**A caution on the use of Generative AI for your coursework in my class**

Generative AI, like most things, is simply a tool.

In the same way that a hammer cannot solve all our construction problems, generative AI cannot solve all our writing problems. And just as calculators did not replace mathematicians, generative AI will not replace humans.

Generative AI is just the next (major) step forward in technology. For historical context, although the first commercially available typewriters were introduced in 1874, they weren’t common in offices until after the mid-1880s. A century later, computers with word processors began to replace them. Throughout this time, people witnessed the evolution of writing, making it easier and more accessible through each iteration. While the concept of generative AI has been around since the 1960s, it was popularized by OpenAI in 2022 with the launch of ChatGPT. This time, it didn’t take 15 years like it took the typewriter or ten years for word processors, but rather, it came swiftly and insidiously into our lives. ChatGPT is the fastest-growing non-social media consumer application in history, with over one million users within just five days of its release. To give a comparison, Spotify took five months, Dropbox seven months, and Airbnb 2.5 years to reach the one million users mark.

At the time of writing, there are over 180 million ChatGPT users. That’s a lot of people using a new tool without much time to figure out what it is or does.

And just like most tools, it has its purposes. Personally, I love using ChatGPT to brainstorm my ideas, suggest approaches to challenging situations, manage tedious tasks, and act as a personal reviewer for my work before I submit it to a journal where real human reviewers will evaluate it.

However, generative AI is not magic.

It will not consider the truth in its words nor fact-check its responses (I mean, hey, why should it?). It will tell you what it thinks you want to hear and base what it says on narrow worldviews and stereotypes. For example, ask Midjourney to generate images of entrepreneurs, and it will send you back photos of almost entirely *male* business owners until you explicitly request it also to include females. These biases are often hidden and hard to recognize if we’re not aware of them.

There are many ways that AI falls short compared to a human being’s ability to think critically, contextually, and analytically. As a result, students who don’t diligently review the information they receive from Generative AI are doomed to perform poorly on assessments in the short term and atrophy these essential skills in the long term.

Here are some examples of ways that AI can harm your grade rather than help it in my class:

1. AI frequently “hallucinates” by generating false text output, either very convincingly or completely with gibberish. For the former, you will lose marks for writing factually incorrect information. In the latter, you will lose marks for writing incoherently or without a clear purpose.
2. AI writing is repetitive, lacks specific terminology you will have learned in this course, and is overly verbose (i.e., “fluffy”). It loves to use phrases like “A tapestry of…”, “It is important to note that…”, “In this essay, I will…”, etc.). It also follows very predictable formatting patterns, like overly using Oxford commas and creating lists of bullet points when not always necessary. This will impact the conciseness of your writing.
3. AI spelling is flawless. It doesn’t make mistakes, at least from what I’ve seen. We do. Honestly, there’s probably a spelling error on this page somewhere. If your writing is also flawless, I may request a one-on-one meeting before I release your grade to learn how you did it.
4. Many questions will ask you to reflect on your experiences and provide original examples to illustrate a point. If your writing is impersonal or robotic, you will lose marks accordingly.
5. Generative AI loves bold ideas. A little too bold, actually. You will lose marks if your ideas and arguments are unrealistic, unsupported by what was learned in class, or lacking evidence of critical thinking skills.
6. AI is good at thinking compartmentally but struggles to consider the broader context or structure of the paragraphs it generates. Your ability to connect your thoughts to the overall purpose of the assessment is an important criterion for determining your grade.
7. AI often uses very forced or irrelevant expressions in its writing. If you include expressions that don’t make sense in the context of your arguments, you will lose marks on the appropriate use of expressions.

I am not saying you should fear or shy away from generative AI tools. In fact, I’m saying the opposite: you will need these skills to succeed in today’s technologically literate workplace. I am willing and happy to work with you to develop these skills and provide examples of how generative AI can be used in various contexts throughout the semester. However, you must recognize the fine line between using generative AI to support your learning versus using it to impede it. Not always easy.

A good indication that you’re using generative AI appropriately is asking yourself whether it is helping or inhibiting your learning, growth, and development. Suppose you use generative AI to make a task more manageable in a creative (yet ethical) way or to give you additional viewpoints to consider as you complete a complex task. In those cases, it is most likely being used appropriately. However, suppose you’re using it to get an assignment submitted before a tight deadline or to avoid having to search for references to support your ideas. In that case, that’s not only unethical but also pointless from a learning perspective, not to mention a violation of FDU’s integrity policy.

Another good question to ask yourself is this: if you will use generative AI to help you get through the semester, when does it end…? Will you stop next semester, or will the lack of active learning due to relying on it this semester result in you being even more reliant on it next semester, too? At some point, you might realize that it has been quite a while since you thought for yourself and allowed your ideas to develop and improve with each attempt.

So, please remember that generative AI is ultimately just a tool. Using it correctly and appropriately can improve your learning in ways you might not even imagine. But if misused or without integrity, it can distract you from your goals and become something you rely on more until you can’t imagine how you’ll get by without it. Please don’t let that happen.

**Remember, you are ultimately responsible for the work you submit for this course.**

Cheers,

Michael