

## 1.6 Why Write With AI? | Reflection

You're about to spend a good part of this program creating something of your own—a story, a screenplay, a collection of poems, or another creative work—in collaboration with AI. Before you begin, it's worth asking why. In fact, it's worth being a little suspicious of the whole idea.

Plenty of thoughtful writers believe that using AI to write is a mistake, perhaps even a betrayal—not only of the craft, but of a way of life. Writing is something you learn by doing. You struggle with the blank page. You search for the right word. You build sentences, discover what you mean, revise what isn't working, and gradually develop a voice of your own. Why would we want to hand any of that over to a machine?

Further, we already know that technologies can change the abilities we develop. Rely heavily on spell-check, and your own spelling may soften. Rely on GPS everywhere you go, and you may become less skilled at finding your own way. Rely on a calculator for every calculation, and some mathematical fluency may fade. So this concern about AI and writing is straightforward: rely on AI to write your paragraphs, and your ability to write paragraphs may weaken too.

But there's a fair question from the other direction. If spell-check is always available, how important is it to become an *expert* speller? And if AI can generate a competent paragraph in seconds, how important will it be to learn how to produce a paragraph entirely on your own? That's a fair question too.

If our only goal is fast, competent output, the temptation is obvious: lean heavily on the machine. But if our goal is superior work from highly skilled human beings immersed in their craft, then the human has to do the years of work required to develop those abilities. That slow process is itself worthy of respect. Slowness can be a feature, not a fault.

Still, we can ask whether the choice is really so black and white: Must technological assistance necessarily come at the expense of human capability?

### A Third Possibility

There is another possibility. What if AI can be used not merely to produce better writing, but to help us become better writers? Those are two very different claims: *AI helped me produce better writing* is not the same as *AI helped me become a better writer*. The first is about the quality of the product. The second is about the capability of the human being.

The difference may lie in what happens to your thinking when AI enters the process. If AI does the mental work you need to practice, you may produce

better work while developing less ability of your own. But if AI takes care of something you already know how to do and frees you to tackle something more demanding, your thinking hasn't necessarily disappeared—it may simply have moved elsewhere.

The question, then, isn't simply whether AI does some of your thinking. It's what thinking you hand over, what thinking remains for you, and what you do with the added time and attention AI made possible?

### **What Problem Are We Trying to Solve?**

It's fair to ask: What problem does writing with AI actually solve?

One answer is that we are entering a world in which machine-generated language is everywhere. AI can already produce fluent paragraphs, stories, reports, arguments, emails, and explanations in seconds. Whether we think that's wonderful or terrible doesn't change the fact that it is happening. And in a world where generating words becomes easier, judging words becomes more important. Without that judgement there is no push back. With no push back there can be a race to the bottom.

Is this accurate? Clear? Manipulative? Generic? Is the reasoning sound? Does this sound like me? Is it worth saying? Should I accept what the machine produced, revise it, reject it—or start over on my own? The more critically we work with AI-generated writing—questioning it, comparing it, revising it, and rejecting it when necessary—the better positioned we become to judge then improve or steer away from what it provides.

### **Lowering the Threshold Without Lowering the Destination**

But AI is more than a problem to manage. It also presents an opportunity. Some people never really enter writing at all. The blank page intimidates them. They struggle to organize their thoughts. They fear being bad at it. Somewhere along the way, they may accept a quiet verdict: Writing isn't for me.

Might AI help lower that threshold without lowering the destination? The destination would need to remain demanding: clear thinking, sound judgement, a genuine voice, patience with revision, sensitivity to an audience, and the ability to communicate something worth communicating. But perhaps the threshold to writing doesn't have to be so difficult to cross. AI may provide a ramp—another way in for people who otherwise might never begin.

And for people already comfortable with writing, AI may open other avenues—allowing them to work at a scale, speed, or level of complexity they haven't experienced before.

Whether these possibilities actually strengthen us as writers depends greatly on how we use the tool. This we will be investigating.

### **Your Writing Ability Is Your Power**

In this AI-Ed program, we assume you've already developed some writing skills. You know something about grammar. Sentence structure. Paragraphs. Organization. You've had experience putting ideas into words and trying to make those words understandable to someone else.

Everything you've already learned matters enormously when working with AI. It is your own experience with language that helps you recognize when an AI sentence is awkward, when a paragraph wanders, when an argument doesn't make sense, when a character's voice rings false, or when polished language is disguising an empty idea. The better your judgment becomes, the harder it is for fluent AI output to fool you. So keep writing. Your writing ability isn't something AI makes obsolete. It is the source of your power over the tool.

### **The Master and the Apprentice**

Think about a master craftsperson and an apprentice. A master can often judge a piece of work differently from a beginner—not because the master no longer does basic work, but because years of doing that work have developed an eye for quality. The master recognizes when something is right, when it isn't, and often why.

Writing works much the same way. Experienced writers still wrestle with sentences. They still revise. They still get stuck. Mastery doesn't mean leaving the fundamentals behind. It means developing judgment through years of practicing them.

AI gives us a strange new kind of assistant: one capable of producing work that can look remarkably accomplished even when it isn't particularly good. That makes your own judgment more important. And remember that every master began as an apprentice. The work you do while learning—constructing sentences, organizing ideas, struggling to say precisely what you mean—is part of what develops the judgment you'll rely upon later.

AI can accompany you on your journey. But the less developed your ability for a particular task, the more carefully you need to decide how much of that task to hand over. If AI repeatedly performs the very skill you're trying to acquire, it may improve today's product while shortchanging tomorrow's writer. On the other hand, if you use AI in ways that make you examine, question, revise, compare, decide, and think more deeply, something different may happen. You may grow.

AI may make some parts of writing easier while quietly weakening others. It may help you see things you hadn't noticed before. It may sometimes expand your thinking and sometimes narrow it. It may give you confidence. It may make you dependent. It may help you find your voice—or tempt you to accept its voice instead. Those possibilities are reasons to approach AI thoughtfully and to pay close attention to what happens when you use it.

Perhaps the question isn't simply: *Why write with AI?* A better question is: *Can I use AI in ways that expand my ability to communicate effectively—and how will I know if that's actually happening?*

That's one of the questions you'll explore through the creative project ahead. You'll write both with AI and without it. You'll watch what the machine does. And, most importantly, you'll watch what happens to your own thinking, documenting what you notice in your field journal.

The goal isn't to prove that writing with AI is better. In many cases, it's not. The goal is to develop the judgment to decide when AI helps, when it doesn't, and when you're better off doing the work yourself and to what degree.

A tool that helps you produce better work today but leaves you weaker without it has made you dependent. A tool that helps you become better at the work tomorrow has made you stronger. The creative project ahead is about learning to tell the difference.

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### Reflection Questions

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1. Which matters more in writing: what you produce, or what happens to you while producing it? Does your answer change depending on why you're writing?
2. If AI can write a decent paragraph in seconds, why should anyone still learn to write one themselves?
3. What parts of writing do you think a person needs to learn to do well without AI?
4. Spell-check, editors, friends, and AI can all help a writer. At what point does assistance become authorship? Where would you draw the line?
5. If you hand some of your thinking to AI but use the freed-up time and attention to tackle harder thinking, have you outsourced your thinking—or expanded what you can think about?
6. Some of writing's difficulty teaches you something; some of it just keeps people out. In your experience, which struggles are worth keeping—and which are only barriers?