

FACULTY GUIDANCE: EDUCATION, WRITING, AND GENERATIVE AI

Through the guidance, mentorship, and instruction of expert faculty and leadership, USNA Midshipmen strive to become discerning, resilient military leaders who will serve the nation. Education cannot be reduced to job preparation, nor to a passive transfer of information and skills. Instead, education challenges students to develop their logical reasoning and ethical judgment. Writing is inextricably linked to this development, and shortcuts in the writing process inevitably stunt the growth of thought. Skillful writing, like skillful thinking, can be formed only through a long practice, one that depends as much upon missteps and failures as upon successes.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) presents a temptation for today's Midshipmen. Time pressures invite corner-cutting, and novice writers often mistake superficial polish for clearly communicated thought. The inappropriate use of generative AI prevents the development of Midshipmen into thoughtful, resilient leaders. USNA faculty play a critical role in teaching Midshipmen discernment in this area to know when, how, and if to use the appropriate supports in the writing process. In turn, Midshipmen must actively apply this discernment on their own, not merely following rules, but assessing their own work critically and honorably.

USNA policies on AI-generated writing are less about preventing Midshipmen from illicitly gaining benefits over their peers, and more about keeping all Midshipmen focused on the education goals defined by USNA.

WHAT IS GENERATIVE AI?

Generative AI chatbots mimic natural language in response to user prompts, producing text on almost any subject, almost instantly. The most recent publicly available generative AI chatbots are powered by large language models (LLMs), which are trained on massive bodies of text, usually scraped from the open web. Their algorithmic output is created by predicting (with a certain degree of randomization) the most likely text to follow any given text segment. While technologies may change, current iterations can already produce extensive conversations, completed essays, working programming code, and text summarization and translation.

IMPACTS OF GENERATIVE AI ON THE WRITING PROCESS

Whether the occasion is a formal essay, journal entry, or technical report, writers develop their work through a complex process. Writers propose and explore ideas, draw on evidence both to support and to challenge their own claims, and constantly reshape the content and style of their work according to their audience's capacity for understanding. For Midshipmen this is a worthwhile struggle because it pushes them to stretch, shape, train, and strengthen their own minds. **The educational advantage of writing assignments of many kinds comes not from the existence of a finished, polished product, but from engagement in the struggle at every stage. In eliminating the struggle, generative AI eliminates the very possibility of growth.** Among the dangers of generative AI for writers are:

- A false sense of certainty about the truthfulness, accuracy, and/or authority of the content
- Defaulting to majority opinions and suffering increasingly derivative thought
- Loss of the opportunity to assess and verify source material
- Muting of important minority or marginalized viewpoints
- Withering of problem-solving abilities and critical thinking

DEVELOPING DEPARTMENT AND INSTRUCTOR POLICIES

- All course policies **must** include language specifying the course's default policy on generative AI use in the Academic Integrity section.
- Department Chairs shall ensure that discipline specific needs have been discussed and addressed and shall work together with their faculty to develop both a default approach and alternatives.

- In each writing assignment prompt, faculty should consider repeating the generative AI guidance from their policy. To ensure efficient management of honor incidents, faculty should consider requiring students to draft and submit work through software that provides a time-stamped history of all edits.
- A default policy forbidding generative AI use might state: “Use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) to complete any part of assignments or exams in this course is prohibited. Use of AI without explicit written authorization from your professor in this course is a violation of the Naval Academy’s Honor Concept. Midshipmen are responsible for identifying if any programs they use when completing an assignment are considered generative AI. If in doubt, ask your professor.”
- If faculty wish to allow some use of generative AI, they shall ensure that this use meaningfully supports learning outcomes for the course and communicate that students are still responsible for their own work. Any approved generative AI use shall be discussed with and approved by the department chair. An alternative policy allowing (some) generative AI use might state: “Use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) is permitted in these and only these ways: [list stages of the writing process in which AI use is permitted, e.g., editing, background research]. Furthermore, I acknowledge that any unauthorized use of generative AI prevents me from achieving the education goals defined by USNA by sacrificing long-term growth for short-term, dishonorable results.”
- When AI is forbidden, midshipmen shall include the following statement with their written work: “I have abided by the Honor Concept with regard to this assignment, including not using generative AI at any stage of the writing process.”
- When AI is allowed, midshipmen shall include the following statement with their work: “I have abided by the Honor Concept with regard to this assignment. I used generative AI only in the following stages of the writing process: [student should list stages here].”
- Because the results of generative AI cannot reliably be reproduced, if Midshipmen are allowed to use generative AI, faculty should consider requiring them to preserve a copy of the output.
- Faculty should not assume that midshipmen have read and understood the policy on generative AI. Therefore, faculty should reserve time early in the semester to discuss the policy of generative AI.

RETHINKING PEDAGOGY

To continue providing excellent instruction in an era of generative AI, faculty should review and consider revising their pedagogy. While the following methods can increase visibility and accountability and discourage the illicit use of generative AI, faculty should understand that no assignment prompt will prevent such uses entirely. Instead, faculty should seek to create a writing culture that provides engaging and meaningful writing projects, emphasizes process over product, and is critically reflective about the limitations of generative AI. Best practices include:

- Reviewing how grades are calculated for individual assignments as well as for courses, possibly adjusting percentages to value the writing process and to disincentivize illicit use of generative AI. (In general, focus more on the process, less on the final product.)
- Breaking larger assignments into smaller, discrete stages (e.g. brainstorming journals, drafts, final reflections) that can each be evaluated and incorporated into the final grade.
- Stipulating “Show your work” practices, such as in-class writings, peer-review workshops, or requiring that electronic documents be submitted with the ‘track changes’ function enabled.
- Designing assignments based on information that is not easily available online, including primary sources, paywall protected material, current and/or local events, personal experience, etc.
- Developing assignments that achieve learning outcomes while also hamstringing the illicit use of generative AI, such as oral presentations, group projects, reviews of performances, or even critiquing writing produced by AI.