Embracing Change: Reimagining Curriculum and Assessment for AI Literacy in Higher Education Writing

Hala Sun
Michigan State University

"When ChatGPT first came out…" is a conversation-starter phrase about which many educators have a lot to say, especially in the writing field. As a writing instructor, I still recall when, before the end of the semester in November 2022, I noticed that my students' writing dramatically improved in their revised drafts prior to their final project submission. Out of "curiosity," with a mixture of doubts and faint hope, I created a spontaneous group work activity, asking them to reflect and present on what they consider to be good writing in their discipline. They had just completed their writing on this topic, so I assumed (and hoped) that, as a group, they would reflect on the similarities and/or differences in their discipline and create a few slides. Yet, to my dismay, almost all groups presented the same three-bullet-point presentation. At the time, I wondered if their seemingly collective decision to use ChatGPT for this non-graded activity was due to it being a last-minute task, hence needing support, or because the task was not challenging enough, they turned to a free new tool out of convenience to quickly do a mundane task, or perhaps out of curiosity. Nevertheless, it was a moment of blended emotions when everyone in the classroom realized their reliance on a tool. Some seemed shocked, some thought it was funny, and some looked embarrassed. For me, I not only felt disappointed, but was alarmed, realizing the need to revise my curriculum and assessment materials without further delay.

Realizing the need to revise materials is one thing, but actually finding time and navigating how to revise—with limited resources and knowledge, not to mention ChatGPT's fast-paced upgrades—was challenging. Having once been told that the only humans who like "change" are babies (as in "diaper change"), I was not enthused about revising my materials, especially since, just a couple of years ago, we had the pandemic, and that also took a lot of time and effort to make changes.. To successfully transition when faced with the emergence of AI or a pandemic virus, looking back, I relied on the following three pillars—change, confidence, and clarity presented in Figure 1. First, it was important for me to understand the nature of the *change* I was about to face and/or what was required of me. In this case, I had to understand what ChatGPT was and what it could do so that I knew how students were using it. Second, I was only able to build *confidence* to adapt and embrace the changes in my curriculum once I knew I was not the only one struggling and once I found communities of educators

where we all shared our knowledge and resources. Third, *clarity* was much needed at the institution and departmental levels, so that I knew what was expected of me and my students, and so I could clearly communicate to students when to use or avoid generative AI (genAI).

Figure 1

The Three Pillars of Teacher Transition in Critical Times

Transition was not a one-time event; in fact, I still feel I am transitioning as an educator in this genAI-driven era. Initially, I tried to outsmart ChatGPT by making my Word document assignments into images, preventing students from copy-pasting prompts. That did not last long, because very soon, ChatGPT gained the ability to read image files and turned them into texts. That is when I realized that I had to shift my mindset to co-exist with genAI. I reflected on three key areas to transform my teaching, specifically in curriculum and assessment.

1. Explore GenAI as Part of the Curriculum

In one writing project, I had students explore textual genres of both academic and nonacademic texts. Students chose a topic, gathered texts from diverse genres, and analyzed how each genre portrayed the same topic differently, based on genre, purpose, and audience. In my revised writing project, I introduced various genAI tools, asking students to select one and analyze its outputs (and inputs), including textual genre. Since social media posts constitute their own textual genre, I wanted students to learn more about how genAI tools communicate and interact with humans, and how their outputs vary by purpose and audience. I also had students gather diverse academic and nonacademic genres to examine what is being said about their genAI tool choice (see Sun, 2025 for more details).

2. Reframe Assessment with Scaffolding

In a digital age, where students can easily ask a genAI tool to write an entire essay, and considering generation Z students often struggle with longer texts due to exposure to short-form information (Seemiller & Grace, 2016), giving a single prompt, such as "write an essay about X topic," is ineffective. Thus, scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976) is a concept we can adopt into our assessment, as it aims to guide students to engage more deeply, gaining greater agency and independence in the learning process. My approach involved creating "project builders," which are shorter pieces of writing students

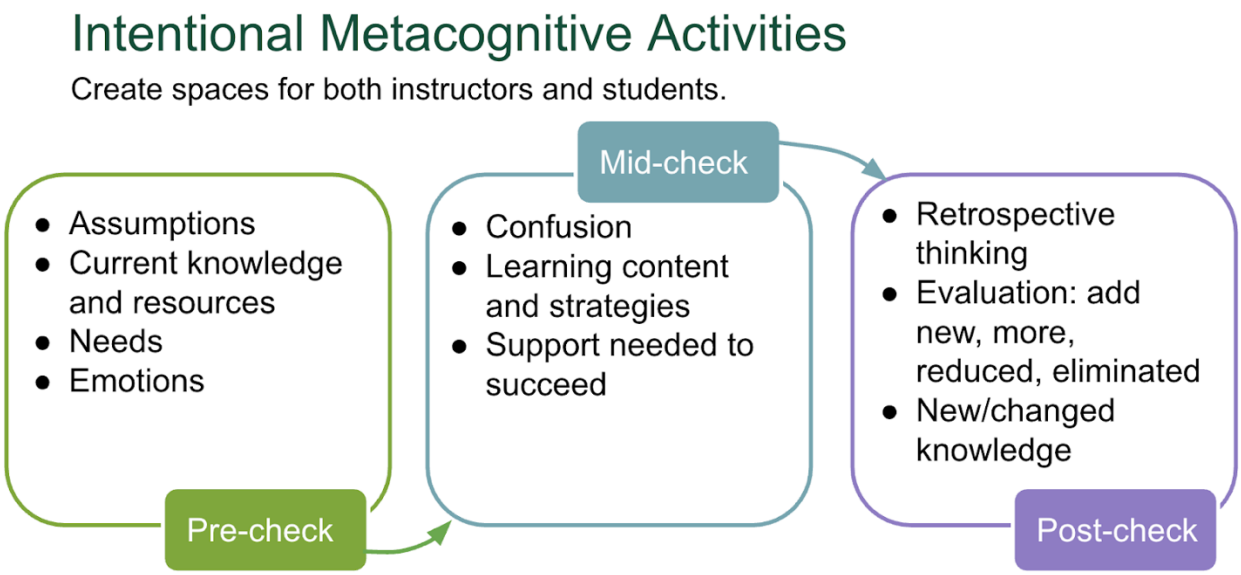
complete before writing the final text, such as freewriting, brainstorming, creating evidence tables, or outlines. The intent is reducing the length of writing in each session to avoid the pressure of "high-risk" writing, but increasing writing frequency. This method has been effective in my writing course, with students self-reporting their decreased reliance on genAI to generate their essays.

3. Increase Active Learning through Intentional Metacognitive Reflection (IMA)

Student engagement was something I took for granted when teaching in person before genAI emerged. Now, with more students using genAI, what concerns me the most is their willingness to engage in critical thinking—or simply think—and produce texts with originality. Aside from scaffolding, another concept that enlightened me in my transition is active learning. According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), active learning involves students "doing things and thinking about what they are doing." With this concept in mind, and inspired by Tanner's work (2012) promoting student metacognition, I created intentional metacognitive activities (or what I refer to as "IMA") throughout lessons and the semester, presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Intentional Metacognitive Activities (IMA)



Through IMA, I built interpersonal relationships with my students, increasing their classroom engagement. Regularly checking students' confusions (about content or assignments) and their emotions—including frustrations or overwhelm—provided students opportunities to resolve confusions. Students reported feeling better prepared to apply their learning without relying on genAI. Additionally, I asked students to write metacognitive reflections, not to simply look back on what they did, but to evaluate their own process work (rather than final output). Students reflected on three areas: (1) How and why they wrote as they did; (2) What led to their choice of evidence; and (3) Their writing process, including the rhetorical choices they made and the argumentation strategies they took.

There are no right or wrong answers for transitioning as educators. However, we cannot ignore that our students are actively using genAI in their learning. In these critical times, I remain committed to exploring new possibilities, re-examining my curriculum and assessment approaches, and continuously reflecting on my needs as an educator. By embracing change with curiosity and intentionality, we can empower ourselves and our students to thrive in this evolving educational landscape.

Looking ahead, I have come to see change not just as something to manage, but something to engage with—openly and reflectively. One thing that helped me in this journey was connecting with fellow educators. Sharing frustrations, ideas, and small wins reminded me that I am not alone, and that we are all figuring this out together. It is not about having perfect answers; it is about staying curious and staying in conversation.

At the same time, clarity and support at the institutional level matter. When expectations are communicated clearly, I feel more confident making choices for my students—and more equipped to teach them how to navigate this space with integrity. GenAI does not replace what we do; it challenges us to think more deeply about why we teach the way we do. And in that challenge, there is also an opportunity to grow, together.

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