



THE WORD ON WAC

NEWSLETTER OF THE WAC

PROGRAM AT YORK

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- Articles on AI, Creative Writing, "Writing-to-Learn," and Pleasure in the Classroom
- Upcoming Workshops
- WAC Support & Resources



WRITING TO LEARN: CREATIVITY AND AI

Since the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT generative artificial intelligence chatbot back in the fall of 2022 (almost exactly two years ago to the day), not much has changed. Debates have not yet ceased to engage with the AI tool, cast alternatively as an obstacle needing to be overcome by some and as a revolutionary time-saver by others. Nonetheless, one of its qualities we can perhaps all agree on is its persistence. The WAC! Newsletter previously covered AI writing in a past issue (April 2023) just as instructors were beginning to feel its presence in their classrooms.

In this fall edition of the WAC! Newsletter, our contributors revisit questions on the use and role of AI tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly, ranging from an experiential report on its use as a pedagogical aid in the writing classroom to raising new questions engendered by the existence of AI writing further downstream, i.e. revisiting "writing-to-learn" teaching strategies and the employment of creative writing as well as out-the-box approaches.

An Updated List of Sources Tackling the Issue of AI Writing in the Classroom

- **Graduate Center scholars** [share their latest insights on teaching in an AI-infused world.](#)
- **The Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP)** [hosted a virtual roundtable discussion on the topic of utilizing AI tools constructively in the classroom.](#)
- **The UN's Environment Programme** [has published a report on AI's environmental impact.](#)
- **Texas A&M's Library** [released an open access educational module on AI use in rhetoric and composition classrooms.](#)

WRITING AND CRITICAL THINKING IN THE AGE OF A.I: REVISITING “WRITING-TO-LEARN”

BY RAQUEL COY

Recently, AI has emerged as a focal point within academic discourse, sparking fruitful discussions about the potential benefits and pitfalls of its use in teaching. Clara's article outlines many intriguing uses of AI, while other voices have raised concerns about its negative environmental impact and the ethical implications of the training data used by large language models. In particular, while AI has become remarkably adept at mimicking style and genre, fostering student critical thinking skills remains one of, if not the most, important aspects of education. To address this, it behooves us to revisit a core component of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) pedagogy: "writing-to-learn."

"Writing-to-learn" is a teaching strategy that encourages critical thinking through writing. Rather than focusing on the mechanics of style and genre, "writing-to-learn" activities are often short, informal writing tasks aimed at helping students hone critical thinking skills by reflecting on key concepts or ideas central to a course.

A renewed focus on these sorts of low-stakes activities can result in students processing information, reflecting on content learned, and connecting newly learned concepts to existing knowledge.

Some of these assignments could include:

- Journal/Blog entries (See sample prompts [here](#))
- Annotation of readings or Group Annotations on platforms like [Hypothes.is](#).
- Field Notes (See a sample assignment [here](#).)
- Scaffolded Mathematical Proofs (See Abrahamson's recommendations [here](#).)

If you are interested in learning more about "writing-to-learn" and other efficient strategies for teaching writing-intensive courses, check out the [York College Writing Intensive Faculty Seminar](#). It is an asynchronous seminar that explains key terms and the general pedagogical approaches of WAC philosophy. Upon completion, faculty will have created materials that can be used for WI course syllabi, writing assignments, and in-class activities. Further resources include:

More about "Writing-to-Learn" with Examples of Writing-to-Learn Activities:

<https://wac.colostate.edu/repository/teaching/intro/wtl/>

Additional Examples of Low-Stakes Writing Assignments:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/catalogs/tip-sheets/low-stakes-writing-assignments>

HOW CAN WE INTEGRATE CHATGPT IN THE CLASSROOM INSTEAD OF BEING AFRAID OF IT?

BY CLARA RAMAZZOTTI

hello! i would like to write a newsletter about the benefit of chatgpt in the classroom. what do you suggest?



If you ask ChatGPT, the AI tool will optimistically answer back that “in today’s rapidly evolving digital landscape, educators are constantly looking for innovative tools that can enhance learning experiences and better engage students. One such groundbreaking tool is ChatGPT, an AI-powered language model that is revolutionizing the classroom. By providing personalized assistance, fostering creativity, and improving accessibility, ChatGPT is shaping the future of education in remarkable ways.” (2024), but how this implementation is done is not clearly stated. This is one of the main issue with ChatGPT: it is vague, and has a vague writing style that does not really state some idea, some fresh concept, some faulty but personal take on a research topic.

I asked my Communication and Media Studies students to test it out, they were free to use in an open and honest activity where

“cheating” or “plagiarizing” from ChatGPT was not condemned. The majority of them “wrote” quite boring commentaries about a film that is all but boring (They Live, 1988, by John Carpenter). Most were not able to explain what the machine told them to write. Students do use the AI, in which Grammarly and other digital tools can be included, to simplify and often avoid writing work, and that is a statement in which many instructors can recognize themselves

But as with any new technology, there are positive side effects. For example, instructors can use ChatGPT to teach how **not** to write a paper. They can use it as a way to let the students recognize how their personal thoughts, their knowledge and writing, although a work in progress, is better than any copy/paste. It could add a sense of confidence, and trust in the relationship between the student and the instructor as well.

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According to ChatGPT, "One of the standout advantages of ChatGPT is its ability to offer personalized learning experiences [...]. Traditionally, it's challenging for teachers to provide one-on-one support to every student, especially in large classrooms. ChatGPT, however, can provide immediate responses to student queries, helping them understand complex concepts at their own pace." (2024).

Students do use the AI, in which Grammarly and other digital tools can be included, to simplify and often avoid writing work, and that is a statement in which many instructors can recognize themselves.

I disagree, and I would add that this is an extra work on the shoulders of instructors who now have to check if students' sources are completely invented.

What I believe could be a good use of ChatGPT is in explaining disinformation, how plagiarism works, and how to ask questions. At the University of Toronto it is already integrated in order to have students learning the potential of the machine, and not its basic copy/paste attitude. "Throughout the course, students will develop skills in the use of artificial intelligence in order to develop cutting-edge critical analyses of AI from a variety of ethical, practical and philosophical perspectives", stated Professor Paolo Granata, and he added,

"By experimenting with AI tools in the classroom, we hope to provide our students with a unique and enriching learning experience that will prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century, where AI literacy is key."(2023).

REFERENCES

U of T prof to offer experimental course taught with AI tools like ChatGPT

FOSTERING CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

BY ALEX VITERI

Teaching writing to students from different disciplines often feels like an uphill climb.

Many don't see themselves as writers, and some openly admit they don't read for fun—or at all. And yet, writing is everywhere—from the cereal box to an Instagram post. It's central to how we process ideas and also to how we communicate across fields. The question I keep coming back to is: how can we help students connect with writing in a way that feels meaningful?

One approach that's worked for me is reframing writing as a practice—something you show up for regularly, like exercise or meditation, not to perfect it, but simply to keep going. I like to encourage students to keep a low-stakes journal, a sketch book where they document their daily lives and digest the constant overload of information. Nothing elaborate—just a space to jot down ten things they noticed today, five things they thought of, a sentence they overheard, and a sketch of an image that crossed their mind. This kind of daily habit helps me to let go of the pressure to write “well” and focus on the act itself. It also creates a record of my life, something I'll look back on years later and rediscover with fresh eyes.

Reading for pleasure might be another piece of the puzzle. Many of my students aren't drawn to traditional texts, but they'll engage with other formats.

Alison Bechdel's *The Secret to Superhuman Strength* is one I often think about. It's essentially a long, visual essay exploring ideas about nature, fitness, and human connection. It's playful and deeply intellectual at the same time, combining images and text in a way that feels accessible. Graphic novels like this can be an entry point into complex ideas—just like the analysis of a chart or a diagram might be in another field.

Then there's the visual culture students already navigate. Many are creating content daily—Instagram posts, memes, short videos—and these practices are rich with narrative and argumentation. I've found that inviting these formats into the classroom helps students see writing as more than just a task to accomplish. Storyboarding an essay, analyzing the humor or rhetoric in a meme, or creating a multimedia project can make the work feel more relevant and connected to their world.

Ultimately, writing isn't about rules or rubrics—it's about finding meaning. If we can help students approach it with curiosity and joy, we'll have done more than teach a skill.

READ IT ONCE MORE WITH FEELING

BY ANDREW FAN

Pleasure is not a feeling often associated with the writing classroom (nor, for that matter, with the reading classroom).

It is more a pedagogical ideal, perhaps even fantasy, than an expectation of teaching reality. Instructors who manage to pull together the polarities of the “fun” and the “rigorous” often appear like miracle-workers. This polarity is a tight-rope instructors must navigate according to the demands of curricula, students’ attention spans, and the demands of workloads (on both “sides” of the classroom). We might, then, consider pleasure in writing and reading pedagogies as a luxury, as ornamental, as decorative elements to whatever target learning objective we are trying to hit for a particular class session, learning module, or throughout the semester. Thus, pleasure is in this way an outside-the-box pedagogical technique.

Ultimately, we might wish such a mutable and ephemeral affect were not so central to students’ sustained presence in the class. Yet pleasure—and by extension, creativity—is worth re-examining; not only in its role as a way to capture and sustain attention but as a more integrated pedagogical and scaffolding tool in itself.

In my own teaching, I have struggled to implement pleasure as a catalyst for student interest. Humor is often the most

easily graspable method of turning a boring lecture or reading on its head. But we all know humor varies in its mileage—some students laugh, others chuckle softly under their breath, while still others remain stony-faced.

Recently, I have turned to the notion of teaching students to “read like a writer.” Francine Prose’s book *Reading like a Writer*, a guide for aspiring literary fiction writers, is a direct inspiration.

Yet pleasure—and by extension, creativity—is worth re-examining; not only in its role as a way to capture and sustain attention but as a more integrated pedagogical and scaffolding tool in itself.

There, Prose advocates for a creative writing pedagogy that takes in the “great works” as models, where novice fiction writers (and belletristic writers in general) would seek to digest the evergreen tools, tricks, and techniques employed by renowned fiction writers and make those techniques their own.

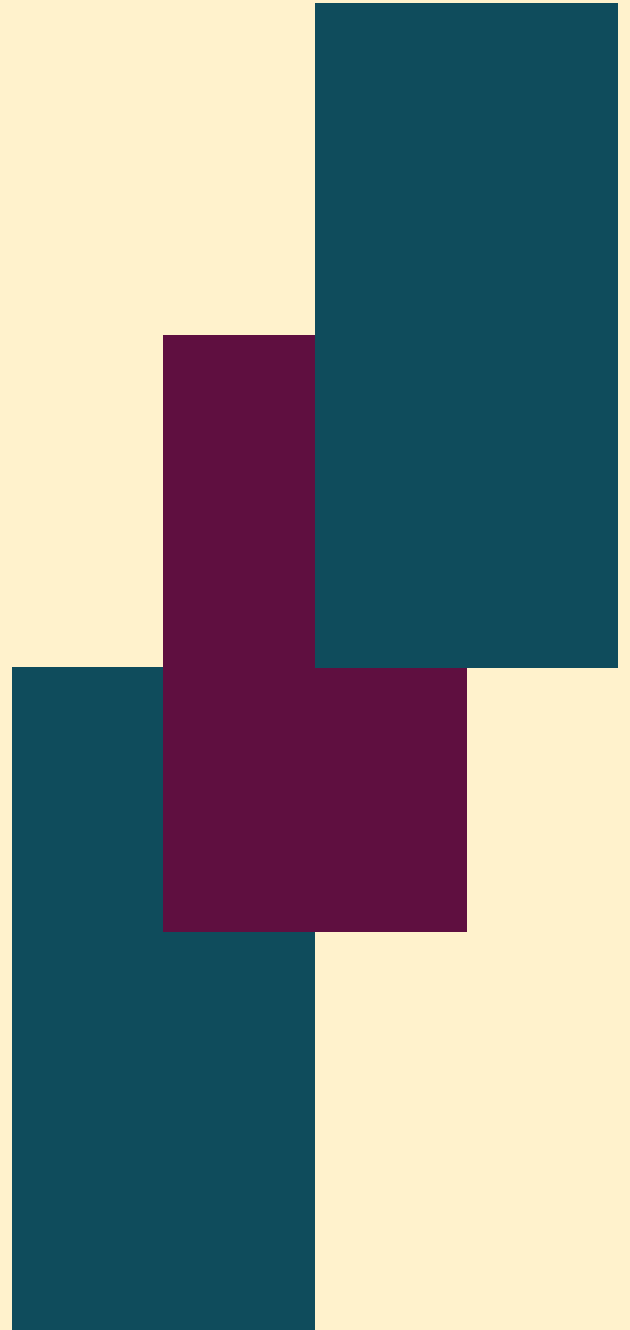
Reading and writing are different, but undeniably complementary skills: every writer necessarily began as a reader. However, in academic settings the usual analytic mode of reading follows a scholarly modality: read for information, read for persuasive power, read for research significance.

Consequently, writerly aspects such as style, voice, and rhetorical technique end up neglected. After all, these are ornaments, they are artifacts of pleasure—and we do not trust pleasure in the classroom.

However, I’ve found that focusing on these writerly aspects gets students to not only see writing as a package through which content is delivered, but the decorative elements themselves become worthy of attention and, potentially, imitation. Teaching to “read like a writer” can translate and scaffold well into writing activities.

REFERENCES

Prose, Francine. *Reading Like a Writer. A Guide for People Who Like Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them*. HarperCollins, 2006.



HOW TO WRITE A COURSE PAPER: A READING LIST

BY KATYA KISTANOVA

As students, we all experience genuine fear or irritation when faced with the task of writing a course paper, thesis, or PhD dissertation in order to satisfy the degree requirements. Many of us have not had and do not have the chance or opportunity to take a course on how to write a scientific text. At best, we receive a list of requirements and, if we are lucky, brief instructions on the structure of the work, the number of sources, the citation style, and the number of printed pages our final draft should have. Questions about how to choose a topic for a course paper or thesis so that it does not become unbearably boring and continues to interest us for a significant period of time and from which side to approach the chosen topic often remain unanswered. In references provided below, I offer a brief introduction of two books that have provided and continue to provide me with remarkable assistance in writing course papers, articles, and a PhD dissertation. These books will give you an idea of what a scientific paper is, how to choose a topic and calculate the time frame for writing the paper meeting your deadlines, how to organize the literature you have read and the materials you have collected, and finally, how to put the results down on paper and work on your style.



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Eco, U. (2015). *How to write a thesis* (Caterina Mongiat Farina, Geoff Farina, and Francesco Erspamer Translators). MIT Press.

In this book, the famous writer and scientist, author of best-selling novels such as *Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*, Umberto Eco (1932–2016), outlines for students the path to follow so that they can hand in their scientific work on a certain day and time. Everything that students need to know, especially when they take on a thesis or course paper, is presented with intelligence and tact, with artistic expressiveness and excellent technicality. Any student who reads this book will get rid of doubts and questions and will experience genuine joy from getting acquainted with the method of scientific research of the great scientist and writer. Some provisions presented in the book, concerning certain technical aspects, are outdated (we do not use typewriters and do not copy, but scan books). However, everything that concerns the intellectual component of scientific work is universal and will always be relevant. **Bonus:** You as students at the City University of New York have access to the book online through the CUNY library for free!

Pinker, S. (2015). *The sense of style: The thinking person's guide to writing in the 21st century*. Penguin Books.

Steven Pinker is a prominent linguist and cognitive scientist. In his book, *The Sense of Style*, he demonstrates how writing can be turned into a pleasurable and intellectual endeavor. It is difficult to find words to convince you to open this book. You just have to open it. You will encounter an intelligent and engaging mentor who will gently guide you in the art of writing. **Bonus:** You as students at the City University of New York can borrow this book in the CUNY library for free!

WAC SUPPORT

Fall 2024: Upcoming CLC Writing Workshops for Students

Dec 2nd at 9 am

- Anatomy of an Essay

Faculty, would you like some feedback on your writing intensive materials? Then consider taking the self-paced online [WI Faculty Seminar](#).

Or, take the [WAC program survey](#) to provide feedback and suggestions!

If you have a more targeted request of the Writing Fellows, then email Raquel Coy at rcoy@york.cuny.edu.