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Critical AI Literacy as a Tool for Building Writing Skills

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Critical AI Literacy as a Tool for Building Writing Skills

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Overview

This structured classroom activity offers an agency-centered approach to teaching critical AI literacy in the writing classroom through a feminist methodology lens. Rather than approaching AI literacy as training students *how to use* generative AI tools, the activity positions students as rhetorical judges and critical witnesses, aligning with feminist methodologies of refusal that foreground consent, transparency, and the material conditions that make AI possible (Fernandes and McIntyre 67; Rodríguez 6). The assignment is highly adaptable for first-year writing and writing-intensive courses across disciplines, and it supports instructors who either allow limited AI use or prefer to discourage it.

This activity is best sequenced in the first half of the semester, but not with immediacy, as it helps develop students as writers, but is most successful when students have first been exposed to examples of good disciplinary writing. The activity begins with a discussion of LLMs' context: what they are, how they work in simple terms, and a brief overview of genAI use's risks and drawbacks. Students then are guided to produce an AI-generated essay responding to a course-relevant prompt. Working individually, they evaluate the essay using one of two strategies: (1) applying the instructor's rubric or a co-constructed rubric, or (2) answering guided questions about rhetorical effectiveness, accuracy, bias, and genre conventions.

Through this evaluation, students learn to articulate what makes writing effective within a specific disciplinary, rhetorical, and genre context. Designed to simultaneously foster critical AI literacy in

students while also helping them to become stronger writers through evaluation and meta-cognition, this activity also demystifies the composing process and reduces reliance on AI by revealing its shortcomings in analysis, nuance, and writerly decision-making. Ultimately, the assignment supports students in developing rhetorical judgment and writerly identity while fostering critical, ethical engagement with emerging writing technologies.

Time Commitment

One to two full class periods.

Materials

The activity requires an existing or newly developed assignment prompt relevant to the course, student access to a Large Language Model (LLM) platform such as ChatGPT or Gemini, a strong local or professor-specific policy on AI usage, and potentially a rubric for evaluation. Template phrases for critiquing AI outputs, such as those from *How Arguments Work* (Mills), can also be helpful.

Activity Process

- The instructor prefaces the activity with a brief, grounding discussion of how generative AI works, including real-world concerns related to bias, environmental impact, and the non-consensual data extraction through which LLMs are trained.

- Utilizing an assignment prompt from the course (or a newly-developed prompt related to course content, if the instructor prefers not to have their actual assignment prompts shared with LLMs), students are asked to input the assignment prompt into an LLM to generate an essay. Instructors may let students choose the LLM of their choice or standardized the LLM platform across all students.

- Next, students will individually evaluate the writing of the generative AI output using a rubric or a template bank of evaluative statements for guidance. If using a rubric to evaluate writing, the instructor may provide students with the rubric used to evaluate that assignment (or an assignment like it) in their course. Alternatively, the instructor and students may collaboratively create a rubric together based on what students have noticed about effective disciplinary writing they've read so far in the course. If guiding students to use evaluative statements is preferred, students can be instructed to use "Template Phrases for Critiquing AI Outputs" from *How Arguments Work* (Mills). This template can be used as is, or modified to be more specific to writing moves instructors would like to see students assess and learn, or to disciplinary writing conventions common to their field.

- Finally, students are asked to reflect on their evaluation, either via in-class writing or small group discussion. Students may be guided to reflect on and share what they think the LLM did well and what it did not do so well, and to identify patterns, strategies, evidence of formulaic writing, and limitations.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Foster greater critical AI literacy via thoughtful engagement with and transparent conversation around generative AI used for composition

- Become stronger writers through critical evaluation of model texts and engaging in meta-cognition

- Increase rhetorical awareness and attention to disciplinary writing conventions

- Learn to articulate what makes writing effective for a given audience, task, and purpose

Learning Accommodations

- Instructions should be delivered in multiple formats, visually and verbally, and modifications should be offered for students who may not wish to or be able to bring a laptop to class.

- Students should be allowed to locate and adhere to their own personal values surrounding the use of artificial intelligence, and the overall approach should be motivated by feminist pedagogies and methodologies that center consent and agency in the AI usage process. Therefore, a suitable alternative assignment should be offered to a student who does not wish to produce AI-generated text.

Works Cited

Fernandes, Maggie, and Megan McIntyre. "Recoveries and Reconsiderations: Linguistic Justice and Storying Resistance to Generative AI." *Peitho* 27.2 (2025): 66-72.

Mills, Anna. *How arguments work: A guide to writing and analyzing texts in college.* Open Education Resource (OER) LibreTexts Project, 2020.

Rodríguez, Yanira. "Pedagogies of refusal." *The Radical Teacher* 115 (2019): 5-12.

Further Reading

Sano-Franchini, Jennifer. "What's "Critical" about "Critical AI"? A Recommitment to Humanistic Inquiry in the Ostensible March to Hyper-Automation." *Proceedings of the Computers & Writing Conference.* 2025.

Sano-Franchini, Jennifer, Megan McIntyre, and Maggie Fernandes.

"Refusing GenAI in Writing Studies: A Quickstart Guide." *Refusing Generative AI in Writing Studies*. Nov. 2024, refusinggenai.wordpress.com