

# Learning the Hard (Copy) Way: Teaching Writing's Value after AI Policy Failure

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TXST 2026 AI in Teaching and Learning Symposium

# The Grain of the Voice: Building Students' Conviction in Writing

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TXST 2025 AI in Teaching and Learning Symposium

From last  
year's  
presentation:

- To fully comprehend AI's presence in higher ed is a process of mourning  
(at least for humanities professors)

From last  
year's  
presentation:

- The stages of AI grief do not go in any order...For example, AI Denial and AI Anger can overlap, as they often do for critics who claim in the same sentence that AI is not real and yet must be stopped at all costs.

Benjamin Bratton, "The Five Stages of AI Grief," *Noema*, June 20, 2024,  
<https://www.noemamag.com/the-five-stages-of-ai-grief/>

From last  
year's  
presentation:

- **What is to be done?**
  - Talk to students about the importance of “the grain of *their* voice”

Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice.",  
translated by Stephen *Image Music Text*  
Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

From last  
year's  
presentation:

- **What is to be done?**
  - Talk to students about the transferable quality of writing (career preparation) and the social scientific evidence of a correlation between advanced literacy and economic/personal well-being

From last  
year's  
presentation:

## My recommendations:

- Prohibit AI use on writing assignments shorter than 3 pages
- Permit AI use for **writing guidance only** (never generating text) on assignments longer than 3 pages
- In-class writing in every single undergraduate humanities seminar unit (viewing/reading reflections, discussion questions, whiteboard brainstorming, start-of-class focus journaling)

If at first you  
don't  
succeed...

- **Fall 2025 seminar, 15 undergraduates:**
  - Choice of writing 2, prompt-driven short essays (5 pages) or a 10-page research paper.
  - 1 withdrawal (“unable to give the class the focused attention it deserves”)
  - 4 confirmed as using AI in violation of the policy, and disciplined (zero on the assignment); 3 were humanities majors
  - 1 confirmed as using AI in violation of the policy and fabrication of false evidence to cover up the academic dishonesty (D in the course); humanities minor
  - 3 did not complete one of the two 5-page papers assigned; none were humanities majors or minors
  - **60% of my seminar students were unable to complete the long-form writing tasks as assigned**

If at first you  
don't  
succeed...

- **What is to be done again...or redone?**
  - Detailed prompts for permitted AI use on writing assignments over 3 pages

If at first you  
don't  
succeed...

- **Examples of permitted AI uses and prompts**
- **Reviser** - For suggesting phrase or sentence revisions to content and structure (revising entire paragraphs with AI is prohibited)
  - **Example prompt:** “I know this sentence is very awkward but I’m having trouble fixing it. Suggest three different verbs I can use that might express the thought more clearly.” To maintain academic integrity and my learning experience, please limit your response to suggestions that I can implement and do not generate essay text for me”
  - There should be NO fully-AI-generated sentences in your final hand-in
- **Proofreader** - For help with grammar, spelling, and syntax corrections
  - **Example prompt:** “Flag the areas in this essay where there are major improvements to be made in grammar, spelling and/or syntax. When there is a major grammar or syntax mistake I’ve made, give a concise and clear explanation so I can be alert to them and avoid those mistakes in the future. To maintain academic integrity and my learning experience, please limit your response to suggestions that I can implement and do not generate essay text for me”;
  - There should be NO fully-AI-generated sentences in your final hand-in

If at first you  
don't  
succeed...

- **What is to be done again...or redone?**
  - Require submission of AI use statement:  
“I worked with AI (model, version) to complete this assignment in the following ways (how-to-tutorials/title ideas, proof reading, improve transition between paragraphs 4 and 5, etc.)”

If at first you  
don't  
succeed...

- **What is to be done again...or redone?**
  - Delete a course unit, and devote 1-2 class sessions to discussion about reading, writing, their value, and the complexity of AI
    - Assigned materials:
      - Andrew Limbong, host. "How to Practice Deep Reading." *Life Kit*, NPR, 30 Apr. 2024, [www.npr.org/2024/04/30/1196979151/how-to-practice-deep-reading](http://www.npr.org/2024/04/30/1196979151/how-to-practice-deep-reading)
      - Anna Mills, *AI and College Writing: An Orientation*, [https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Specialized\\_Composition/AI\\_and\\_College\\_Writing%3A\\_An\\_Orientation](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Composition/Specialized_Composition/AI_and_College_Writing%3A_An_Orientation)

Reading  
beyond  
decoding,  
toward deep  
cognitive and  
affective  
processes



An amazing resource for ethical and effective AI use

# AI AND COLLEGE WRITING: AN ORIENTATION

Anna Mills  
College of Marin and Cañada College



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

### 1: Basics

- 1.1: Introduction
- 1.2: What is AI, and why are people talking about it so much?
- 1.3: How do chatbots come up with text?
- 1.4: AI copies patterns; it doesn't think
- 1.5: AI can generate decent-sounding text. Do we still need to learn to write?

### 2: Cautions

- 2.1: Don't trust AI- sometimes it makes things up
- 2.2: Don't trust AI to cite its sources
- 2.3: Don't trust AI with sensitive information; check the privacy policy
- 2.4: Don't trust AI- it's biased
- 2.5: Does using AI do harm? If so, should we stop using it?

### 3: Academic Integrity

- 3.1: How do I know which use of AI is allowed and which isn't?
- 3.2: Acknowledging and Citing Generative AI in Academic Work
- 3.3: How can I protect myself against false accusations of using AI?

### 4: AI Strategies

- 4.1: How do we tell uses of AI that help learning from ones that hurt?
- 4.2: AI for tutoring-style assistance
- 4.3: Reasons not to let AI brainstorm, write, revise, or edit (in college)
- 4.4: Getting the most out of AI (prompting)
- 4.5: Which AI tools should I consider?
- 4.6: Getting the most out of AI feedback
- 4.7: AI for research assistance

### 5: Prompts for Student Use

- 5.1: Writing Feedback Prompts
- 5.2: Prompts That Help Us Check AI Outputs
- 5.3: Research Topic Feedback Prompt
- 5.4: Grammar and Style Explainer Prompt
- 5.5: Others Sources of Prompts for Students

### 6: Additional Resources

- 6.1: Student Essay Critiquing a New York Times Article on the Dangers of AI
- 6.2: Writing a reflection about AI feedback
- 6.3: Template Phrases for Critiquing AI Outputs

Ever tried, ever failed...

- **Spring 2026 seminar, 14 undergraduates:**
  - Choice of writing 3, prompt-driven short essays (3-4 pages) or a 10-page research paper. 2/24 deadline for Short Essay I or research paper working thesis statement and outline
  - 2 have not submitted anything.
  - 4 confirmed as using AI in violation of the policy and disciplined (zero on the assignment); 2 were humanities majors, 2 arts majors
  - 2 used AI as allowed per course policy, and submitted detailed AI use statements
  - 6 did not use AI at all
  - **43% of my seminar students are so far unable to complete the mid-to-long-form writing tasks as assigned**

Ever tried, ever failed...

- **Which way to go from here?**
  - Add more class sessions on responsible, ethical AI use?
  - Greater focus on peer review (for example, more frequent class presentations on work in progress, more student symposia, more student submissions to publications?)
    - Both of these mean more content carved out of an already abridge curriculum
    - Ideally, TXST would take this on in Core Writing courses

Ever tried, ever failed...

- **Which way to go from here?**
  - Require submission of AI prompts used in essay research development and writing?
  - Require submission of X number of questions posed to AI while reading/viewing assigned material (encourage fact-checking)
    - Will more intense “vetting” work if I haven’t had buy-in with a simply AI use statement?

Ever tried, ever failed...

- **Which way to go from here?**
  - Am I a literacy coach now?
  - Is banning or disregarding AI use the best alternative (in my view, these are one and the same)?



# What Students Are Really Saying About AI: A Dialogue

Wednesday, March 11 | 2:30 - 4 p.m.  
Online via Zoom

In Partnership with the University Writing Center

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Center for Teaching,  
Learning & Scholarship



# Stob AI, Reading and Writing Questionnaire

- Emailed to 170 students (those enrolled in my spring classes and Art History majors and minors)
- 33 completed it
- Mostly upperclassman (26 out of 33)
- Mostly Art and Design majors (21 out of 33), but we are a diverse school (Studio Art, Art History, Art Education, Photography, Communication Design)
- <https://forms.gle/EN3hHP1TUacU97yi8>
- *Do you believe in this literacy project we're doing together?*
- *What do you do about AI in your education, and what do you think I should do?*

# Stob AI, Reading and Writing Questionnaire

- Extremely unscientific (I am not a data analyst!); real patterns, but probably skewed by reporting bias.
- For my purposes: a portrait of the profound ambivalence and cognitive dissonance involving AI in the student population
- 16% cite ADHD, dyslexia, depression, fatigue, or a chronic condition as contributing to reading and writing challenges
- 58% report no AI use whatsoever on assignments and 47% would prefer that their professors ban AI use entirely

# Stob AI, Reading and Writing Questionnaire

- “The most important correlation in this dataset: the near-universal belief in writing's value (Q9: 97% affirm connection; Q12: 77% believe writing will change them) does NOT predict consistent, intrinsically motivated engagement (Q13: only ~19% frame effort in learning terms). **Students believe writing matters. They do not consistently act on that belief.**” (Claude Sonnet 4.6 query, 3/2/26)
- “AI use, where present, is almost always framed as a response to **time pressure, workload, and the assessment-driven nature of academic writing**” (Claude Sonnet 4.6 query, 3/2/26)
- For now and the near future: what, if anything, can I do about the distance between students' belief in writing's value and their actual experience of it in humanities courses?

# Discussion

- A few parameters I'd like us to honor:
  - Specific and pragmatic
  - Genuine curiosity
  - Avoid the poles and address what's in the middle
- Thank you so much for being here!