

07

CONTEXTS OF USE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ▷ Identify the value and risks associated with GenAI in various contexts.
- ▷ Examine the potential uses of Gen AI in academic, professional, civic, and personal contexts.
- ▷ Recognize the importance of integrity when using GenAI in each context.

BEFORE YOU READ THIS CHAPTER

Think about the different kinds of writing you will probably have to produce in your career, in your civic life, and in your personal life. Make a list of those possible tasks and of the ways in which GenAI might be a valuable collaborator for completing them.

INTRODUCTION

You've probably heard the old real estate adage, "location, location, location," which implies that the value of a piece of property is primarily about where it's located. We can adopt a similar axiom toward GenAI: context, context, context. *How* you should use GenAI has a lot to do with the context in which you're using it. For example, how you use GenAI in your academic work will probably be different from how you use it in professional contexts such as a job or internship; how you use it in civic/political writing, or in personal writing, will differ again. This chapter explores the application of GenAI in those four distinct writing contexts: academic, professional, civic, and personal.

ACADEMIC CONTEXTS

There's an increasing belief that college and university students need to learn and practice the forms of writing they're more likely to produce in their careers. Some academic disciplines design their curricula specifically around the relationships between industry and education. Industry standards change (frequently because of technological changes, as we're witnessing with AI), so educational institutions that target job-specific skills must react and revise their curricula often. Higher education so heavily emphasizes writing and communication in part because nearly every industry now identifies communication skills—written, visual, and spoken—as primary qualifications when hiring new employees. These also happen to be areas in which GenAI is having significant impact.

Traditionally, the primary assignment in academic writing has been the essay. First-year writing programs often focus on essay writing simply because those programs are designed to prepare students for further courses, many of which will themselves require essays. However, it's unlikely—though not impossible—that you will ever be asked to write an essay after finishing college. For this reason, many instructors now assign writing forms other than essays. The rise of digital media has drastically altered the kinds of writing we produce, and has increased the role of visuals used in conjunction with writing.

GenAI can be a useful tool for forms of writing, from essays and multimodal writing to visual rhetoric and even programming:

- ▷ Text generators and editors such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Jasper, Wordtune, AnyWord, and QuillBot can help with generating, revising, and editing text, whether for use in an essay or in some other form of writing.
- ▷ Visual GenAI programs such as Dall-E, MidJourney, Firefly, and Express can generate original images.
- ▷ Conventional image programs such as Photoshop use integrated GenAI tools for editing and revising images.
- ▷ InVideo, Synthesia, Pictory, and Veed.io can be useful for generating and editing film.
- ▷ Aviva, Soundful, Boomy, Loudly, and Soundraw can produce original music.
- ▷ Platforms like TabNine, Codex, CodeWP, and CodeSquire can assist in writing computer code.

In all academic writing contexts, be sure to adhere to your college's or university's policies regarding GenAI, as well as your instructor's course-specific policies.

Provocation



Many people claim that they can reliably identify work written by GenAI because, it's said, the language doesn't "sound" like that of a real person—it's flat and repetitive. But if this is true, is the flat voice of the GenAI partly a result of the text being presented on a page or screen, rather than orally?

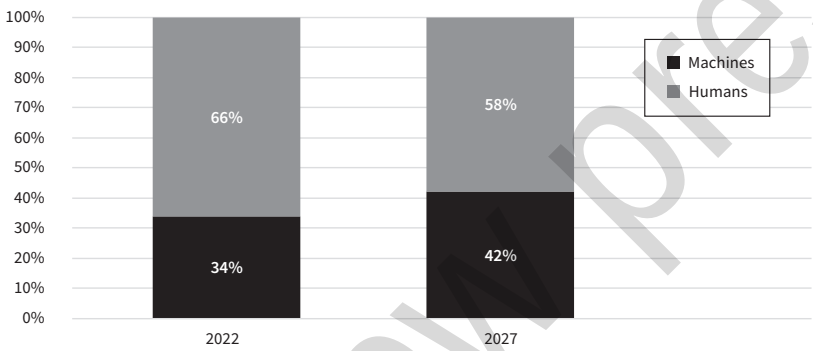
Try this: prompt a GenAI to write two paragraphs about any subject you choose. Don't revise the text. Practice reading the content out loud until you are familiar and comfortable with it. Then, deliver it like a speech to someone else. Can your audience discern whether it's GenAI-generated?

Next, try using a text-to-speech AI such as Speechify or Revoicer to read the text in a computer-generated voice. How does that delivery of the content compare to your own reading?

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS

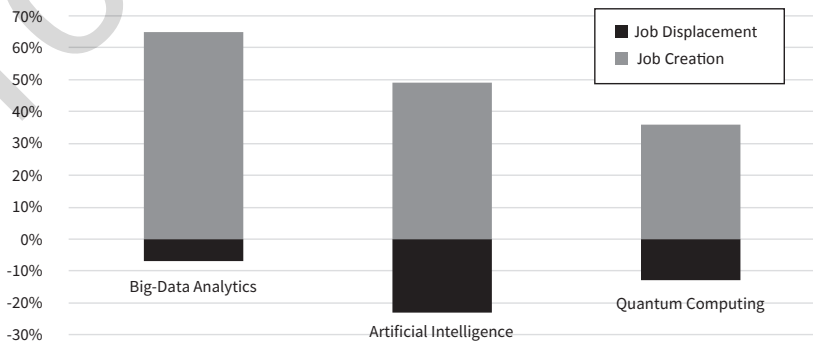
According to the World Economic Forum’s (WEF’s) *Future of Jobs Report 2023*, the category of job that’s expected to grow the fastest over the next few years is “AI and Machine Learning Specialist.”³³ The WEF also reports that the proportion of labor tasked to machines instead of humans is rapidly increasing.

ESTIMATED PROPORTION OF TASKS COMPLETED BY HUMANS VS. MACHINES³⁴



However, this change in the division of labor doesn’t necessarily mean that there will be a net reduction in human jobs, at least not in all fields. Aside from the fear of widespread academic cheating, arguably the biggest panic arising with the public emergence of GenAI has been with regard to job loss. And while it’s true, according to the WEF’s predictions, that many people will be displaced from their jobs by GenAI, it’s also expected that even more jobs will be *created* by GenAI:

EXPECTED IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON JOBS, 2023–27³⁵



Understanding how to deploy AI and GenAI in professional contexts will be a critical part of most of our professional lives.

Part of the difference between academic writing and workplace writing is that in the workplace the “show your work” demonstration is rarely important, and likely never requested. *The outcome is the important part.* Your colleagues, co-workers, supervisors, and superiors are probably not interested in knowing how many drafts you wrote, or how much you revised in order to get to the final product. They just want to see that the final product is complete and successful. In this way, one of the major disadvantages of GenAI in academic contexts—the fact that it often functions as a kind of black box and doesn’t reveal its process in producing an output—is far less of a hindrance in professional contexts.

In many workplaces, GenAI is already now commonly deployed to assist with a wide range of writing tasks, including writing emails, responding to customer inquiries, sending automated responses, setting internal reminders, drafting news releases, summarizing correspondence, creating reports, producing technical manuals, and drafting proposals. Collaborating with GenAI to complete these tasks can lead to greatly increased productivity, as well as improved quality and accuracy.

Consider in greater detail some of the ways in which GenAI can assist in these contexts:

- ▷ **Cover letters:** In most professions, applying for a job requires that you submit a cover letter, which generally includes information such as where you first learned about the job (an ad, a personal referral, etc.), a summary of your work experience, skills that are pertinent to the job, and contact information. There are many GenAI tools that can help with the creation of cover letters. Even conventional word processors such as Microsoft Word include cover letter templates that provide GenAI-driven suggestions for wording and formatting. GenAI can help you structure a cover letter to be more dynamic; it can also help you customize your letter for the specific job and company, and revise it to best represent your abilities in ways that will attract the attention of potential employers. You can also converse with GenAI to identify the key assets that employees in similar positions need and the challenges they typically face. GenAI can also be prompted to shape a cover letter to fit within a given word count, cutting out repetition and focusing on the most important elements of your skill set and background.

- ▷ **Résumés:** It may seem most efficient to simply provide GenAI with all the data that should be included in your résumé and then prompt it to generate an output based on that data. However, doing so will likely result in a bland, generic résumé. To obtain an effective result, you may need to provide multiple prompts. Suppose you begin by prompting the GenAI to identify the most important qualifications of the job for which you are applying. You can then prompt it to customize your résumé to emphasize the ways in which your background and skillset matches with the job's qualifications. Remember, however, that the GenAI may hallucinate qualifications and experiences you don't have in order to fulfill the demands of the prompt, so be sure to carefully check the output for any false information.
- ▷ **Onboarding reports:** Many companies appreciate when new employees provide an overview as to how they can most effectively integrate into the workplace. Onboarding reports allow new employees to describe their strengths and make suggestions for how to maximally utilize those strengths in a new job. GenAI programs can be particularly helpful here, as they can effectively fit a summary of your experiences and aspirations into the metrics and requirements of an onboarding report. Many GenAI platforms can also be prompted to adapt such information into table or spreadsheet formats, so as to produce the types of schedules and performance plans that are often requested alongside written onboarding reports. For example, you could prompt a GenAI to examine your report and generate a table showing what you wish to accomplish in 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, and so on.
- ▷ **Project briefs and reports:** Project briefs and reports typically describe the objectives, purposes, outputs, audiences, timelines, budgets, member assignments, expectations, and other pertinent details of major work projects. Writing these can be tedious because of the many different types of information that need to be included. However, by providing a GenAI with each component part of the relevant data, you can often produce a working draft that will serve as a strong starting point for further revision. GenAI can also adapt its output to meet specific formatting requirements such as a company's report template. In the absence of a template, it can be useful in suggesting organizational approaches and identifying missing elements.
- ▷ **Feedback analyses:** Feedback analyses are documents that analyze feedback information—such as customer reviews—and synthesize

that data into a manageable and interpretable form. This might include quantitative data, such as customer satisfaction surveys: “How likely is it, from 1 to 5, that you would recommend this product to a friend?” Or it might be written evaluations: “Please describe your experience with our customer service team.” GenAI can assist in analyzing and synthesizing such information into a more useful format. For example, it can categorize data if you provide it with the intended criteria: “organize these written responses from those that are most positive to those that are most negative.” If prompted in this way, the AI can scrub the provided data for words and expressions frequently used in positive responses, such as “good,” “appreciated,” “will recommend,” and so on. This can be enormously helpful if you’re trying to identify the features of a product or service that are going well, or if you’re trying to identify the problems. GenAI can also help organize feedback data into reports or executive summaries, and can identify repeated bits of feedback that may be useful for developing actionable insights or responses from the data.

- ▷ **Collaborative writing:** Workplace writing is often collaborative. We all have differences in our writing and communication styles, and GenAI can be a useful tool for synthesizing the collaborative parts of different peoples’ writing into a single cohesive document. It can revise supplied text into a single document with a consistent tone, style, format, and approach.
- ▷ **Presentations:** Whether internally (for other employees or supervisors) or externally (for customers, investors, or other public audiences), it’s likely that at some point in your career you will have to make a presentation. GenAI can help in organizing your information in a way that will make sense to your audience. It can also help you to fine-tune your language to best connect with a specific audience (be sure to mention your audience in your prompt to the AI), and it can even provide advice about how to make your presentation more dynamic and engaging.
- ▷ **Graphics and visuals:** Some companies employ graphic artists and designers to make and design visual assets for company documents. However, not all companies have the resources for this, and often employees are expected to provide visual information to accompany their written documentation. GenAI can help produce and edit all kinds of visual content, ranging from charts and tables to

infographics, diagrams, schematics, and even photograph-quality images and video. In some cases, this content can be produced by simply providing the GenAI with the accompanying written documentation and prompting it to create an accompanying chart (or diagram, etc.).

These are only a few examples of the many kinds of workplace writing that you may be required to produce in your career, and there are many additional ways to collaborate with GenAI to complete these and other writing tasks.

Keep in mind that, as in academic settings, professional contexts often have specific approaches to integrity. Be sure to understand your company's policies about GenAI, and don't run afoul of company or industry practices.

CIVIC CONTEXTS

In addition to your academic career and your professional career, you may also find moments in your life when you need to write about civic issues for public audiences. This kind of writing is often described as political, even when the objective—such as asking for volunteers to help clean up a local park— isn't “political” in the usual sense. Civic writing is vital to our social and democratic processes.

Civics educator Sandra Stotsky identifies civic writing as including “formal legal writing [such] as speeches, petitions, and resolutions ... formal organizational writing [such] as minutes of meetings, agendas, memos, and newsletters ... and informal and personal writing, such as letters to friends, relatives, or neighbors supporting or opposing candidates for public office.”³⁶ Stotsky also identifies five major purposes for civic writing: “[1] to personalize civic relationships with public officials and/or to express a civic identity with other citizens ... [2] to obtain information or assistance ... [3] to provide public information or to offer a public service ... [4] to evaluate public officials or services ... [and 5] to advocate for people or causes.”³⁷

GenAI can be useful in crafting not only long-form civic writing such as political speeches, but also social media posts and interactions. Social media is now central to all kinds of civic writing, as is evident from the role it plays in politics, from presidential candidates' Twitter feeds to citizen reporting at rallies. While some impromptu social media posts may

not involve the degree of careful composition typical of writing in academic and professional contexts, it is writing all the same.

Because social media is public and often meant to persuade an audience, replies and interactions are often argumentative or even adversarial. GenAI can be particularly helpful in crafting responses to reactive or aggressive people. One can prompt a GenAI program to quickly produce measured and adaptive responses that fit appropriately in response to hostile or argumentative social media interactions.

GenAI can also be useful in providing predictive suggestions for the most effective language to use for persuasion in given conversational exchange. It can even help you analyze others' responses so as to better understand their arguments and interests, rapidly creating more effective and individualized responses than may be possible otherwise.

Civic writing demands particular attention to the risk of AI hallucinations. Including inaccurate or obfuscating information in civic writing—especially in social media—can result in people reacting negatively, or even dismissing your credibility. In the realm of politics, your credibility—your *ethos*—is crucial to how readers respond.

PERSONAL CONTEXTS

Often, courses in academic writing begin with personal writing—usually in the form of a personal essay—so as to encourage students to focus on the act of writing rather than the content. The key element of personal writing is how you chose to represent your thoughts—that is, your voice.

One of the things that GenAI isn't (yet) good at is writing in a specific person's voice. GenAI doesn't know your ideas, values, or thinking processes. Thus, simply asking GenAI to produce a piece of personal writing in your voice is likely to lead to a poor or generic result.

That said, there are three ways in which GenAI might assist you with personal writing:

1. It can help you generate ideas. Suppose you recently visited another country that you'd never seen before. During that visit, you recognized some cultural differences between the other country and your home. These differences intrigue you, and you decide to write a personal essay expressing your observations and thoughts, which you wish to submit to a school publication or a travel blog. If you simply prompt

a GenAI program to “write a personal essay about the cultural differences between *this other country* and *your home country*,” it might successfully identify some genuine distinctions; but none would be from your perspective, and the writing will fail to capture your authorial voice. The output wouldn’t be at all appropriate as a personal essay. *However*, what it might do is point toward some specific difference that hadn’t previously occurred to you, which can then be incorporated into your thinking and writing about your travels and observations.

2. GenAI can help you revise your writing into language that will be clear and readable for public audiences. Because personal writing often deeply connects with the writer’s own thoughts, it’s not uncommon for it to make perfect sense to the writer while being far less clear to any other reader. GenAI can be used to identify whether a piece of writing is clearly expressed, and to make suggestions for revision that will improve clarity and eliminate ambiguities.
3. GenAI can help you make connections between distinct ideas in order to create a more cohesive piece of writing. For example, you can prompt a GenAI with a series of thoughts you have on a particular topic, asking it to describe the possible interconnections between those thoughts and the best order in which to coherently articulate them. Cohesion will assist your audience in understanding the point you wish to convey.

Ultimately, any personal writing you produce should reflect your own thoughts and ideas. Since personal writing is meant to be a reflection of you as writer, GenAI shouldn’t be used in ways that lead your writing to be anything other than a sincere expression of your values.

END OF CHAPTER MATERIALS

So What?

1. The conventions and the purposes of writing vary greatly among the four contexts addressed in this chapter. So what? Is it better to adapt our writing to each context, or is consistency more important?
2. The use of GenAI brings with it certain risks, and these risks can be greater in some contexts than in others. So what does that matter?

Should we feel more comfortable using GenAI in some of these contexts than in others?

Conceptual AI

How, specifically, is GenAI being used in the field you are studying or in your career? Conduct some research: speak with practitioners in your field, consider the various types of writing they typically do, and examine any relevant GenAI programs. How widespread is the use of GenAI in your field, and has it proved to be helpful or harmful?

Applied AI

1. Reaction videos display someone's reaction to a first encounter with something—such as the first time they see a movie or hear a song. Prompt a GenAI to write a personal essay about something meaningful to you that you'd like to share with others. This may be an essay about your favorite movie series, favorite book, favorite YouTuber, a hobby, or anything else you enjoy. Or it may be about something you dislike: a personal essay about a political situation, a current trend, a public figure, or another topic that you feel passionate about.

Don't immediately read the GenAI's output. Instead, turn on your computer or phone's camera and press "record." Read the output while recording yourself, creating a reaction video of you reading the GenAI's personal essay. Then save the recording and watch it. What do your reactions tell you about the GenAI's ability to write a personal essay on a topic you care about?

2. Choose one of the four contexts discussed in this chapter—academic, professional, civic, or personal—and pick a topic falling under that heading that you find interesting (for example, "urban planning in Houston" as a civic topic, or "business trends in automotive manufacturing" as a professional topic). Prompt a GenAI program to produce a 500-word essay about that topic in the style of a TED talk. Then, once you have the output, revise it and deliver it by making a video, again in a TED talk style. How well-suited is the GenAI's essay to this purpose? Does the essay make interesting and insightful points? Is it repetitive? Is the language engaging?

3. This chapter describes some methods for using GenAI to write dynamic résumés and cover letters. Create a résumé and a cover letter for a job you might consider pursuing.

For Discussion

1. Discuss as a group how you think you might use GenAI in each of the contexts discussed in this chapter—academic, professional, civic, and personal—and what you see as the advantages and drawbacks in doing so.
2. This book doesn't teach the specifics of how to use particular GenAI platforms such as ChatGPT. This is in part because the relevant platforms and techniques change so rapidly that specific instruction becomes quickly dated, and also because the actual use of GenAI varies greatly by discipline and context. So how *should* students learn to use these tools? How do professionals in the workplace learn to use them? Discuss this as a group.