Thoughtful use of generative AI in writing and editing

A series of original LinkedIn posts to help writers and editors engage responsibly with ChatGPT and other generative AI tools.

Punctuation politics: The em-dash in the age of AI

Why does ChatGPT love the em-dash so much? AI uses it to make a paragraph livelier and more conversational. But it uses the em-dash SO OFTEN these days that seeing one sends up a red flag that text was written by AI. So, I find myself avoiding the em-dash entirely (I mean, we do still have commas and semicolons).

But wait -- I love the em-dash! Sometimes it's the perfect punctuation. And it was good enough for Emily Dickinson!

Here are my suggestions:

- If you use AI to help you write or edit, remove the em-dashes. Just take 'em out and replace them with other punctuation. Or ask ChatGPT not to use them.
- If you must, use no more than ONE em-dash per page. Once you get started, it's tempting to stick them everywhere. Resist the urge.
- But hey, if you're an em-dash person, keep using it. That's your personal style.

Agree? Disagree? Other thoughts about using the em-dash in the era of ChatGPT?

AI wrote this? Telltale signs that text was written by ChatGPT

AI can be genuinely helpful for writers and editors, helping us brainstorm, rephrase, or tighten our drafts. But the text it generates often lacks the nuance, insight, and authenticity of text written by humans. Use AI as a tool, not a substitute for your own professional judgment and wisdom.

People (and automated tools) are getting better and better at identifying AI-generated content. There are some common patterns or "tells" that suggest a piece of writing was created by AI:

- Overused, cliche, or generic phrases. For example: "It is important to note that..." or "Ever-evolving landscape..." or "This article will explore..."

- Buzzwords galore. For example: Leverage, utilize, seamlessly integrate, robust framework.

- Wordiness and meaningless fluff. For example: "It goes without saying that..." or "Due to the nature of the situation..."

- Overuse or awkward use of transition words. (This is a big one! Chat GPT loves to do this!) For example: Consequently, moreover, nonetheless, as such.

- Overly simple, nondescriptive subheadings. For example: "Introduction" or "Conclusion."

Scan your own text for these characteristic words and phrases, or have AI identify the offenders so you can rewrite them.

Sample AI prompt: "Identify words, phrases, and constructions in the text I will provide that suggest it was written by AI. List the problem areas and suggest natural and appropriate replacements for each. Ensure the suggestions reflect how a skilled human writer might naturally phrase the idea. Do not rewrite the text."

Then -- critical step! -- Decide for yourself whether to keep, edit, or remove each identified element.

Make AI your partner, because it's a sorry replacement. We still need you, writers!

Do's and Don'ts for using ChatGPT in your writing process

Generative AI tools (like Chat GPT) are reshaping how writers work. AI is an incredible partner for writing smarter, faster, and more strategically. But if it's used carelessly, AI can spread misinformation and undermine your credibility.

Here are some do's and don'ts to guide your use of AI tools:

✅ **DO: Use AI to jump-start the writing process.**
AI can help you do background research, outline your ideas, and brainstorm catchy headlines.

❌ **DON'T: Treat AI output as a final product.**

AI can generate convincing but incorrect or tone-deaf copy. Always refine and rewrite to make it your own.

✅ **DO: Customize copy for your audience.**
AI doesn't know your readers like you do. Tailor the tone, voice, and messaging to make sure the text is relevant to your audience.

❌ **DON'T: Skip careful fact-checking.**
Generative AI can "hallucinate" statements, statistics, and sources. And it often sounds plausible! Verify all claims, especially names, dates, locations, numbers, and statements about health, science, and policy.

✅ **DO: Collaborate with AI as a creative partner.**
Think of it as a brainstorming buddy, not a ghostwriter. You still need to be the strategist and storyteller.

❌ **DON'T: Pass off AI-written content as your own work.**
If you're submitting work to a client, employer, or publication, be transparent and disclose how you used AI to create the product. Misrepresenting AI-generated text is unethical and runs the risk of plagiarism.

(Disclaimer: I used Chat GPT to help me generate ideas and create an outline for this post.)

I get it—generative AI does a pretty good job and can create content SUPER quickly. It can be tempting to use these tools to cut corners. But in the long run, that can get you into hot water and might damage your reputation. Remember to use AI as a tool, not a substitute for professional judgment or ethics.

💬 Do you have other do's and don'ts for using AI in the writing and editing process?

🔍 **AI citation hallucination: This is not a time to fake it 'til you make it** 🔍

A MAHA report released this week exposed a serious consequence of using AI tools to generate scientific citations: Fabricated references that look real but aren't. Yikes. YIKES.

🤖 AI can hallucinate authors, titles, journal names, even URLs — creating citations for papers that don't exist. These fake citations often sound completely plausible, which makes them especially dangerous in research and health communication.

⚠️ AI is not a replacement for fact-checking. This kind of error is embarrassing and can damage your credibility and reputation. And it's totally avoidable!

✅ One more time for the people in the back: Let's use AI to support clear and accurate communication, not erode the standards of trust and integrity that science depends on.

How do you fact-check AI-generated content? Any tips to share?