



EAST TENNESSEE STATE
UNIVERSITY

Center for
Teaching Excellence

Circumventing AI: Strategies

Use Experiences

For writing assignments, ask students to relate course content to their own personal experiences.

A note of warning: ChatGPT is capable of writing about generic student experiences (e.g., of a teenager) if it is included in the prompt. There are a few ways to circumnavigate this capability:

- **Ask students to first write about and submit *just* their experience**, to be later used in a more complex written assignment. It is less likely that students will AI-generate a simple narrative of an event about themselves (something most students like to talk about).
- **Provide the experience in your class.** In class or online, provide students with a semi-structured experience that contains some unique characteristics, such as an unexpected twist. For a written assignment, ask students to relate some of the more nuanced aspects of the experience to your course content. One excellent method is to incorporate [Community-Engaged Learning \(CEL\)](#) into your course design; watch our website for developing support materials about this teaching strategy.

Go Deeper with the Task

Currently, AI is incapable of nuanced critique or logic. While this may change, right now most AI-generated content will not do a good job of teasing out complex arguments and supporting them.

To that end, examine your written assignments and see if what you are asking is more basic or complex. A basic assignment might ask for a summary of a reading, or analysis of a well-known work in your field. ChatGPT can easily write to these types of assignment prompts.

Instead, consider requiring students to compare two works, particularly works that may on the surface seem unrelated, but that might have connections at a more sophisticated level. ChatGPT is unlikely to find these connections.

Even better: Online or in class, first ask students to discuss, in small groups, their ideas about how these two works (or concepts, etc.) are related. The discussion around these ideas may animate your class, ensure everyone is hearing about the possibilities, and providing enough scaffolding so that students feel more confident they can approach the writing process successfully.

Work in Stages

For larger written assignments, and particularly those that may require deeper critical thinking skills such as those above, consider breaking down the assignment into stages or drafts, so that you can provide guidance and feedback.

Why this helps:

- Students feel more supported and less at risk of failure when they can submit lower-stakes drafts, and when they receive guidance through feedback. Thus, they are less likely to use other sources to represent as their own work. [See here for ways to more efficiently provide feedback.](#)
- When work is submitted in drafts, it is less likely to be revised using another round of AI (even if the original draft was).

Require Sources

Currently, AI is not terrific at accurate citations. Furthermore, it is likely unable to pull supporting quotations. Consider asking students to cite not just the source but the page number and paragraph (for paraphrased ideas) or to add in supporting quotes from the source (textbook, article, story, poem) as part of the analysis.

This does not guarantee a student will not begin with AI to generate a draft. However, because the student must go back and find the supporting information from the source, and sprinkle in supporting quotations, there is a good likelihood that a lot of learning will occur during this process - perhaps unbeknownst to the student!

Go Old School

One way to ensure students truly know the material you would like them to absorb, analyze, and digest is to have them actively use that material in class:

- **Ask students to bring notes and be prepared for a targeted discussion.** Consider using the "chalk talk" method, wherein students in small groups write their points on a large piece of newsprint or wall post-it note, either in silent discussion or while talking about the topic. Having each student choose their own colored marker (write their names in their color on a corner of the paper) gives a sense of accountability, as you can check who contributed what points.

Online, ask students for an ongoing discussion, using sources with citations and possibly some direct quotes to support their points. Require students to interact with one another: A true back-and-forth discussion is harder to generate with AI.

- **Have students do a writing task in class.** If you need students to summarize and fear they might ChatGPT the response, consider asking them to write about it during class. Pen and paper is one method; monitored typing can be another. Please be mindful of student equity per their access to technology.
- **Require group or individual oral reporting.** When students have to present their understandings orally, they must know and understand their material, whether the report was generated by AI or not. For **online** oral recordings, require that students not read a report, but rather speak to notes. (It's usually easy to tell when they are just reading.)

Consider Alternative Grading

Students are more likely to cheat when they believe their grade is on the line. (Here, we are including under "cheating" the illicit use of AI content generation and representing this as one's own work.)

When assignments are high stakes, with no grace for failure or poor performance, students will decide the risk of getting caught is worth the gain of succeeding on the assignment or in the class.

Alternative grading practices, such as [Specifications Grading](#), [Standards-Based Grading](#), or [Ungrading](#), are ways to structure flexibility into your class and help students focus on the learning (rather than the grade). Typically, these approaches build in opportunities for revision, late work submissions (which could be another reason students use ChatGPT: to meet a deadline), and student choice. Watch for upcoming Toolkits about these approaches!