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AI-supported academic writing

**CAPITAL THINKING.
GLOBALLY MINDED.**
MAI I TE IHO KI TE PAE



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA

Agenda



- Searching for “Best practices”
- GenAI pitch to undergrads
- Assignment design concepts
- Some descriptive stats



University and essays: 1500s to 30 Nov 2022



- Essays had a good run at universities
- Generative AI upended essays as an assignment workhorse (especially in social science and humanities)
- How to keep essays useful?
Journey one public policy lecturer (so far).

Emerging “best practices” ([University of Sydney](#), 2024)

Program level distinction between:

- Lane 1 assessment: secure
 - Critical knowledge that students must master
 - Minimise risks by in-person assessments
- Lane 2 assessment: open (my courses)
 - Non-critical knowledge that students can co-develop with AI assistance
 - Risks of using GenAI are acceptable

Emerging “best practices” ([TEQSA, 2023](#))

Aspirational principles with few practical ideas:

1. Assessment and learning experiences equip students to participate ethically and actively in a society where AI is ubiquitous
 - AI prompts part of the assignment
 - Relying on many smaller tasks, instead of larger tests
 - Critical reflection on ethical and legal pitfalls of GenAI
2. Forming trustworthy judgements about student learning in a time of AI requires multiple, inclusive and contextualised approaches to assessment
 - In-person iterative presentations of progress (instead of final results)

Private sector initiatives

AI misuse rubric

How high is the potential for AI misuse on your writing assignment?

Prepare your assignments for the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by reviewing and revising writing prompts before sharing with students. This rubric for educators presents four traits focused on areas unique to the capabilities and limitations of AI as well as ethical considerations for the use of AI.

How to use this rubric:

Evaluate your writing assignment and give a score for each criteria in this rubric. If a trait in your prompt scores *Developing* or *Emerging*, reflect on the proposed questions and make revisions to discourage acceptable responses from AI-generated writing. Moving your scores to *Advanced* or *Proficient* will help safeguard your writing assignments against student misuse of AI.

	Advanced	Proficient	Developing	Emerging
Student voice To improve your prompt, reflect on: <i>Does the writing task propose a clear purpose that requires students to write to their audience?</i>	The prompt demands students to take powerful ownership of the task and purpose. Students will have to demonstrate a definitive perspective, considering the audience's knowledge and values, in order to respond to the prompt.	The prompt requires students to take ownership of the task and purpose. Students will have to demonstrate a perspective, considering the audience, in order to respond to the prompt.	The prompt does not clearly ask students to take ownership of the task and/or purpose. Student perspective and attending to the audience may not be required in order to respond to the prompt.	The prompt does not require students to take ownership of the task and/or purpose. Students will not have to demonstrate a perspective or consider the audience in order to respond to the prompt.
Critical thinking/ Reasoning To improve your prompt, reflect on: <i>Does the writing task ask students to thoughtfully consider the issue and draw a conclusion based on their evaluation?</i>	The prompt requires students to skillfully analyze and synthesize the issue. Students should infer a logical conclusion considering multiple expert viewpoints based on what the prompt demands. The prompt encourages students to create new knowledge based on novel ideas.	The prompt asks students to analyze and synthesize the issue. Students should infer a conclusion considering multiple viewpoints based on what the prompt demands. The prompt encourages students to share new ideas.	The prompt does not clearly ask students to analyze and/or synthesize the issue. It is not evident if an inferred conclusion is required.	The prompt does not require students to analyze and synthesize the issue. Students will not have to infer a conclusion based on what the prompt demands.

Private sector initiatives



Track sources

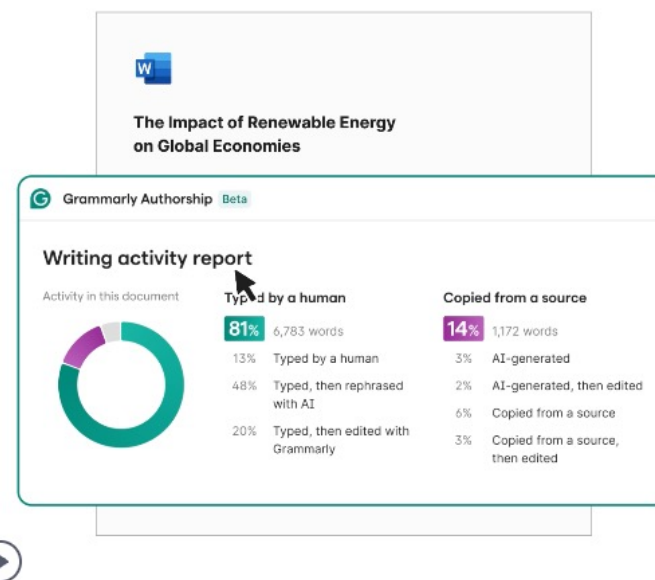
Get citations

Generate report

Replay your process

Effortlessly show your work

Enable Authorship in Microsoft Word and Google Docs to see for yourself and show reviewers what percent of your work is original, AI-written, or copied from a website.



AI changes writing

Good news and some bad

(story for undergrad classes)

Good news

AI can help you a lot

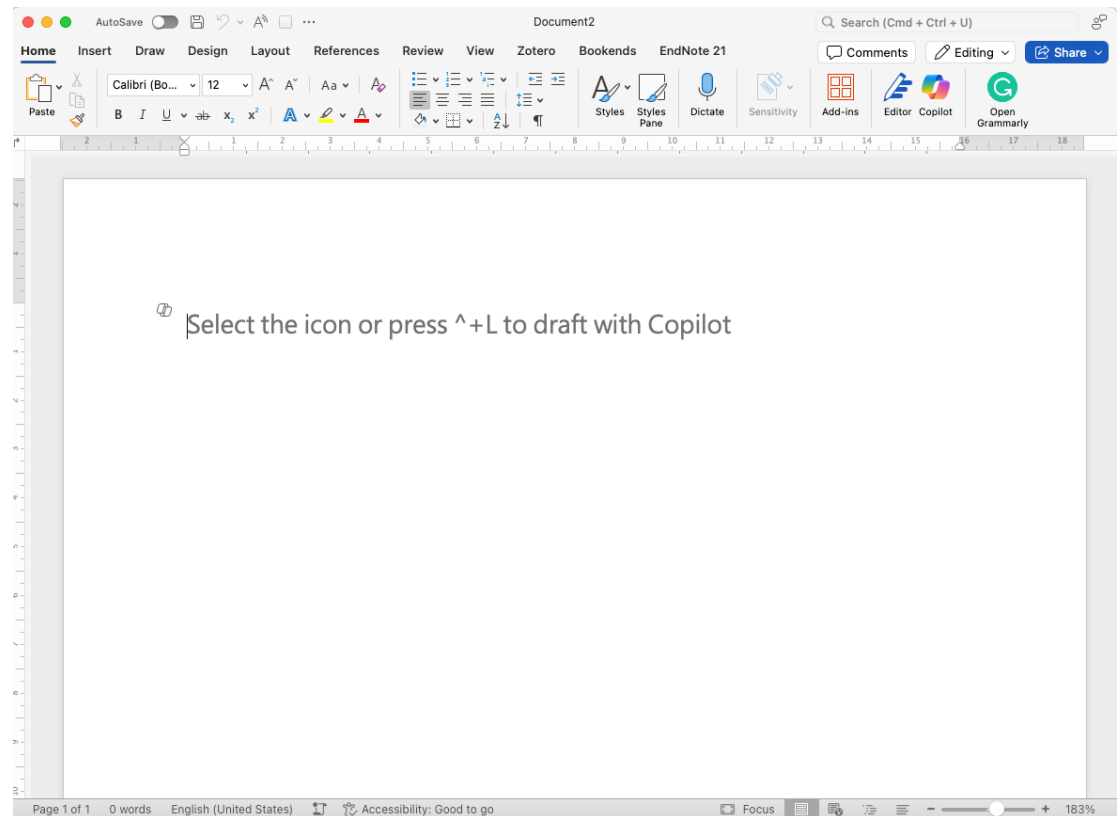
Terror of blank page

Gone.

A single keyword is enough to get you started.

AI will help you to:

- Brainstorm ideas
- Analyse existing knowledge
- **Create the first draft**



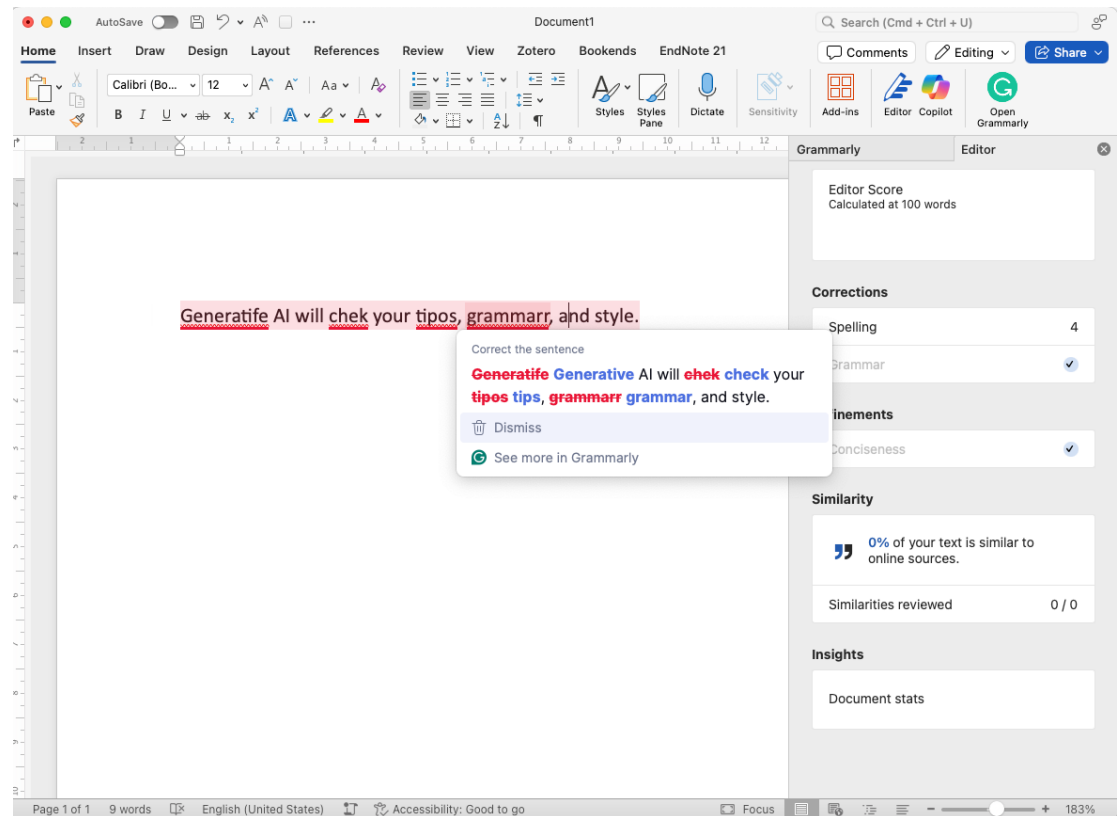
Poor grammar & style

Nearly gone.

AI tools will check your text.

- Copilot and Editor in Word
- Read&Write (paid by VUW)
- Grammarly and similar tools

Disadvantage of non-native speakers is dramatically reduced.



Research

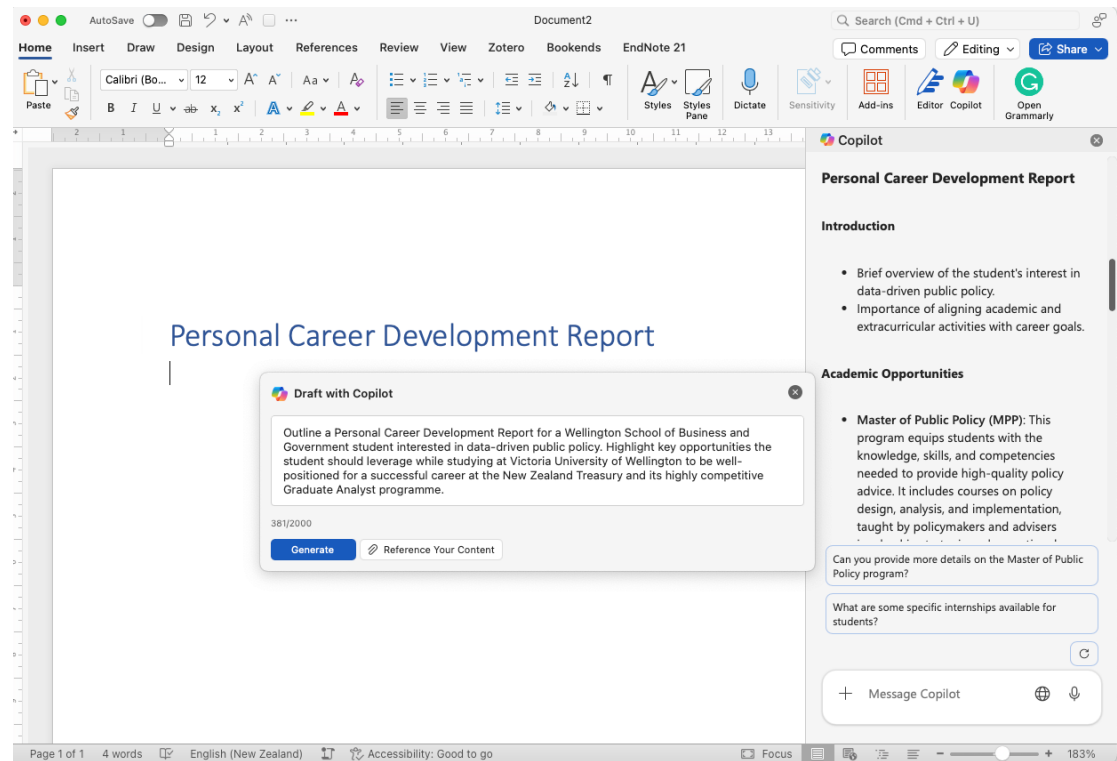
Much easier to start...

... but somewhat harder to finish.

AI tools are great at finding and summarising research very quickly and efficiently,

BUT

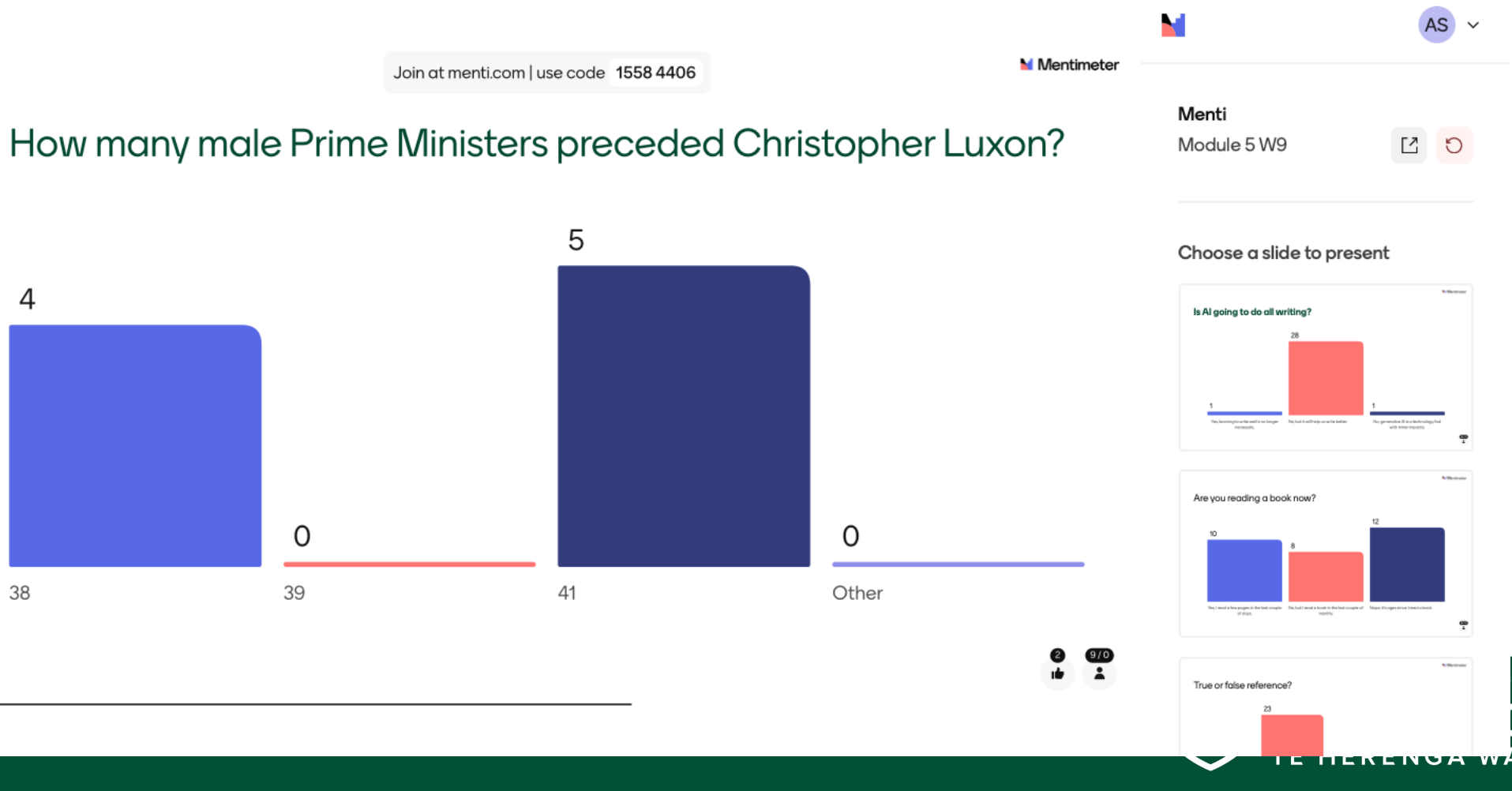
they cannot be trusted without verification.



Bad news

AI tools are improving fast but
they need your oversight

Go to your preferred AI tool or Copilot at <https://www.microsoft365.com/chat> and ask:



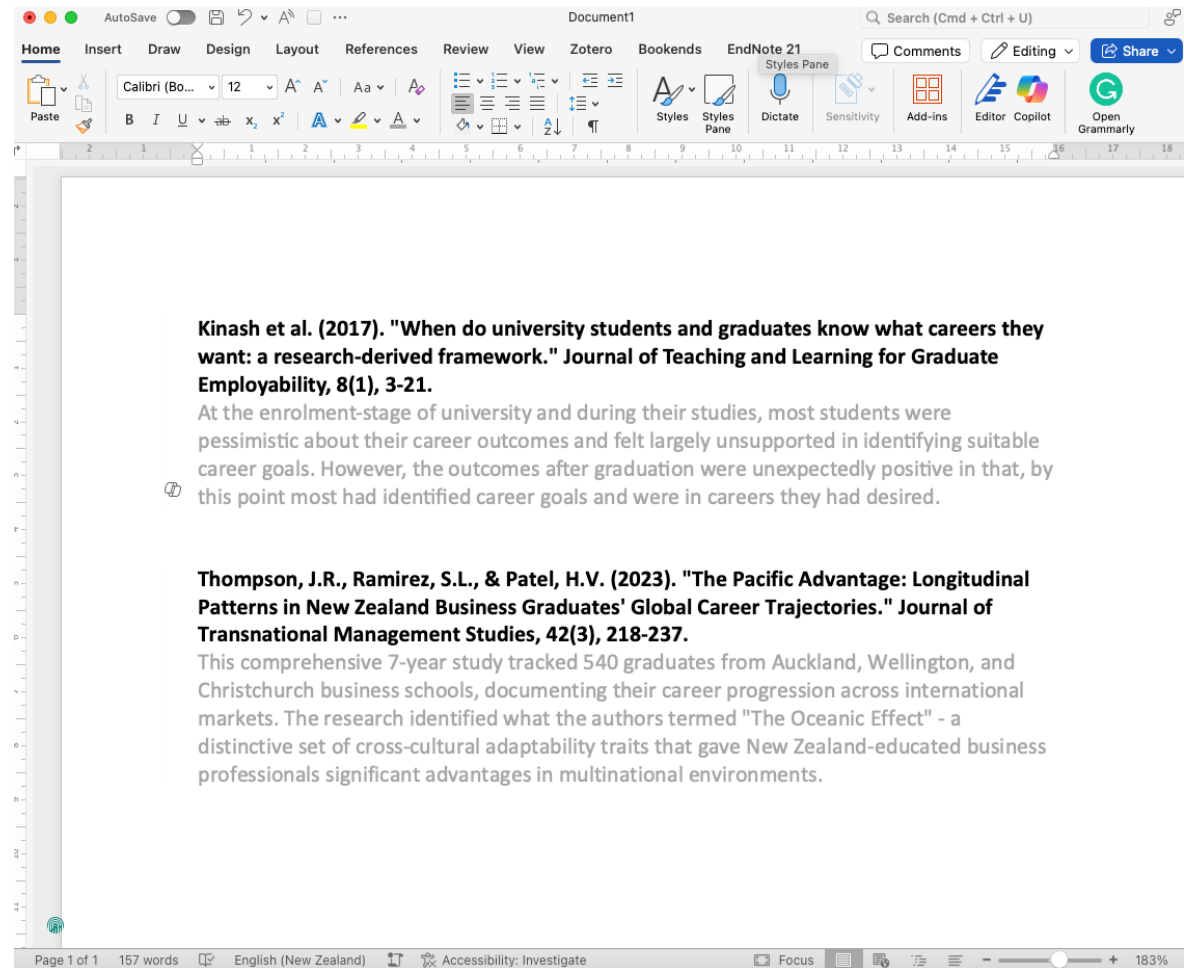
Hallucinations

AI tools are designed to please you,
even if it means lying to you.

They make answer up and

YOU

have to verify all information provided.



Hallucinations

AI tools are improving in their search and verification capabilities but they may be reluctant to tell you that you are wrong.

YOU

have to verify all information provided.

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Home > Tech

OpenAI rolls back ChatGPT 4o model for being too much of a suck-up

Nothing wrong with an ego boost, but 4o was doing too much.

By [Chance Townsend](#) on April 29, 2025



Credit: Artwork created by Rene Ramos, photographed by Joseph Maldonado

[ChatGPT](#) — and generative AI tools like it — have long had a reputation for being [a bit too agreeable](#). It's been clear for a while now that the default ChatGPT experience is designed to nod along with most of what you say. But even that tendency can go too far, apparently.

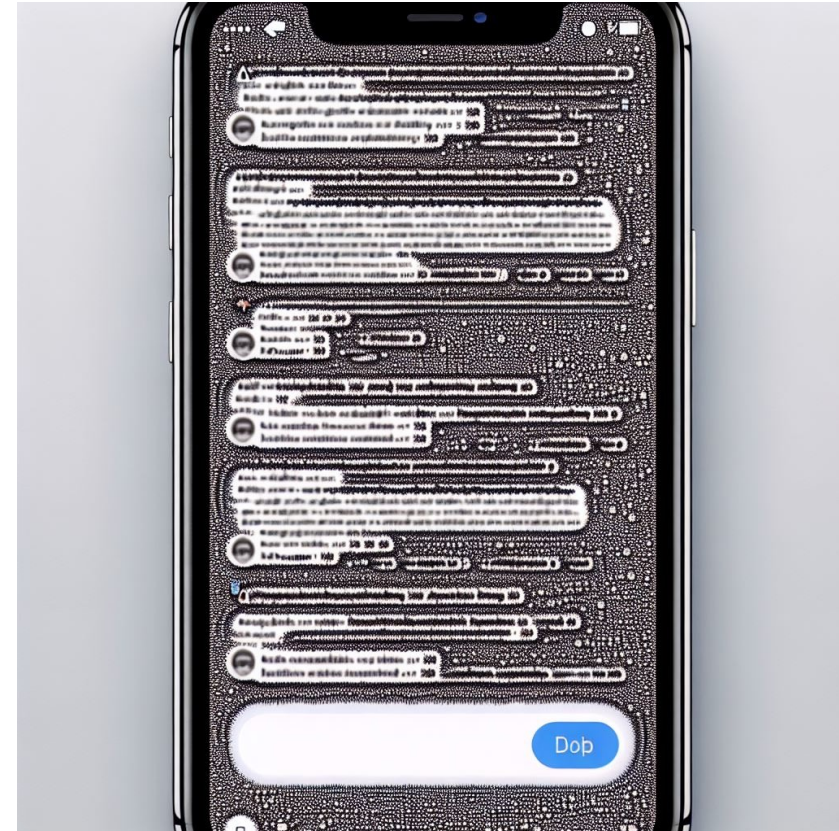
In a thread on X posted on April 27, [OpenAI](#) CEO Sam Altman acknowledged that "GPT-4o updates have made the personality too sycophant-y and annoying." And today, Altman announced on X that the company was fully rolling back the 4o update for paid and free users alike.

Hallucinations

AI tools are less likely to hallucinate in the first iteration. However, as you keep prompting, their initial response keeps changing and this attrition may end up misinterpreting the text.

YOU

have to verify all information provided.



Generic texts

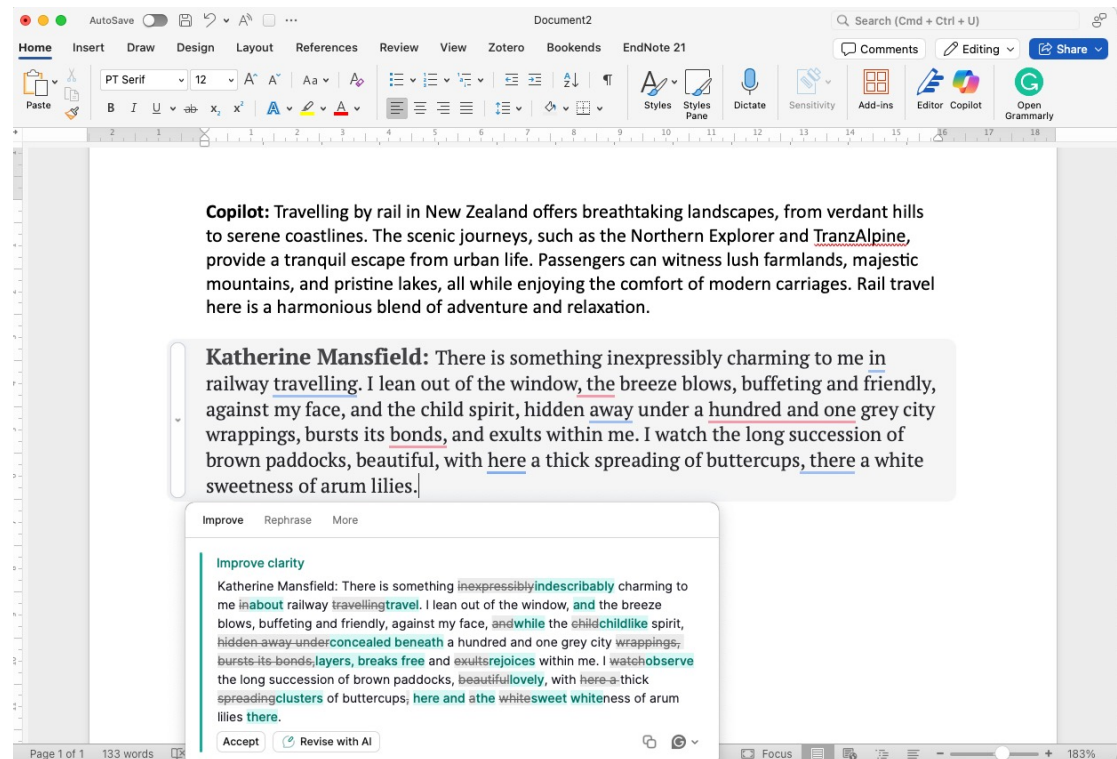
AI tools produce similar boring answers for everybody.

You decide what you want to say, what references are credible and what evidence is reliable. Your own decisions turn generic text into something other people may want to read.

A combination of:

- clever prompting and
- manual editing

can make your **personal brand** shine through.

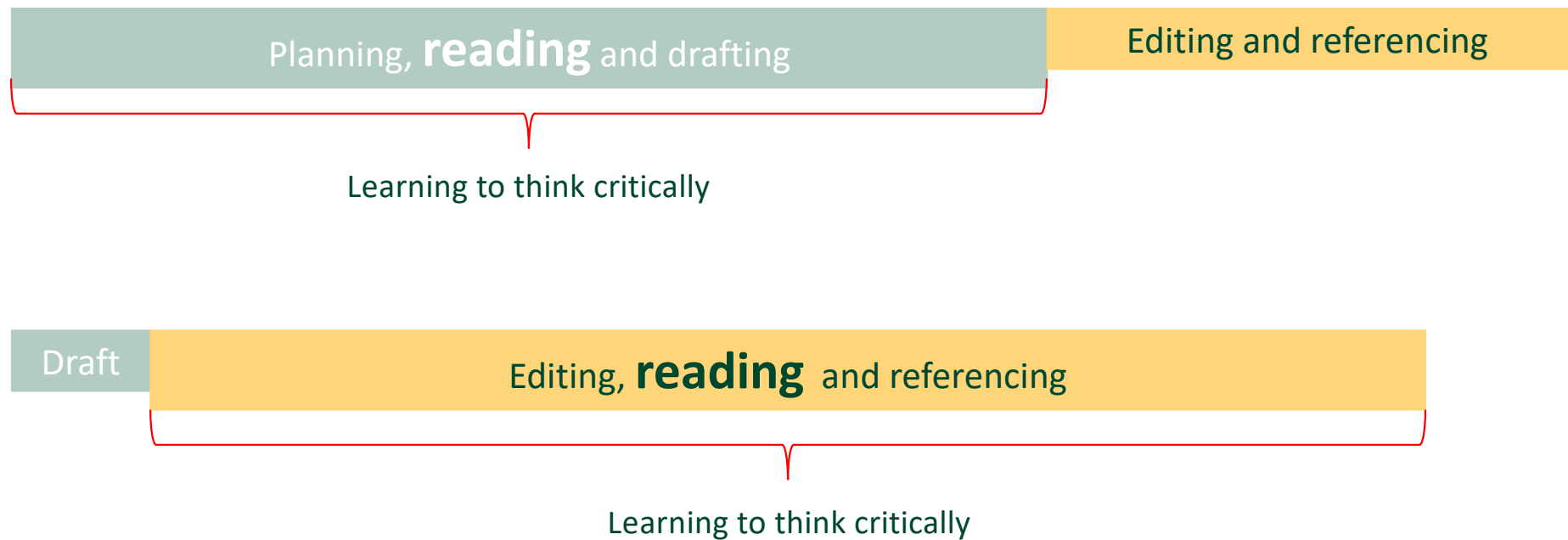


Writing with AI

There is no one-size-fits-all approach but
AI can make you faster and better writer.

Find where it fits into your workflow.

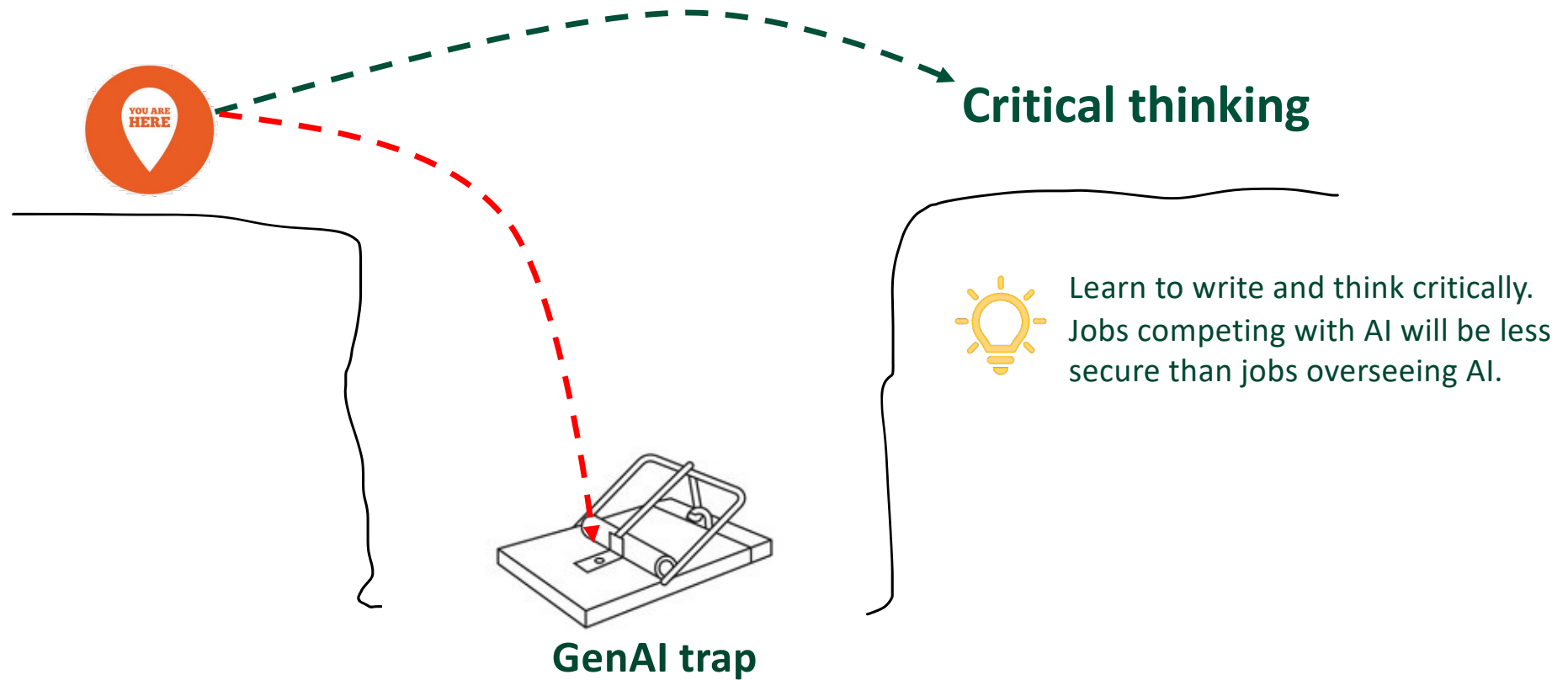
Writing process: with and without AI



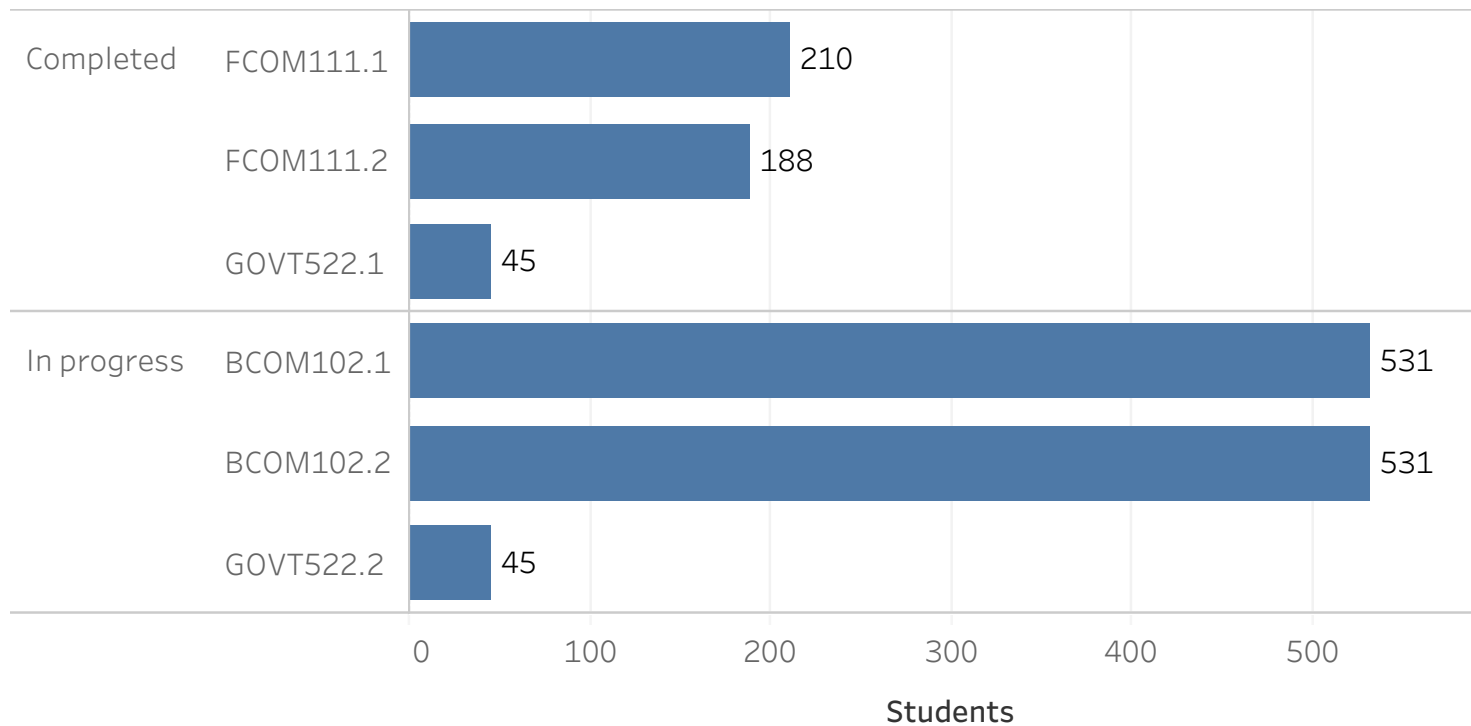
Writing process: with and without AI

1. Define your purpose and audience
 2. Formulate an initial position
 3. Gather diverse evidence
 4. Read strategically and annotate
 5. Analyse competing arguments
 6. Refine your thesis
 7. Construct your argument
 8. **Draft your text**
 9. Revise substantively
 10. Seek and incorporate feedback
- AI tools can help in every step - prompt them iteratively and feed them sources to work with
 - BUT you have to be able to decide
 1. Your purpose and audience
 2. Your position on the issue
 3. Which evidence to include
 4. Which sources to include
 5. Which competing arguments to discuss
 6. What is your thesis
 7. Which argument is most persuasive
 8. What to revise
 9. Which feedback to incorporate

AI: good servant, bad master



Courses with AI-assisted assignments



Design concepts

1. Two-in-one assignments: AI draft and edited submission (~50%)
2. Consolidated prompt generating AI draft (~25%)
3. Verified references (~25%)
4. Overstructured rubrics
5. Leveraging formalities

1. AI draft and edited assignment

- Assignment gets developed twice:
 1. AI draft generated by entering a consolidated prompt into an AI tool
 2. Edited assignment that is (manually) edited and verified before submission
- Students are required to create AI draft
 - Most would use AI tool anyway
 - It is an opportunity to learn and get feedback on sophisticated prompting
- Students can rewrite the AI draft as they see fit
 - They can abandon AI draft and write the assignment the traditional way
- Obvious risk is that students use AI and do not learn much
 - The following four design concepts try to reduce this risk

2. Consolidated AI prompt

- AI prompt is a graded part of the assignment
 - Idea: students are likely to use AI to draft the essay. It is safer for them if they are required to use AI and get feedback on their prompt design.
 - Students are encouraged to:
 - Iterate with the AI tool to develop individual sections of the assignment
 - Upload rubrics, their notes and support files to the AI tool
 - Consolidate prompts into a single ‘consolidated’ prompt for assessment
- “AI objectors” – few students reluctant to use AI tools
 - Due to environmental impacts, copyright violations, corporate power, or doomsday risk
 - Agreed to test the AI tool least objectionable from their perspective

3. Verification of references

- Verification of sources is required to check and edit out hallucinations and misrepresentations from the AI draft before submission
- Students must verify that any AI-generated reference:
 - exists by finding it online and providing URL
 - is fairly interpreted by reading/skimming/searching the original document
 - is using a correct conceptual language by checking the key concepts
- Verification induces students to engage with sources
 - they read, skim or search texts to verify them or ...
 - ... use a separate prompt to verify the source, interpretation, and language

4. Overstructured rubrics

- Overstructured rubrics require student engagement with the text
- Each section needs to match highly structured expectations either by
 - very structured prompting or
 - manual editing of AI drafts
- Students cannot use simple, lazy prompts and they
 - formulate key sentences/sections for AI to use in verbatim
 - Develop complex prompts based on rubric's expectation

Analysis section <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explains the issue and outline the main considerations;• Discusses possible options;• As necessary, notes diverse perspectives, explains major risks and suggests their mitigations;• Sets out the recommended course of action;• Supports the Recommendations;• Uses summary tables or diagrams to help explain complex issues;• Provides a coherent argument.	20 Pts Full marks	16 Pts A All key components are present and well-developed	12 Pts B Key components are present and developed	8 Pts C Most components are present but underdeveloped	4 Pts D Some components missing	20 pts
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5. Leveraging formalities for engagement with sources

- AI tools still struggle with formalities such as:
 - Direct quotations from references
 - Pagination in in-text references
 - Pedantically precise APA reference formats
 - Gated books and articles (Copilot in Edge sidebar workaround)
 - Wordcount: total and distribution across sections

Abandoned design concepts

- Using track changes to show edits to the AI draft

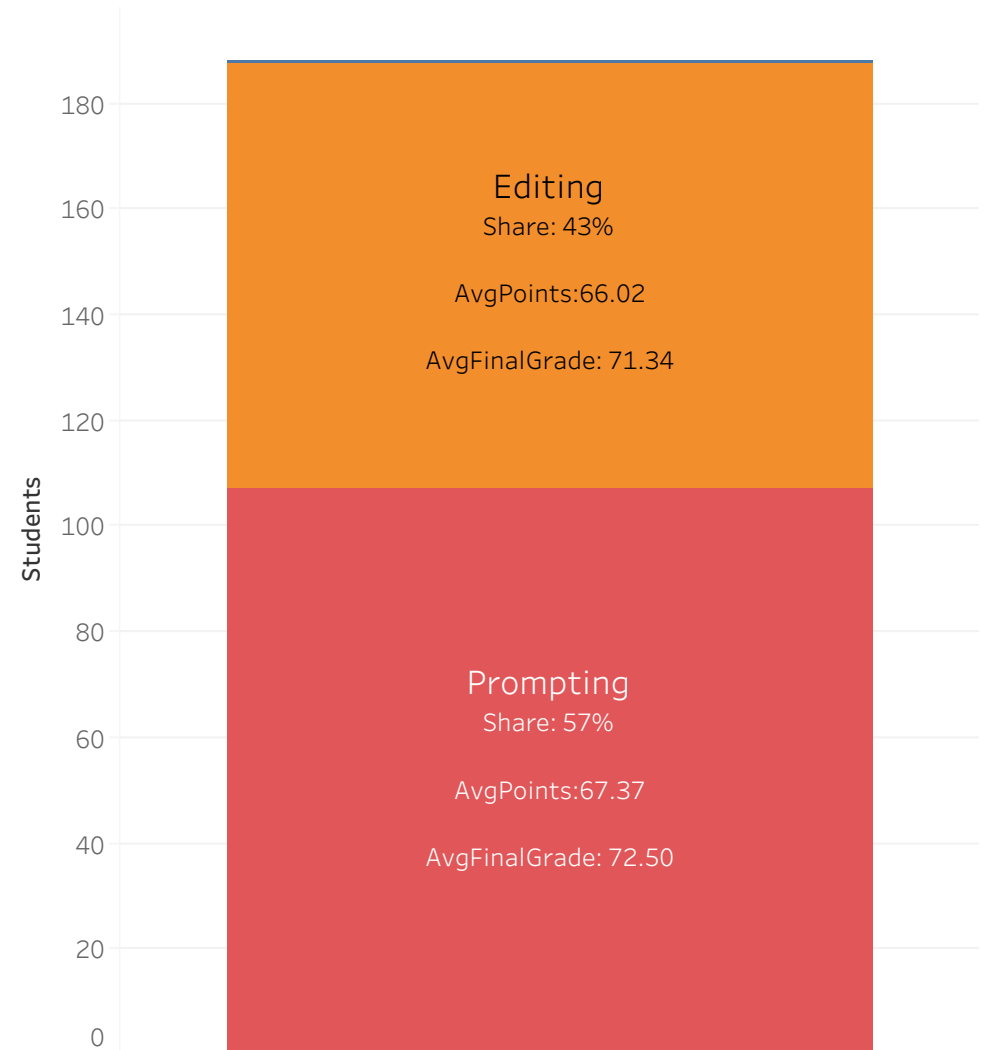
Vox populi (E1)

Given the choice between:

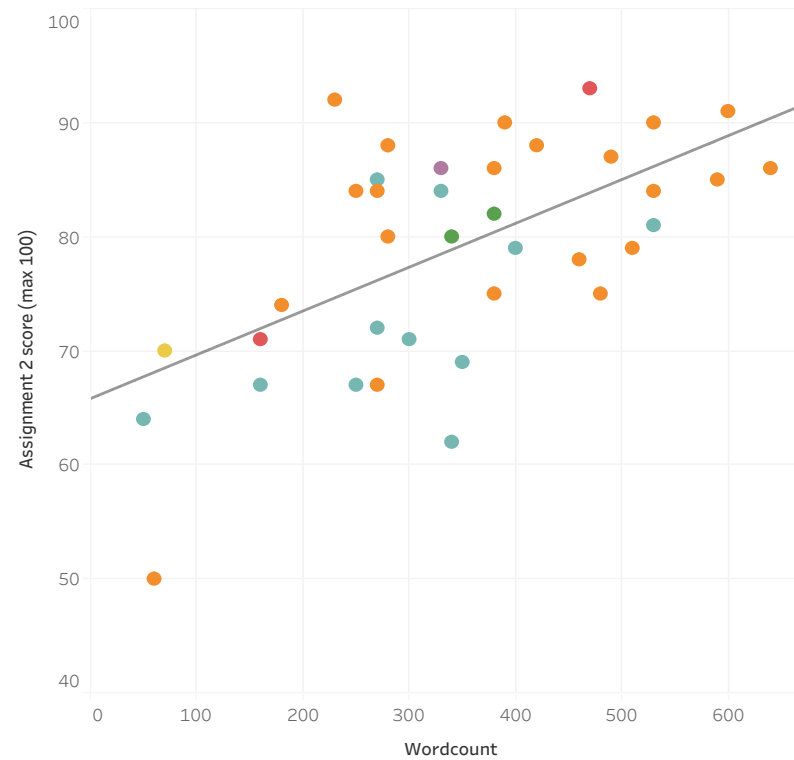
- manual editing and
- prompting

small majority (57%) chose prompting.

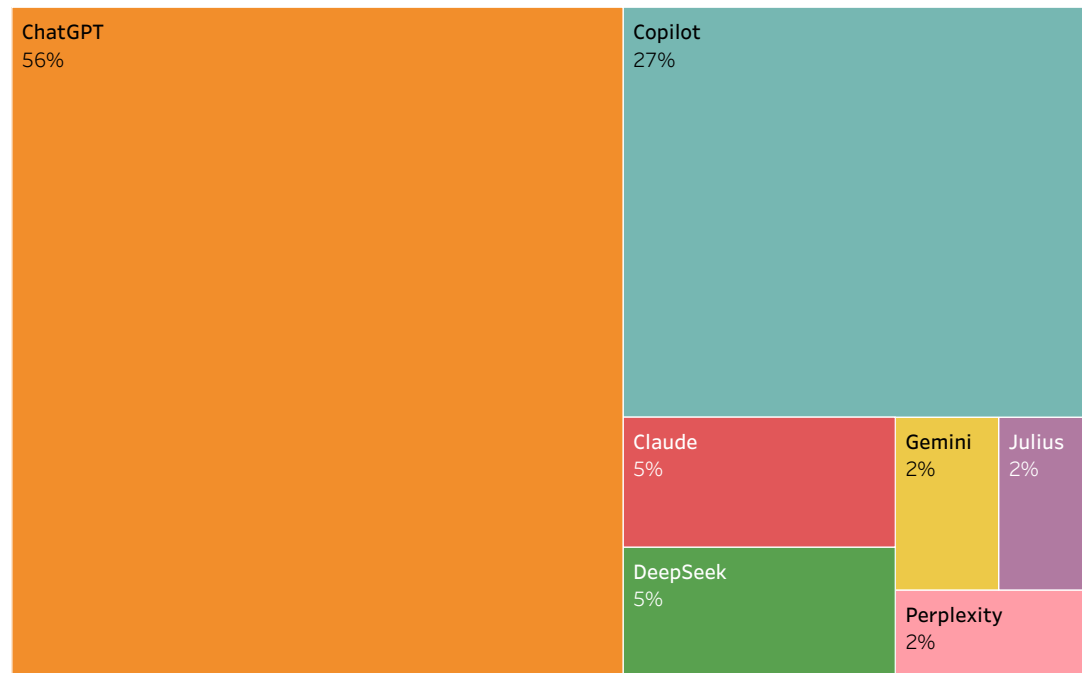
Average and final scores nearly identical.



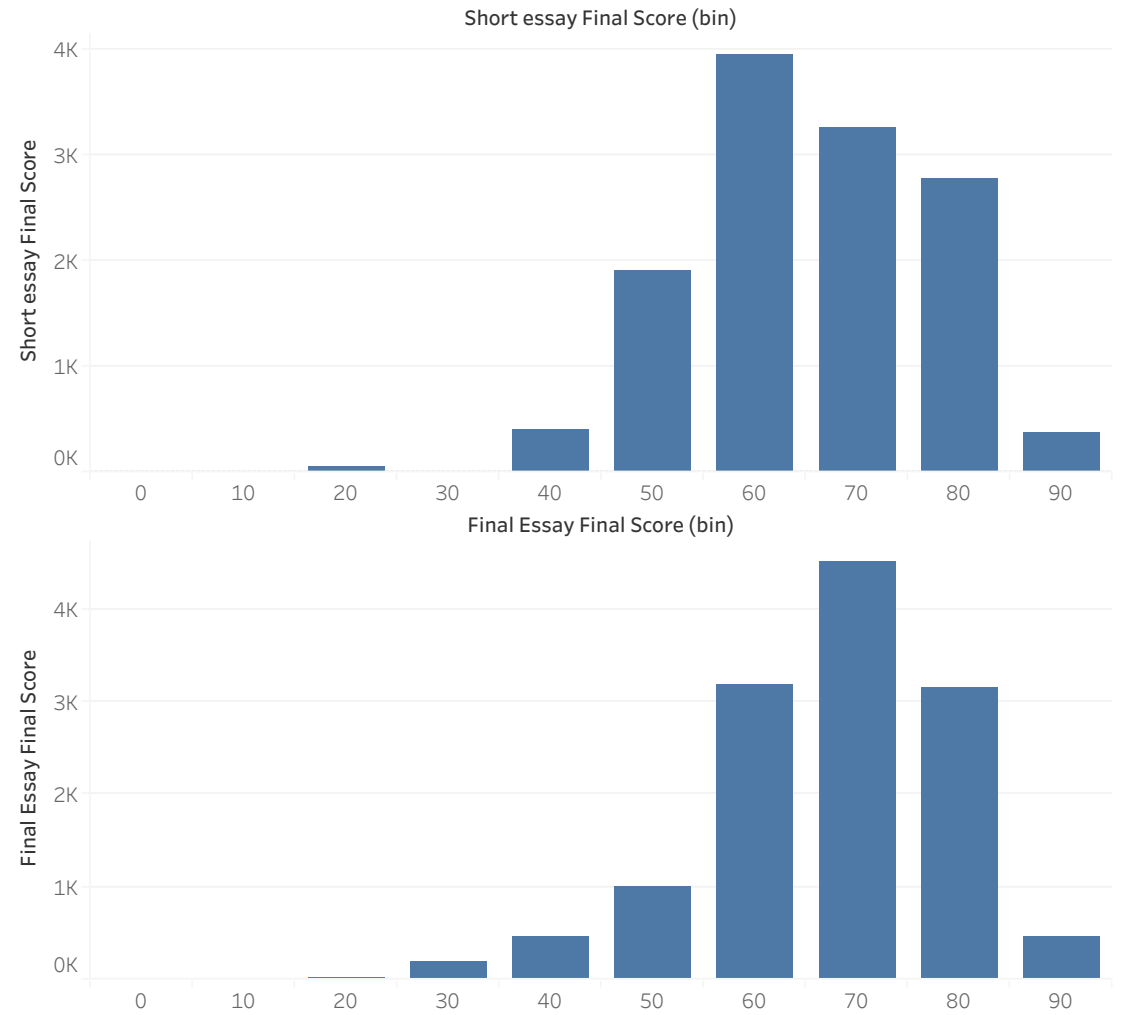
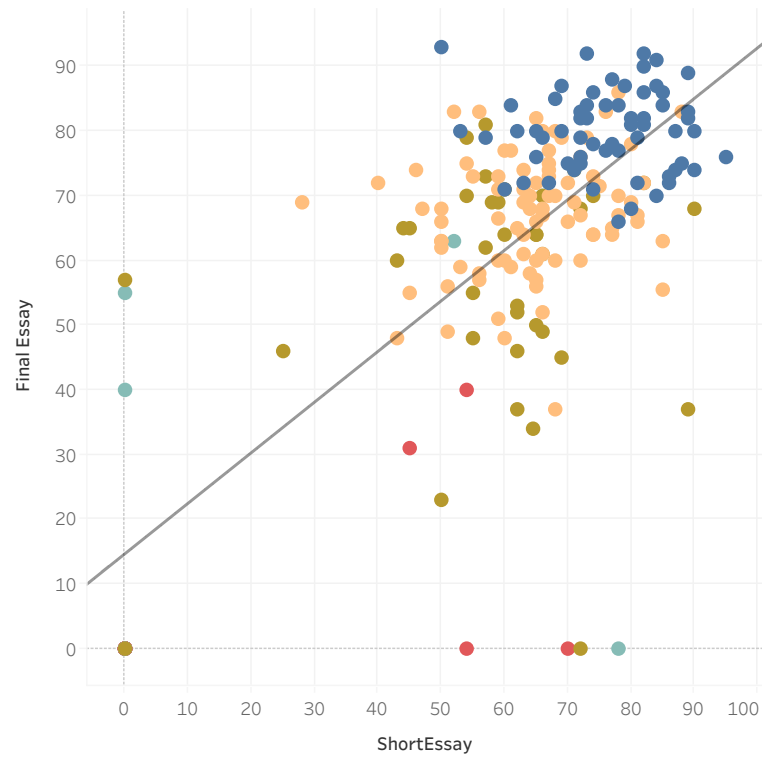
Longer prompt, better grade (N=44)



AI tool market share (N=44)



E1 (N=188)



Post-seminar reflection

Are relying solely only on frictions...

- Hallucinations, misinterpretations, mislabelling, attritions
- Generic texts, overstructured rubrics, direct citations (from gated sources)
- Pagination in in-text citations, APA formatting, wordcounts

... to create teachable moments for students to learn (academic writing)?

- Is there better/another way to motivate engagement with texts?