

AI tools can enhance personalized learning by tailoring content to individual student needs and learning styles (Qadir, 2022). Their increased use may shift traditional educational practices towards more interactive and collaborative experiences. Despite these advancements, classical human skills like critical thinking and problem-solving remain essential for effective technology use. Developing assessments that use AI may be one way to demonstrate effective usage and guide students to course-specific learning outcomes and toward a balanced usage of AI. To do so, we must first understand the primary motivations behind students' use of generative AI. We can tailor an assessment design that best supports students by identifying these needs and perspectives.

Background

As generative AI tools like ChatGPT have surged into mainstream accessibility, their appeal to first-year students is multifaceted. Several key factors influence these novice learners' intentions to engage with AI-powered platforms, aligning with their unique needs and challenges in the foundational year.

Chowdhury Niloy et al. (2024) identified some significant drivers of student use. Two of these most applicable to a discussion of first-year students are accessibility and educational impact. The availability of free AI resources immediately lowers