NO PREP

Using AI to Write Better (Without Cheating)

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

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The Line That Actually Matters

Every student using AI for writing faces a version of the same question: where is the line between using AI as a tool and letting AI do the work for you? This is not a trivial question. It matters for academic integrity, it matters for what you actually learn, and it matters for the skills you will need later in life. The line is not always obvious, and it differs depending on your teacher, your school, and the purpose of the assignment. But

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Brainstorming and Idea Generation

One of the cleanest uses of AI in writing is brainstorming. You are still generating your ideas, making your arguments, and deciding what matters, but you are using AI to expand and pressure-test your thinking. Ask AI to give you ten possible angles on a topic, then choose the one that interests you most and write about it yourself. Ask AI what counterarguments someone might raise against your thesis, so you can address them in your paper. Ask AI what evidence typically supports the type of claim you are making, then go find that evidence yourself and verify it. None of these uses involve AI writing for you. You are using AI the way a student might use a librarian who can suggest resources, or a teacher who can push back on your thinking during office hours. The output is your own writing, shaped by your own choices. AI is the thinking partner, not the author. This is the kind of AI use that

will help you become a better writer over time because you are still doing the actual cognitive work.

Feedback and Revision: The Most Underused Strategy

Perhaps the most valuable writing application of AI is using it as a first-round editor. After you draft something, even a rough draft, you can ask AI to give you specific feedback on it. The key is to be specific about what kind of feedback you want. "Give me general feedback" will produce generic suggestions. "Tell me whether my thesis statement is arguable and specific" or "Identify the two weakest paragraphs in this essay and explain why" or "Check whether my transitions between paragraphs are clear" will produce feedback you can actually act on. What makes this powerful is that it is free, immediate, available at midnight before a deadline, and completely non-judgmental. You can show AI a terrible first draft and ask for honest feedback without worrying about embarrassment. You can submit the same paragraph for feedback five times as you revise it. A good teacher would love to give you this kind of feedback, but a good teacher has 30 other students and limited time. AI has none of those constraints.

What "Revision" Actually Means With AI

There is a critical difference between using AI to help you revise and using AI to rewrite for you. If you paste your paragraph into AI and ask "rewrite this to be better," the AI will produce a new paragraph. That paragraph will be better written — and it will not be yours. You will not have learned anything from the transaction, and if you submit it, you have submitted work that is not your own. The better approach is to use AI's feedback as instructions for your own revision. Ask AI to tell you what is wrong with a paragraph, then close the AI chat and fix it yourself. Or ask AI for one specific improvement — "how could I make my opening sentence more engaging?" — and then write the improved version yourself, using the AI's suggestion as inspiration rather than a template to copy. The act of writing the revision yourself is where the learning happens. If the AI writes the revision, you have outsourced the only part that actually improves you.

Explaining and Expanding Your Own Ideas

AI can help you develop ideas you have already started but do not know how to finish. If you have written a thesis but cannot figure out how to support it with

evidence, you can ask: "My thesis is [your thesis]. What types of evidence would typically be used to support this kind of argument?" If you have a point but feel like your explanation is thin, you can ask: "Here is what I wrote: [your paragraph]. What additional context or explanation might strengthen this point?" You then decide which suggestions are useful, find the actual evidence, and write the expanded version yourself. This is different from asking AI to write your paper. You are the one deciding what argument to make, what evidence to use, and how to say it. AI is providing the kind of assistance a knowledgeable friend might offer when you say "I'm stuck — what would help here?" The test for whether this is legitimate use is simple: can you defend every sentence in your final draft? If you cannot explain why you wrote what you wrote, you do not own the writing.

The Long Game: Why Doing the Work Matters

Students who use AI to skip the hard parts of writing pay a price that is not immediately visible. Writing is not just about producing a document — it is about learning to organize ideas, construct arguments, and communicate clearly under conditions of uncertainty. Those skills transfer everywhere. They show up in job interviews, in emails to managers, in presentations, in negotiations. Every time a student uses AI to bypass the struggle of writing, they are trading a short-term convenience for a long-term skill deficit. There is a place in the world for students who can write clearly and think independently. AI is going to replace a lot of tasks, but clear thinkers who can communicate well will be more valuable, not less, in a world full of AI-generated text that sounds fluent but lacks genuine insight. The students who learn to use AI as a tool while still doing the hard cognitive work will come out ahead of both the students who refused to use AI at all and the students who let AI do everything for them. One particularly useful application is asking AI to help you identify your personal writing patterns that weaken your work. Paste three different paragraphs you have written across different assignments and ask: 'What are the recurring weaknesses across these writing samples?' Good AI tools will often identify patterns you cannot see yourself — overuse of passive voice, a tendency to state conclusions without support, sentences that are grammatically correct but lack energy. This kind of pattern diagnosis is something a writing teacher would love to provide but rarely has time for with every student. AI can do it in seconds.

Key Information: Using AI to Write Better

AI Writing Use	Legitimate or Not?
Using AI to brainstorm angles on a topic, then writing yourself	Legitimate — you are the author making decisions
Asking AI for counterarguments to test your own thesis	Legitimate — strengthens your thinking process
Asking AI for specific feedback on a draft you wrote	Legitimate — like using a non-judgmental editor
Using AI feedback as instructions and revising yourself	Legitimate — the revision work is your own
Asking AI to rewrite a paragraph and submitting it as yours	Not legitimate — you did not write what you submitted
Asking AI to write your paper and putting your name on it	Not legitimate — you are not the author
Asking AI what evidence supports your argument type	Legitimate — you still find and verify evidence yourself
Expanding AI's draft with a few minor edits	Borderline / not legitimate — AI is still the primary author

Case Study: Two Students, One Assignment

Maya and DeShawn are in the same English class with the same essay assignment: argue whether social media does more harm than good to teenagers. Maya opens AI and types 'Write a five-paragraph essay arguing social media harms teenagers.' She edits a few words so it doesn't sound too formal and submits it. She gets a B+ and feels fine about it. DeShawn has a different approach. He types his own rough thesis first: 'Social media is designed to be addictive, and that addiction is hurting teenagers more than people admit.' He asks AI: 'Here is my thesis. What are the three strongest counterarguments someone would make against it?' He reads them, picks the strongest one, and figures out how to address it in his essay. He writes the whole draft himself, then pastes it into AI and asks: 'Which paragraph is weakest and why?' He rewrites that paragraph based on AI's feedback. He gets a B+ too. Six months later, Maya cannot write a strong argumentative paragraph without AI. DeShawn writes a compelling persuasive letter to his school board about a policy he cares about — with no AI help at all.

1. Both students received the same grade, but the reading would argue their outcomes were very different. Based on the reading, what specifically did DeShawn gain that Maya did not?

2. The reading says 'the test for whether this is legitimate use is simple: can you defend every sentence in your final draft?' Apply this test to both Maya and DeShawn's essays. What does it reveal?

Multiple Choice

1. According to the reading, what is the key distinction between using AI as a tool and using AI to cheat?

a) Whether you are the author using assistance or AI is the author and you are the delivery vehicle

b) Whether the AI output is more than 30% of the final draft

c) Whether your teacher has specifically banned AI use for the assignment

d) Whether you disclose and acknowledge your AI use in a note at the bottom of your submitted paper

2. What does the reading recommend doing with AI feedback on a draft rather than asking AI to rewrite the paragraph?

a) Print the AI feedback and attach it to your submission as evidence of revision

b) Ask AI to apply its own feedback and produce the corrected paragraph

c) Share the feedback with your teacher to show you used AI responsibly

d) Use the feedback as instructions and write the revised version yourself

3. What long-term consequence does the reading identify for students who consistently use AI to skip the hard parts of writing?

a) They score lower on standardized tests that do not allow AI assistance

b) They trade short-term convenience for a long-term skill deficit in communication and reasoning

c) They struggle to use AI effectively in professional contexts because they never learned to prompt it

d) They develop a dependence on AI that is expensive to maintain after graduation

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Brainstorming with AI	A) A form of writing where you take a position and support it with evidence and reasoning
2. ___ AI as first-round editor	B) Using AI to generate possible angles or counterarguments before you write your own draft
3. ___ Revision bypass	C) Pasting a draft you wrote into AI and asking for targeted feedback you then act on yourself
4. ___ Argumentative writing	D) A gap in ability caused by consistently outsourcing a cognitive task rather than practicing it
5. ___ Skill deficit	E) Asking AI to rewrite a paragraph and submitting the AI version as your own work

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. The test for whether AI writing use is legitimate is simple: can you _____ every sentence in your final draft?

2. Using AI to generate brainstorming ideas and then writing yourself is legitimate because you are still doing the actual _____ work.

3. Students who let AI do their writing trade short-term convenience for a long-term _____ deficit.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Explain the difference between using AI to brainstorm and using AI to write. Why is one approach more useful for developing your own writing skills?

2. According to the reading, why is using AI as a first-round editor valuable, and what makes it different from asking AI to rewrite your work?

3. The reading argues that clear thinkers who can communicate well will be 'more valuable, not less' in a world full of AI. Do you agree or disagree, and why? Use evidence from the reading to support your position.