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To what (writing) problem is AI the Solution?

And what problems does AI create in the writing classroom?

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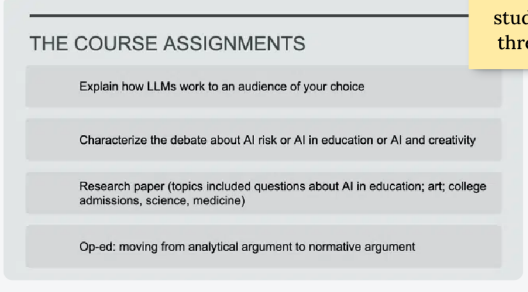
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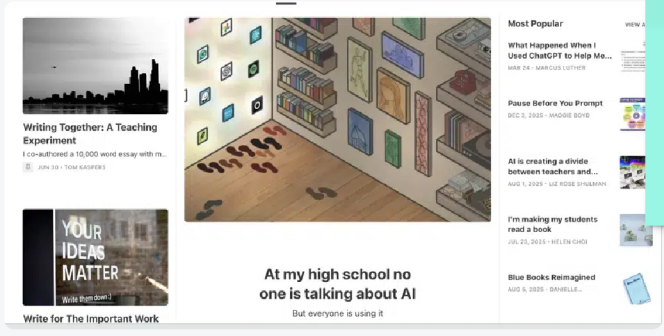
Some context...

Expository Writing 20: To What Problem Is ChatGPT the Solution?

What does it mean for a college education if ChatGPT can pass exams and write essays? What jobs will disappear as generative AI becomes more sophisticated, and what jobs will emerge? Do you want to watch a movie featuring AI-generated versions of your favorite stars, speaking lines generated by ChatGPT? Should tech companies be able to use your written work to train their AI tools? What role should the government play, if any, in regulating generative AI tools? Since ChatGPT was released in November 2022, experts and pundits have raised these questions and many others, predicting that generative AI will lead to everything from the extinction of the human race to unprecedented prosperity to a society mired in disinformation, bias, and inequality. In this course, we'll consider a wide range of arguments by AI ethicists, scholars, writers, and practitioners try to make sense of what problems generative AI tools can solve–an problems these tools may create.

I described the writing course about AI I taught to first-year students for three years





I publish a newsletter that gathers reflections from writing teachers on teaching in the AI era

Neil Postman:
"What is the problem to which this technology is a solution? Now, this question needs to be asked because there are technologies that are not solutions to any problem that a normal person would regard as significant."
"The Surrender of Culture to Technology"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlrv7DIHllE&t=1051s"

I talked about Neil Postman, who framed this question so eloquently

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But what happens when we're not teaching *about* AI?



- Brainstorming help
- Outlining help
- Drafting help
- Revising help
- Editing help
- Instant feedback 24/7
- Track your progress

These are the types of help that frequently get suggested. But what happens when you outsource these processes? We need to think about this in terms of why we are asking students to do these things in the first place.

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A workshop in four questions:

Instead of starting with what AI can do, let's start with what we are trying to do in the first place--and what problems we want to solve.

Why do we teach writing?
What problems are we trying to solve in the way we teach writing?
Can AI solve any of these problems?
What problems does AI create?

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Workshop Goals: Begin a conversation with yourself and others

1. Think about what problems you need to solve and whether AI is a solution/potential solution

2. Think about what problems AI is causing (cognitive offloading, etc.) and how you might solve those problems.

3. Leave with something you want to try, with or without AI

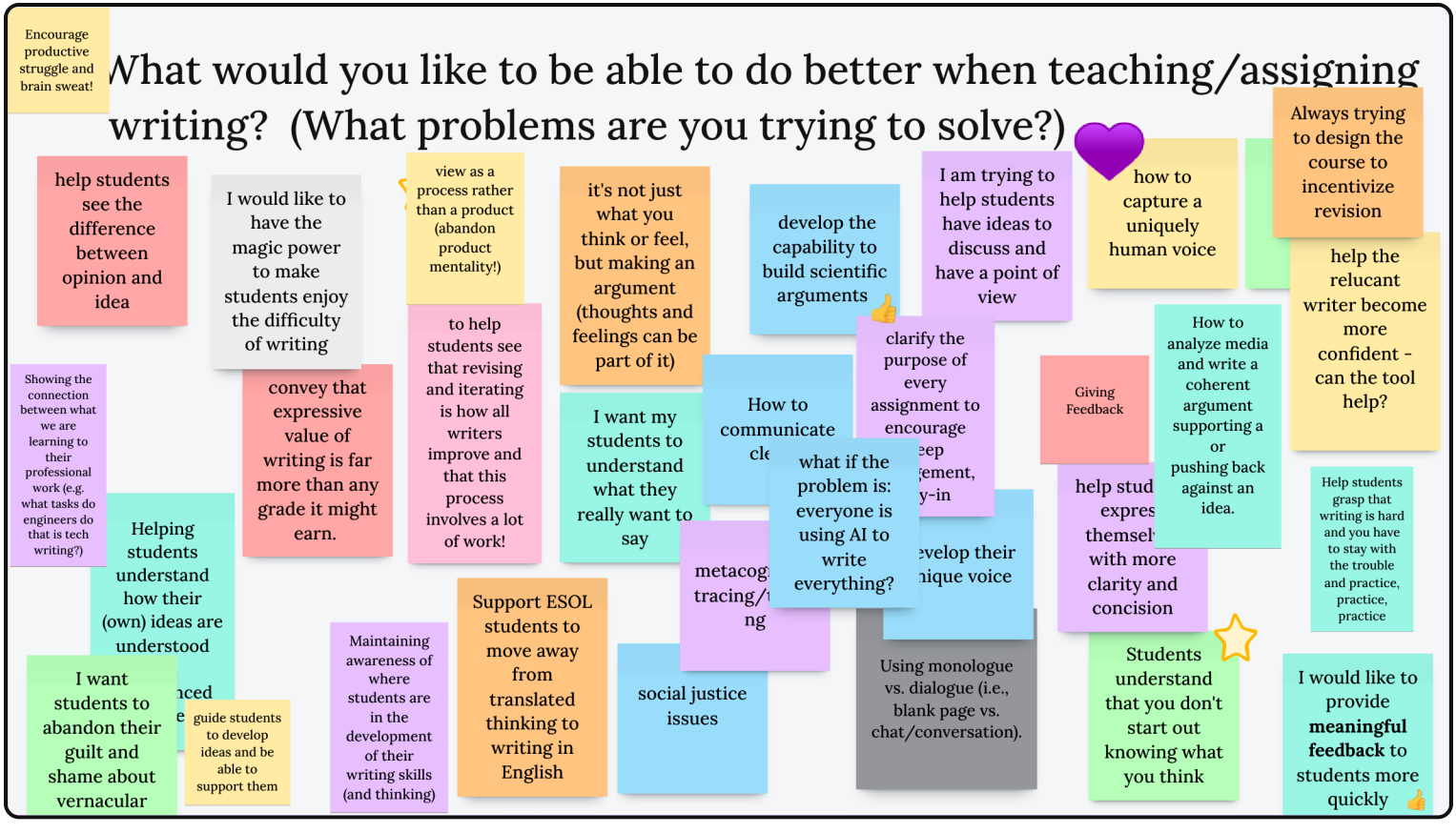
4. Crowdsource ideas

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What are you trying to do when you teach/assign writing?
connect the lived experience with language.
This is what the group came up with
Any writing activity that incorporated GenAI should first include human writing and always include an evaluative reflection on AI output
I want students to be able to figure out what they think
Connect ideas
I want students to develop their thinking and I've not been able to do that hard work unless they actually sit through the hard parts of writing and thinking.
I want students to understand how to confront a blank page
I want to students know how to put ideas and thoughts in words
I want my students to think about the writing they love and what makes it great
For students to clearly identify a purpose, audience & create messaging that is effective
I want students to pratice organizing their thoughts and make strong arguments.
I want my students to be able to translate complex ideas in their own words coherently and creatively.
help students gain confidence in writing
clarify their thoughts/think and reflect in a way that you cannot do without slowing down and writing it down
Help students see writing as a self-discovery process
Students to communicate scientific thinking/methods/findings clearly and accurately. Personal style is nice to have but not required.
Support adult ESOL learners to be able to communicate their ideas in English writing
Help students familiarize themselves with different genres of writing
I want students to explore
I want students to have confidence that they understand enough about writing to make independent decisions in the future
I want students to slow down their brains
I want to know how each of my students are thinking about a topic so that I can decide what to do next
Students need to internalize how communication is different than putting sentences in statistically likely word orders
see how grammar, diction, syntax, style, etc can affect an argument
I want my students to make mistakes (and learn from those mistakes).
For students to understand the many purposes of writing, including its role in helping us think through ideas
To help students develop and express their ideas

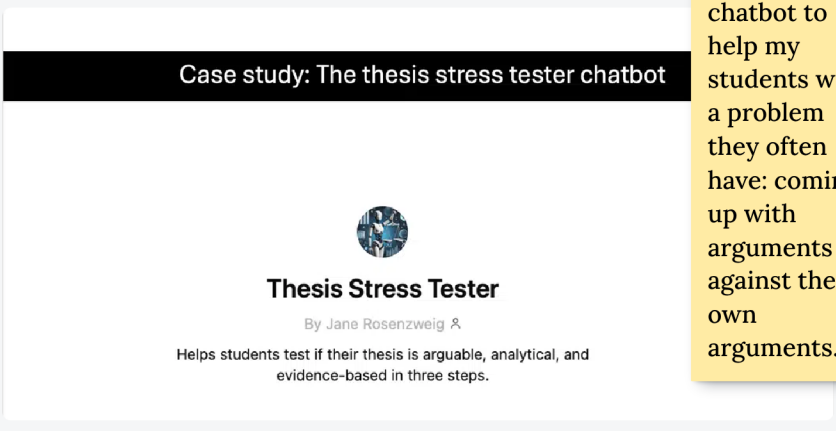
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For discussion: How will you solve the problems that you've identified?



I experimented with making a chatbot to help my students with a problem they often have: coming up with arguments against their own arguments.

Pros: Addresses a real problem: Students need help with counterargument

Cons: Students thought this would be a "productivity" tool. When it wasn't, many said they preferred talking to me and each other about their ideas.

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Guiding Questions

Is this a problem you want to try to solve with AI?
Or a problem that AI is causing?

What is the problem?
Can AI help me solve this problem?
What are the pitfalls of this solution?
Can I solve this problem without AI?



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