

ChatGPT Blog – Spring 2023

Reflections on the First AI Semester – Possibilities, Problems, and Paths Forward

By [Sarai Brinker](#)

On the first day of the Spring Semester back in January, I asked my students how many of them knew what ChatGPT was. Only a handful raised their hand, and I was surprised not more of them had heard about it given that I, like many of my colleagues, spent a good chunk of Winter Break hand wringing and wondering if sensational headlines like [The College Essay Is Dead](#) were really true. It turns out that the essay isn't dead exactly, but things will certainly never be the same. After a semester of experimenting with AI in the classroom with my students, I've come away with exciting new teaching strategies as well as even more questions about the implications of AI for teaching.

My inclination towards AI is to “play chess, not checkers.” By that I mean there is no way this genie is ever going back into the bottle, and so we need to be more strategic than banning its use or moralizing about why people should or shouldn't use it. We need to be a little smarter, a little savvier, and we need to offer students something more valuable than automatically generated text. I made it my mission to figure out how to do that well.

In my classes, we listen to and analyze a lot of music. In the past, I assigned musical analyses for homework. This year, rather than assigning students to create an analysis and worrying about whether the analyses were human or AI generated, we did a lot more work in class. “Beat the Bot” style activities were the biggest hit. We asked the bot to analyze the song in class in real time, and then we worked collaboratively to make the analysis better than what the bot could produce.

One day, we asked ChatGPT to analyze Taylor Swift's “Anti-Hero.” The bot provided a decent analysis, but we added details, nuance, and more descriptive

language than the bot could provide in its first response. Possibly the best teaching moment came when the bot stated the song was released in 2020 as part of *evermore* and in response to Taylor’s mental health struggles throughout the pandemic. Turns out, ChatGPT is not a Swiftie and did not “know” that the song was actually released in 2022 on *Midnights* and is more of an exploration of personal anxieties and insecurities than a critique of public health policy. I like to think that the students learned that A) they don’t actually need a bot to create an excellent analysis, and B) it’s more rewarding and fun to do it ourselves. Oh, and by the way, AI will occasionally lie to you.

While “Beat the Bot” is probably my favorite AI strategy (it’s probably my competitive nature), there are other useful ways we integrated AI this year. I showed my students how to give AI a rubric as part of the “prompt engineering” process and asked my students to run their drafts through AI to get some initial feedback prior to submission. We discussed how to use AI to assist in idea generation or to develop an excellent outline.

AI helped my students, but it also helped me in Spring 2023. Instead of spending hours scouring the internet for teaching ideas, I used AI to develop more engaging lesson plans. AI helped me generate discussion questions, handouts, ideas for in-class activities, and worksheets. Sometimes it felt like having an extra TA, and it gave me more time to spend where it really matters- like giving my students more personalized feedback.

There are many positive aspects to using AI in the classroom. It can be leveraged to engage students at a high level of thinking, and it can assist with the editing and revision process. It can help instructors free up time to engage with students and materials more deeply. It can make our classrooms smarter and more creative spaces.

At the same time, I’m also an academic, which means I can’t help but think through every possible way this whole thing could go sideways, and I do have a lot of concerns. Of course, one of those is preserving academic integrity, particularly

in online courses. I am not confident I can consistently and accurately recognize AI writing. Is anyone? Are you really 100% confident I wrote this post with no assistance or input from AI? I'm not even confident AI detection software can make that claim.

I feel a responsibility to teach my students how to use AI, because it will be just as much of a game changer in their lives as the development of the internet was in mine. At the same time, I worry that if we don't get this right, students will have a hard time finding their own voice. AI writing makes it so easy to generate a voice that it has the potential to take away the absolutely necessary process of stumbling through repeated failures on the way to finding the right words. I worry AI might interfere with the cumbersome and difficult process of figuring out who we really are, what we really think, and why. Maybe helping students do that is the ultimate way to "beat the bot?"

This fall, I'd like to think we are going into the new semester a little wiser and better prepared when it comes to AI, but the truth is that, if last three years have taught us anything, it's that things are always shifting and we should expect the unexpected. We will continue to navigate uncharted territory. In a way, that's the spirit of academic inquiry, anyway. There is one thing my students can expect, though- I will be there to help navigate that uncharted territory with curiosity, humility, and, most importantly, humanity.

Additional Resources:

[The College Essay Is Dead](#)

[20 ways to use AI in the classroom, including "Beat the Bot" style uses](#)

[Example Assignment-Musical Analysis](#)

Notes & ideas:
