Level: B1 | B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

Writing and AI

First published in The New York Times LINK

Does Learning to Be a Good Writer Still Matter in the Age of A.I.?

A New York Times columnist worries that programs like ChatGPT threaten the future of writing — and the benefits and joys of excelling at it. Do you agree?

Are you a good writer? Do you enjoy the craft?
How do writing and the skills needed to be an effective writer help you inside and outside school?
Do you think learning how to be a good writer is less important now that artificial intelligence programs like ChatGPT can write some things for us?

In "Our Semicolons, Ourselves," the Times Opinion columnist Frank Bruni provocatively asks whether we still need to teach the craft of writing now that students can use A.I. to generate prose in an instant:

When I go through students' papers and flag the misplaced modifiers, note the clichés or explain that a 15-sentence paragraph is less approachable than a five-sentence one, I sometimes ask myself a question that the students who get those papers back from me perhaps ponder as well: Does it really matter?

Is skillful writing a prerequisite for accomplishment? For contentment? Even for communication? You can make your point without punctuating it properly. The most potent ideas may well survive the most flaccid prose.

Besides which, you can now generate prose without writing at all. Wait, scratch that: You do need to fashion the prompt that you're giving ChatGPT — the parameters of the composition you want, the objectives, the guidelines. But artificial intelligence will do the rest. It will sweat the structure, the syntax, the semicolons.

When I prattle on about dangling participles and the like, some students hear a sad evangelist for a silly religion. I can tell. Even a few of my faculty colleagues look askance at me. One couldn't understand my frustration with a student who had toggled repeatedly and randomly between "and" and "&" in an essay. Didn't the student's meaning come across well enough?

I suppose so. But it could have come across a whole lot better, and that's one of the arguments for writing well — for taking the time and summoning the focus to do so. Good writing burnishes your message. It burnishes the messenger, too.



You may be dazzling on your feet, an extemporaneous ace, thanks to the brilliant thoughts that pinball around your brain. There will nonetheless be times when you must pin them down and put them in a long email. Or a medium-length email. Or a memo. Or, hell, a Slack channel. The clarity, coherence, precision and even verve with which you do that — achieving a polish and personality distinct from most of what A.I. spits out — will have an impact on the recipients of that missive, coloring their estimation of you and advancing or impeding your goals.

Mr. Bruni continues on the virtues of effective prose:
Good writing announces your seriousness, establishing you as someone capable of caring and discipline. But it's not just a matter of show: The act of wrestling your thoughts into logical form, distilling them into comprehensible phrases and presenting them as persuasively and accessibly as possible is arguably the best test of those very thoughts. It either exposes them as flawed or affirms their merit and, in the process, sharpens them.

Writing is thinking, but it's thinking slowed down — stilled — to a point where dimensions and nuances otherwise invisible to you appear. That's why so many people keep journals. They want more than just a record of what's happening in their lives. They want to make sense of it.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Level: B1 | B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

Writing and AI

Read the essay and answer the following questions

In what ways do you use writing inside and outside school? How much do writing and the skills needed to be a good writer help you in your life? What do you see as the benefits — and the pleasures — of writing?

Do you think that learning to be a good writer still matters in the age of A.I.? Why or why not? Mr. Bruni asks: "Is skillful writing a prerequisite for accomplishment? For contentment? Even for communication?" How would you reply?

"Good writing burnishes your message," Mr. Bruni said. "It burnishes the messenger, too." Do you agree? What arguments in favor of learning to write well do you find most convincing? Which, if any, are less so?

LIVEWORKSHEETS