Befriending Generative AI

Generative Artificial Intelligence is a front and center issue for many in higher education. It has certainly shifted the landscape of the teaching profession. The six teaching tips that follow are designed to help instructors harness the full power of AI.

Clearly state your policies in the syllabus

To avoid any potential misunderstandings with students, every instructor is encouraged to state their policies around the use of generative AI in their class syllabus. Consider sketching out the types of scenarios in which students would be allowed to use generative AI in their work and highlight the fact that using it without attribution constitutes violation of academic integrity. Additionally, remind yourself and your students that AI-generated content may contain erroneous and fabricated data. Double-checking the AI-generated output, as well as the sources it cites is good practice.

Let generative AI assist you with visual storytelling

Text tools are popular and helpful with idea generation, document summarization, and many other tasks. Equally useful, even if not as popular, are image generating AIs, such as Adobe Firefly. Although AI-generated images may contain graphic errors (for example, bunnies with 4 ears, or human hands with 6 fingers), they can be very effective in enhancing visual storytelling, particularly when 100% accuracy isn't of utmost importance. Pleasant and creative visuals are easy to make, and they add variety, versatility and spice to one's presentations, lecture notes or handouts. Additionally, they can serve as good examples of AI's propensity for hallucinations. While AI-generated video content is in its nascency, and prone to comical behavior, short video clips can aid in expanding one's visual storytelling palette. Furthermore, AI-generated captions in Kaltura/Illinois Media Space have a very high accuracy rate and greatly reduce production time, while helping to fulfill accessibility requirements.

Practice prompt engineering

Prompt engineering (prompt creation) is a skill that can be practiced and improved. Being as detailed and descriptive as possible gives one a better chance of generating the desired output, as gen AI is inept at understanding metaphors and colloquialisms. As an example, the image below was created in Adobe Firefly with the following prompt: "Night owl on a couch reading a book." The phrase "night owl" was interpreted and executed literally by AI.

It doesn't reason the same way humans do, yet. Learn to learn its language and you'll be successful in your creations. For a concise guide to prompt engineering consult this article.

Be mindful of what information you share

By default, generative AI companies will use your prompts and your outputs to further train their models, thus exposing your data to privacy and security risks. Opting out of this setting tends to be cumbersome and difficult. That's why it is recommended to use the university approved tools. Microsoft Copilot, Adobe Firefly, and Illinois Chat, to name but three, offer extra levels of privacy and security by keeping your data local and not using it in their knowledge base. In all situations, though, refrain from sharing sensitive or personally identifiable information, including student records, with any generative AI tool. Also, any original content, especially one created by someone else, deserves careful handling in the digital realm, where it can be easy to unknowingly and unconsciously violate privacy and

copyright laws. When in doubt, a prudent approach would be to never run any original, copyrighted work through generative AI.

AI is here to stay, so make friends with it

Generative AI is a fact of life. It elicits a full range of emotions. Some of our students and faculty are fearful for their professional careers in the wake of this new agent. At the same time, the data shows that companies value generative AI skills in prospective employees. Therefore, it is recommended to welcome the new technology. Serving as exemplars of ethical use of generative AI in higher education is going to better prepare our students for success in the future.

Be patient! We are here to help

Be patient with yourself and your students. We are all in this together; we are all learning and growing. Don't let the amount and speed with which generative AI is expanding overwhelm you and get you down. Reach out to us at the CITL with any questions. In addition, avail yourself of the generative AI workshops offered by the CITL and other organizations on campus. We are here to help.