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# From Résumés to Surveys: GenAI in the Professional Communication Classroom

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Back in 2023, one of my students asked if I'd be interested in being an interview subject for an article they were writing about AI integration in the classroom. As we had been talking about depictions of AI in horror films just the week before, I presumed they were looking for an apocalyptic take that leaned into the existential dread of it all. As it turns out, however, they wanted the thoughts of someone who teaches writing: what did these tools mean for my field? This was the first time I seriously began to question if and how GenAI could potentially be integrated into the classroom: what would it mean for the creative process, and what could it do to help struggling students? The following semester, I began low-level discussions about these tools in my professional communications classes, at which point it became increasingly clear that students didn't want to just briefly touch on the ethical questions raised by these tools; they wanted to actively explore playing around with them in a safe space. Thus began my full integration of these tools into the classroom.

Specifically, in Fall 2024, I piloted the integration of GenAI across English 462 and 463, Technical Communications and Business Writing, respectively. I specifically chose these classes for two reasons: 1) they are aimed at upperclassmen, and 2) they are explicitly focused on writing needs in the professional world, which is already expecting new hires to use these tools. Over the past academic year, I've integrated these tools into a combined four sections of these classes, three taught for our Honors College and one online. We began the semester with a week-long conversation about perceptions and use of GenAI in both daily life and the wider culture: for example, debating the extent to which our negative view of AI is caused by the prevalence of dystopian Sci-Fi, asking how these tools call into question our understanding of authorship, and discussing what regulations at both the national and university level could look like. Following this discussion, students researched and presented on how these tools are perceived and used in their future professions, as we leaned into the professional communications side of our time together. All semester long, students were encouraged to bring in current examples of GenAI tools being used in the professional realm to be used as case studies: why did the organization decide to use these tools, was their use ethical and effective, and what could have been done differently? The point is *never* to point at faulty tool use and laugh at the company but to ask what was lost and gained by this GenAI implementation and how it could be improved.

It is my belief that GenAI is best approached academically as a tool: something that can improve our ability to get tasks done, *not* replace our ability to complete those tasks. A vital element of a tool, then, is deciding when to - and when not to - use it. As such, the guiding principle of these classes is student choice. Students have full freedom to use whatever tools they want in whatever way they want. This goes from basic in-class writing work all the way up to our four major assignments. Obviously, this freedom wouldn't work without a significant degree of accountability. Every major assignment includes an extensive written reflection that, among other things, asks students about what tools, if any, they used, the prompt(s) used, and how much AI generated work remained. Not only does this increase student agency in the classroom, but it also helps break a single-minded focus on base requirements, allowing for more thoughtful submissions.

To take résumé writing, for example, when students are less preoccupied with the stressors of cutting their document down to fit one page - because they can use a tool to aid concision - they can instead focus on what is included on that page, why they are placing some experiences above others, and how they can better adapt it for their audience's specific needs. For another example, a student working on a complaint adjustment can utilize GenAI to ensure they aren't breaking strict company policy, freeing them to better focus on tone and word choice, elements that otherwise can get neglected. The most important element, though, is that while they *can* use GenAI, they are by no means *required* to: it is a way for students to work around the areas of composition that are causing them the most anxiety, and to work out where they should *instead* focus their energies.

The non-judgmental choice approach gives students more agency, letting them approach material in the way they see fit. In Fall 2024, for example, 7 of 36 students chose to never use any GenAI tool, while 7 used the tools for all major assignments. As long as the student reflected on their decisions around these tools, I did not factor tool-use into grading to avoid implying that *that* specific decision was the deciding factor in how they were doing in our class. Instead, they were treated as any other writing aid would be, similar to how use of a résumé template or spellcheck shouldn't be factored into grading.

Because these classes are built around student choice, I didn't require *or* restrict the use of any specific tool. That said, GPT is the clear tool of choice for most students, being used for 103 different submissions between Fall and Spring. Beyond this, 10 submissions reported using Grammarly, 7 Gemini, 3 Quilbot, 2 SnapChat AI, and 2 Co-Pilot. The way tools were used changed based on the assignment: for our résumé, students mostly used GPT for concision purposes, while for our business proposal, numerous submissions included AI-generated logos and other 'art' intended to promote their project. The assignment the fewest students used tools for across both semesters was composing a campus-wide survey, as they reported not seeing how the tools could help. More notably, perhaps, students reported feeling most reluctant to use tools to aid more personal writing, with far less issue using them for more abstract assignments. This reluctance is partially why I don't foresee ever fully requiring the use of GenAI tools in assignments: students

shouldn't be forced to feel uncomfortable by the means through which they complete coursework (note: this is very different to not challenging students with potentially uncomfortable material).

Across these submissions, one fact remains clear to me: there is no one tool that is guaranteed to help or hinder; it just comes down to how the student uses it. Furthermore, in their current form at least, these tools are *not* a replacement for the human at the heart of writing: their implementation is still ultimately only as strong as the student who is utilizing them. To reiterate, there was no notable grade distinction between students who used GenAI tools and those who did not. In other words, a student who would earn a C because they rushed their work is *still* going to earn that C as they did not utilize GenAI with any care; similarly, a student who would carefully revise their work and receive an A will use GenAI with that same level of care, and *still* receive that A. Indeed, across Fall semester, there was a proportionally equal number of A/B/C grades for students who did and didn't use GenAI tools. It was this discovery that made me so positive about continuing my open approach to tool use in this current semester, and while we still have a number of weeks left, the results are heavily leaning towards being the same. All of this to say, if these tools help a student, that's an objectively good thing, and if they choose not to use them, that should be *their* choice to make.

Moving forward, I plan to continue this open approach to GenAI implementation. Students have been vocal about liking it, and the benefits stated above greatly outweigh the 'negative' of having additional writing to read and respond to like the extensive reflections discussed above, which are a genuine joy to read. Furthermore, I am currently trialing an iteration of these reflections in a section of first-year English (FYE). This implementation has led to frank discussions with freshmen about why just blindly submitting a heavily generated project will *not* work at this level, which is far more productive than just saying "don't do it," and has seen a strengthening of grades. Will my implementation in this FYE class evolve beyond here? To be determined.

My advice to fellow instructors, then, is to give students a chance: is it not better to give students a safe space to experiment with these tools in a way that holds them accountable than to fully ban their use, and thus not prepare students for how fallible these tools ultimately can be?