

AUTOMATING WRITING FROM AUTOMATA TO AI



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Generative AI platforms such as ChatGPT have suddenly thrust the automation of writing into the public spotlight. The machine learning techniques behind Large Language Models such as the GPT series may be new; however, for centuries, humans have attempted to automate writing using mechanical, spiritual, and logical means. The automation of writing parallels a longer history of automation, yet with a twist: each of these attempts to automate writing also implicated a kind of artificial human intelligence. Writing is uniquely human, and as such, it has served as a touchstone for scientific and literary imaginations focused on replicating human intelligence.

This presentation puts current conversations about AI writing in historical context with 18th century automata, 19th century spiritualists, and 20th century computer scientists to probe both what writing meant in previous eras as well as dominant assumptions of what it meant to be human in these eras.

Attendees of the talk will come away with an understanding of: current Large Language Models driving generative AI writing plus how they do and don't replicate human intelligence; historical contexts for the attempts to automate writing; and open research questions and pedagogical challenges and opportunities surrounding writing in the age of generative AI.

