

LIFE SKILLS

Who needs classwork?

Certainly not the bots. **Dana Goldstein** on how teachers in the US are making students write without AI help and why

Megan Hart, an English teacher at South Forsyth High School outside Atlanta, said that last year, she noticed take-home essays returned sounding eerily similar and formulaic.

At the same time, her district has encouraged teachers to get comfortable with generative AI. Several of Hart's former students have told her they use AI frequently in their adult jobs, helping convince her that teenagers need to develop AI skills.

Now, she requires students to complete most writing in class, but she also teaches them how to use AI to find reliable sources for research papers. And Hart has worked with students to use AI to solicit feedback on drafts.

"The kids have to build that critical thinking," she said, including fact-checking the information AI provides.

Breton Sheridan, who teaches English at a Philadelphia charter high school, has prioritised in-classroom reading and writing, oral presentations and debates. The problem with AI, Sheridan said, was that while adults who have mastered basic skills may use AI on the job, teenagers have not yet grasped those basics.

"They are using generative AI to write before they learn how to write. They are reading ChatGPT summaries of a book before they have ever read a book," he said. "The result is a diminished population."

He noted that schools serving low-income students, like his, are often under the most pressure to show that they are embracing innovative technology and preparing students for the working world, where it may soon be standard to rely on generative AI.

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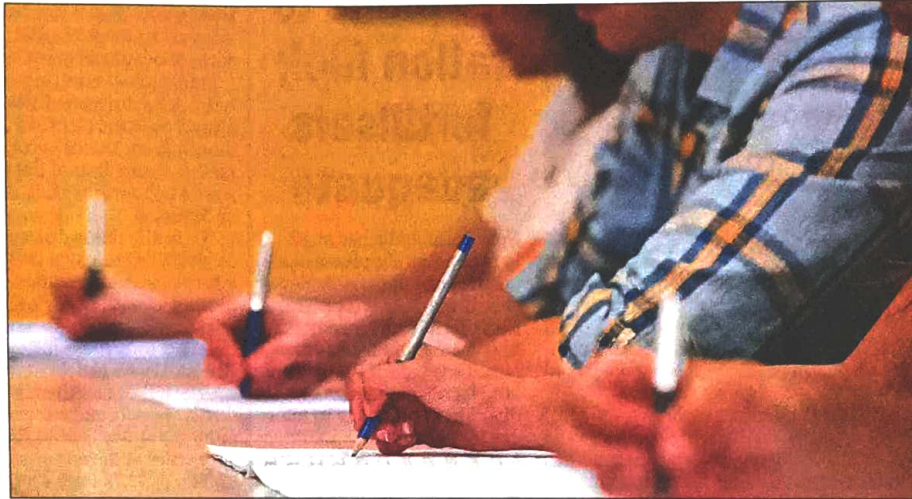
For today's high school and college students, the all-night writing session is on the way out. In the era of artificial intelligence, take-home writing assignments have become so difficult to police for integrity that many educators have stopped assigning them.

Instead, teachers are requiring students to write while in the classroom, where they can be observed. Assignments have changed too, with some educators prompting students to reflect on their personal reactions to what they've learned and read — the type of writing that AI struggles to credibly produce.

The *New York Times* heard from 400 college and high school educators who responded to a callout about how generative AI is changing writing instruction. Almost all described a deep rethinking of how to teach writing.

Over the past year, AI use has become ubiquitous among American students. Between May and December 2025, the share of American middle school, high school and college students who reported regularly using AI for homework increased from 48 per cent to 62 per cent, according to polling from RAND — even as two-thirds of students said that the technology harmed critical-thinking skills. A third of the students reported using AI to draft or revise writing.

Chatbots can easily produce polished essays in response to any prompt — analysing US Supreme Court cases, parsing symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*, explaining the science behind the Artemis mission. AI-powered browser extensions allow students to instantly generate and revise text as they complete on-



Over the past year, AI use has become ubiquitous. Students use it for homework, to draft and revise writing. Many believe this practice harms critical-thinking skills

line assignments. The tools are able to find and replace language in student writing that could trigger AI-detection software, and can also rephrase published writing into new text that students can turn in as their own.

Educators consider many of these uses akin to plagiarism. But some are also worried about students falling behind the curve of a technology that is reshaping the economy and day-to-day life.

Over the past year, Jessica Binney, 49, overhauled her English classroom at John Jay High School in the Katonah-Lewisboro school district, north of New York City. She gave up assigning three to five-page papers, once a staple homework in her Advanced Placement courses. Now, her students write in-class essays, either by hand or on a laptop with a locked-down browser.

Binney regrets the loss of depth that longer assignments could produce. But she and many other educators who have moved writing into the classroom described relief at being

able to abandon the highly imperfect science of AI detection. Student reliance on chatbots had gotten "worse and worse" as the technology gained sophistication, Binney said.

At Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, Matthew Gartner said that because of AI overuse, he now has his freshman composition students write on paper in the classroom for 30 minutes, then share their drafts immediately in small groups.

Recent studies of ChatGPT and of Anthropic's Claude chatbot show that help with schoolwork is among the most popular uses of generative AI. When it comes to writing, two-thirds of ChatGPT queries ask for edits or translation. About a third ask the chatbot to generate text from scratch.

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