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# INTRODUCTION

I embark on this book with a bit of an identity crisis: In relation to the topic of artificial intelligence (AI), who am I?

First, you should know that I am a full-time English teacher entering my twenty-third year of teaching. Currently I teach a full schedule of high school sophomores and seniors in a public high school in Pennsylvania, and for a long time I taught English in eighth and ninth grades. Helping students grow as writers is the best part of my profession. By the end of my career, I will be able to say that I have supported the growth of writers in a world with very little AI and writers in a world flooded with AI, and I find this fact exciting.

You should also know I am not a tech guru. I am not that teacher you lean on when you cannot figure out how to get your online gradebook to cooperate. Technology is a key component of my writing instruction, but so is paper, and so is conversation.

I am not an AI enthusiast, touting all the ways it will seamlessly simplify our teaching lives or individualize each student's experience. My primary interests in AI are not about productivity for teachers and students but about how generative AI affects the creative process, writing, and human capacity for deep thinking.

I am neither an AI denier, ignoring the impact of AI on my students and their writing, nor a doomsayer, prophesying the collapse of all human intelligence as the influence of its artificial cousin expands.

This leaves me, I guess, as an explorer, a sojourner, a learner. I am curious, tinkering with my lessons and refining the options I give for assigned writing in a new era. I talk to students and try to listen closely to what they have to say about AI—and other things too! As we take on something unfamiliar, something that raises both zeal and alarm, I think being a listener is a good place to start.

Mary Oliver’s poem “Mysteries, Yes” (2009) resonates with me right now. After enumerating some of the mysteries of the natural and human world, the speaker concludes:

Let me keep my distance, always, from those  
who think they have the answers.

Let me keep company always with those who say  
“Look!” and laugh in astonishment,  
and bow their heads.

As I explore and adapt to a world quickly becoming saturated with AI, I often find myself laughing in astonishment at how speedy, how artificial, how perfect, or how absurd AI-generated text can be. And I often find myself bowing my head, alternately humbled and disappointed at what this technology can do *to* and *for* humans.

I remember that I am not alone in my newness; teachers everywhere are exploring both the tactics and the ethics of navigating artificial intelligence. I continue to learn from them each day.

There is one thing that especially excites me about the present: I get to be a learner alongside my students in a way I never have been before. During a teaching career there are times when we start teaching a new grade level or move to a new school and feel ourselves energized, learning as much as we are teaching. And in all of these circumstances we bring the wisdom that experience and adulthood afford us.

In the expanding universe of text-generating artificial intelligence tools, we are all beginners, students and teachers alike, and by opening a dialogue and learning alongside our students, my hope is that we can treasure human voices more than ever. My experiences with students over the past several years and my avid reading and research on the topic of generative AI suggest that this is possible. My own development into a teacher who feels more confident in how and when to apply sound pedagogy to the decisions I make around generative AI

tools serves as living proof that teachers can keep growing in productive ways as this technology evolves.

## FROM ARTIFICIAL TO ARTFUL

In a world where AI-generated text can seem like a writing teacher's enemy, incorporating it into our writing instruction feels to some like an act of betrayal. Deep thinking is under constant attack in our world. The advent of generative AI might feel like "one more thing" eroding the capacity for sustained and focused thought in the young humans before us.

You may be a reader who picked up this book because you feel that generative AI is a grave threat to learners, to teachers, to writers, to anyone seeking to deepen human thought. I see you. There are days I feel a bit like that myself. To suggest that generative AI can create something artful feels like a stretch, and you approach this book skeptically.

Other readers may be approaching this book with a hopeful mindset. You have always treasured writing as an artful act. You enjoy and appreciate it as such, and you try to cultivate this mindset in your students. But you wrestle with the feeling that the skills your students develop will be diminished when an option exists to organize words into sentences and paragraphs so easily. You know that artful work is never easy.

Still others open this book with great enthusiasm for what AI can do for teaching and learning, and I hope you will feel welcomed here too! I have felt enthusiastic many times in the past few years as my knowledge and experience grows. Where I am guarded or cautionary in these pages, I hope that we can pause together and reflect on what we know so far and what is yet unknown about the effects of integrating this technology into writing instruction. The lessons in this book are made to modify, so play with them and see what adaptations best fit your vision for the future of AI in education and best assist the writers you work with every day.

As I caught myself expressing to my umpteenth colleague that my journey with this topic has been a rollercoaster, I changed course. "No," I said, "It's been more a tilt-a-whirl!" My own reactions spin with delight and disappointment, rise and fall with new experiences and interactions and iterations and knowledge, and sometimes this brings on a sense of dizziness and intellectual nausea. I don't think this ride is going anywhere. And our students know it.

But as humans, we create. We paint in caves and on canvases and on the sides of buildings. We create viral videos and we tell stories around the fire. We sculpt with clay and design architecture with computers and embellish scarves with sequins. We write, not just to communicate with clarity, but to bare our souls and shape the world around us. And we teach.

Humans are artful beings, and while over the centuries the media and tools have changed, this essential element of humanity has not. So when we encounter a new tool—one that is powerful enough to be scary in more than one way—it feels fair to consider how we can use it artfully. So in the context of artificial intelligence and writing instruction, what does that mean—to use AI artfully?

It means exploring the ways that artificial intelligence can help us mine our authentic human ideas more efficiently and deeply. It means classroom lessons that tap new creative wells within our students. Engaging with AI tools need not be paving paradise to put up a parking lot of AI-generated text. Rather, we can uncover some nuances of what a particular large language model (LLM) can and cannot deliver to its users and explore the varied approaches of different LLMs. At times, using artful AI may mean weaving our students' words with generated words to practice expanding ideas, or fishing for just-right words within generated text that they can transfer to their own vocabulary, adding new brushstrokes for more artful diction.

It is healthy to think in terms of possibility and abundance even as we proceed with caution. The best art is always produced through a balance of audacity and care. This is true of both writing and the teaching of writing.

I invite you to weigh each idea in this book for the value added and the hidden costs. Allow for the prospect of teachers and students engaging their own intelligence with this technology in ways that are more artful than artificial.

A comparison to smartphones—a technology we love to decry for its pervasive effects—may be informative here. In her 2018 book *How to Break Up With Your Phone*, Catherine Price posits that smartphones themselves are not an enemy. Instead, she notes that “smartphones have infiltrated our lives so quickly and so thoroughly that we have never stopped to think about what we actually want our relationships with them to look like—or what effects these relationships might be having on our lives” (Price, 2018, p. 2).

The speed at which the smartphone began to dominate our lives resembles the speed at which AI tools are expanding. We can learn from recent history and proceed more thoughtfully with how we engage with AI in our writing instruction. We can envision, articulate, and work to build the kind of relationship we want with this technology and help guide our students to do the same.

Building relationships is a kind of art as well, and when we face a new technology that is suddenly everywhere, engaging artfully becomes especially important if the relationship we develop is to be a healthy one. So far, this technology's greatest contribution in my classroom has been the quality and quantity of reflection it has provoked for both me and my students. You will notice this thread runs colorfully through these pages. The mere existence of generative AI has my students talking and thinking in new ways about how and why we write, what is valuable in our process or not, and what makes human thought so special. Conversations with them about AI have been enlightening and energizing. We need to pause and listen.

My hope is to feed thoughtful reflection as generative AI technology evolves. We need to harness the energy of this technology without letting it overwhelm the good things we already do to nourish writers in secondary classrooms. With this goal in mind, here are some features you will find in this book that honor the pedagogy, practices, and aspirational mindset that make the growth of writers possible in the first place:

- This book values writing as a process and is organized in the general order most people take to approach composition, from prewriting through publishing. No matter what long-term impacts AI-generated text has on writing, the arc of an iterative writing process will remain.
- Each chapter begins with a quote from an esteemed writer about writing. These anchors remind us of the essence of what matters about writing and why humans become writers in the first place.
- This book shares lessons that integrate AI into our students' writing process in ways that can amplify their skills and shape their values. These lessons may make students embrace or pull away from AI; either of these results can be desirable depending on the circumstances.
- Each chapter excerpts and embeds interviews I conducted with other teachers. These "Teacher Voices" sections aim to value

the experience and the adaptability of professionals currently in classrooms working with students on their writing.

- This book also values student voices. It contains both samples of what students have created and reflective moments about how they feel, how they have grown, or what they think as a result of their experiences writing with AI. “What My Students Say” sections in each chapter model the kinds of conversations you can have with students and the feedback you can invite from them. You might share some of my students’ thinking from these sections with your students and ask them what they agree or disagree with.
- I could never write a book on generative AI without including “A Word of Caution” notes throughout. Too much is emergent and unknown about the educational effects of this technology, and it would be irresponsible not to share the hesitations I have myself and have read about from others every step of the way, suggesting some necessary guardrails we can incorporate.
- And, of course, what would a book about AI be without some “Bot Thoughts” entries. These are pure, unedited but credited blurbs crafted by AI, published alongside the prompt I engineered to elicit the response. These responses are not exactly “thoughts” of course, but I hope that they will provoke your own thinking. For those less familiar with generative AI’s capabilities, they demonstrate effective prompt engineering and potential outputs.

## A WORD ON MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

I spent years of my career working in a middle school teaching seventh to ninth graders, and now I teach tenth to twelfth graders in high school. The lessons in this book have been written so that they can scale up or down according to the age and needs of your students.

Each lesson has some middle school and some high school Common Core Standards listed. Many states have their own standards with similar wording. Most of these standards are for ELA, as this is a book on writing instruction. But since writing affects all of the academic disciplines, some of the listed standards reflect this. While I write from the perspective of an English teacher, the lessons are broad and adaptable enough to be applied wherever students are writing.

At present, the terms of use on the big, readily available GenAI tools exclude students in elementary schools from using the products. While



educational technology companies will no doubt develop tools that can be used by younger students, it pays at this point to pause and think about whether childhood writing instruction without any artificial intelligence in school is worth preserving, at least until those middle school years.

I trust teachers to mold and weld and collage these lessons in ways that will most benefit their students.

I began this introduction referencing my own identity crisis in creating this book, but in the age of artificial intelligence, perhaps we are all due for an identity crisis—at least all of us writers.

As a teacher who deeply values writing as a vehicle for thought and as an art form, you will come across some ideas in this book that intrigue or excite you and others that agitate or even infuriate you. That is a good thing. Gauging our reactions to what AI *can* do helps us determine how best to communicate what it *should* do for our students. It helps us better articulate what we value most about writing and why. It helps us hold our assignments under a critical spotlight and determine whether they pass muster in terms of making students lift what we want them to lift, ponder what we hope they will ponder. Feel all those feels as you read this book. It will yield some new thinking about teaching, learning, and writing!

As I said at the start, I see myself as a humble explorer of this topic. I invite you to come and explore with me, open-minded and cautious and keenly observant all at once. Bring your classroom experience with what already works well for writing instruction and what does not, and I will bring mine, and together we can figure out some ways that artificial intelligence opens new possibilities for artful practice without damaging processes students need to acquire to build their own skills and identities as writers.

My hope is you will find that your own adaptations of the lesson plans in this book illuminate some meaningful truths for the writers in your care. Teaching students to write well has always been and always will be hard, hard work. It is also noble work, and I give you my standing ovation for taking it on in the first place, and doubly so for engaging in the challenges of our generative AI world.

Let's begin.