Supporting Student Agency in the Age of AI



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Every Learner Everywhere is a network of partner organizations with expertise in evaluating, implementing, scaling, and measuring the efficacy of education technologies, curriculum and course design strategies, teaching practices, and support services that personalize instruction for students in blended and online learning environments. Our mission is to partner with institutions to harness digital learning technology, driving innovation in higher education to improve outcomes for every learner. We build capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes with digital learning through direct technical assistance, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institutional practices and market trends. WCET (the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies) and WICHE (the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education) serve as the intermediary organizations for the Every Learner Everywhere Network. For more information about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to advance student success in higher education through digital learning, visit everylearnereverywhere.org.

INTRODUCTION

Very few technologies have affected teaching and learning across as many parts of higher education as generative artificial intelligence (AI). Any discipline or profession that uses words, images, or data has been touched by AI and, in some cases, dramatically changed by it. It is hard for us as educators to keep up with changing AI technologies and the ways they are adopted in our fields. It's even harder for our students to navigate these changes.

All this disruption is stressful for our students. Those who started college before the launch of ChatGPT are finishing school only to enter a very different job market where AI has upended the traditional entry-level job. Other students are confused by course policies banning AI use when AI technologies are increasingly embedded in all the tools they use in their studies. And there are students who are no longer sure why they should be in college at all when it appears that AI can do so much of what they're being taught.

> *We may be anxious about all this disruption, too, but we have a role to play in helping our students learn and thrive in this AI-augmented and -inflected world.* ***This playbook is designed to help us educators understand the complex relationships our students have with AI and to build courses and assignments that empower students to use AI effectively and responsibly—or to avoid its use altogether when that's the better choice.***

Our hope is that the perspectives and practices in this playbook will equip us to make informed, intentional choices about the roles of AI in our courses and, in turn, to support students and their learning in this age of AI.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Derek Bruff is an educator, educational developer, and author. He directed the Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching for more than a decade, where he helped faculty and other instructors develop foundational teaching skills and explore new ideas in teaching. Bruff consults regularly with faculty and administrators across higher education on issues of teaching, learning, and faculty development, and he is currently an associate director at the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Virginia. Bruff has a PhD in mathematics and has taught math courses at Vanderbilt and Harvard University.

Bruff is coauthor with Annette Vee and Marc Watkins of *The Norton Guide to AI-Aware Teaching* (W. W. Norton, 2026) and has written two other books on teaching with technology, *Intentional Tech: Principles to Guide the Use of Educational Technology in College Teaching* (West Virginia University Press, 2019) and *Teaching with Classroom Response Systems: Creating Active Learning Environments* (Jossey-Bass, 2009). He produces the *Intentional Teaching* podcast, which features interviews with creative and effective educators throughout higher ed.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

This playbook has been designed to provide you with strategies for adapting your teaching to account for generative AI technologies in student learning. While the specifics of AI tools are likely to change over time, the teaching principles in this playbook are evergreen and will be useful for guiding your instructional choices even if some example practices become dated.

In this playbook you will find detailed recommendations divided into five sections. Each section provides a summary recommendation, research-based support and explanations for the recommendation, and example teaching practices you can adapt to your teaching context to implement the recommendation. Each section also includes discussion questions you can use to reflect on your own teaching or in conversation with colleagues, perhaps in a faculty learning community using this playbook as a reading. The sections end with links to additional resources we think you'll find useful for further exploration.

This playbook does not provide a general introduction to generative AI technologies. If that would be helpful to you, we recommend "Generative AI Exists Because of the Transformer," a 2023 explainer from the *Financial Times*, and "The Student Guide to Artificial Intelligence" from Elon University and the American Association of Colleges and Universities, an up-to-date tour of AI as it intersects with the student experience.

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1. LISTEN TO YOUR STUDENTS.

> The first step in caring for your students in this age of AI is to listen to them—to find out how they're using AI, when they're avoiding it, and what they think about AI in their learning. The more we understand our students' perspectives on AI, the more we can help them navigate their relationship with AI and achieve the learning outcomes we have set for them in our courses.

When educators started learning about ChatGPT and its AI-powered text generation ability in late 2022, many asked a very sensible question: Are my students using ChatGPT to write the essays and papers I assign in my classes? This led to a cluster of questions about academic integrity, plagiarism, detecting AI-generated text, and course AI policies. As important as these concerns were, though, they framed the conversation about student AI use in education as an "us versus them" struggle, where students use AI to cheat and instructors try to catch them. "Everyone Is Cheating Their Way Through College" went the headline of a *New York Magazine* article by James Walsh in May 2025, reflecting a common assumption.

However, surveys and focus groups of college students paint a much more complex picture. Consider a July 2026 survey by *Inside Higher Ed* of over 1,000 students. Twenty percent of students indicated that they had not used generative AI at all in their coursework over the previous year. And for the students who used AI, they reported different ways of doing so, from learning support like asking questions of an AI like a tutor (60% of students), career readiness like interview prep (43%), and getting support for course projects (41%). When asked for their stance on AI, the most common response was concern that AI is reducing their ability to think independently. This survey and others show that students are using AI in more nuanced ways than some of us feared back in late 2022.

When students are asked how they feel about their AI use, more complexities emerge. Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh conducted focus groups with 95 students in the spring of 2025. They found that students were often reluctant to use AI in their studies, only turning to AI when they were pressed for time or didn't see the relevance of the work (the dreaded "busywork"). Many students had positive experiences with AI, finding it a useful tutor that was less intimidating or more available than some of their professors. Others reported a sense of guilt in using AI, because of environmental or ethical concerns or just feeling like it was the lazy way out, or a sense of frustration at classmates using AI on group projects instead of contributing in more authentic ways.

Studies like these show that students have mixed feelings about the role of AI in their education. If you knew more about how your students were using AI, how would that affect your teaching? Consider how you would respond to a student who says one of the following:

> **It feels like all of my classmates are using AI to get ahead. They're turning in polished papers that only took them twenty minutes to write, and I'm staying up until 3 am working on my assignments. I don't want to undermine my learning by overusing AI, but I think I have to in order to compete. This is stressing me out."**

> **I heard from my cousin who graduated last year that the job market in this major is crashing out right now thanks to AI. He's struggling to find any kind of entry-level job. I don't know what I'll do when I graduate! Am I learning skills that will land me a job? Do I need to know more about using AI so employers will hire me?"**

> **This one prof bans AI in his class, but for someone like me with ADHD, some of these AI tools are super helpful. The idea of reading a ten-page academic article is overwhelming, but if I can listen to an AI audio summary of the thing, I'm much more likely to make sense of it. And don't get me started on how much Goblin Tools helps me plan my week so I get all my work done."**

> **Between my job and my family and my courses, I have too much to do. I want to learn as much as I can in these courses, but some of these take-home assignments are really pointless. If I can get them done quickly using a little AI, I'll have more time for the class projects that actually relate to my career."**

When we listen well to our students, we understand how complex and challenging their lives are. Hopefully, that prompts us to respond with empathy and to teach in ways that are more responsive to their learning needs.

Teaching Practices

National surveys and studies at other institutions shed light on how students in general use and think about generative AI, but your students aren't general students; they are very specific students with their own experiences, identities, and cultures that affect their relationships with AI. What do your students have to say about AI?

Asking students about AI directly can be challenging. Some students can be reluctant to admit to doing something that others might view as cheating, while others might feel judged by their peers if they talk openly about their AI use. Here are three practical strategies for surfacing your students' perspectives on AI that come at the topic indirectly:

Survey your students anonymously.

Early in your course or perhaps just before a major assignment, invite your students to share their views on AI through an anonymous online survey. Ask your students to:

- describe their AI use (what AI tools they use, what they use those tools for, how often they use AI in their studies);
- reflect on their AI use (the ways they find AI useful, the ways they find AI frustrating, the concerns they have about using AI for learning);
- share their experiences in other courses (what AI policies and guidelines they have encountered, which ones they find useful); and
- tell you what they need from you when it comes to the role of AI in your course.

Letting students answer anonymously will make it easier for more students to share. That said, you can also give them the option to include their name with their responses, particularly if they have questions, concerns, or learning needs you can address.

Share the aggregate results with students in a future class session or online module as an invitation to further conversation and a way to help students see where they stand compared to their peers. Just as we can make assumptions about students' views on AI, so can students.



Discuss statistics or essays on student AI use with your students.

Instead of asking them about their own AI use and views, invite your students to respond to some external source on the topic. You could share the results of the *Inside Higher Ed* survey mentioned earlier, a recent piece of journalism on students and AI, an op-ed written by a student for your campus newspaper, or a podcast episode featuring interviews with students about their AI use.

Ask students what resonates in the statistics or stories and what they find surprising. You can use this as a launching point for your students to share about their own use of AI or to comment on how they perceive other students using AI. Ask your students what they think instructors should know about students and AI that *isn't* reflected in the research/article/essay/podcast. You might find out some details of the student culture around AI that are somewhat unique to your campus.

If you run this activity in a synchronous class session, consider polling your students to help them engage with the source (e.g. "Which of the following views on AI reported in this article most aligns with your own view?" or "What percentage of students do you think reported using AI to complete assignments?") before sharing the actual statistics. If you're looking for an asynchronous version of this activity, have students collaboratively annotate the article or podcast episode using a tool like Perusall or Hypothesis. Polling questions and annotation tools make it easier for more students to participate, especially those who are less likely to jump into a classwide discussion.

Ask for an AI transparency statement.

Once your course is running, ask students to disclose how they use AI on the assignments they turn in. One structured way to do this is to provide them with a template for an AI transparency statement.

Kimberly Acquaviva gives her University of Virginia nursing students a list of ways they might use AI on an assignment, from idea generation and outline creation to research support and visual aid creation. Students check off the ways they used AI and list the AI tools they used for each function. Acquaviva reviews the statements as they are submitted, to learn what her students are doing with AI, which allows her to follow up with individual students to learn more about their approaches to AI or to respond to the whole class about patterns she sees in their AI use.

Some instructors prefer to specify for students at the start of an assignment how they can and cannot use AI, but if you're okay for students to use AI in whatever ways they find useful, a transparency statement can be useful for shedding light on students' relationships with AI, particularly if you don't have clear ideas about how AI might be used in your course.

Discussion Questions



1. What do your students tell you about generative AI and learning? What might they not be telling you?
2. What makes it challenging to have open and honest conversations with students about AI in teaching and learning?
3. What questions do you have about students' use of AI? What questions do you hear from your faculty colleagues?
4. What activities or assignments have you used (or heard about) for opening up dialogue with students about AI and learning?

Additional Resources

"**These Students Use AI a Lot—But Not to Cheat.**"

Beth McMurtrie's June 2025 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article reports on comments from more than 100 students about the ways they use generative AI in their coursework, providing concrete examples of a variety of uses.

"**How Do Students Feel about Their AI Use? It's Complicated.**"

In this *Learning Curve* podcast episode from November 2025, reporter Jeff Young teams up with student journalists at the University of Minnesota to interview students about their perspectives on AI.

"**What Happened When I Tried to Replace Myself with ChatGPT in My English Classroom.**"

Piers Gelly's July 2025 essay in *Literary Hub* features his observations about a semester-long experiment in encouraging students to question the value of learning to write when generative AI is readily available.

"**Where AI Meets Accessibility: Considerations for Higher Education.**"

This guide from Every Learner Everywhere and Teach Access provides concrete recommendations for making AI accessible and leveraging AI for increased accessibility and inclusion.



2. LEARN ABOUT AI WITH YOUR STUDENTS.

> We can't prepare our students for a world with AI if we ourselves don't understand AI and its strengths and limitations. We could try to figure it out on our own, but as our students are asking for our help in navigating the challenges and opportunities posed by AI, why not learn about it with them? Through dialogue, transparency, and reflection, we can work together with students to better understand AI and its role in learning.

How can students use generative AI effectively and responsibly to support their learning? That's an important question to ask, but in most parts of higher education we are a long way from finding definitive answers. Let's consider one hypothetical example that shows why this is so hard to do.

Suppose you're teaching a marketing class and one of your goals is to teach students how to write an effective press release for a product launch. You know that marketing professionals are using AI to help them write press releases, so you talk to a few colleagues in the field and ask them about the ways they use AI. There are two possibilities here:

1

You find out that there's no consensus on how AI should be used for such a task. This poses a teaching problem: How can you teach students to use AI well when even the experts haven't figured it out?

2

Your colleagues identify emerging best practices for using AI to write press releases, but all of them involve an experienced marketer reviewing the AI output. This poses a different teaching problem: What do novices in your field need to learn so that they can use AI in expert ways in the future?

How do you respond? You could teach your students to write press releases without AI, but (a) they have ready access to AI tools, making prohibition of AI challenging, and (b) any entry-level marketing job will likely require some AI skills, so you'll need to teach those skills at some point. This leads to the million-dollar question: When and how do you bring AI into the learning process so that it enhances—and doesn't undermine—skill development?

You probably don't teach marketing, but, whatever your field, you're likely facing similar questions. Many industries are still figuring out what to do with generative AI; a McKinsey survey in November 2025 found that two-thirds of organizations are still in the experimentation phase of AI use. Marketing might actually be moving toward best practices, according to a May 2025 Mediaocean report. You might teach in an area that isn't as career-focused as marketing, but your students are undoubtedly thinking about the impact of AI on their future jobs.

As if these questions weren't challenging enough, we also have to contend with the fact that next year's AI technology will likely be different from this year's, given the rapid pace of change in these tools. Even if you know now exactly what AI skills to teach and how to teach them, you will almost certainly have to reevaluate and revise your assignments, courses, and curricula next academic year!

This is why educators find generative AI exhausting. But if we are frustrated at having to update our approach to meet changing AI technologies, our students are likely more so! After all, they're the ones looking ahead to their professional careers, wondering if what they're learning in their coursework now will actually prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow. And most of them want our help in figuring that out. "A clear consensus to emerge among the Student AI Advisors," according to a June 2025 Boston College report, "was that they wanted more open, honest conversations with their professors about how to navigate generative AI responsibly."

Since we (instructors and students) have the same questions about effective and responsible AI use in learning, why not work together to answer them? Look for ways to learn *with students* about generative AI and its applications to your field, building on the conversations you're having by listening to students and anchoring your explorations in your course goals and objectives.

Teaching Practices

What does learning about AI with your students look like in practice? Here are three structures you can use to create these learning experiences for you and your students. Each includes the scaffolding and support that students need to feel confident experimenting with AI and to develop a sense of agency when it comes to working with AI.



Critique the chatbot.

Generative AI is no oracle. Ask an AI chatbot a question, and you'll get an answer but likely an answer with some problems. In a "critique the chatbot" assignment, ask your students to evaluate the output of an AI chatbot when it's given some task relevant to the learning goals of a course. These assignments can help students (and you) explore how AI operates while giving students an opportunity to practice the skills you're teaching them.

For example, in a political science course have your students ask an AI chatbot to theorize why a particular United States Supreme Court justice voted the way they did in a high-profile court case. Ask your students to apply the judicial theories they're learning in your course to evaluate the AI's argument. Does the argument make sense given what we know of the justice's approach to jurisprudence? What did the AI miss in its analysis? Often an AI chatbot will provide a logical argument but miss subtle details of the case in question, which is useful for students to know as they build their own expertise in political science and working with AI.

To design a good "critique the chatbot" exercise, try asking an AI chatbot a variety of questions that come up in your course. You'll likely find that AI excels at some tasks, utterly fails at others, and lands somewhere in the middle for the rest. This is sometimes called the "jagged frontier" of AI capabilities, where AI's ability to complete two tasks that seem similar to us can vary dramatically. Look for tasks in that middle zone where AI has something to offer (like writing in a particular genre or making logical arguments) but doesn't succeed 100 percent (maybe showing problematic biases or attempting to justify a demonstrably incorrect claim). These tasks offer the richest space for students to investigate.

Since AI technologies change rapidly, your "critique the chatbot" assignment from last semester might not work as well this semester, so test your assignment every time you use it. After all, if AI can now ace your task, it makes the critique less useful for your students.



Crowdsource using AI for course-related tasks.

As an in-class activity, select a few tasks where generative AI might or might not be helpful, load up your AI chatbot of choice, and project the interface where your students can see it. Then invite your students to direct your use of the chatbot, to help with each of the tasks.

Start with a relatively easy course-related task, something that you would ask students to do on an early assignment. Invite your students to suggest how to use AI to accomplish the

Crowdsource using AI for course-related tasks. (Continued.)

task, and try out their suggestions using the AI chatbot you selected or some other AI tool suggested by your students. See what they come up with as far as strategies for using AI go, and how far you can get toward accomplishing the given task.

Then repeat the process for harder tasks. Each time, let your students guide your AI use, perhaps by having a few volunteers make suggestions then asking the rest of the class to vote on which suggestion to follow. Optionally, invite your students to progress through the tasks themselves, using their laptops or phones to access the AI tools of their choice, and report their findings to the class.

After each task, debrief the experience with the students, discussing the extent to which the AI tools were helpful or not. You will all learn a little about how AI works and you'll set the stage for a productive discussion of how students should or shouldn't use AI on an upcoming assignment. A warning: Only try this if you're prepared to be surprised. You may learn that AI can do things you didn't think it could do, or that your students' AI skills are stronger or weaker than you expected.

Give students a "green light" assignment.

In these assignments you actively encourage students to see what they can do with AI while also requiring them to reflect on and document their experiences of using AI.

Start by asking students to predict how they will use AI in the assignment. This helps students make plans for their AI use and provides a benchmark understanding of AI's application to the work that they can return to later. Be sure to provide students with support during the assignment, like opportunities to ask questions about AI and to get help from you or other students. Clarify for students what kind of collaborative work is permitted on the assignment and what channels to use to get help.

The end-of-assignment reflection is the most important part of a green light assignment. That's where students step back and evaluate their use of AI. Have students document their AI use through a transparency statement or brief reports on their chatbot interactions. Then ask students to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of AI as they applied it to their work. See if you can get students to identify how they might work productively with AI in the future. If a student reports something like "I learned that brainstorming ideas on my own before turning to AI works better for me than starting with an AI-generated list of ideas" then you're encouraging a very useful kind of reflection, one that generates metacognitive awareness for your students.

These assignments work best when they follow other assignments that help students develop specific skills in using AI. For instance, if students already know how to write good prompts for an AI chatbot or realize the value of iterative prompting, they're more likely to find creative and effective uses of AI on their own. See the next section on teaching students about AI for practices to build this kind of AI know-how.

Discussion Questions



1. What do you know about the ways that generative AI is being used in your field? How is work in your profession changing to leverage or reject AI?
2. If you were to include a "critique the chatbot" or green light assignment in your course, how do you think your students would react? How would they react if you prohibited all use of AI on assignments?
3. What other assignments, activities, or structures have you used (or seen used) to learn about AI with students?
4. How do you feel about the need to respond to generative AI in your course and assignment design? Is this an exciting opportunity to rethink your teaching? Or a lot of work that you wish you didn't have?

Additional Resources

"**Integrating AI into Assignments to Support Student Learning.**"

This collection on the University of Virginia Teaching Hub website features several examples of assignments designed to help students learn about AI while also working toward course goals and objectives.

"**AI Pedagogy Project.**"

This initiative from Harvard University's metaLAB features a guide to AI you can use to learn how AI tools work, as well as a substantial collection of assignments designed to help you explore AI with your students.

"**Unmaking the Grade.**"

Emily Donahoe's blog details her ongoing experiments with AI in her writing courses, reflecting her approach to teaching, which involves collaboration with students on grading, AI, and more.

"**Centaurs and Cyborgs on the Jagged Frontier.**"

Ethan Mollick's newsletter from September 2023 explains the "jagged frontier" metaphor for understanding AI's capabilities and provides advice for navigating that frontier in education.



3. TEACH YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT AI.

> Whether for workforce readiness or information literacy purposes, our students need to understand generative AI. Students express frustration that they don't receive enough guidance from their instructors on using AI effectively and ethically. Your course might be an appropriate place to teach students about AI through experimentation, modeling, or critique.

Once you've understood your students' experiences with and perspectives on AI and you've got a better grasp of how AI works, you'll be in a position to make informed, intentional choices about the role you want AI to play in your course, if any.

- Some instructors reach this point and decide with good reason that AI won't help their students learn, so they adopt a "red light" policy of some kind, prohibiting AI use on assignments and/or inviting students to do the hard work of learning without AI assistance.
- Other instructors survey the landscape, check their course goals and objectives, and decide to engage with AI in some fashion (a green light approach), whether that's to help students learn course material or to develop AI literacy.

There's no one correct decision that applies across all teaching contexts, but, from the students' point of view, they need to know about AI. Not every course needs to teach the technology, but some courses need to move to green light or at least yellow light approaches. Ideally, courses within a major or program would be coordinated in some way so that students build AI literacy and competencies over time, though in reality few curricula are so structured—yet.

Why do our students need to know about AI? One reason is that employers increasingly expect new hires to have some familiarity or even expertise with generative AI. Our students know this and want help preparing. However, according to a 2025 Cengage Group report that surveyed over 900 recent college graduates, "Graduates specifically felt underprepared to enter an AI-fueled workforce, with just 51% believing they had sufficient skills for all the jobs they applied to." Should higher ed be the place where students learn AI skills? Methodist University Psychology professor Mark Kline put a fine point on this question during a 2024 webinar:

> **"Do we want our students to be able to ethically and skillfully use these tools, which WILL be required in the work environment, or wait for them to learn 'on the job' where they may NOT have emphasis placed on skillful and ethical use?"**
>
> —Mark Kline, Methodist University Psychology professor

Another reason is that AI tools are ubiquitous and very easy to use badly. Marquette University English professor Jacob Riyeff wrote in July 2025 about a student who used an AI tool to identify quotations from an article for use in an assignment. The student based their entire paper on these quotations, not realizing that the quotes did not at all reflect the arguments made in the original article. "We cannot scrutinize reality together if we cannot see reality," wrote Riyeff. "And many of our students (and colleagues) are, at least at times, not seeing reality right now" because they lack critical AI literacy. AI has problems with truth, bias, and sycophancy; it is used in disinformation campaigns; and it raises questions about environmental impact, labor, and intellectual property. Our students will struggle to successfully navigate the modern information world if they don't learn about AI.



Teaching Practices

If you determine that your course is an appropriate place to teach students about AI, here are some approaches you can use to do so thoughtfully and effectively.



Create times for telling.

Rich Ross teaches statistics at the University of Virginia. He noticed that some of his students seemed to be overly relying on AI tools to do the computer coding required for his course. During class, he showed his students a particular data visualization and asked them to work with their favorite AI chatbot to write the code that would generate it. Twenty minutes later his students were still struggling to get the output correct, so he walked them through the correct functions to use. Five minutes later, all of his students produced the correct visualization.

Ross' activity created what Schwartz and Bransford call a "time for telling." This teaching method involves giving students a hard problem or challenging experience as a way to get them ready for learning. In this case, the students' unproductive struggle with AI prepared them for Ross' explanation of the direct solution. In a time for telling, there's a cognitive component—students are better able to understand the explanation because they've been wrestling with the problem—and often also a motivational component—they are more interested in learning the better way to solve the problem because of their (brief) failures. This structure works well for helping students understand any of the many limitations of generative AI.

The time for telling approach can also work to help students develop skills in working with AI. For example, many students don't enter our classes with strong AI prompting skills. Give your students some task to accomplish with AI, let them try for a while using whatever AI prompts they think will work, then show them a prompt that is well-designed for the task. It means that you'll have to learn a few prompting strategies yourself, of course! See the end of this section for some resources. When your students see (perhaps dramatically) different results from AI when it's given a robust prompt, that's the time for telling.



Model AI use through think-alouds.

What might the "telling" part of a time for telling look like? One option is to do a think-aloud for your students: work through some AI-related task or problem in front of them while saying out loud what you're thinking as you do it. What strategies are you using to write your prompt? What do you look for in the AI output as you evaluate it? Why are you responding with a second and third prompt? What motivates you to switch to a different AI tool or change the settings on the tool you're using? Your answers to these questions will help students understand not only what to do with AI but why to do it.

Model AI use through think-alouds. (Continued.)

This approach is standard practice in computer science education, where instructors think aloud in class while developing code, but it can work in a variety of fields. Students may use AI for lots of tasks and entertainment in their daily lives, but they often don't know how to use it in sophisticated ways for specific academic purposes. By modeling that for students, you can help them see how disciplinary ways of thinking and doing can shape and inform their AI use.

This approach also works if your goal is AI literacy, if you focus your think-aloud on the analysis of the AI output. You might critique the quality of a source that ChatGPT identifies for you or identify the biases or connotations you see in a Midjourney-generated image. Modeling this kind of thinking isn't a guarantee that students will develop it themselves, but it is a useful step along the way.

Annotate AI outputs with your students.

Consider having your students collaboratively annotate AI output using an annotation tool like Perusall, Hypothesis, or even Google Docs. You can generate a chatlog with your AI tool of choice, then copy and paste that into one of these platforms. Invite your students to highlight and comment on elements of the AI output that catch their attention.

Annotation helps students anchor their observations of AI output in the output itself, and creates space for more students to share their observations than a class discussion would allow. If your annotation tool allows replies to annotations, the activity can also generate useful dialog among your students. Social annotation works well as an activity during a synchronous class session, but also as an asynchronous activity for online students.

When giving your students a social annotation activity, consider the prompts you'll give them, because good annotation doesn't come naturally to most students. You could use a simple "What do you notice? What do you wonder?" prompt, or give students prompts tied to the cognitive moves you'd like them to make:

- Where are you skeptical about the truth or accuracy of the AI's output? Highlight those areas and say why you're skeptical in your comment.
- What biases, implicit or explicit, do you notice in the output? Comment on why you think those biases are there.
- What parts of the output would you call "AI slop"? In your comment, say how you would make these parts less formulaic or more authentic.

Discussion Questions



1. Are your courses currently more red light or green light when it comes to AI integration? In which direction do you think your courses should move?
2. What do your students need to learn about AI? What mistakes or misunderstandings do you observe in their use or interpretation of AI?
3. What assignments or activities have you used (or seen used) to help students develop AI know-how and literacy?
4. How might you coordinate with other instructors in your department, school, or program so that your courses provide a more coherent approach to AI education?

Additional Resources

Fostering AI Literacy: A Guide for Educators in Higher Education.

This open access book by Fang Yi, Jess Taggart, and Bethany Mickel provides a practical, scaffolded definition of AI literacy along with examples of in- and out-of-class activities to foster AI literacy.

"**AI and How We Teach: A Norton Newsletter for AI-Aware Teachers.**"

This blog from lead author Annette Vee offers advice and resources for practicing AI-aware teaching, helping instructors make informed choices about the roles that AI should (and should not) play in their courses.

"**The CLEAR Path: A Framework for Information Literacy Through Prompt Engineering.**"

This paper by Leo Lo outlines a practical approach to AI prompt design, shedding light on how AI tools turn our requests into text generation.

"**Annotation in Teaching and Learning.**"

This collection from the University of Virginia Teaching Hub points to several articles and resources on the use of social annotation in teaching for those interested in exploring this kind of pedagogy.



4. CREATE AI-FREE EXPERIENCES.

> Designing an AI-proof assignment seems impossible given how readily available AI tools are and how rapidly the technology is changing. However, students want AI-free experiences as part of their education, and we can provide those experiences with a little creative learning design.

Students' lives can seem increasingly digital, causing some to wish for analog experiences that are free of the distractions of technology, including AI, or to look for human connections, like the student interviewed in Beth McMurtrie's June 2025 article on student AI use, who "believes that plenty of students crave the kinds of connections she does, but are lured to AI by the promise of efficiency." Other students want educational spaces where they can develop into the people they want to be, like the editors of the University of Notre Dame student newspaper, who argued in October 2025 that core curriculum classes at the university should be AI-free zones: "These courses should be about teaching students how to read and write well—a task which AI can only detract from."

Still other students have concerns about the companies that build and sell popular AI tools. What are those companies doing with my data? Who is profiting from AI investment? What impact are these technologies having on the environment? These students often request alternative assignments when instructors give them a critique the chatbot or green light task, requesting to opt out of AI use. Boston University writing instructor Pary Fassihi infrequently hears these requests from students, but it happens often enough that she routinely builds alternatives and opt-outs into her assignments.

In his June 2025 essay about teaching writing with AI, University of Virginia English professor Piers Gelly shares the story of one student who said that a semester of experimenting with ChatGPT had led her to realize just how long it had been since she hadn't used AI in her writing.

> **"I quickly realized I had forgotten how to do that … I came to the realization that ChatGPT has become my crutch rather than my tool."**
>
> —Student from a course taught by Piers Gelly, University of Virginia English professor

Gelly points out that the student probably didn't use the word "crutch" lightly there since she spent a month on actual crutches. This student didn't explicitly request an AI-free learning experience, but she represents a cohort of students who are questioning their own use of AI and might welcome a little help in learning more independently.

You, too, may be questioning whether your students should be using AI in their studies. You may have determined, like University of Minnesota-Rochester professor Cate Denial, that AI won't help your students learn in your course. "There is nothing that I ask my students to do in my classes that benefits from being done by generative AI," Denial wrote in a January 2025 blog post. "There is no added value to my courses or my students' learning." She came to this conclusion after several semesters exploring the use of AI in history courses with her students. Even if your students aren't asking for AI-free learning experiences, though, it may be a priority for you to create those experiences for your students.



Teaching Practices

Creating AI-free learning environments is more easily said than done, but it is possible. Keep in mind that it's less about prohibiting generative AI or other technologies and more about creating conditions that make it easier for students to choose not to use AI as a shortcut or assistant.



Bring the learning into the classroom.

University of South Florida philosophy professor Lily Abadal has redesigned the traditional term paper assignment in her course so that students do most of the work on that assignment during class time. She scaffolds the term paper across the entire semester, breaking it into small writing tasks that can largely be completed in class. Her classroom turns into a studio, where she circulates among students to help them work through writing problems. She uses grading practices that shift students' attention away from earning points and toward learning the writing process, with lots of feedback and opportunities for revision.

Jim Seitz, University of Virginia English professor, uses a similar approach for his writing courses. He asserts that writing teaches us how to discipline and hone our thinking, so he moves that important work into class time so that he can help his students with it. He provides a writing prompt along with quiet background music and some snacks, and his students open their laptops (with Wi-Fi off) and their word processor of choice and use it in "focus" mode to minimize distractions. Seitz debriefs the writing session with his students at the end of the hour.

Both of these faculty report that students eventually come to appreciate this approach. "They begin to care—deeply," writes Abadal. "They've invested themselves in their argument; it reflects their own hard-won understanding." Seitz's students say they appreciate the dedicated writing time and the chance to write in a distraction-free, communal setting. Seitz doesn't think that all courses need to be structured this way, but he argues that all students should have opportunities to take low-tech/no-tech courses during their education.



Direct your students to embodied experiences.

Long before ChatGPT arrived, college educators were experimenting with learning experiences that involved students connecting their physical and sensory experiences with places and spaces outside of the classroom. Sociology professor Rosemary McGunnigle-Gonzales had students construct historical timelines in chalk on the sidewalks outside her classroom. Biology professor Margaret Rubega asked her ornithology students to observe and report on the birds they saw as they went from school to work to home. Mathematics professor Amy Langville designed a calculus textbook in the style of the creativity book *Wreck This Journal* by Keri Smith, a textbook that asked students to engage with calculus concepts in the physical world—and sometimes throw the book around or tear out its pages to better understand a mathematical idea.

Direct your students to embodied experiences. (Continued.)

As Susan Hrach reminds us in her 2021 book *Minding Bodies: How Physical Space, Sensation, and Movement Affect Learning*, we aren't just brains on sticks. Our embodied experiences affect how we encounter the world and how we learn. When we invite our students to observe or interact with a place outside the classroom or their typical study environment, we help their learning become tangible and relevant to their lived experience. These activities don't preclude the use of AI, but they relegate it to a secondary role at best.

Consider the embodied learning experiences you might give students. What might they observe in a city park or on a street corner near campus? What if you were to ask them to submit a reading reflection via video recorded in a place that's special to them? Or to listen to a course reading while taking a walk? With a little creativity, we can direct students toward embodied learning that is relevant to the courses we teach.



Design authentic assessments.

Authentic assessments ask students to do something meaningful enough that they won't want to reach for AI as a shortcut. These assignments typically feature tasks drawn from realistic professional or disciplinary contexts, involve problems that require students to navigate complexity or ambiguity, and ask students to practice interpersonal skills like communication or teamwork skills. These assignments promote transfer of learning and provide opportunities for meaningful evaluation of learning.

Authentic assessment takes different forms depending on a variety of situational factors. You might ask students to consult with a local nonprofit on an organizational challenge and make a set of recommendations. You might ask students to study a bill under review by your state legislature and write policy briefs to share with legislators. You might send students out to conduct environmental tests for local homes and share their results with homeowners. You might direct your students to produce a course podcast and share it with your campus community. There's no formula for these assignments, but look for opportunities to have students work on open-ended problems, to exercise choice in how they approach those problems, and to share their solutions with interested audiences.

These aren't "AI-proof" projects, but if you can tap into students' intrinsic motivations for learning, you might keep students from turning to generative AI too early in the process. Having students share their work with some external audience creates accountability for students to own their ideas, with or without AI assistance. These projects take a lot of scaffolding, which can help students see the progress in their own skill development, building a sense of self-efficacy that fosters independence from AI.

Discussion Questions



1. Do you think it's possible to create AI-proof assignments? Why or why not? What would it take to design and implement such an assignment?
2. What do your students say about the idea of an AI-free learning experience? If you haven't asked them, what do you think they would say?
3. How practical do you find the teaching practices described here? Can you see using one in your teaching? What other strategies might you use to help your students avoid AI?
4. What do you think of the idea that the curriculum should feature intentionally low-tech or no-tech courses?

Additional Resources

"**The Analog Sandwich.**"

In this blog post, English professor Marc Marino poses the provocative question: "Can we bring AI into the classroom and then ask it to step outside?" He answers with an activity structure he calls the "analog sandwich."

"**Analog Inspiration.**"

This is a deck of cards designed by educational developer Carter Moulton and intended to inspire conversations about human-centered teaching and learning in an age of AI, using one of five different sets of game rules available on Moulton's website.

Creating Wicked Students: Designing Courses for a Complex World.

This book by Paul Hanstedt provides a framework and lots of illustrative examples for building your own authentic assessments.

"**Wisdom in the Machine Age.**"

This is Lily Abadal's blog where she writes about her slow-thinking pedagogy and how to think about AI and education through the lens of virtue ethics and character.



5. MAKE YOUR EXPECTATIONS CLEAR.

When students don't understand the rules of engagement for AI use in your course, they're likely to use AI in ways that disrupt their learning or your assessment of their learning. Making your expectations for AI use clear through policies, guidelines, and conversations with students can help them avoid these pitfalls and lower their academic anxiety.

Hopefully it's clear by now that there's a lot more to figuring out generative AI's role in teaching and learning than simply determining if students are cheating with AI or not. However, the questions about AI and academic integrity that emerged after ChatGPT launched in late 2022 are still an important part of the conversation in higher ed:

- When is use of generative AI by students permissible in an assignment or course?
- When is its use considered plagiarism or unauthorized aid?
- What will instructors do when they suspect that a student has violated a course AI policy?
- When a student has gone out of bounds with their AI use, what interventions or punishments will follow?

Students are looking to their instructors and institutions for answers to these questions. In a June 2025 report on the work of Boston College's student AI advisors, Clare Angus noted that students expressed "a need for more specificity in the guidelines they received from their professors on what constituted acceptable and unacceptable academic uses." A spring 2025 survey of University of Notre Dame students conducted by Xiuxiu Tang and colleagues showed "a lack of clarity in institutional guidance around GenAI use" with "mixed agreement on whether instructors and institutions have communicated expectations clearly." And Annette Vee, reporting on a series of student surveys at the University of Pittsburgh, noted that "students overwhelmingly ask for specifics on how they're allowed to use AI in their courses."

Why do students want clear expectations on AI use from their instructors? Some are worried about the consequences that come with an academic integrity violation and want to stay well away from any actions that might land them in trouble. Others are anxious about being falsely accused of inappropriate AI use, perhaps from a false positive result from an AI "detector" program, and want to know how to avoid or appeal such an accusation. Some students don't want their classmates to have a competitive advantage in achieving course grades through the use of AI because of ambiguous guidelines. And some students don't want their use of AI to inhibit their own learning and are looking to their instructors for guidance on how to avoid that.

Whatever our course AI policies are, when we can communicate those policies clearly to students in a way that addresses these and other concerns, we not only lower our students' academic anxieties but also support their learning. Transparent assignments are those for which the purpose, tasks, and assessment criteria are clear to students, and research by Mary-Ann Winkelmes and colleagues as part of the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) project has shown that transparent assignments can lead to increases in student learning and academic persistence. In this age of AI, being transparent with students about the tasks required for an assignment means making clear the ways that AI use is allowed or prohibited.

Your approach to AI in your course should be informed by your goals and objectives, your students' perspectives on AI, and your understanding of AI and how it works. You might decide to refuse or resist AI or to explore or engage with AI. There's no right answer here—it's all context dependent—but your approach and expectations should be clear to your students.



Teaching Practices

You have a few options for providing students with the AI guardrails they're asking for, all of which should be accompanied by the message that you want students to learn and succeed in your course.



Make a statement in your syllabus.

Given the syllabus' role in orienting students toward a course, it's important that you address generative AI use in your syllabus. James D'Annibale, director of academic technology at Dickinson College, recommends these essential parts of a syllabus statement on AI: allowed and prohibited uses of AI, a "transparent and understandable rationale" for your policy, an explanation of responsible use (if allowing AI), and an acknowledgment that other courses might have different policies.

When specifying allowed and prohibited uses of AI, consider the many ways that students might use AI on a given assignment: generating ideas, developing research questions, locating sources, constructing arguments, outlining, drafting, editing, summarizing readings, generating images or videos, writing computer code, visualizing data, performing computations, and more. If you're not prohibiting or green-lighting all AI use, you'll want to specify for which of these tasks students may use AI.

If you'd like an organized approach to this, one option is to use the AI Assessment Scale developed by Mike Perkins and colleagues. The scale identifies five levels of AI use, from 1 ("You must not use AI at any point during the assessment") to 5 ("You should use AI creatively to solve the task"). It was designed for the assignment level, so you could specify levels for different assignments or the same level for all assignments in your course. Or consider a more discipline-specific approach, like University of Mississippi writing instructor Marc Watkins, who uses a stoplight approach (green for acceptable AI uses, yellow for uses that are acceptable with attribution, red for unacceptable uses) based on a distinction he makes between "AI-assisted writing" and "AI-generated writing."

For the other parts of your AI syllabus statement, connect your rationale for your policy to your course goals and objectives. How will using or avoiding AI help students learn in this particular course? If you disallow AI in your course, explain why your learning goals are important to your students and make the case that they won't reach those goals if they lean on AI. If you allow generative AI use by students, tell them what responsible use is—vetting AI output for accuracy and bias, confirming any sources that AI cites, disclosing AI use appropriately, and so on. And tell students how you will and will not use AI in your role as teacher—this goes a long way toward building trust and opening the door for open dialogue about AI. For example, most students don't respond well to instructors using AI to provide feedback on their work, but do appreciate AI feedback when it's transparently situated as complementary to instructor and peer feedback.

As important as AI syllabus statements are, we know that simply stating a policy on a document isn't sufficient for most students to understand and internalize that policy. You'll want to discuss your syllabus statement with your students early in the course and come back to it again over time to help them see how it applies to your assignments. Cate Denial, the historian

Make a statement in your syllabus. (Continued.)

who determined that AI wouldn't help her students learn, advises: "It is not immediately or clearly apparent to students why we're so against [AI] ... We have to use class time to make it transparent to students that generative AI takes skills away from them, rather than simply providing more."

Write an AI policy with your students.

In the spirit of engaging students as partners in teaching and learning, some instructors work with their students to develop an AI course policy.

Sydney Sharkey teaches writing at San Diego State University. In her summer 2025 online course, she invited her students to post their ideas for what it would look like to use generative AI to help them grow as writers. Over the first week of the course, students shared a range of perspectives which Sharkey summarized: "AI can be a valuable support tool for learning when used intentionally and ethically. It should assist—not replace—your thinking, voice, or writing process." She then drafted an AI policy based on their comments—it included ethical and inappropriate uses of AI, the expectation of transparency in AI use, and a rationale for the policy—and invited students to provide feedback on the draft policy and help revise it.

Co-creating course policies with students gives students a sense of ownership, which affects how they engage in a course. "They come to understand that they have a voice in shaping the classroom environment," writes Angela Rodriguez Mooney. "This realization fosters a sense of ownership and agency, which in turn leads to greater participation and accountability throughout the semester." Instead of trying to follow a set of rules they might not understand, students think critically about their own values as learners and how to enact those values as a learning community. When a situation comes up that's not covered by the policy, students then have the tools to negotiate and navigate that situation.

Lead with compassion when students fail to meet your expectations.

No matter how clear your expectations for AI use are, unless you have a 100 percent green light policy, you will inevitably find yourself looking at some student work where you suspect they used AI in a way you disallowed. When that happens, look for ways to create teaching moments for your students.

While there are signs you can look for that indicate AI-generated writing, humans are not great at distinguishing between student writing and AI writing. AI detection software is often better at that job, although even that still reports enough false positives (that is, claiming that AI wrote something when, in fact, it didn't) to be problematic. Neither your professional opinion nor the results of an

Lead with compassion when students fail to meet your expectations. (Continued.)

AI detection tool can be considered proof that a piece of writing was AI-generated. This isn't like plagiarism detection where you can compare text from a student essay to text in a source. There's no paper trail for AI use in writing. That said, AI detection software can still be useful, according to University of Colorado writing instructor Christopher Ostro, provided you view it more like a metal detector—it's useful for pointing you toward places on the beach where you should dig, but it's no guarantee that you'll find something.

Before talking with a student about a possible AI policy violation, take some time to research the academic integrity or honor code policies at your institution. Most policies now have something to say about unauthorized use of generative AI in assignments, and your institution's policy may have very useful advice or resources you can avail yourself of. Be sure to see what options you have for responding to a possible violation; look for those that prioritize education over punishment. Some policies give instructors lots of agency here, but be aware that if you don't report your student to your local academic integrity office, that student might have other instructors making the same decision, effectively getting away with policy violations across a number of courses. Central reporting can prevent that situation.

If and when you talk with your student about the assignment, don't lead with an accusation. Instead, ask the student to tell you about their work and the process they used in writing it. Let them know that you think they might have used AI in a way that wasn't appropriate, and listen to what they have to say. Most students will respond with honesty. Sometimes students aren't aware that they're getting extra AI help when they use a copyediting tool like Grammarly, or they don't realize that they need to disclose a particular use of AI. If you approach your student in a nonthreatening way, it's likely to lead to a conversation about responsible AI use. Georgia Southwestern State University psychology professor Gary Fisk allows students to revise their work and resubmit with no penalty. Fisk writes: "My students have responded to this approach with appreciation, enthusiasm, and increased trust."

Finally, if and when you report a student honor code violation, know that you will likely need evidence of a pattern of AI misuse. One dodgy assignment will generally not suffice for a proper investigation, which is why it can be useful, both for learning and for academic integrity, to scaffold writing assignments so that you can see the development of students' work over time. This not only helps their learning but also provides more context for a potential misuse of AI. Having that conversation with a student, even if they insist that they did nothing wrong, can also be part of the pattern of evidence you bring. These are very challenging teaching moments, but if you follow the advice in this playbook—listen to students, have open conversations with them about AI, and design authentic assignments that focus on process over product—you'll have fewer of these hard moments and more tools with which to respond to them when they occur.

Discussion Questions



1. What guidelines for using generative AI do you give students in your courses? How do you communicate those guidelines?
2. What experiences have you had with students using AI in ways you didn't approve or expect? How did you respond in those instances?
3. Have you tried cocreating course policies with students, as described here? If so, how did it go? If not, how do you think your students would respond?
4. In what ways do you try to lead with compassion in your interactions with students, whether that's around AI use or other topics?

Additional Resources

AI Teaching Strategies: Transparent Assignment Design.

This website from the Teaching & Learning Resource Center at Ohio State University applies the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) framework very practically to AI-aware assignment design.

"**Syllabus Policies for Generative AI Repository.**"

Lance Eaton's collection of AI syllabus statements features 200 statements drawn from a variety of disciplines and institutions. It's a great place to look for example language.

"**A Big Picture Look at AI Detection Tools.**"

In this episode of the *Teaching in Higher Education* podcast, host Bonni Stachowiak talks with Christopher Ostro about the state of AI detection software as of January 2025.

A Pedagogy of Kindness.

This 2024 book by Cate Denial doesn't explicitly address generative AI, but it has a lot to say about leading with compassion in our work with students. The chapter on kindness and the syllabus is particularly helpful for communicating expectations to students.

CONCLUSION

Generative AI has brought so much uncertainty to the lives of our students. Which professors don't want them using AI and which ones do? Which AI tools are allowed for this assignment and which ones aren't? Can they use AI for outlining or drafting? Or editing or revising? What do they need to learn about using generative AI that will help them get a job when they graduate? What kinds of jobs will even exist in a world with AI? What's the point of education when AI can do so much?

We can't answer all those questions for our students, but we can listen to our students, explore generative AI with them, teach them what we know about AI and its strengths and limitations, create opportunities for them to learn without AI, and provide some measure of clarity on what we expect for their AI use in our courses. See the practical advice and additional resources in this playbook for ideas on how to go about this important work.

How do we address those big questions about their future in a world with AI? We can't predict the future, but we can help our students train in how to learn with AI. More precisely, we can help our students discern when and how AI use will and will not support their learning. Even if we're still figuring that out for ourselves, we bring a lot of experience in discernment to share with our students.

What you do when you're stuck trying to figure something out in your professional work, do you use Google to search for a solution? Do you turn to ChatGPT for advice? Do you reach out to a colleague and ask a couple of questions? Do you look through your virtual or physical files for a suitable resource? You might do any and all of these depending on the context, but you probably have a good sense about which path will be most fruitful for a particular question.

If your student has a question about a concept in your course, what paths do they take to get an answer? Do they come to your office hours and ask you? Do they find a peer in the course and get help? Do they turn to Google or ChatGPT or YouTube for explanations? Or the course textbook or readings? Context matters here: If it's 2am, the Google and ChatGPT options start to look pretty good.

We can build into our courses a variety of learning experiences for students that help them appreciate the strengths and limitations of different learning strategies and resources, including the use of generative AI tools. We can prompt our students to reflect on those experiences so that they start to understand which strategies and resources work best for them in different situations.

Imagine the student who learns through your assignments that an AI-generated summary of a hard reading can miss important points but also serve as an on-ramp to help the student do a closer reading of the text. That's the kind of metacognition—learning about learning—that students can take with them when they leave our courses into their personal and professional lives.

> *University of Sydney educational technology professor Danny Liu uses a menu metaphor for helping students practice this kind of discernment. Liu writes that just as a good waiter can direct a restaurant customer to the dishes on the menu that the customer will most appreciate,* **"as educators who know our students and our teaching and assessment contexts, we are uniquely positioned to know" what uses of AI to recommend to our students.**

By approaching the use of generative AI in our courses in this way, we acknowledge our agency as teachers and build our students' agency as learners. That agency can reduce their anxiety about navigating this AI world and empower them to identify and reach their own learning goals when so much in this future is uncertain.



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