

OPINION

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CARROLL COLLEGE

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| | AI may be used for both idea creation and writing production, so long as the student takes responsibility for the accuracy and appropriateness of the output. | AI may assist with producing a written text, so long as the ideas are the students' own. |
| | AI may be used for developing ideas but not for writing the actual text. | Both ideas and text must be the students' own work, without consultation or input from AI. |

An AI & Writing classification system, developed by Martin & Roncalli in 2023.

How AI is reshaping writing and teaching

Whenever I hear someone say that AI will make our lives easier, I bite my tongue. As a long-time educator, English teacher, and instructional designer, I often quip that it has done nothing but make my life more complicated. However, that is not a fair or balanced



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assessment of the technology and its impact. After three years of redesigning assignments, coaching faculty, and teaching a 200-level college class AI & Communication, I believe that the worst thing we can do is look away from this topic. For this reason, I am honored to write the first of five pieces by experts from Carroll College, each reflecting on how AI has influenced our work. I would also like to invite you to come to campus tomorrow, Wednesday, Feb. 4, at 7 p.m. for a panel discussion titled, "AI in Society." I will be joined by colleagues and students as we present our perspectives and engage with this topic.

My use of the word "engage" is intentional. Since ChatGPT entered the world, I have spoken to Carroll College faculty each August before classes begin, sharing technological updates and offering a common framework for approaching them.

This year, I was clear; liking or disliking generative AI is irrelevant. It is here; we must engage with it. My second point was far more controversial. "The long-form essay is dead or dying," I declared. I could have said, "Our assumptions about the long-form essay are dead or dying," but I knew that nuance would follow. Throughout the fall semester, I hosted weekly AI working groups, where professors shared newly rebuilt assignments, challenges, and revision ideas. These were the latest step in our three-year engagement with the meaning of writing in the era of generative AI.

In 2023, Dr. Elvira Roncalli (Philosophy) and I created a matrix as a first attempt to classify the possible uses of generative AI in writing. We made separate categories for idea creation and text production, resulting in four boxes of options ranging from NO-NO to YES-YES. We hoped to use these categories to talk to our students about brainstorming and proofreading, outlining and originality. The distinctions were helpful, but the real-life process of writing often doesn't follow linear steps. A writer passes between text production and idea generation many times, so few real-life examples fall neatly into one of the four boxes. In an attempt to make sense of AI, I had tried to make a messy human process as tidy as a prompt engineering

formula. A more fruitful path has been to look at the purpose of writing.

Why do we write? Or why are we assigning writing tasks to students? These have become my go-to questions. We write to summarize, to argue, to work out what we really think. Others write to explore or represent or to prove that we have engaged with an idea thoughtfully, for an extended period. Writing, in all its wonder and frustration, can do many things, but only a few at the same time.

In an age of always-on, on-screen AI "assistance," can writing still serve these purposes? Sometimes and with certain constraints. We cannot assume how students are creating their texts. We must be clear on what our purpose is in every assignment and design for it. I do not believe that AI has destroyed writing, but it has destroyed our easy assumptions about the meaning of writing. There are many forms of writing and there are many things that we can learn from writing, even in the AI-augmented era. Writing is not a unified activity, and neither should our response be.

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