



# The Role of ChatGPT in Navigating Writing Challenges: Evidence from a First-Year Archival Research Assignment

Quang C. Ly 

University of Miami

## Abstract

This qualitative study investigates how frequently students rely on AI tools to support a group archival writing project. Reflective essays from 27 undergraduate students reveal both when and how they use ChatGPT throughout the writing process. The findings show that students most often turn to ChatGPT during the early stages—such as brainstorming and outlining—and rely on it less as they move toward finalizing their drafts. Many participants described using ChatGPT to overcome writer’s block, particularly when initiating research papers. These insights support the argument for thoughtfully integrating AI into writing classrooms not only to assist students in navigating the writing process but also to help them understand the value of AI as a learning tool and the importance of using it appropriately and responsibly in academic contexts.

**Keywords:** Writer's Block; Writing Process; Group Papers; ChatGPT

## 1 Introduction

Students often face challenges that disrupt or delay their progress in writing, a phenomenon that is widely recognized. Commonly referred to

as writer's block, this well-documented issue is one that students frequently cite as a primary barrier to completing academic essays. Unlike human writers, ChatGPT is immune to such cognitive stalls. When students get stuck at any part of the writing process, they can leverage ChatGPT to generate ideas and content (Beck and Levine 2023). Additionally, the tool's ability to provide feedback on higher-order concerns—such as organization, coherence, and clarity—offers significant advantages for both native and non-native writers (Yoon et al. 2023). While the general capabilities and limitations of AI are widely recognized (Wang et al. 2024), it remains unclear when and why students choose to transition from independent writing to AI assistance. Su et al. (2023) explored the potential of using ChatGPT to support students throughout the writing process. The researchers examined the editing, proofreading, and reflection stages and concluded that ChatGPT could support the structural, dialogical, and language aspects of argumentative writing.

As AI continues to emerge across many disciplines, it has also sparked fear among educators. For example, some teachers worry that students may use ChatGPT to write their papers (Beck and Levine 2023); some universities have gone so far as to ban students from using ChatGPT for coursework (Ho et al. 2023). When students rely on ChatGPT to write their papers, in whole or in part, it brings the issue of academic integrity into question (Han et al. 2023). Anecdotal evidence from research studies has pointed to the difficulty that instructors face in distinguishing between student-generated and AI-generated text (Corizzo and Leal-Arenas 2023; Li et al. 2023). These concerns have sparked a spirited debate about how to address students' use of ChatGPT and other AI tools for course-related work. ChatGPT is, in many ways, simply a tool—similar to Grammarly or Microsoft Editor and, dare I say, even a graphing calculator. Students rely on these tools to support their work; however, like any tool, these tools can also be misused or abused.

Some people who see the potential of ChatGPT argue that AI should not be viewed as a cheating tool, much less an enemy of writing studies. Even so, many educators also recognize AI's potential to support learn-

ing, which aligns with broader conversations about educational equity. Regardless of intent, tools are designed to serve as aids to people, and permitting this kind of aid in the classroom is an important part of providing equitable education for all students. Regardless of intent, tools are designed to serve as aids to people, and permitting this kind of aid in the classroom is an important part of providing equitable education for all students; equity in education means providing tailored resources and support to help all students succeed, despite differences in their circumstances (OECD 2023). Acting as a learning tool, ChatGPT can help provide greater equity in education to both native and non-native students of English in order to address the opportunity gap that has plagued the education system in America (Heaven 2023). Some students need more help than others when it comes to writing. Not everyone claims writing is their strong suit. There are some students with limited language proficiency who struggle with communicating in the target language; this struggle makes it challenging for them to write clear, coherent sentences. Artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT can provide a positive learning experience for all students and help ensure some measure of success because they offer a more level playing field for those who face additional barriers to learning (e.g., challenges such as limited language and writing proficiency, cultural assimilation, and learning disabilities). Overall, teachers—specifically EFL teachers—tend to hold largely positive perceptions of ChatGPT (Mohamed 2024; Shaikh et al. 2023). There is broad agreement among both teachers and students that ChatGPT is valuable. Whether people want to openly admit it, many people already incorporate some form of AI into their daily routines (Ho et al. 2023; Knowles 2022; Pack and Maloney 2023; Rahman et al. 2023; Salvagno et al. 2023). Given ChatGPT’s wide-ranging capabilities, it is no surprise that many teachers and students alike are eager to integrate it into their academic and professional work.

## 1.1 Research Questions

Taken together, these points help frame my own perspective on ChatGPT’s role in writing instruction. In some respects, I see ChatGPT as an equalizer. We should not, therefore, dismiss ChatGPT for what it can do for

students (e.g., write their papers), but we should embrace it as a tool to guide students in using AI appropriately for writing support—such as offering model examples and text suggestions. In this article, I argue for viewing ChatGPT as a 24/7 support hotline—a resource students can access instantly for assistance without needing in-person or phone-based interaction. Consequently, this study addresses the following research questions: At what stage of the writing process do students most frequently use ChatGPT, and what specific trigger points prompt them to seek AI intervention? Exploring these questions is vital; identifying the exact points at which students struggle will enable educators to develop more targeted, in-depth instructions, helping students navigate common obstacles and foster greater writerly independence.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Writer's Block and Traditional Interventions

Writer's block is a common disruption in the writing process and can be perceived as an embodied experience that occurs across populations, including secondary students, undergraduates, and professional writers (Enriquez and Vaughan 2024). Rose (2009)'s definition of writer's block, "an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment" (3), shifts the focus away from a deficit view of ability. This viewpoint helps explain writer's block prevalence across different learners in different contexts. In support of this broader framing, studies attribute writer's block to multiple, intersecting causes. Students often experience writer's block when they lack sufficient background knowledge about a topic, especially when composing informative texts. Additionally, writer's block may appear at key moments in the writing process—typically in the introduction and conclusion—when students are uncertain about how to initiate or finalize their ideas (Bastug et al. 2017). Within higher education settings, college students have reported experiencing writer's block because they were not sure how to effectively write a particular concept, such as the structure of a thesis, or they experienced anxiety provoked by stringent evaluative criteria (Prihandoko 2021). Beyond student writers, professional writers also report blocks, despite

extensive writing experience. According to [Ahmed and Güss \(2022\)](#), some causes of writer's block for professional writers are more physiological, including life stress, general anxiety, depression, and burnout. Other identified causes include motivational (e.g., fear of criticism or rejection), cognitive (e.g., problems due to errors in planning or rigid thinking), or behavioral (e.g., procrastination or lack of time to write) ([Ahmed and Güss 2022](#)). Taken collectively, research studies depict writer's block as a normal, distributed phenomenon that can appear at any stage of a recursive writing process rather than as evidence of inadequate skill.

Because writer's block has many different causes, there is no single solution. Research suggests that interventions must be flexible and context-dependent, serving as a menu of options to help writers resume their work. For instance, among college business students, some solutions identified for writer's block include working in teams and receiving feedback ([Salem 2018](#)). Likewise, professional writers often use process-regulating strategies, such as taking breaks, discussing ideas with others, shifting to different projects, taking a walk, reading a book, or watching a movie ([Ahmed and Güss 2022](#)). While these approaches alleviate immediate pressure and encourage reorientation, they often delay actual output or fail to address the specific labor needed to finalize a draft. Furthermore, because most conventional solutions predate the AI era, they fail to account for contemporary writing workflows in which AI now assists with invention, outlining, organization, and editing, to name a few.

## 2.2 AI-Supported Writing Processes

To address the gaps left by these traditional interventions, AI tools offer a functional alternative, as they are immune to the affective blockers that often impede human writers. ChatGPT, for example, provides critical scaffolding that helps students overcome inertia during the prewriting, drafting, and revising/editing stages of the writing process. In practice, these tools streamline tasks that are traditionally time-consuming or cognitively taxing to perform in isolation. While researchers are still mapping the technology's full boundaries, a working understanding of its broader utility is already emerging ([Dergaa et al. 2023](#); [Salvagno et al. 2023](#)).

Studies suggest that students view AI as an essential bridge across the writing process. In their study, [Tica and Krsmanović \(2024\)](#) discovered that students used ChatGPT as a tool to assist them with their assignments, with 46.3% saying that they used ChatGPT very frequently (136); 27.5% of students used ChatGPT for essay and research writing tasks, and 23% of them used ChatGPT to generate example essays (137). Complementing these functions, students applied ChatGPT primarily for proofreading, sentence correction, and text structuring (137–138). By intervening at these specific friction points, ChatGPT allows users to bypass writing paralysis and make steady progress toward a finished draft.

Beyond its role as a writing assistant, the actual output of AI tools has become a subject of scholarly scrutiny. Researchers have sought to assess the quality of ChatGPT-generated essays to determine if they meet academic standards. Some studies have found that AI-generated text can exceed the quality of student-produced writing. [Li et al. \(2023\)](#) randomly sampled 900 out of 14,908 student reflections, and the results showed that the ChatGPT-generated response had higher scores across all criteria, outperforming student-written reflective responses for a pharmacy course. Parallel to these findings, [Zhou et al. \(2023\)](#) compared the writing performance of ChatGPT to Chinese English majors and the results indicated that ChatGPT performed better in narrativity, word concreteness, and referential cohesion; however, it performed worse in syntactic simplicity and deep cohesion. Similar results from [Li et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Zhou et al. \(2023\)](#) were found in [Yan \(2023\)](#)'s study. In a study of eight Chinese undergraduate EFL majors, [Yan \(2023\)](#) found that ChatGPT could write across disciplines as effectively as the average learner, utilizing an advanced workflow to regenerate content based on specific requirements. Collectively, these studies show that while ChatGPT can help students develop language skills, it also supports the development of their broader writing skills. ChatGPT can offer students feedback on their argumentative essay outlines, suggest strategies for selecting evidence, and even generate potential rebuttals and counterarguments ([Su et al. 2023](#)). The combination of these strengths with observed weaknesses reinforces a model in which AI support is integrated into an instructor-guided process

emphasizing human oversight and iterative revision. Many students recognize the quality of AI-generated content from the outset and frequently rely on ChatGPT as a dependable tool to support their academic success. For these students, ChatGPT addresses many of the writing challenges they face and has become a valuable element of their academic toolkit.

The high quality of AI-generated content holds particular promise for specific populations, though targeted research on English learners remains comparatively limited. Whether these students experience a language-mindset issue (Rong et al. 2025) or a content- or language-related writing block (Xu et al. 2026) that affects their writing performance, they can benefit from using ChatGPT to assist them with the multidimensional layers of writing. Barrot (2023) argues for positioning AI as a supplementary writing tool because ChatGPT considers variables such as pragmatics, semantics, format, grammar, syntax, and coherence when it produces text. Students—regardless of their level of English proficiency—often turn to ChatGPT for writing support because it can produce clear, concise, and coherent sentences that enhance effective communication. Relatedly, research on EFL and L2 learners highlights the benefits of using ChatGPT to generate essays. Because ChatGPT can produce full-length texts, second language learners gain exposure to linguistic features of the target language in context. By offloading the cognitive burden of mechanical syntax to the AI, students can maintain consistent compositional progress. For instructors who permit AI use, the goal remains a balanced pedagogical cycle—one in which metalinguistic awareness ensures that the student remains the primary architect of the text, using AI to support the cognitive act of writing (Barrot 2023; Xu et al. 2026) rather than diminishing their writing skills.

### **2.3 ChatGPT’s Roles, Limitations, and Feedback**

Given these performance capabilities, the focus of research has shifted to the varied instructional roles ChatGPT can fulfill within the classroom. Among ChatGPT’s many features, its writing assistance stands out as the most impactful for students, offering critical support throughout their academic work. ChatGPT can assume varied roles—such as professor,

manuscript reviewer, audience member, or writing partner (Beck and Levine 2023; Pack and Maloney 2023). For example, undergraduate students at a Chinese university viewed ChatGPT as a peer tutor that can help improve a paper, including providing guidelines on how to write an introduction and problem section in a technical proposal. Driven by AI's high accessibility, some students rely less on language centers and teachers, using ChatGPT to produce new ideas more efficiently (Xiao and Zhi 2023). Consequently, this versatility often leads users to anthropomorphize AI tools. Some students, then, perceive AI as almost human, a peer they feel more comfortable approaching with questions than their own instructors (Han et al. 2023). This tendency toward personification reflects ChatGPT's highly adaptable nature and ability to simulate the nuanced interactions of a human peer. Furthermore, when used for educational purposes, ChatGPT can generate audience- and genre-tailored drafts that students compare to deepen their understanding of revision and rhetorical decision-making (Beck and Levine 2023). Additionally, because ChatGPT can engage in every stage of the writing process—brainstorming, generating counterarguments, summarizing content, drafting abstracts, and editing for clarity and coherence (Lingard 2023)—it serves as an antidote to writer's block. Accordingly, researchers emphasize conceptualizing ChatGPT not as a replacement for the writer but as a guide that facilitates growth within a reflective writing process (Ho et al. 2023).

Despite its wide-ranging applications, ChatGPT also exhibits limitations. It cannot provide emotional or individualized life experiences in the text it produces (Barrot 2023), and it can include inaccurate source citations, misattributed concepts, and false or biased information (Dergaa et al. 2023). Regardless, ChatGPT remains a trusted tool among users due to its powerful versatility, significant time-saving advantages, and ability to deliver expansive, accessible knowledge across diverse domains (Tica and Krsmanović 2024). When viewed as more than just a "cheating" tool, ChatGPT can assume several productive roles: a virtual tutor providing instant, tailored support to learners; an assistant helping educators create supplementary materials; and a domain expert supporting students with

complex, subject-specific tasks. In addition, ChatGPT can act as a collaborative learning companion by enriching group activities through interactive engagement, serve as a reflective tool that encourages learners to assess and improve their performance, and promote critical thinking by sustaining dialogue, posing follow-up questions, and guiding deeper exploration of challenging concepts (Zhu et al. 2023).

Perhaps the most critical role for AI in the compositional cycle is its capacity to provide immediate evaluative feedback. Because seeking and incorporating feedback is central to writing development, peer review often serves as a primary method for strengthening papers. Empirical data suggest that ChatGPT provides faster, more efficient feedback than traditional methods. For instance, based on its analysis of student essays, ChatGPT can supply appropriate feedback, revision suggestions, and supporting rationales while frequently offering praise (Ho et al. 2023). Such immediate input is highly beneficial for guiding a writer from initial draft to final product. While teachers also provide feedback, their responses are often delayed or less detailed due to high student volumes and looming deadlines. Consequently, students benefit from using ChatGPT for instant feedback and detailed explanations, creating valuable opportunities to master writing style and grammatical rules in real time.

Research further highlights systematic differences between the nature of human- and AI-generated feedback. Comparative analysis by Guo and Wang (2024) found that while human instructors prioritize content and linguistic accuracy, ChatGPT provided a more balanced distribution of comments across content, organization, and language. Their study of Chinese EFL undergraduates also revealed a difference in feedback style: instructors tended to offer more inquiry-based and information-rich feedback, whereas ChatGPT leaned toward directive suggestions, explicitly stating what required revision and offering a higher frequency of praise (Guo and Wang 2024). Despite the efficiency of automated feedback, scholarly consensus suggests that its accuracy remains inconsistent, necessitating a multi-source approach. While Yoon et al. (2023) observed a strong correlation between human and ChatGPT scoring,

they identified significant constraints in AI feedback. In their examination of 50 ELL student essays, the researchers found that ChatGPT struggled with higher-order structural elements; specifically, the tool was unable to identify controlling ideas accurately and was imprecise in detecting the repetition of ideas. Instead, the AI's feedback on coherence often relied on the presence or absence of transitional words rather than a deep understanding of logical flow (Yoon et al. 2023). Ultimately, these findings underscore the necessity of triangulated feedback. Because AI tools have identifiable limitations in recognizing nuanced features such as coherence and cohesion, they function most effectively when used to supplement feedback from teachers and writing centers. This allows writers to address the limitations of one source with the targeted strengths of another.

Although preliminary research suggests that AI can support students throughout the compositional cycle (Barrett and Pack 2023; Su et al. 2023), empirical data are still needed to determine which specific stages prompt the highest usage and what forms of assistance students prioritize. Existing literature has examined how students use ChatGPT, but it has not yet identified when and why they turn to it during the writing process, particularly in moments of writer's block. This gap raises important questions: What prompts a student to consult ChatGPT while composing an essay? Which specific tasks do they rely on the tool to perform? Addressing this gap is the objective of the present study.

## 3 Methods

### 3.1 Participants and Recruitment

This study was conducted during the spring 2024 semester while I taught four sections of WRS 106: First-Year Writing II. Given my growing interest in archival studies and the potential for students to develop research skills in this area, I aimed to explore how students might use artificial intelligence for archival research—an area not fully explored in the literature. Because my WRS sections were the only course in the Department of Writing Studies that focused on archival research—and because these

students were the most accessible for data collection—I selected my own students as participants in the study. Therefore, all students enrolled in my course who were 18 years or older at the time of the study were eligible to participate. After obtaining the necessary approvals, including IRB approval, I enlisted the help of another faculty member in the department to assist with the recruitment process. To minimize the presence of undue influence or bias in asking my own students to participate in the study, this colleague managed the informed consent component of the IRB process. This colleague visited each of my sections at the beginning of class and read my consent script aloud, which explained the research project to the students and their role in the study should they wish to participate. While my colleague read the consent script, I stepped out of the room in order to give them privacy. The consent form stated that participation was voluntary and that neither monetary compensation nor extra credit would be provided.

At the conclusion of the semester, students who wished to provide their work products gave their consent by indicating in their reflection essay whether they allowed me to use their deliverables in my research study (e.g., “I consent to you using my work for your research” or “You can use my work” or some other variations of clear consent). Each of the four sections had 19 undergraduate students, totaling 76 students for the semester. In total, only three students did not submit their reflection essays. And some students either did not provide consent or failed to clearly state their consent (likely because they forgot to indicate consent or refusal), resulting in their papers being excluded from the study. In the end, for the actual study, 35 students provided written consent, representing participants from each of the four sections. Specifically, the participants included 18 students who self-identified as male (15 freshmen and three sophomores) and 17 students who self-identified as female (11 freshmen, five sophomores, and one junior).

### **3.2 Artifacts**

The final project had a mix of individual and group deliverables. One of the data sources was students’ reflection essays, which were completed

individually. Students were asked to reflect on their experience conducting research in the archive and, if applicable, their use of artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT for their project. This 500-word reflection addressed three main areas. First, students described the steps they took in the archive to locate the necessary information for the project, including the strategies they used and the challenges they faced and overcame. Second, they explained their use of ChatGPT (or other AI tools) as a research resource, detailing how it assisted their work, any limitations or challenges they encountered, and reasons for not using AI if applicable. Finally, they reflected on what they learned from the archival experience, including how the project shaped their understanding of the research process and whether conducting archival research changed their approach to general research. This essay was one of the deliverables submitted alongside the archival research paper.

The second data source was the archival research paper, which required students to conduct slow research on a topic related to the University of Miami. For the research paper, students had to select a significant topic that affected the university and trace the topic's history and representations in the archives. The research paper was 8–10 pages and asked students to articulate the conversation around their topic across one decade, including how the topic evolved, who or what initiated the conversation, what caused shifts in it, and who the major participants were. They also had to identify any missing voices, possible reasons for the silent voices, and the current state of the conversation. The project was designed to enhance students' research skills, deepen their appreciation of historical context, strengthen their understanding of rhetorical situations, and help them craft a compelling narrative about the university. Students who used AI in their papers were asked to highlight the sections containing AI-generated content and include proper citations to indicate its use. Structurally, this archival research paper was completed in groups, and students were allowed to select their teammates (3–4 students per group). Though the research paper was written together as a team, all of the groups had divided the tasks associated with completing the paper and assigned each student individual tasks; students informed me of this

division of labor during our group conferences. Thus, after reading each reflection essay, it became clear that each participant's decision to use AI was made individually, without the consultation or approval of the other members of their group.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

To code the reflection essays, I began by reading each essay in its entirety to get a general sense of how often and in what ways participants used AI for the project. This step helped me understand participants' research and writing processes. After completing the initial overview, I conducted several rounds of coding to begin processing the data. In the first round, I read through all 35 reflection essays to identify recurring themes and made a mental note of them. This step was designed to provide a macro-level view of the commonalities participants experienced while working on the same project. In the second round, I highlighted any mentions of AI tools and how participants used them. To minimize irrelevant information, I focused on highlighting and noting the reasons participants chose to use or not use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) for the project. Following this step, I documented the reasons by copying and pasting the relevant parts of their reflection essays into a Word document. This process resulted in 35 single paragraphs, one for each participant; given the requirements of the essay, participants had to address several areas of their research experience, and they dedicated one paragraph to talking about AI (hence, one paragraph for each of the 35 participants). In the third round of coding, I read through the 35 paragraphs and broadly summarized the reasons that participants used AI with a short phrase (e.g., one participant used ChatGPT to help with the thesis statement, so I categorized this reason as "Used to Refine Thesis"). Then, in the fourth round of coding, I created another document to list all of the reasons that I had identified from the 35 paragraphs on AI usage. By the end of the coding process, I identified 25 reasons participants used AI and 15 reasons they did not use AI. Finally, I combed through all the participants' paragraphs and counted how frequently they mentioned any of the identified reasons in their essays and wrote participants'

names next to them (pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of all participants).

To confirm the reasons that were manually coded and to identify any additional ones not considered during the initial coding process, I used Microsoft Copilot to analyze the 35 paragraphs. I chose to use Copilot because it was included in the Microsoft 365 package that my institution provided to faculty and students. The prompt that I used to generate the output was as follows: "Create themes for reasons why students decided to use AI and why they did not use AI." Because of technical constraints and Copilot's 16,000-character limit, I could not paste all 35 paragraphs in one session. After I typed in the prompt, I pasted 19 paragraphs into Copilot (the maximum allowed before I ran out of characters) and then repeated the process with the remaining 16 paragraphs. Copilot generated six categories for reasons that participants used AI and five reasons that participants did not use AI. However, when comparing the 40 reasons that I manually identified (25 for using AI and 15 for not using AI) with the 11 categories that Copilot produced, I noticed that Copilot's categories, such as (1) Idea Generation and Brainstorming and (2) Preference for Personal Thought Process, were broader and more general, and the output did not specify the reasons for using AI. This level of specification is necessary for instructors to understand how students are using AI in their work. Thus, the results from Copilot were extraneous to what I coded. The output did not produce any additional reasons that may have been overlooked during my manual coding process.

To enhance the readability of the data, I asked Microsoft Copilot to organize the 25 reasons for using AI that were extracted from the participants' reflection essays into a table using this prompt: "Create a table to organize this information," and then I pasted the 25 reasons participants stated for using AI, along with the names of the participants who stated the reasons, into the prompt box. Copilot generated a two-column table with the list of reasons on the left side and the name of the participants on the right side. From there, I asked Copilot to organize the information using this prompt: "Organize it in a logical manner." Copilot organized

the 25 reasons into five categories, while miscellaneous reasons that did not align with the writing process were placed in a separate category I created. Afterward, I mapped the five categories onto the writing-process stages based on which stage they aligned with most clearly. For the prewriting stage, the categories included brainstorming/idea generation and thesis/outline. In the drafting stage, the categories included research/information gathering and writing assistance. For the revising and editing stage, the category included proofreading/editing. The final category, overcoming challenges, did not fit neatly into any aspect of the writing process but was addressed toward the end of the analysis. The results corresponding to these five categories and their alignment with the writing-process stages are presented in Tables 1–6, with Table 6 representing the miscellaneous category I created.

### **3.4 Delimitations**

Because of the space constraints of a typical research article, I could not address all the data from my study. Therefore, this article focuses on the reasons participants chose to use AI and the stages of the writing process during which they used it. The data also revealed 15 reasons students gave for avoiding AI; however, the limits of this article do not allow me to examine that set of data with the depth and care it warrants. Consequently, of the 35 students who consented to participate, only the 27 who discussed their reasons for using AI were included in the final dataset. The eight students who wrote exclusively about avoiding AI were excluded because this study centers on reasons for using AI.

## **4 Results**

At the start of the archival research project, I granted my class permission to use AI (e.g., ChatGPT) for their work. I wanted students to be transparent about their use of AI, so I explicitly authorized it without placing any restrictions on how they could use it. This unrestricted access encouraged participants to discuss their AI use openly in their reflection essays, resulting in richer and more detailed data. The reasons students provided for using AI also align with patterns reported in the literature (see Literature

Review section) on common AI usage among college students. Tables 1–6 present the reasons participants chose to use AI during the project.

<b>Task</b>	<b>Contributors</b>
Brainstormed ideas for the project topic	Anna, Brody, George, Nick, Sam
Provided ideas and perspectives to explore further on the topic	Adam, Sam, Tara

Table 1: Brainstorming and Idea Generation

<b>Task</b>	<b>Contributors</b>
Gave ideas for the thesis	Amelia, Anna, Paige, Raven
Helped refine the thesis	George, Lisa, Mary, Ruth
Created an outline	Ashley, George, Mary, Nick, Ruth

Table 2: Thesis and Outline

<b>Task</b>	<b>Contributors</b>
Provided information on the topic	Aaron, Adam, Austin, Ben, Brody, Ian, Izzy, Nelson, Stacy
Helped streamline the research process by managing, summarizing, and interpreting information	Fred, Nelson
Noted that AI responses should be supplemented with additional research to corroborate information and fill gaps or inconsistencies	Sam

Table 3: Research and Information Gathering

<b>Task</b>	<b>Contributors</b>
Generated main points for the essay	Kerry, Nick
Helped express ideas	Ruth
Wrote the introduction	Ian
Helped create transitions in the draft	Mary
Assisted with integrating quotes	Kerry

Task	Contributors
Condensed multiple ideas into a single point	Anna
Simplified complex information	Fred, Kerry
Reworded sentences to avoid repetition	Rachel
Revised long sentences	Ben
Wrote the conclusion	Lisa

Table 4: Writing Assistance

Task	Contributors
Organized information	Kerry
Organized references in alphabetical order	George
Double-checked citations	Alice
Proofread the draft	Mary

Table 5: Proofreading and Editing

Task	Contributors
Helped with getting started	Eric, Larry, Mary
Assisted in overcoming writer's block	Mary
Provided support when feeling burned out	Lisa

Table 6: Overcoming Challenges

## 5 Discussion

In reviewing the reasons for AI usage, it appears that participants used AI throughout the various stages of the writing process. Scholars [Dobrin \(2015\)](#) and [Faugley \(2016\)](#) have proposed different iterations of the writing process, with some identifying the process as consisting of three steps ([Flower and Hayes 1981](#)) and others identifying the process as consisting of five steps ([Laplante 2018, 47–74](#)). Regardless of the number of steps proposed, the steps in most models tend to overlap ([Alber-Morgan et al. 2007; Dobrin 2015, 18](#)). For this analysis, I adopted the approach that organizes the writing process into three stages—prewriting, drafting, and revising/editing—because this framework offers clarity and consistency

for grouping and interpreting the data. While simplified, these stages capture the essential progression of writing a research paper and provide a practical structure for analysis.

## 5.1 Prewriting Stage

The prewriting stage involves selecting a topic, making a plan, and developing a thesis (Faigley 2016, 35–41). During this stage, participants particularly sought help with crafting their thesis statements. Participants had a general idea of their research topic and asked ChatGPT for help with giving ideas for their thesis (as cited by Amelia, Anna, Paige, and Raven) and for refining their thesis (as cited by George, Lisa, Mary, and Ruth). Importantly, turning to ChatGPT was not a sign that participants were incapable of crafting their own thesis, but rather it was a sign that they recognized their initial thesis could be improved. Most of them wanted to reword their original thesis to make it sound more sophisticated, as cited by Mary, who “took a dumbed down and simplified version of [their] thesis into the AI machine and summarized the advanced version it spit back.”

In addition to seeking help with thesis refinement, the next leading reason for using AI during this stage of the writing process was to brainstorm ideas for the project (as cited by Anna, Brody, George, Nick, and Sam). For most students, the archival research paper was a new and unfamiliar task, so it was expected that they might struggle to generate ideas while searching the digital archives. Not only that, but participants were researching topics that they had limited knowledge of, so it was challenging to find a starting point. Consequently, participants relied on the help of AI to give them a jumping-off point, as stated by Nick: “ChatGPT played a pivotal role ... aiding us in brainstorming topics and generating main points throughout the essay.” Brody expressed a similar position: “It was a great way to brainstorm and generate ideas and pointers crucial to my project.” The participants’ reasoning aligns with the findings reported in Wang et al. (2024)’s study, in which students similarly noted that AI is a helpful tool for getting started on writing assignments and for supporting idea generation and the production of high-quality sentences (7–12).

Moving further into the prewriting stage, it is common for students to draft outlines of their intended content. This step helps them consider the direction of their paper and determine what points are necessary to cover. Nick, for instance, believed ChatGPT was “pivotal as a planning and outlining tool.” Participants across all sections used ChatGPT to give them an outline to work with because they needed guidance in writing the paper. As this was the final research paper for the class, the length of the paper (8–10 pages) was likely intimidating, and participants may have needed help coming up with ideas for how to reach the page requirement. This was the position of Ashley: “What I use ChatGPT for most is when I outline essays. ... ChatGPT can assist in creating a clear outline, streamlining the process, and ensuring that your essay covers all necessary points.” Likewise, most participants wanted a clear sense of what their paper would cover so they could determine whether they had enough material to meet the page requirement and identify the types of sources and ideas they needed to research. Asking ChatGPT to suggest an outline for the research paper was cited by Ashley, George, Mary, Nick, and Ruth. Along the same lines, George used ChatGPT twice for outline purposes: “We also used it [ChatGPT] to help structure our presentation and paper by prompting it to create an outline for the topic.” Similarly, Mary took the same approach, asking ChatGPT for help with outlines for her essay and presentation. However, most participants did not attempt to create their own outlines before seeking feedback from an AI tool, which suggests that some students rely more heavily on AI during the initial planning stages because these readily accessible tools can quickly streamline many parts of the writing process (e.g., creating outlines). AI tools like ChatGPT can enhance short-term task performance (Fan et al. 2025, 507), so instead of experiencing a stall in the project, participants used AI to maintain momentum. This feature of ChatGPT helps explain why many found it useful for improving their writing and completing project tasks.

Beyond brainstorming and outlining, starting a project can be challenging for students, as they may not have a clear idea of where to begin or what ideas would be feasible to pursue (as cited by Eric and Larry). Going

straight to ChatGPT instead of brainstorming independently can undermine the creative process that educators aim to cultivate. At the same time, however, seeking assistance from ChatGPT can also serve as an appealing way to kick-start the writing process. AI tools like ChatGPT can be perceived as a virtual assistant, similar to asking a classmate, friend, or even Google for help, which may seem innocent and acceptable from the user's perspective. With this viewpoint in mind, it can be argued that ChatGPT functions as one possible remedy for writer's block—a position Ashley would agree with: "When starting a research project, it's common to feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information available on the internet. ChatGPT can help narrow down your topic, suggest keywords for effective searches, and even recommend reputable sources to explore further. Whether delving into academic journals, books, or online articles, ChatGPT can provide guidance on where to begin." Moreover, Brody believed that ChatGPT facilitated his research process by enabling him to begin earlier than he otherwise would have. As he explained, "I feel my research process may have been delayed without ChatGPT, and I think it is a great tool for students to brainstorm information when they hit a block." This kind of obstacle can contribute to writer's block—a point both Brody and Mary acknowledged. Without AI assistance, some participants' projects would likely have been delayed, which could have negatively affected their grades. Although some instructors may hold negative views of ChatGPT because of its ability to generate fully written essays (among other features), students tend to view it as a necessary resource for meeting their learning goals.

## 5.2 Drafting Stage

The next stage in the writing process is drafting, in which writers begin developing a working version of their piece. In this stage, individuals draw on the ideas and structure outlined during prewriting and translate them into a coherent draft as they begin constructing paragraphs (Faigley 2016, 43–51). Notably, this stage of the writing process accounted for the greatest number of reasons participants chose to use AI. Participants, for example, asked ChatGPT to help them write the introduction and conclusion of their paper. At the beginning of drafting, students often

struggled to get started. For participants like Ian, ChatGPT provided the support needed to get words on the page and continue making steady progress. Moreover, toward the end of the project, students often felt fatigued and burned out, which could lead to procrastination or a loss of motivation. At this point, some participants turned to ChatGPT to draft portions of their papers. This kind of cognitive fatigue was the reason that motivated Lisa to ask ChatGPT to write the conclusion paragraph of her research paper. Understandably, final class projects can be especially demanding, as the end of the semester is a high-pressure period marked by overlapping exams and assignments. To manage this load, some students turned to artificial intelligence for support. Lisa's reasoning for using ChatGPT aligns with findings from [Abbas et al. \(2024\)](#), who reported that students experiencing high academic workload and time pressure were more likely to use ChatGPT.

Beyond drafting support, students also used ChatGPT to clarify their reading materials, showing that their reliance on AI went beyond mere text production. Depending on the type of source, whether a journal article, an archival document, or a complex report, students sometimes struggled to understand what they read, so they turned to AI for support. For example, Fred used ChatGPT to summarize long archival texts for clearer understanding. Similarly, Kerry used ChatGPT to simplify difficult material and get advice on integrating quotes into the research paper. And Ben used ChatGPT to consolidate long sentences and create bullet points for a PowerPoint presentation. Collectively, participants' responses show that they perceived AI as a practical resource for saving time and reducing their workload. Students can seek help from professors to understand texts, integrate sources, or rephrase sentences—but if AI tools like ChatGPT can perform these tasks more quickly and effectively, it raises the question of whether educators should encourage students to use these tools. Even [Fan et al. \(2025\)](#) discovered that ChatGPT improved students' writing performance even more than the condition that involved support provided by a human expert (507).

AI's expanding capabilities have increased its usefulness to students. Although some instructors may view ChatGPT primarily as a shortcut that undermines academic integrity, students recognize its broader functions and use it for far more than producing text. [Usher and Amzalag \(2025\)](#) found that master's-level graduate students sought seven types of assistance from AI chatbots: (1) content generation and expansion, (2) source integration and verification, (3) concept clarification and definitions, (4) writing consultation, (5) text refinement and formatting, (6) rephrasing and modifying content, and (7) translation assistance (8). These types of assistance also appeared among the undergraduate students in the present study. Specifically, some participants struggled to articulate their ideas, and ChatGPT enabled them to convey their thoughts more clearly (as cited by Kerry, Nick, and Ruth). There were participants who used ChatGPT to reword sentences to avoid repetition (as cited by Rachel), while others relied on the AI to condense long sentences into a manageable length (as cited by Ben). Participants also used ChatGPT to generate transition phrases for their paragraphs (as cited by Mary) and to integrate quotes into their essays (as cited by Kerry). Thus, by using ChatGPT during their research projects, students can recognize where they struggle in writing and consider the suggestions it offers, thereby supporting skill development within a technology-enhanced learning process.

Although AI technologies have progressed considerably, they remain imperfect, and users understand that these tools can occasionally generate inaccurate or fabricated information. In a study by [Tica and Krsmanović \(2024\)](#), 45% of students who used ChatGPT frequently said it was reliable compared to 55% who said it was not (138–139). This finding, alongside those found by [Shaikh et al. \(2023\)](#), suggests that users do not blindly accept everything ChatGPT provides. Students understood that ChatGPT could not truly comprehend user input, which required them to evaluate its output critically. Their prior experience with AI made them aware of the possibility of hallucinations. As a result, while drafting their papers, participants simultaneously conducted research to identify sources that substantiated their ideas and claims. In addition, students can sometimes become confined to a single perspective, with their research shaping and

limiting what they believe is available on their topic. It becomes important, then, to seek guidance from external resources to push the research beyond their current scope. This approach is demonstrated by Adam, Sam, and Tara, who turned to ChatGPT to gain additional perspectives on their topics. Sam also believed that AI-generated responses should be supplemented with additional research to corroborate information and address gaps or inconsistencies in the data. His position indicates that he is aware of the false or unreliable outputs that AI can produce. This skepticism aligned with broader patterns observed in research. [Lee et al. \(2025\)](#), for example, found that students who use AI do not accept all outputs at face value. Their research led them to learn that students expressed skepticism over the credibility of ChatGPT's output, with some students expressing doubts about its accuracy and potential to generate incorrect or illogical information (14). Participants such as Sam had encountered fake data and erroneous information, so when they used ChatGPT, they knew they had to read the results carefully and evaluate their validity. This demonstrates a critical awareness of AI-generated content. While students generally hold positive views of ChatGPT, they also recognize that it is a technology with flaws. Still, these limitations do not deter them from using the tool, as they continue to view it as helpful for their writing.

In the broader context of research habits in the AI era, students increasingly relied on AI tools to conduct quick, targeted searches—often by entering a prompt and receiving relevant information without having to sift through unrelated material. Many students also do not instinctively think about using library databases as a starting point for locating information on a research topic; instead, they view AI tools as more intuitive and accessible. Although educators continue to promote the value of academic resources such as library databases and Google Scholar, students often preferred turning to AI tools like ChatGPT as their primary starting point for research. For the participants who used AI, drawing on ChatGPT to gather content was especially helpful when writing the archival research paper. Izzy, for example, used ChatGPT for background information on diversity, equity, and inclusion, in addition to brainstorming ideas related

to Florida and the University of Miami. Whereas Austin used AI to find out the founding dates of the university's athletic programs, Adam used AI to help identify connections between education inequality and events like the Vietnam War by exploring complex interactions. Sam, on the other hand, used ChatGPT to provide insights, context, and background information on his campus diversification topic. And Sofie used ChatGPT to provide background on topics like university enrollment and clubs. Moreover, once information is gathered, AI can streamline the research process by efficiently organizing, summarizing, and presenting content in bullet points (as noted by Fred and Nelson)—a level of convenience that library databases do not typically offer, since they require students to invest more mental effort in identifying relevant sources and extracting key ideas on their own.

It is clear that participants treated ChatGPT as their default search engine. Whereas students once turned to Google for information, many now go directly to ChatGPT—the new Google—to explore their topics. This shift was the leading reason participants reported using ChatGPT for their project (as cited by nine of them: Aaron, Adam, Austin, Ben, Brody, Ian, Izzy, Nelson, and Stacy). For example, Stacy said, “I looked up on ChatGPT what college life was like for students through 1965–1975, and how it changed because of the Women’s Rights Movement.” Similarly, Ben also used ChatGPT to gather information on his topic: “I used it to help find some of the events in my time period, by just asking for certain highlights in UM’s history between 2001–2011.” Participants noted that ChatGPT simplified the research process by filtering out irrelevant results and highlighting useful content, a point echoed by Nelson, who stated that ChatGPT helped him “understand the topic in depth and made the research process more efficient.” Instead of entering a broad topic with a few keywords into Google and navigating pages of results, AI provided participants with concise, targeted material without unnecessary clutter. This advantage was especially apparent in Adam’s experience: “By leveraging AI, I was able to sift through extensive archival materials, digitized documents, and historical records related to education at UM during the 1965–1975 period. This proved to be very useful for pulling out

important information and insights in an expedient manner. I had a lot more time to connect pieces of information together because I spent less time finding them.” In this process, participants also began to learn the basics of prompt engineering—the idea that the clarity and specificity of the questions or instructions they provide directly shape the quality of the responses they receive. Because ChatGPT is reactive, its output depends entirely on the user’s input, and the responses it generates vary based on the effectiveness of each prompt (Su et al. 2023). As they refined their prompts to obtain more accurate and useful information, participants also developed greater awareness of word choice, learning to select their language more carefully to elicit clearer, more precise responses. This emerging awareness became part of their revising and editing stage, reinforcing the role of thoughtful language use in guiding the tool’s output.

### **5.3 Revising and Editing Stage**

In the final stage of the writing process—the revising and editing stage—writers refine and polish their work as they prepare it for either submission or publication. This stage requires individuals to evaluate their draft, incorporate feedback, revise sentences, and proofread (Faigley 2016, 55–60). Although class time was dedicated to peer review at the 50% and 75% draft stages of the archival research paper, it was evident that students also sought additional feedback from ChatGPT. Mary, for instance, used AI to help proofread her draft, whereas Kerry relied on it to organize her paper. In the final stage of the project, students also checked their citations and sources, making ChatGPT especially useful for tasks beyond seeking feedback on their draft. Some participants needed assistance with managing their references. George, for instance, used ChatGPT to alphabetize his list of references, and Alice used it to double-check her citations. Taken together, these examples show that participants were intentional in their efforts and used AI strategically to ensure their work met the expectations of the project.

Building on this final stage, the revising and editing stage required groups to bring their separate contributions together into a single, coherent document. Because this archival research paper required collaborative

writing, students had to learn how to blend multiple styles and voices into a unified text. This weaving process is inherently challenging, as it involves revising and reshaping sentences from several authors to create a smooth, continuous flow of ideas. Without this integrative work, group-written documents often become disjointed—especially when sections are copied and pasted together without further editing to ensure logical connections and transitions. From my teaching experience assigning and evaluating group papers, I know that students rarely devote the necessary time to this step, even though it is essential for producing a cohesive product. To manage this challenge, participants used ChatGPT to assist with the integration process by inputting their teammates' contributions and asking the AI tool to perform the initial synthesis, helping them establish a unified draft. For example, Anna noted that "ChatGPT was useful for condensing all our ideas into one." Furthermore, when writers receive feedback from multiple peers, the sheer volume of suggestions can feel overwhelming, making it difficult to integrate all relevant points into a single essay. In such cases, AI tools like ChatGPT can help by condensing and synthesizing these contributions into a cohesive, coherent narrative. Mary echoed Anna's experience, explaining, "We also asked it to proof-read a rough draft version of our essay. Our first rough draft was an outline of our compiled notes, lacking sophistication and fluidity. We asked ChatGPT to improve said fluidity through easing our transitions." Together, these accounts illustrate how participants relied on ChatGPT not only for mechanical support but also to manage common writing-process difficulties, particularly the cognitive bottlenecks and stalled momentum that have the potential to contribute to writer's block during collaborative and revision-heavy stages.

In contrast to the earlier stages of the writing process, where participants used ChatGPT frequently during prewriting and drafting, the revising and editing stage saw a noticeable decline in AI usage, with only four participants reporting using it at this point in the process. As the semester drew to a close and the end of the project came into view, their focus likely shifted toward simply finishing the paper rather than refining every detail. This period may also have coincided with peak cognitive fatigue, reducing the

motivation to engage in additional research or further idea development. Overall, participants appeared to rely on AI most heavily during the initial stages of research and writing, when the more demanding tasks—such as outlining, gathering sources, and drafting—typically occur. This pattern aligns with findings from [Barrett and Pack \(2023\)](#), who reported that students and teachers viewed GenAI as more acceptable during the early writing stages (such as brainstorming and outlining) and less acceptable in later stages, where using GenAI to complete writing tasks was considered inappropriate. Although AI use decreased in the final stage of the writing process, its continued presence shows that participants considered ChatGPT indispensable to completing the research project.

## 5.4 Overall Findings

Based on participants' reflection essays, they used ChatGPT as a supportive aid throughout the writing process rather than a shortcut to avoid doing the work themselves. Those who engaged with AI tools did so to strengthen their archival research papers across the three major stages of the writing process, using ChatGPT to explore new ways of expressing ideas and to locate information relevant to their projects. Whether in the prewriting stage, when they asked ChatGPT for help refining thesis statements; in the drafting stage, when they sought clearer sentences; or in the revising and editing stage, when they requested feedback, participants felt they could depend on the tool to enhance their work. Importantly, participants did not view ChatGPT as a form of cheating because they did not ask it to write their entire paper. Instead, they saw ChatGPT as a collaborative partner—something that contributed to their work but did not function as an author. Participants completed their own research, conducted their own analysis of archival materials, and wrote their papers independently. When they needed help, however, they found it more convenient and efficient to turn to an AI tool: opening their laptop, typing a question, receiving an immediate answer, and continuing to write. For them, ChatGPT became a necessary resource. It served as a supplement that deepened their thinking, helped them initiate and complete drafts, and provided support when they felt stuck.

Using ChatGPT also helped participants develop a sharper awareness of its strengths and limitations, an understanding grounded in firsthand experience rather than hearsay. It is important for students to interact directly with AI tools so they can understand what the technology can and cannot do, make informed decisions about when to use it, and determine whether it is acceptable or appropriate for a given task. In the present study, some participants learned that ChatGPT could produce incorrect information, a possibility that made them more critical readers of AI-generated output and more attentive to evaluating its reliability. Students in [Wang et al. \(2024\)](#)'s study reported similar awareness, noting that AI-generated writing can be overly general, repetitive, impersonal, or lacking a distinct voice (9–10), underscoring the importance of human-driven writing. While the present study focused on participants who used ChatGPT, those who chose not to use AI still understood why others found it beneficial, particularly for overcoming writer's block or receiving grammar-related feedback. Only one participant explicitly described AI use as "cheating." Several others preferred conducting research independently because they valued engaging directly with archival sources, as Ben noted. Interestingly, some participants used AI so infrequently that they nearly forgot it was available; tools like ChatGPT never even crossed their minds, as one participant observed. The overall findings illustrated that participants approached ChatGPT as a purposeful learning tool, using it strategically and critically to support their writing goals. At the same time, participants maintained ownership of their writing and balanced human judgment with AI assistance.

## 6 Conclusion

Overall, the data revealed that participants were aware of both the benefits and drawbacks of AI. They demonstrated thoughtful and appropriate use of the technology—a perspective clearly captured by participant Amelia: "ChatGPT is a fantastic research tool if one uses it correctly and does not abuse its power." From an instructional standpoint, I want my students to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to

conduct research and write effective papers. I recognize this goal can be achieved, in part, through careful and responsible use of AI.

At the same time, given how advanced AI has become and how much more sophisticated it is likely to grow, there are concerns that students may become overly dependent on it for their thinking and writing. Despite this concern, participants in the present study reported that they do not accept ChatGPT's output uncritically. Instead, they read its responses with caution, which suggests a discerning approach to AI-generated content. As a result, their writing reflected a blend of AI-assisted and human-authored work. Still, even when students use AI responsibly, the act of integrating its language can blur boundaries between original wording and borrowed phrasing. During the writing process, students may engage in patchwriting—borrowing phrasing or reshaping AI output—which raises important questions about how academic integrity should be reconsidered in the era of AI (Puxon et al. 2024). This intersection between AI-generated language and students' own writing illustrates the increasingly complex relationship between authorship, originality, and technological assistance. As students navigate this relationship, educators must consider how traditional definitions of academic integrity should evolve alongside emerging writing technologies.

Students in other studies have likewise noted that they must use ChatGPT appropriately—as an assistant rather than a replacement—if they want to strengthen their skills (Xiao and Zhi 2023), demonstrating that they recognize their own responsibility in producing original work. At the same time, I recognize the real possibility of metacognitive laziness, described as “learners’ dependence on AI assistance, offloading metacognitive load and less effectively associating responsible metacognitive processes with learning tasks” (Fan et al. 2025, 506); some participants even cited this risk as a reason they turned to ChatGPT. Even so, banning ChatGPT outright would prevent students from developing the discernment needed to determine when they actually need AI. Encouraging students to experiment with it—within reason—allows them to decide how it fits into their learning and intellectual growth. Viewed together, these patterns suggest

that the central task is helping students develop the judgment needed to determine when AI can assist them—especially when they are stalled by writer’s block—while still requiring them to remain active thinkers in their own writing.

Importantly, participants did not use ChatGPT simply to lift ideas or replace their own thinking. Rather, they relied on it to organize material, identify potential research directions, refine drafts, integrate quotations, and summarize texts. In some regards, AI functions like a mobile writing center—almost like having a professor on speed dial—and, in many cases, like a 24/7 support hotline. The variety of ways participants engaged with ChatGPT aligns with research showing that students use the tool for multiple, practical purposes, including as a dictionary, translation aid, co-writer, or editor (Lee et al. 2025, 14). Consequently, fully banning AI in writing courses could limit some students’ ability to succeed, especially when it may prevent them from overcoming a disruption in their writing process. Tools such as Grammarly and calculators are widely accepted resources that students can use without penalty; if AI brings these functions together in one place, it raises a question: Why restrict access to a tool that consolidates what is already permissible?

Thus, writing instructors should not assume that every student will use AI or feel responsible for policing its use through detection websites. Such an approach is ineffective because AI detectors can still produce false positives (Sullivan et al. 2023). Instead of banning AI, teachers should strengthen students’ digital literacy so they can use these tools responsibly and ethically (Campbell and Cox 2024, 104). Some scholars outline a general plan that any discipline can adopt for introducing AI in courses where writing is a key learning outcome. The purpose of this plan is to guide students in using AI to “facilitate the writing process but not to completely author the work” (Campbell and Cox 2024, 106). In other words, AI should serve as a resource that contributes to learning rather than replacing the effort required to write. Ultimately, I argue that prohibiting AI use can restrict, or delay, students’ learning progress. Some students need additional help when grappling with complex ideas—whether in

writing or other academic areas—and AI tools like ChatGPT can offer clear, concise, or comprehensive explanations. ChatGPT can also present qualitative information in a broader and more accessible way (Niloy et al. 2024), which several participants in this present study found useful. AI, therefore, functions as an additional educational resource that students can consult when working through challenging material. At the same time, using ChatGPT—or any AI tool—to assist with parts of a paper does not exempt it from critique by those who question its appropriateness or application. While such use may be acceptable, it can also raise doubts about a student’s abilities, knowledge, or authorship. This is a response that students must be prepared to address.

Looking ahead, examining the ways students choose to use AI provides a more accurate picture of its role in their writing practices. As AI becomes increasingly woven into daily life, it is important that we learn to adapt to it and guide its use thoughtfully in educational settings. Akata et al. (2020) argue that hybrid intelligence is the next major development, where “humans and machines cooperate synergistically, proactively, and purposefully to achieve shared goals, showing AI’s potential for amplifying instead of replacing human intelligence” (19). Although some educators fear that letting students use ChatGPT may prevent them from developing foundational writing skills, this concern did not materialize in the present study. Students who used ChatGPT did so to extend their own thinking, approaching it as a tool to augment their human intelligence. Treating ChatGPT as an additional resource aligns with research emphasizing the continued importance of strong student–teacher relationships in the learning process (Mohamed 2024; Shaikh et al. 2023). For now, we need to accept that AI is here to stay and learn to work with it in ways that support our students throughout the writing process.

## Publication Details and Disclosures

### Generative AI Use

Microsoft Copilot was used for exploratory support to help identify additional reasons students may have used AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) that the author may have overlooked

during the coding process, and to assist the author with data organization. All interpretations and analyses were conducted by the author.

## Biography

Quang Ly is a lecturer in the Department of Writing Studies at the University of Miami.

## Copyright

"The Role of ChatGPT in Navigating Writing Challenges: Evidence from a First-Year Archival Research Assignment" © 2026 by [Quang C. Ly](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#) to the *Journal of Writing and Artificial Intelligence*.

## References

ABBAS, Muhammad, JAM, Farooq Ahmed and KHAN, Tariq Iqbal, 2024. Is it harmful or helpful? Examining the causes and consequences of generative AI usage among university students. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*. February 2024. Vol. 21, no. 10. DOI [10.1186/s41239-024-00444-7](#).

AHMED, Sarah J. and GÜSS, C. Dominik, 2022. An Analysis of Writer's Block: Causes and Solutions. *Creativity Research Journal*. July 2022. Vol. 34, no. 3, p. 339–354. DOI [10.1080/10400419.2022.2031436](#).

AKATA, Zeynep, BALLIET, Dan, DE RIJKE, Maarten, DIGNUM, Frank, DIGNUM, Virginia, EIBEN, Guszti, FOKKENS, Antske, GROSSI, Davide, HINDRIKS, Koen, HOOS, Holger, HUNG, Hayley, JONKER, Catholijn, MONZ, Christof, NEERINCX, Mark, OLIEHOEK, Frans, PRAKKEN, Henry, SCHLOBACH, Stefan, VAN DER GAAG, Linda, VAN HARMELEN, Frank, VAN HOOFF, Herke, VAN RIEMSDIJK, Birna, VAN WYNSBERGHE, Aimee, VERBRUGGE, Rineke, VERHEIJ, Bart, VOSSSEN, Piek and WELLING, Max, 2020. A Research Agenda for Hybrid Intelligence: Augmenting Human Intellect With Collaborative, Adaptive, Responsible, and Explainable Artificial Intelligence. *Computer*. August 2020. Vol. 53, no. 8, p. 18–28. DOI [10.1109/MC.2020.2996587](#).

ALBER-MORGAN, Sheila R., HESSLER, Terri. and KONRAD, Moira., 2007. Teaching Writing for Keeps. *Education and Treatment of Children*. 2007. Vol. 30, no. 3, p. 107–128. DOI [10.1353/etc.2007.0012](#).

BARRETT, Alex and PACK, Austin, 2023. Not quite eye to A.I.: student and teacher perspectives on the use of generative artificial intelligence in the writing process. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*. November 2023. Vol. 20, no. 59, p. 1–24. DOI [10.1186/s41239-023-00427-0](#).

BARROT, Jessie S., 2023. Using ChatGPT for second language writing: Pitfalls and potentials. *Assessing Writing*. July 2023. Vol. 57, p. 100745. DOI [10.1016/j.asw.2023.100745](#).

BASTUG, Muhammet, ERTEM, Ihsan Seyit and KESKIN, Hasan Kagan, 2017. A phenomenological research study on writer's block: causes, processes, and results. *Education + Training*. July 2017. Vol. 59, no. 6, p. 605–618. DOI [10.1108/ET-11-2016-0169](https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-11-2016-0169).

BECK, Sarah W. and LEVINE, Sarah R., 2023. Backtalk: ChatGPT: A powerful technology tool for writing instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan*. September 2023. Vol. 105, no. 1, p. 66–67. DOI [10.1177/00317217231197487](https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217231197487).

CAMPBELL, Laurie O. and COX, Thomas D., 2024. Facilitating the Research Writing Process with Generative Artificial Intelligence. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. June 2024. Vol. 24, no. 2, p. 104–109. DOI [10.14434/josotl.v24i2.36580](https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v24i2.36580).

CORIZZO, Roberto and LEAL-ARENAS, Sebastian, 2023. One-Class Learning for AI-Generated Essay Detection. *Applied Sciences*. July 2023. Vol. 13, no. 13, p. 7901. DOI [10.3390/app13137901](https://doi.org/10.3390/app13137901).

DERGAA, Ismail, CHAMARI, Karim, ZMIJEWSKI, Piotr and BEN SAAD, Helmi, 2023. From human writing to artificial intelligence generated text: examining the prospects and potential threats of ChatGPT in academic writing. *Biology of Sport*. 2023. Vol. 40, no. 2, p. 615–622. DOI [10.5114/biolsport.2023.125623](https://doi.org/10.5114/biolsport.2023.125623).

DOBRIN, Sidney, 2015. *Writing Situations*. Hoboken, NJ: Pearson.

ENRIQUEZ, Grace and VAUGHAN, Andrea, 2024. Exploring Writer's Block as Embodied Experience Across the Grades. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*. October 2024. Vol. 126, no. 10, p. 30–56. DOI [10.1177/01614681241305997](https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681241305997).

FAIGLEY, Lester, 2016. *Writing: A guide for college and beyond*. 4th. Hoboken, NJ: Pearson.

FAN, Yizhou, TANG, Luzhen, LE, Huixiao, SHEN, Kejie, TAN, Shufang, ZHAO, Yueying, SHEN, Yuan, LI, Xinyu and GAŠEVIĆ, Dragan, 2025. Beware of metacognitive laziness: Effects of generative artificial intelligence on learning motivation, processes, and performance. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. March 2025. Vol. 56, no. 2, p. 489–530. DOI [10.1111/bjet.13544](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13544).

FLOWER, Linda and HAYES, John R., 1981. A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing. *College Composition & Communication*. December 1981. Vol. 32, no. 4, p. 365–387. DOI [10.58680/cccl98115885](https://doi.org/10.58680/cccl98115885).

GUO, Kai and WANG, Deliang, 2024. To resist it or to embrace it? Examining ChatGPT's potential to support teacher feedback in EFL writing. *Education and Information Technologies*. May 2024. Vol. 29, no. 7, p. 8435–8463. DOI [10.1007/s10639-023-12146-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-12146-0).

HAN, Jieun, YOO, Haneul, MYUNG, Junho, KIM, Minsun, LEE, Tak Yeon, AHN, So-Yeon and OH, Alice, 2023. *ChEDDAR: Student-ChatGPT Dialogue in EFL Writing Education*. 2023. arXiv.

HEAVEN, Will, 2023. ChatGPT is going to change education, not destroy it. *MIT Technology Review*. Online. April 2023. Available from: <https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/04/06/1071059/chatgpt-change-not-destroy-education-openai/>

HO, Wai Lone Jonathan, KOUSSAYER, Bilal and SUJKA, Joseph, 2023. ChatGPT: Friend or foe in medical writing? An example of how ChatGPT can be utilized in writing case reports. *Surgery in Practice and Science*. September 2023. Vol. 14, p. 100185. DOI [10.1016/j.sipas.2023.100185](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sipas.2023.100185).

KNOWLES, Alan M., 2022. Human-AI Collaborative Writing: Sharing the Rhetorical Task Load. In: *2022 IEEE International Professional Communication Conference (ProComm)*. Limerick, Ireland: IEEE. July 2022. p. 257–261. ISBN 978-1-6654-9517-2. DOI [10.1109/ProComm53155.2022.00053](https://doi.org/10.1109/ProComm53155.2022.00053).

LAPLANTE, Phillip A., 2018. The Writing Process. In: LAPLANTE, Phillip A. (ed.), *Technical Writing*. 2. New York: CRC Press. p. 47–74.

LEE, Sun Kyong, RYU, Jongsang, JIE, Yeowon and MA, Dong Hoon, 2025. Motivations and Affordances of ChatGPT Usage for College Students' Learning. *Media and Communication*. April 2025. Vol. 13, p. 1–23. DOI [10.17645/mac.9508](https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.9508).

LI, Yuheng, SHA, Lele, YAN, Lixiang, LIN, Jionghao, RAKOVIĆ, Mladen, GALBRAITH, Kirsten, LYONS, Kayley, GAŠEVIĆ, Dragan and CHEN, Guanliang, 2023. Can large language models write reflectively. *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*. 2023. Vol. 4, p. 100140. DOI [10.1016/j.caeai.2023.100140](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeai.2023.100140).

LINGARD, Lorelei, 2023. Writing with ChatGPT: An Illustration of its Capacity, Limitations & Implications for Academic Writers. *Perspectives on Medical Education*. June 2023. Vol. 12, no. 1, p. 261–270. DOI [10.5334/pme.1072](https://doi.org/10.5334/pme.1072).

MOHAMED, Amr M., 2024. Exploring the potential of an AI-based Chatbot (ChatGPT) in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching: perceptions of EFL Faculty Members. *Education and Information Technologies*. February 2024. Vol. 29, no. 3, p. 3195–3217. DOI [10.1007/s10639-023-11917-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11917-z).

NILOY, Ahnaf Chowdhury, AKTER, Salma, SULTANA, Nayeema, SULTANA, Jakia and RAHMAN, Sayed Imran Ur, 2024. Is Chatgpt a menace for creative writing ability? An experiment. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*. April 2024. Vol. 40, no. 2, p. 919–930. DOI [10.1111/jcal.12929](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12929).

OECD, 2023. *An Overview of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Education*. Paris: OECD Publishing. DOI [10.1787/e9072e21-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/e9072e21-en).

PACK, Austin and MALONEY, Jeffrey, 2023. Using Generative Artificial Intelligence for Language Education Research: Insights from Using OpenAI's ChatGPT. *TESOL Quarterly*. December 2023. Vol. 57, no. 4, p. 1571–1582. DOI [10.1002/tesq.3253](https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3253).

PRIHANDOKO, Lastika Ary, 2021. Students' Writing Self-Efficacy, Writers' Block, and Academic Writing Performance: An Empirical Study in Eastern Indonesian Students. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*. December 2021. Vol. 13, no. 3, p. 2029–2037. DOI [10.35445/alishlah.v13i3.1156](https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v13i3.1156).

PUXON, Peter, BROOK, Jessica and PREVATT-GOLDSTEIN, Ayanna, 2024. The use of generative AI tools in the reading-into-writing process: gains, losses and recommendations. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*. October 2024. No. 32, p. 1–17. DOI [10.47408/jldhe.vi32.1464](https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi32.1464).

RAHMAN, Mizanur, TERANO, Harold Jan R, RAHMAN, Nafizur, SALAMZADEH, Aidin and RAHAMAN, Saidur, 2023. ChatGPT and Academic Research: A Review and Recommendations Based on Practical Examples. *Journal of Education, Management and Development Studies*. March 2023. Vol. 3, no. 1, p. 1–12. DOI [10.52631/jemds.v3i1.175](https://doi.org/10.52631/jemds.v3i1.175).

RONG, Jun, DENG, Yaochen and LIU, Dilin, 2025. The effects of incorporating mindset intervention in L2 English writing on Chinese college EFL students' learning engagement and writing performance. *Journal of Second Language Writing*. June 2025. Vol. 68, p. 101193. DOI [10.1016/j.jslw.2025.101193](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2025.101193).

ROSE, Mike, 2009. *Writer's block: The cognitive dimension*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

SALEM, Ashraf Atta M. S., 2018. Engaging ESP University Students in Flipped Classrooms for Developing Functional Writing Skills, HOTS, and Eliminating Writer's Block. *English Language Teaching*. November 2018. Vol. 11, no. 12, p. 177–198. DOI [10.5539/elt.v11n12p177](https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n12p177).

SALVAGNO, Michele, TACCONE, Fabio Silvio and GERLI, Alberto Giovanni, 2023. Can artificial intelligence help for scientific writing?. *Critical Care*. February 2023. Vol. 27, no. 1, p. 1–5. DOI [10.1186/s13054-023-04380-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13054-023-04380-2).

SHAIKH, Sarang, YAYILGAN, Sule Yildirim, KLIMOVA, Blanka and PIKHART, Marcel, 2023. Assessing the Usability of ChatGPT for Formal English Language Learning. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*. September 2023. Vol. 13, no. 9, p. 1937–1960. DOI [10.3390/ejihpe13090140](https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe13090140).

SU, Yanfang, LIN, Yun and LAI, Chun, 2023. Collaborating with ChatGPT in argumentative writing classrooms. *Assessing Writing*. July 2023. Vol. 57, p. 100752. DOI [10.1016/j.asw.2023.100752](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2023.100752).

SULLIVAN, Miriam, KELLY, Andrew and MCLAUGHLAN, Paul, 2023. ChatGPT in higher education: Considerations for academic integrity and student learning. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*. March 2023. Vol. 6, no. 1, p. 31–40. DOI [10.37074/jalt.2023.6.1.17](https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2023.6.1.17).

TICA, Lena and KRSMANOVIĆ, Ivana, 2024. Overcoming the Writer's Block? Exploring Students' Motivation and Perspectives on Using ChatGPT as a Writing Assistance Tool in ESP. *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries*. August 2024. Vol. 21, no. 1, p. 129–149. DOI [10.4312/elope.21.1.129-149](https://doi.org/10.4312/elope.21.1.129-149).

USHER, Maya and AMZALAG, Meital, 2025. From Prompt to Polished: Exploring Student–Chatbot Interactions for Academic Writing Assistance. *Education Sciences*. March 2025. Vol. 15, no. 3, p. 329. DOI [10.3390/educsci15030329](https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15030329).

WANG, Changzhao, AGUILAR, Stephen J., BANKARD, Jennifer S., BUI, Eric and NYE, Benjamin, 2024. Writing with AI: What College Students Learned from Utilizing ChatGPT for a Writing Assignment. *Education Sciences*. September 2024. Vol. 14, no. 9, p. 1–16. DOI [10.3390/educsci14090976](https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14090976).

XIAO, Yangyu and ZHI, Yuying, 2023. An Exploratory Study of EFL Learners' Use of ChatGPT for Language Learning Tasks: Experience and Perceptions. *Languages*. September 2023. Vol. 8, no. 3, p. 212. DOI [10.3390/languages8030212](https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8030212).

XU, Jinfen, YANG, Jiaqi and CHEN, Ziyi, 2026. Writer's block in continuation task: Construct, causes, and link with task performance. *The Journal of Educational Research*. January 2026. P. 1–12. DOI [10.1080/00220671.2026.2613820](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2026.2613820).

YAN, Da, 2023. Impact of ChatGPT on learners in a L2 writing practicum: An exploratory investigation. *Education and Information Technologies*. November 2023. Vol. 28, no. 11, p. 13943–13967. DOI [10.1007/s10639-023-11742-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11742-4).

YOON, Su-Youn, MISZOGLAD, Eva and PIERCE, Lisa R., 2023. Evaluation of ChatGPT Feedback on ELL Writers' Coherence and Cohesion. *arXiv*. 2023. DOI [10.48550/ARXIV.2310.06505](https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2310.06505).

ZHOU, Tongquan, CAO, Siyi, ZHOU, Siruo, ZHANG, Yao and HE, Aijing, 2023. Chinese intermediate English learners outdid ChatGPT in deep cohesion: Evidence from English narrative writing. *System*. November 2023. Vol. 118, p. 103141. DOI [10.1016/j.system.2023.103141](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103141).

ZHU, Chenjia, SUN, Meng, LUO, Jiutong, LI, Tianyi and WANG, Minhong, 2023. How to harness the potential of ChatGPT in education?. *Knowledge Management & E-Learning: An International Journal*. June 2023. Vol. 15, no. 2, p. 133–152. DOI [10.34105/j.kmel.2023.15.008](https://doi.org/10.34105/j.kmel.2023.15.008).