Beyond the Bots: Writing Support in the Age of AI

Raise Your Hand if You Use AI at Work or Home

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We Don’t Always “See” the GenAI Around Us

Example:
When Liz was making this slide about the predictive text feature embedded in her phone’s email app, PowerPoint offered several design choices that worked with UVM’s templates.

How Does GenAI Work?
• GenAI relies on large language models (LLMs)—a type of trained machine learning that first gathers massive amounts of text
• LLMs mine up text as many sources as possible and deploy predictive algorithms to generate “new” sentences that follow grammatical and mechanical conventions.
• The result is typically a less-complete language, often devoid of personalities.
• GenAI’s sentences are prone to “hallucinations,” presentations of factually inaccurate material or grammatically correct nonsense.
• They also make users vulnerable to plagiarism, because they can drop pre-existing work into their texts whole-cloth without citation.
• Like many digital tools, GenAI offers both benefits and drawbacks.

What Does GenAI Have to do with Writing Centers?
• GenAI is sometimes described as a potential replacement for human student support.
• In the Writing Centers, we believe GenAI cannot replace the work of peer-to-peer learning.
• However, this does not mean that there is no place for GenAI in the Writing Center.
• Writing Centers can play a role in helping students:
  • Develop a metacognitive awareness of their writing processes
  • Build flexible writing strategies
  • Shape rhetorical awareness
  • Improve citation practices
  • Learn to use AI tools ethically

GenAI and Writers: Uses
• A starting point or prompt generator
• A grammar assistant
• A translation aid
• An editing tool for specific challenges
• A boilerplate language generator

GenAI and Writing Tutors: What We Train Them To Do
• Follow instructor guidelines and policies for GenAI
• Approve GenAI tools as orthogonally related to client goals, acknowledging potential and respective affordances
• Librarians explain why and how they have used GenAI
• Ask writers to explain their understanding of the tools’ benefits and limitations
• Encourage writers to explore their own interactions with GenAI tools
• Model critical thinking around GenAI tools
• Encourage writers that humans can use things differently (LLMs)
• Recognize “hallucinations” and correct errors in logic or reasoning
• Remind writers that humans can use things differently (LLMs)
• Remind writers to consider audience, context, meaning

Connecting Students to the Writing Centers
• Point them to our websites or encourage them to drop in.
• Walk them through registering for an account in our system.
• Talk about the value of peer-to-peer support for all writers.
• Explain that we build accessibility into our services:
  • In-person & online services
  • A space packed with resources for all learners
  • Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach
  • Guides to genres, citation styles, common challenges
• Recommend potential tutors and consultants!

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