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“IS IT CHEATING?”—A VALUES ASSESSMENT FOR PREWRITING

Objectives

- To help students choose and articulate their beliefs about academic integrity as it relates to AI
- To explain an argument in writing, using details and reasoning

Relevant Standards

Middle School

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

High School

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Materials Needed

- A generative AI tool you have familiarized yourself with (e.g., ChatGPT)
- A projector to present generative AI responses live
- A writing prompt that you will not be asking students to respond to in class
- A sample handwritten outline for this writing prompt, created by the teacher or student
- Writer’s notebooks for all students

Procedure

Tell students that you will be sharing three different scenarios with them using a generative AI tool. You will be asking them to determine which, if any, of these scenarios are cheating on an assignment and why. Follow the directions below for each round.

Round #1

1. Live, in front of the whole class, engineer a prompt that invites a generative AI tool to create an outline for an essay based on a prompt. Use one that you do not actually plan to assign. A past prompt you have used or a prompt from the textbook materials may work well.
2. Discuss as a class what you notice about the outline the AI creates.

3. Ask students, “Is this cheating? Why or why not?” By hand, students write a one-paragraph response to this question in their writer’s notebooks, elaborating with details that support their argument.

Round #2

1. Share a short handwritten version of an outline you (or a former student) created for the same prompt you used in Round #1. Project this outline for the class.
2. Put this outline next to the AI-created outline from Round #1, projected for the whole class to see. Discuss how looking at two different outlines might help you as a writer.
3. Tell students, “Imagine if we created our own outline first and *then* prompted generative AI to create this outline. We compare them and revise our original outline. Is that cheating? Why or why not?” By hand, students write a second one-paragraph response in their writer’s notebooks.

Round #3

1. Type the handwritten version of the outline into the generative AI tool and ask the AI for feedback on the quality and clarity of the outline. (It may be helpful to have the outline already typed before class and saved on a document.)
2. Tell students, “Imagine if students ask AI for feedback on their own outline and get this reply. Is that cheating? Why or why not?”

From here, depending on the time you have available, teachers will handle the lesson differently. You may choose to

- have students physically “take a stand” for a belief by moving to one of the four corners of the room (strongly believe it’s cheating, kind of believe it’s cheating, kind of believe it’s not cheating, strongly believe it’s not cheating) and then argue their point to the class,
- have a partnered or small group discussion of these responses followed by a whole class discussion, or
- take a vote for each of the scenarios and have a whole class discussion after each vote.

You may notice that in this lesson there is both the presence of handwritten human thinking *and* the absence of a teacher’s opinion until after students have had a chance to think.

Much like teachers who invite students into the process of creating classroom rules, this simple lesson helps democratize the classroom and gets students internalizing the values of the classroom by having a voice in articulating them in the first place.

The class may notice:

- In Round #1, the AI creates the structure for the writing.
- In Round #2, the writer creates a structure for the writing, but after that, AI creates the structure for the writer to compare with their own plan.
- In Round #3, the AI evaluates the structure the writer has created and gives feedback.

You should consider: As a teacher, which (if any) prewriting practices do you consider cheating? Which do you consider an ethical use of a new tool? How would your district define academic integrity in this scenario? How are colleagues and colleges defining it?

A Writing Teacher's Reflection

Rather than closing this lesson with my answer, I leave you with this observation from my years of classroom teaching: Teenagers love discussing fairness. What is fair and unfair and why, what is honest and shady—these reckonings are already baked into adolescence as the young people we work with begin to grapple with the complexities of the world. So why not use it to our advantage when we approach AI?

In my experience, if students feel like AI is intrusive in their thinking, it weirs them out and they are likely to abandon it without my rules and regulations. Through some experimentation and a little time to write, this lesson has helped them craft their own values, and I think you'll be impressed with how adolescents think.