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Assistive Yet Authorial: Critical Use of GenAI in Personal Narrative Prewriting

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Overview

Due to the accelerating adoption of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) across higher education, writing instructors face everyday challenges in developing academic writing skills while integrating GenAI to enhance digital literacy, critical AI literacy, and prompt engineering. Not to undermine students' authorial agency, authentic voice, and ownership in their production, but to provide them with a deliberate initial contact with an authorial use of new meaning-making technology, the activity suggests a hybrid approach to personal narrative prewriting that promotes creative and critical thinking with GenAI as an assistive yet authorial tool, rather than as an impersonator or replacement of student writing.

Through the ordered sequence of initial contact, from 1) inventing a personal narrative title, 2) planning potential content, 3) articulating personal narrative project's purpose, 4) entering the qualitative data to interact with GenAI for prompt engineering practice, 5) critical diagnosing and analyzing the result, students can (re)discover their lives as narratable qualitative data which only they can generate and have control to extend for the further academic, professional communication and meaning-making activities. Furthermore, this concept of lives as qualitative data serves as the key to initially preserving students' authorial power, which allows students to hold their own primary, irreducible raw source of narratable/researchable data and to possess a critical lens for autonomous inquiry, discovery, and communication. The authorial capability also enables them to discover their values, even with the deliberate utilization of GenAI on what it is given, as Goldkuhl mentions that "[a] researcher's

intentional act [creates] situations that produce qualitative data. Researchers often cannot simply gather already existing data out of everyday life reality” (Goldkuhl 577).

Applying the authorial, intentional, and critical lens to using GenAI, it functions as an assistive tool for testing (evaluating) and troubleshooting initial ideas and potential content that capture authentic voices from students’ lives. Furthermore, by witnessing where GenAI fails to represent their lives and personalities, students paradoxically gain confidence in their own narratives as genuine stories, liberated from prewriting-stage writing anxiety, and reclaim ownership beyond the dependable routine of algorithm-generated texts, in developing powerful metacognitive, critical AI literacy skills.

In this activity, students are never alone with a novel tool they do not understand. With synchronous, instant support from the instructor and collaborative peers, they learn to experiment, question, and reflect together in class in dynamic relationships among themselves, their peers, their instructor, and even GenAI, using it assertively yet agentially. This activity is applicable to any institution where the personal narrative serves as an entry point of an academic writing course.

Time Commitment

45-60 minutes

Materials

A personal device to type texts or a computer lab desktop is recommended for accessing 1) a free or institution-offered version of a GenAI tool (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or Copilot) and 2) Google Docs to read and make a duplicate version of the activity worksheet so that students can add content, edit, and revise freely on their duplicate document. No other specialized software or institutional subscriptions are required.

Activity Process

- The instructor will conversationally guide students to an initial comprehension of what activity is going to be given to them, for the personal narrative prewriting process, saying, “this activity will serve as a fundamental source to creatively extend your initial thoughts of vague ideas to an advanced storytelling, and this is also to practice the assistive yet critical use of GenAI technology.”
- In stage one, students will write their own qualitative data under the requested subjects, before any interaction with GenAI:
 - Personal Narrative’s Potential Title: students will be informed that setting a title is essential work in any kind of narrative to hint at the main theme and message for the audience’s vivid imagination. After that, they are required to write a part that gives the personal narrative writing a unique attribute and identity.
 - Planning Potential Content and Purpose Statement: Students will brainstorm and write the potential content, such as 1) three sentences of beginning, middle, and end, 2) a broad conversational discussion of what they want to show and tell in their narrative, and 3) the purpose or intended (emotional or other) impacts that students want to fulfill, such as to reflect, to entertain, to inform, to sadden, etc.
- Next, in stage two, students will open a GenAI and practice prompt engineering and critical facilitation of it, to understand that “*prompting is not just a technical input, but a pedagogical act* that demands awareness, iteration, and

contextual adaptation” (Qian 1801).

- First, students will ask GenAI to generate a skeletal outline of a personal narrative, including a beginning, middle, and end, based on the attached pre-written information (from stage one). When entering pre-written data, the student will be guided to follow the CLEAR prompt engineering framework: *concise* (refined qualitative data), *logical* (the logical order of title, potential content, and purpose), and *explicit* (asking for the generation of a skeletal outline) inputs (Lo 2).
- Second, students will do selective revising and editing work on the generated outline, using their own authorial intention/agency.
- Third, students will generate a short-full draft (around 200 words) of the personal narrative using the pre-written qualitative data plus the revised and/or edited outline. Or, if a student builds a completely new outline with new bullet points, the student will be allowed to do so to rebuild their qualitative data.
- Fourth, students will have a few minutes to think, reflect on, and review the quality of the generated personal narrative, its authenticity, the feeling of successfully exercising or being deprived of agency, and the extent of impersonation or individualization using the tool.
- Next, in stage three, students will be asked to answer the following questions by expressing their own thoughts through criticism, contemplation, and interpretation of the generated text.

- **Questions, for Students' Critical Review of the Generated Text:**
 - Does the generated text represent your actual life truthfully and factually? Simply put, does this story represent you and your identity?
 - Read the AI-generated text and compare it to the way you would like to or planned to naturally tell the story. What specific differences do you notice in tone, word choices, voice, or the way your personality comes through?
- **Questions, for Students' Decision as an Author with Agency**
 - Did the AI fulfill what you originally intended and aimed for? What did it miss, add, or change with or without your intention or permission?
 - Based on your review and reflection, what parts of the generated outline and/or paragraphs would you keep, revise, or discard for your personal narrative?
- Finally, students will be ready to write their first draft of a personal narrative for the next class, and the instructor will guide them in submitting the document to a discussion board and saving it to their database.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity will:

- Recognize the value of lived experiences as qualitative data that only students can generate, gather, and use, as a primary source to be explored, composed, and communicated in a textual form
- Develop academic writing, digital literacy, critical AI literacy, and prompt engineering skills, understanding the CLEAR framework (Lo 2)
- Utilize GenAI as an assistive academic writing tool to test, troubleshoot, and evaluate initial ideas in the prewriting stage
- Critically evaluate AI-generated text for authenticity, voice, tone, and genuine representation of students and their lives
- Exercise authorial agency by selectively revising, editing, or discarding AI-generated content, based on their own authorial intentions and set purposes
- Foster metacognitive awareness of GenAI's abilities and limitations as an assistive academic writing tool, providing a space to contemplate the double-edged nature of GenAI and to reclaim authorial ownership beyond heavy reliance on algorithm-generated texts

Learning Accommodations

- For students who are uncomfortable using personal accounts for any kind of GenAI tools, the instructor may provide a shareable demonstration account or may be able to generate texts in lieu of a student through using the student's shared prewritten data, particularly for the third question-and-answer stage.
- For multilingual students, the instructor may encourage them to brainstorm in their native language(s), rather than blocking their natural self-discovery in authentic mining and

constructing qualitative data from their lived experiences. Also, if necessary, these students can use an AI translator with the instructors' guidance.

Works Cited

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