REVISING WRITING ASSESSMENTS IN RESPONSE TO GENERATIVE AI

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Abstract
The author describes how she revised writing assessments in the university's first-year writing sequence to emphasize rhetorical analysis of multimodal texts, prompts to which generative AI and ChatGPT struggle to respond.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, AI, writing assessments, ChatGPT, first-year composition, comparative analysis, multimodal texts

Like many writing teachers, I have been spending a lot of time thinking about how to respond to advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI). One of my responsibilities at Wichita State University is overseeing English 102, the second course in our first-year writing sequence. As we entered fall 2023, I was especially concerned about the final exam for the online version of this class.

Historically, the exam asked students to write a timed essay responding to one of three quotations, and the results were scored with a rubric based on the six traits of writing. This data was used for programmatic assessment as well as university accreditation. In online sections of the course, students took the final exam through our learning management system. The exam was timed but not proctored, making it relatively easy for students to submit AI-generated output instead of their own writing. In summer 2023, we noticed that many online students' final exams exhibited hallmarks of AI-generated writing—high technical proficiency despite the limited time frame, a formulaic five-paragraph structure, and little sense of the student's own voice. It was clearly time to rethink the exam.

Instead of doubling-down on student surveillance via online proctoring services or AI-checking software, I put together a team of instructors to help me redesign the exam. Through experimentation, we discovered that ChatGPT struggled with prompts asking it to analyze multimodal texts, especially if the texts had not received media attention. From previous experience working with ChatGPT, we also knew that it struggled with comparing texts. With this information, we set out to redesign the exam around a comparative analysis of recent advertisements.

In its final form, the revised exam asked students to compare two advertisements for a similar product. To encourage student choice, each version of the exam offered three options: a set of video advertisements, a set of print advertisements, and a set of audio advertisements. For example, one version of the exam asked students to compare two video advertisements for different credit cards, two print advertisements for different brands of dog food, or two audio advertisements for local car dealerships.

The revised exam also provided us with an opportunity to reinforce other course content. English 102 includes a unit on rhetorical analysis, in which students analyze how *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* are used in different texts. The new exam encouraged students to draw on what they learned

during this unit and discuss the rhetorical strategies used in each advertisement. We also revised the exam rubric to reflect the new format and emphasis on rhetorical analysis.

In fall 2023, we piloted the redesigned final exam in eight sections of ENGL 102, with exciting results. Both students and instructors felt that the new exam was more relevant to the course content, and instructors reported receiving more authentic and engaged writing. By privileging the kinds of thinking and writing that generative AI struggles with, we ended up creating a better assessment of students' writing.

Author Biography
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