Digital Literacy

AI: Easy Writing?

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BEFORE YOU READ: What are the advantages and disadvantages of using artificial intelligence (AI) to do your writing for you?
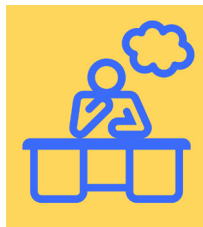
This Deserves Some Thought!

Do you need to write an essay for school or a memo for work, but you don't know how to start? Do you have writer's block? Are you worried about your grammar? These days, it is not such a problem because you can ask ChatGPT to write it for you. Using artificial intelligence (AI) for writing has become a global fever. And it's not just for complicated texts. People are using AI for simple messages, like birthday wishes or condolences.

What's not to like about AI doing your writing for you? It's a tool that makes our lives easier, right? Well, maybe. But it is also something that deserves a lot of reflection. In this article, I will look at the negative sides of using AI for writing and how AI can spread disinformation.
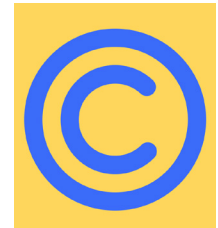
The Negative Side of Using AI in Writing

Too much dependence

Most of the time, if you want to write something meaningful, it is necessary to read a lot, research a lot, and think a lot. For example, if you are a student and you write an essay for school, you will develop your opinion as you write. However, if you ask AI to do this "hard work" for you, you will get your essay in seconds, but you will miss the chance to think about it yourself. If we all get dependent on AI, then writing will not include human creativity, critical thinking, originality, or style. We risk losing the unique qualities that an author brings to his or her work.

Violation of copyright

Another concern about AI is that it scans the internet and gathers information from published writing. This writing belongs to other authors. They have a copyright on it. AI takes this information and "writes" a new article. Is this a form of *plagiarism*? Is it maybe even a form of theft? AI does not always properly acknowledge its sources, and so it could be infringing on copyright laws.

The context is not considered

AI tools can create high quality articles about almost everything. On the surface, it looks fantastic, but the reality is that AI does not always understand the context for the writing it is doing. For example, a friend of mine told me that someone from his company asked him to make a list of the most important challenges of leadership at their workplace. My friend went to ChatGPT, which gave him some good information about leadership challenges in general. The problem was: the list didn't fit his company. In other words, the answer came quickly, but it wasn't helpful.

Bias

Unfortunately, prejudice, racism, sexism, and other types of social bias are a part of life, and it is not different in writing. So, when AI goes looking on the internet for information, it collects all these biases as well. And then it spreads the biases around. AI can make inequality, exclusion, and intolerance worse among people.

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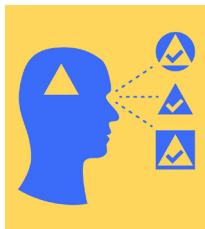
Spreading Disinformation

Biases are not the only problem. There is lots of fake news out there on the internet. These are stories that are not based on fact, but how will AI know the difference? When AI scans the internet to write something, it can easily spread false information—on a very large scale! This is important any time, but especially during an election when people are trying to choose who they want to vote for.

Fake Social Media Accounts

Everybody knows that social media platforms are full of fake profiles. AI makes this problem even worse. AI tools can easily create fake profiles and populate them with stories. It doesn't matter if the stories are true or not.

News Bubbles and Polarization

AI can scan your profile and decide what news aligns with the views you already have, and then it sends you those news stories and advertisements. So you never hear different points of view. You never hear debate. In other words, the voters are separated into their own "news bubbles." Without healthy debate and exchange of ideas, it's hard to have a true democracy.

Not Enough Protection

One article published by journalists from the *New York Times*, Tiffany Hsu and Steven Lee Myers, said that "Gaps in campaign rules allow politicians to spread images and messaging generated by increasingly powerful artificial intelligence technology." According to the journalists, experts say that Congress should pass laws that protect us from ads made by AI. They say that "existing defenses, such as social media rules and services that claim to detect AI content" are not enough.

What Can We Do?

The truth is: this article covers just a small part of the problems with AI. I have shared only the *tip of the iceberg*. We should all be extremely careful when we use AI tools for writing. Experts say that AI can be an effective support for our writing but it is no replacement for our own critical thinking. When it comes to news, we should not just read what AI puts on our social media feed. We should look to a wide variety of sources for our news and do our part to stop the spread of disinformation.

Sources:
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https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/humans-absorb-bias-from-ai-and-keep-it-after-they-stop-using-the-algorithm/
https://nypost.com/2023/08/24/scientists-found-1140-ai-bots-on-x-creating-fake-profiles/
https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/25/technology/ai-elections-disinformation-guardrails.html

AFTER YOU READ:

1. Look at how the author organized this essay. What are the two general concerns she has about AI? And what specific concerns are in each category?

2. Notice the word *plagiarism.* What does it mean? How can you avoid *plagiarizing* when you are writing?

3. Notice the idiom *tip of the iceberg*. What does it mean? Use your own words to explain what the author means when she uses that term.

Tereza Leite is a student at the Dover Adult Learning Center in Dover, NH. She was born in Brazil, received an MBA in marketing, and worked as a journalist. She has lived in New Hampshire since 2015, and she has been an ESL student since 2017.

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