



## On ChatGPT

Mary Beth Simmons, Senior Director of the Villanova University Writing Center

When Open AI launched ChatGPT on November 30th, 2022, higher education was in that pocket of time after Thanksgiving and the rush to finals and then higher ed hibernation, otherwise known as winter break. While a Princeton undergraduate was spending the holidays creating GPTZero, software that could detect whether something was written by a human or A.I., most faculty and students were lost in the leisurely pursuits of Netflix viewing, gift wrapping, and sleeping in.



January came roaring in with alerts from various fronts that the sky was falling, and essay writing was dead.

Here are some things to consider and possibly implement:

- **Invite students into the conversation.** Type the class's next writing assignment into ChatGPT and watch together as it generates a response. Have students analyze the response and judge its college-worthiness. Oftentimes students will comment the response is "generic," "repetitive," and "voiceless." Across disciplines, ChatGPT's output is grammatically correct and sound. But usually, flavorless.
- **Write prompts which require a personal voice.** If the assignment calls for a personal voice in the writing, ChatGPT spits out, "As an A.I. generator, I do not have a personal opinion on this text." The first person "I" has long been acknowledged as a legitimate academic voice and now is the time to ask our students to use it.
- **Write prompts that are highly specific** and ask students to quote the professor and fellow students from class discussions. ChatGPT can layer in quotations from Hemingway, but it can't quote Professor Smith and classmates' discussion contributions.
- **Consider using ChatGPT as a site for brainstorming.** Just as some faculty suggest students consult SparkNotes to better understand the plots and characters of a novel, use ChatGPT as a teaching tool. This is the "don't embrace, but don't ignore" approach to the technology. Talk to any coder and they say that the technology now is great, if somewhat flawed, but ChatGPT (and other A.I. generators) will only improve with time. Like the calculator, it is with us and not leaving.



Seek out various professional organizations and see what statements they have published regarding ChatGPT.

The Association for Writing Across the Curriculum released theirs' on January 30, 2023:

"As scholars in the discipline of writing studies more fully explore the practical and ethical implications of A.I. language

generators in classroom and other settings, we underscore this: Writing to learn is an intellectual activity that is crucial to the cognitive and social development of learners and writers. This vital activity cannot be replaced by A.I. language generators."

As we all know, new developments, questions, and concerns about A.I. generators are happening every day. Keep following your trusted news sources. [Inside Higher Ed](#) and [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) are both following this closely with excellent reportage.

The title for this issue of VITALITY was inspired by Michel de Montaigne, the brilliant French essayist from the 1500's. Often titling his essays, "On (insert topic)" allowed him to explore his thoughts on several matters that interested him. (Friendship, education, his occasional heartburn when he ate radishes, just to name a few.) We know the French verb *essayer* means "to try." And isn't that what we are asking our students? Try to become the best version of your human self in this educational journey through knowledge and communication. And this effort can only truly be achieved if students develop their own critical and creative thinking selves.

*How have you worked with ChatGPT in your courses? How have you engaged with students around ChatGPT? What instructional opportunities has it afforded you?*

Share your experiences and practices by [e-mailing](#) VITAL so we can continue the conversation in the next issue.

Upcoming: Villanova Faculty Forum on ChatGPT, April.

Issue Date: March 2023

Resources:

McMurtrie, B. (2023, March 6). ChatGPT is already upending campus practices. Colleges are rushing to respond. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from [https://www.chronicle.com/article/chatgpt-is-already-upending-campus-practices-colleges-are-rushing-to-respond?utm\\_source=Iterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=campaign\\_6331762\\_nl\\_Daily-Briefing\\_date\\_20230307&cid=db&source=ams&sourceid=](https://www.chronicle.com/article/chatgpt-is-already-upending-campus-practices-colleges-are-rushing-to-respond?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_6331762_nl_Daily-Briefing_date_20230307&cid=db&source=ams&sourceid=)

Prochaska, E. (2023, January 23). Embrace the bot. Designing writing assignments in the face of AI. Faculty Focus. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/embrace-the-bot-designing-writing-assignments-in-the-face-of-ai/>

University members react to ChatGPT on campus. Villanovan, February 8, 2023. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://villanovan.com/22175/news/university-members-react-to-chatgpt-on-campus/>

Will ChatGPT change the way you teach? Chronicle Teaching Newsletter, January 5, 2023. Retrieved March 14, 2023, from <https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/teaching/2023-01-05>