Customizable and Standardized? A Super-set of Educational AI Use Labels

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Description

AI policies are nuanced, fast-changing, and use- and domain-specific. Almost every academic institution is working on (or trying to improve) their AI policy. Rather than having every institution reinvent the wheel, Sarah Newman and the AI Pedagogy Project team are developing a customizable “superset” of AI policy “labels.” Designed to be both standardized and customizable, the labels will identify types and extents of AI use with definitions, concrete examples, and edge cases. This interactive workshop invited participants to critique and improve the draft set of labels, identify what was missing, and opt to be involved with the publication and dissemination of these labels later this fall.

This live zoom workshop on Thursday, September 17, 2026 had 60 attendees. We kicked things off with intros and some reflections in the chat. I asked:

What is lacking in your current institutional policy?

Some responses included:

- *Curiosity!*
- *What policy?* 😁
- *We've got pretty simple buckets; no AI, some AI, expected AI. It's not nuanced enough*
- *Guidance on agentic AI is lacking*
- *Shared understanding of what terms mean*
- *Student Input*
- *We don't really have one - if instructors don't say otherwise, AI use is considered cheating*
- *Clarity about what happens when misuse is suspected…*
- *Any space for experimentation / innovation*
- *the "No AI" zone is fuzzy and not clear*

What is the biggest roadblock right now to clear, comprehensive policies?

Some responses included:

- *Silos/legit disciplinary differences*

- *CHANGE in AI/the rapid changes*
- *Disciplinary difference and lack of understanding about AI (where it is now)*
- *Desire to maintain academic freedom/Academic freedom (it's good, bad, and confusing)*
- *different employee groups looking to the others to take the first step*
- *Inclusivity/Understanding of diverse contexts within the university*
- *Research based best practices are unknown*
- *faculty understanding*
- *Nobody seems to want to take the responsibility. Not everyone agrees on what the policies should be*
- *Lack of conversation between students and faculty*
- *faculty overload*
- *No clarity on what ethics and responsibility is within the institution*
- *The nuance and complexity of AI use - there are so many ways to use AI and its hard to anticipate all of them*
- *Afraid to get it wrong*
- *Feeling like they were forced upon them/Policies are burdening us*
- *How to get buy-in from students*

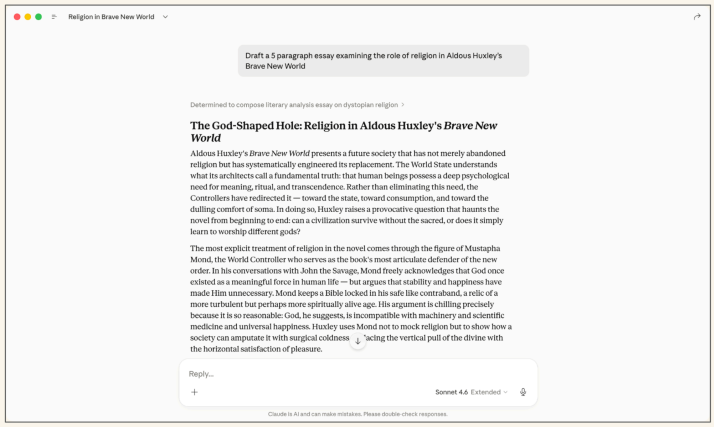
Where are faculty struggling with policies? Either not following them, not understanding them, or other?

Some responses included:

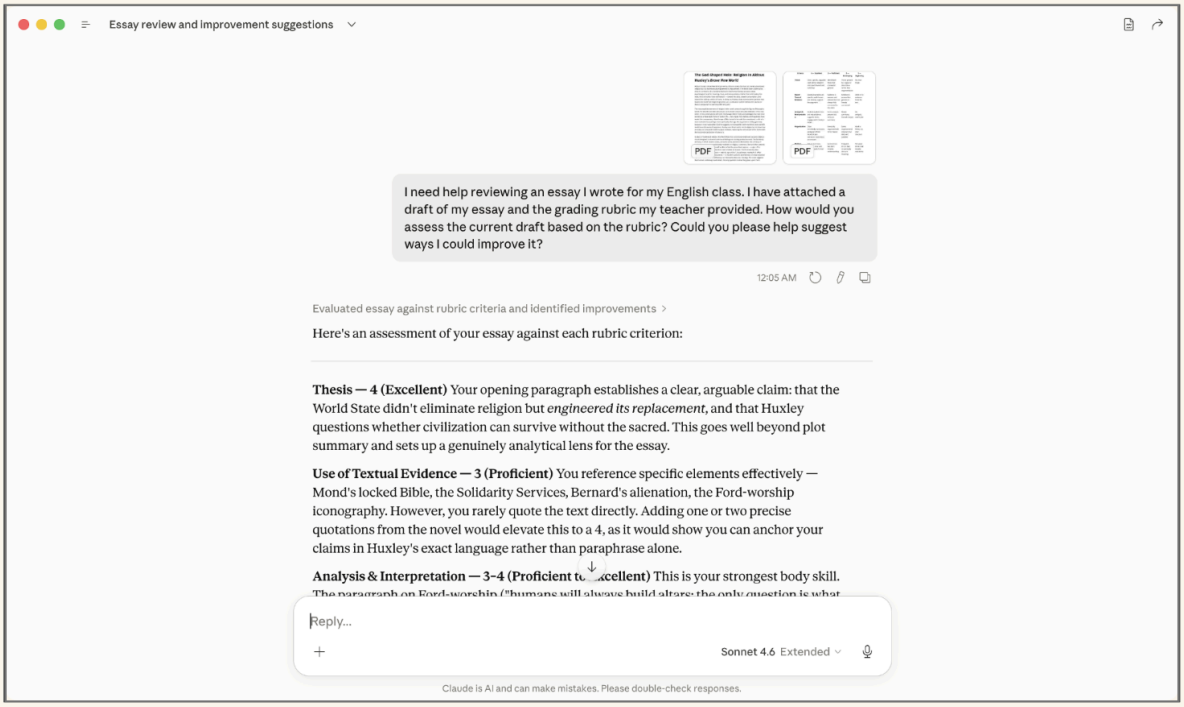
- *I think faculty and students are both overwhelmed and uncertain about what's ok, and also doing it "wrong"*
- *They don't remember the policy they read earlier in the syllabus*
- *"It's not allowed" doesn't leave room for experimentation or asking questions*
- *student struggle with wide variety of messaging from different courses*
- *Some find it restrictive and some are unsure/struggling with shame around transparency for use*
- *Fear of being accused of breaking policy is shaping their use of AI*
- *Students - lack of clarity, inconsistency from instructor to instructor (even for the same course).*
- *Students are not usually involved in the policy making process*
- *Also, a definition of what "AI" is. Grammarly can be considered AI in one course, but might not be in another.*

We then discussed the tremendous variation of AI use in educational contexts; e.g., drafting an essay, brainstorming and planning for a science fair project, brainstorming possible titles for workshops/courses, getting feedback on an essay, finding or comparing sources, understanding vocabulary in context, and understanding a problem from a math test.

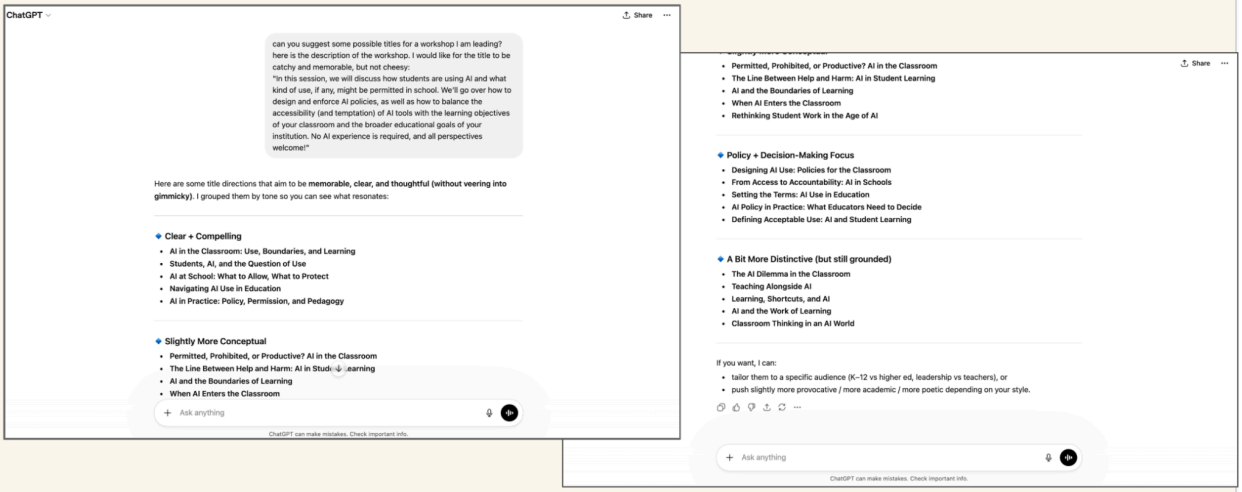
Drafting an essay



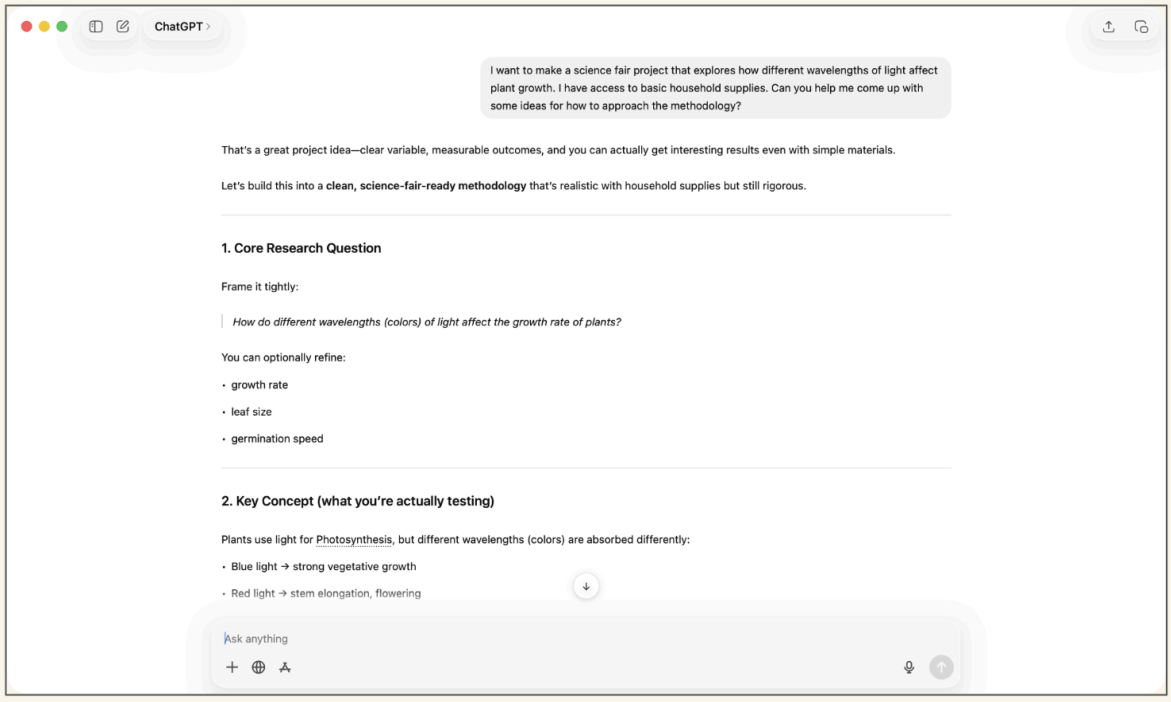
Getting feedback on an essay



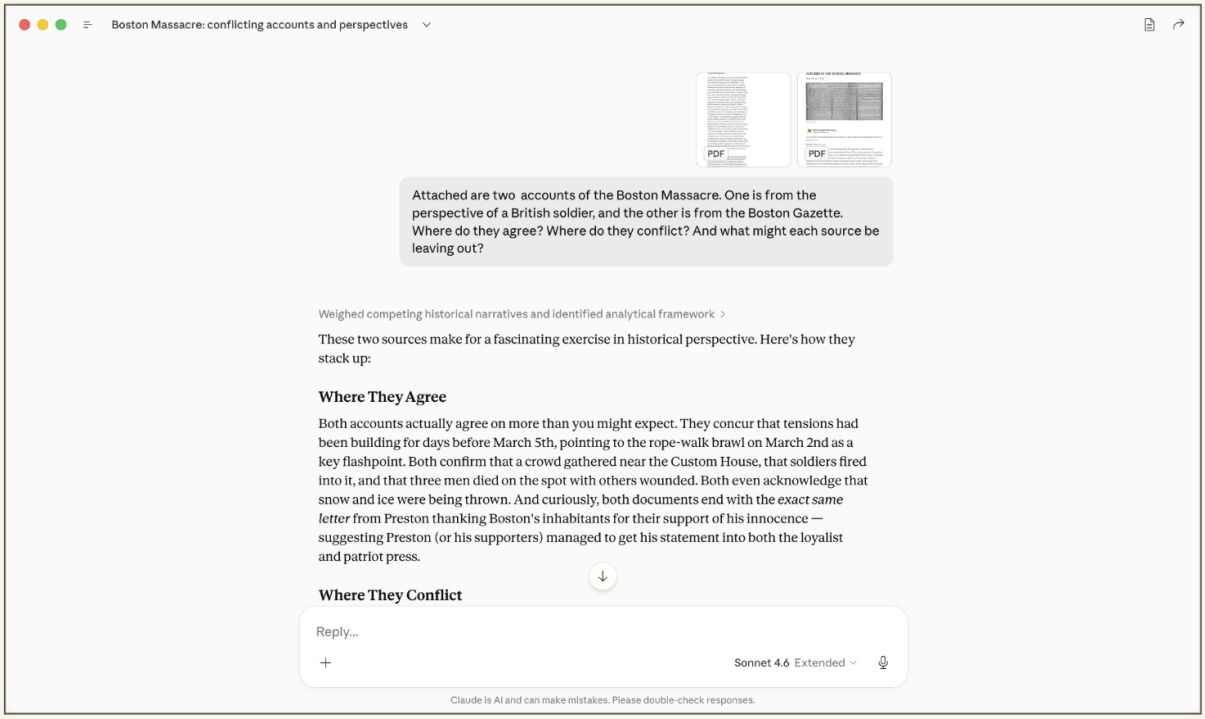
Brainstorming possible titles (lightweight)



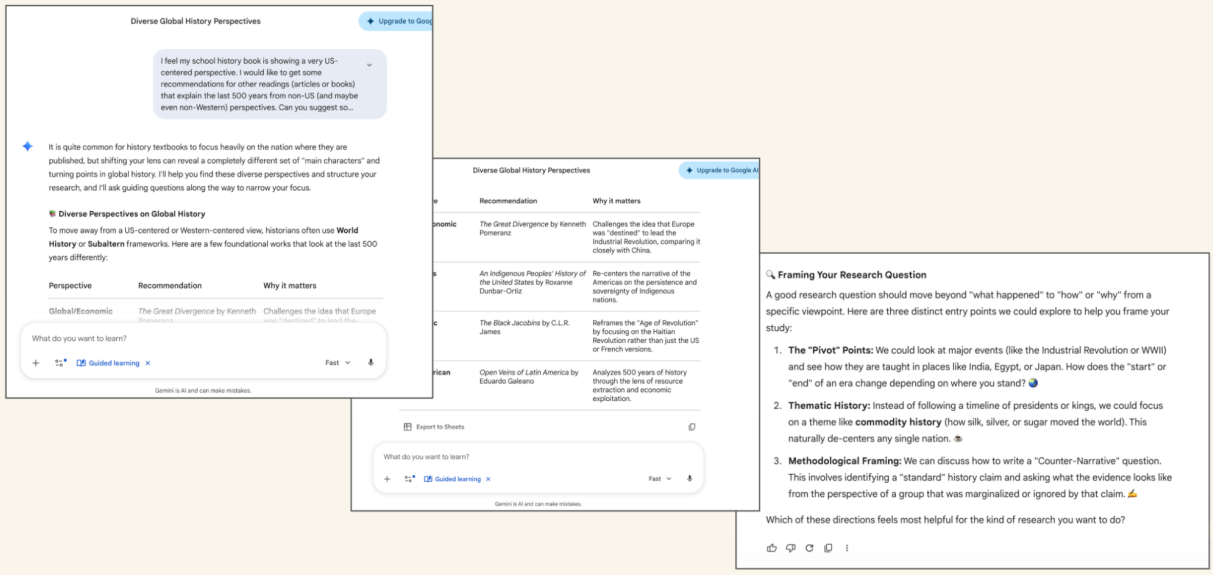
Brainstorming & planning for a science fair project (extensive)



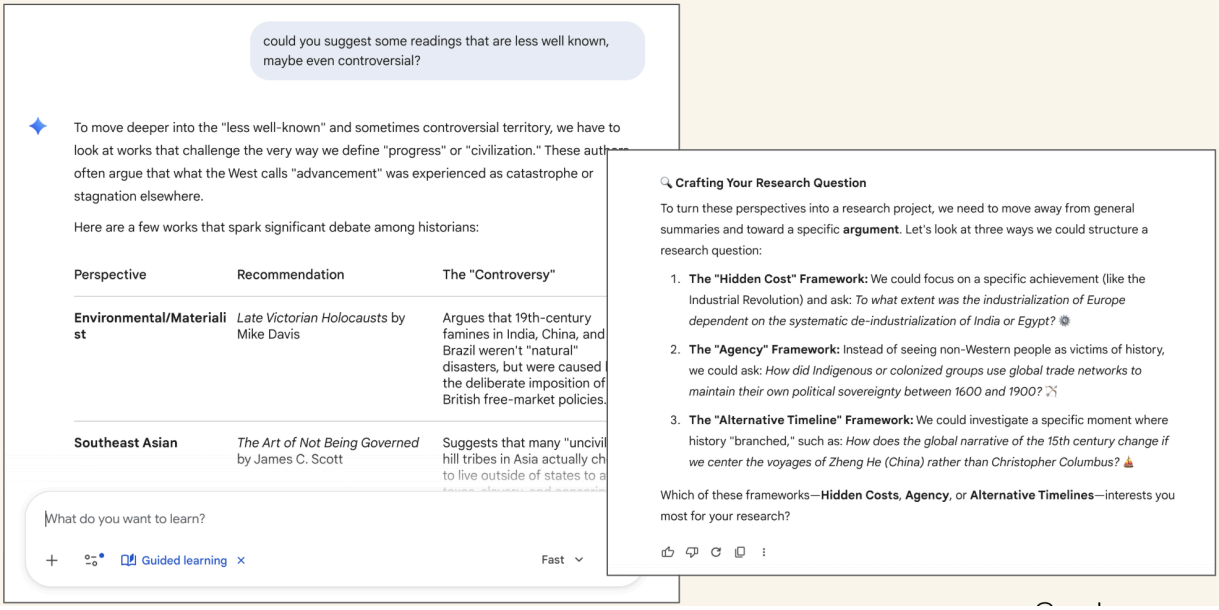
Comparing two sources



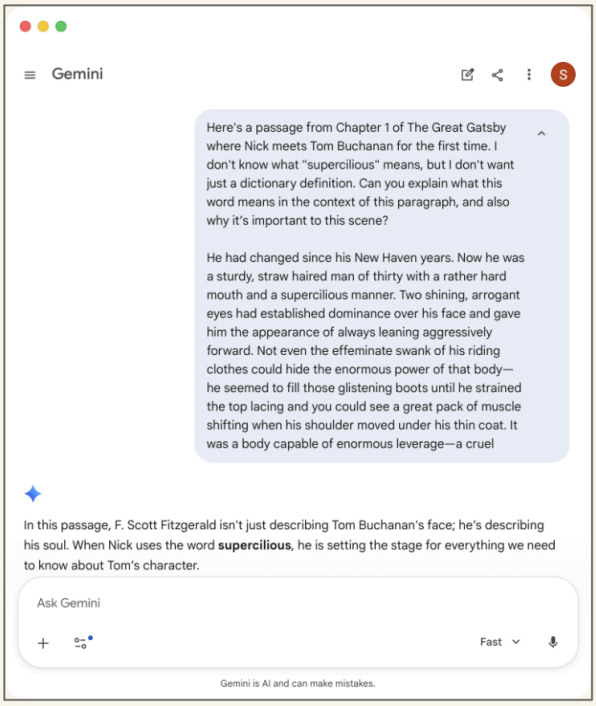
Finding new sources

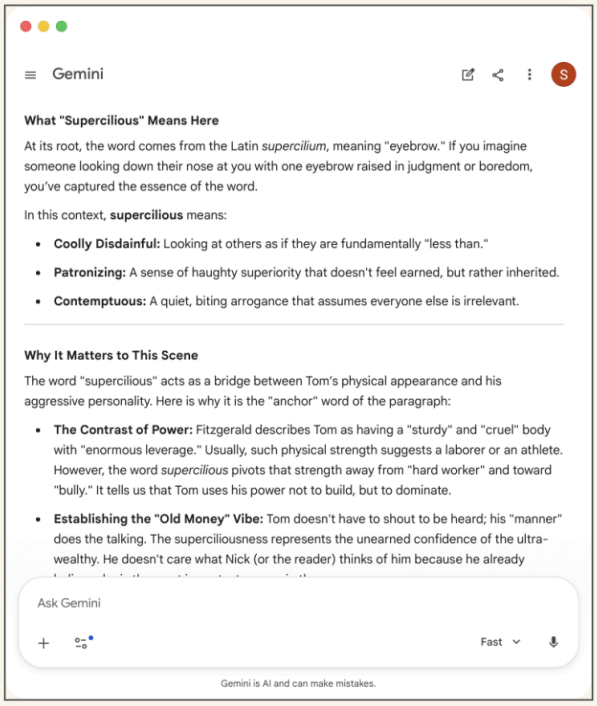


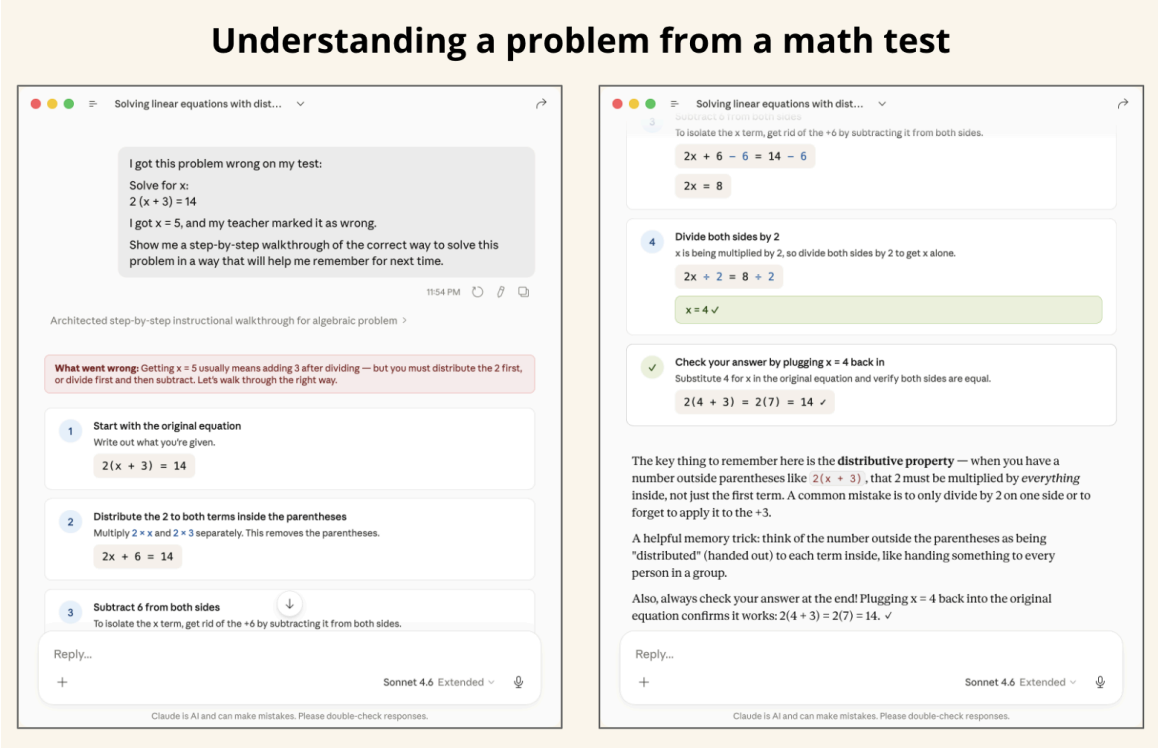
Finding new sources, cont.



Understanding vocabulary in context







How can a simple policy address such broad usage types and extents? It can't.

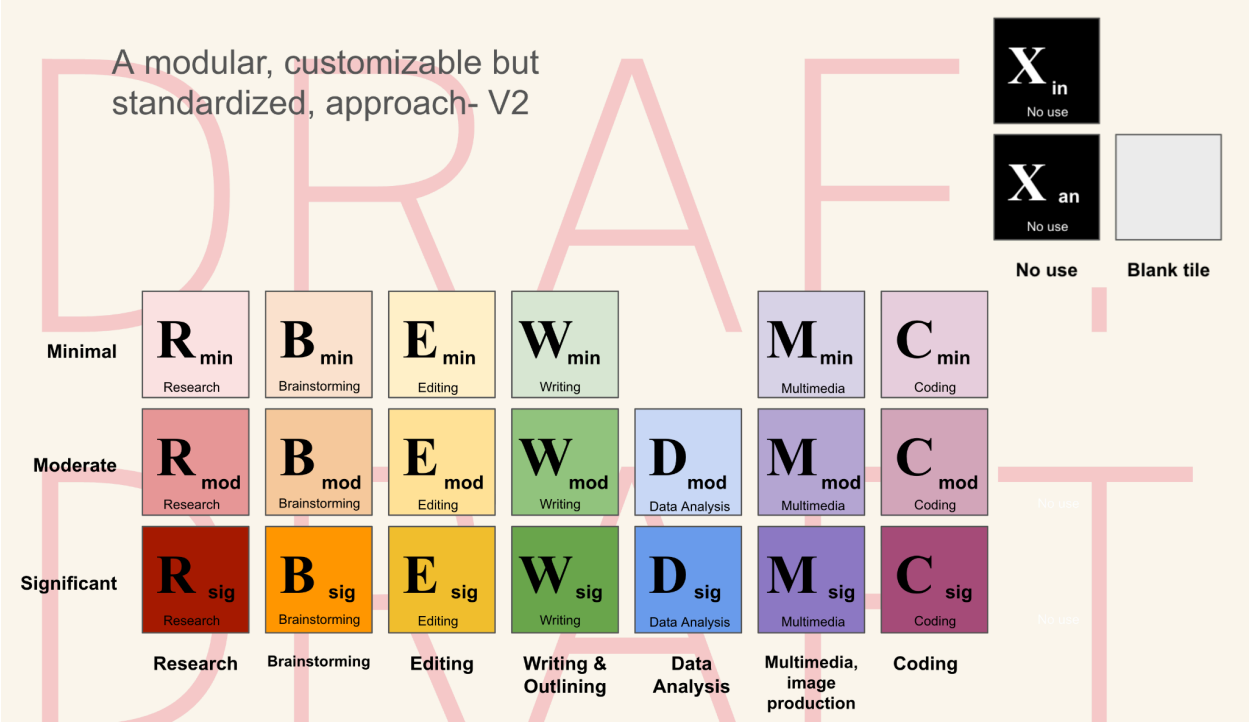
We discussed the difference between:
Type of Use & Extent of Use

And the importance of always differentiating:
What AI uses *are* and *are not* permitted, and why
AND
What is this assignment or course meant to teach

We then talked about some best practice principles in any AI policy:
Be exceedingly clear
Don't be dogmatic
Good reasons go a long way
Discuss openly
Revisit & revise
Require citation and reflection

We discussed existing AI policy precedents and resources (e.g., metaLAB (at) Harvard's Proposed AI Code of Conduct and the University of Pittsburgh's The Prompt: Resources for Teaching with AI), tiered policies (e.g., The AI Assessment Scale (AIAS)), and Lance Eaton's "Syllabi Policies for AI Generative Tools."

During the second half of the workshop, I presented the draft set of labels and collected feedback (11 pages worth!) on how it could be improved, including the columns, rows, and when/how citation is needed.



P- nc - Permitted no cite needed
P- ind - Permitted indicate use / disclose
P- ann - Permitted annotate use (meta reflection/prompt log/other)

Excellent feedback came in from participants, including requests for additional STEM uses, such as a dedicated mathematics category, as well as missing use cases like tutoring, self-quizzing, and problem-solving. Participants questioned whether the three levels of AI use provide enough nuance and suggested alternatives for representing different kinds of use. They also raised practical questions about whether the labels should apply to an entire course or individual assignments, how they should be explained to students, and whether the system could be customized for different disciplines and teaching contexts. Some participants flagged the potential for cognitive overload and suggested simplifying the visual system, while others offered specific feedback on the color scheme, including

whether color is necessary and concerns that red could be interpreted as “stop” rather than permitted use.

Twenty-two workshop participants wanted to stay involved with this project and help contribute to the final set that will be published later this fall. That work is now underway and will be linked here once it is published in the coming months.

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