

Reflections on EAP Writing Pedagogy in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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In recent years, the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly large language models, has fundamentally impacted English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing. Based on recent empirical studies and theoretical proposals, this paper provides three reflections on EAP writing pedagogy: reconceptualising writing constructs, transforming assessment practices, and developing critical AI literacy as a core pedagogical objective. It concludes that while AI's potentials can be leveraged legitimately and strategically to enhance teaching and learning, the humanistic values—such as authorial voice, critical thinking, and intellectual integrity—that have long defined EAP writing constructs should be preserved.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, EAP writing, writing constructs, assessment practices, critical AI literacy

Introduction

The advent of ChatGPT, Deepseek, and other advanced artificial intelligence (AI) tools has exerted a fundamental impact on academic English writing. For the first time in history, machines were able to produce coherent, grammatically accurate texts across a wide range of academic genres in response to simple natural language prompts (Crosthwaite, 2026). As Crosthwaite (2026) observes, generative AI applications possess the potential to fundamentally change the way that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is learned and taught. This potential is accompanied by equally significant concerns: the risk of over-reliance on AI at the expense of authentic skill development, the increasing difficulty of detecting AI-generated content, and the weakening of foundational writing constructs, such as authorial voice, cognitive engagement, and the very meaning of independent writing performance.

So, how to conduct EAP writing instruction in response to a technology that challenges the long-existing assumptions about what EAP writing is and how it should be taught, practised, and evaluated? This paper intends to provide several reflections on EAP writing pedagogy: reconceptualising writing constructs in an AI-mediated environment, transforming assessment practices, and cultivating critical AI literacy as an essential pedagogical objective.

Recent Studies of AI Mediation on Learners' Writing

Some recent studies have tried to present the features of AI-generated writing and reveal the differences between AI-generated writing and student writing. Here, this paper mainly focuses on the two latest studies that follow.

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Jiang and Hyland (2025), make a comparative analysis of ChatGPT-generated and student argumentative essays and found that while the overall frequencies of metadiscursive nouns were similar in the two conditions, ChatGPT demonstrated distinct preferences for simpler syntactic constructions and heavy reliance on anaphoric references, whereas student writers tended to use more balanced syntactic constructions and more nouns for evaluation or reasoning. The authors conclude that while Large Language Models (LLM)-generated texts are structurally coherent, they often lack the rhetorical flexibility and evaluative sophistication of human academic writing. This finding has important pedagogical implications: If AI can produce structurally adequate texts but consistently lack rhetorical sophistication and evaluative depth, then EAP instruction should strategically adjust its priorities toward those dimensions of writing where human writers have a comparative advantage.

Complementing this finding, Lei (2026) conducts a metadiscourse analysis by comparing applied linguistics master's theses written before and after the widespread applications of GPT models and made two significant observations. First, post-GPT theses exhibited more standardized organizational patterns, with increased use of interactive markers that guide readers through the text. Second, somewhat interestingly, these same theses showed rising frequencies of first-person references that reflected students' efforts to assert their authorship. Lei (2026) interpretes this as evidence that students are actively negotiating their rhetorical agency against the standardized AI-generated discourse. This conflict between the standardized influence of AI and students' efforts to assert their individual voices reveals a complex reconstruction of authorial practice.

These two studies reveal that AI can generate structurally coherent and grammatically correct texts with more standardized organizational patterns and more interactive markers, although compared with student writing, it tends to generate simpler syntactic constructions and lack rhetorical or evaluative depth. These results suggest that AI is a powerful tool, posing great challenges for EAP writing, which necessities reflections, and further, concrete transformations in EAP writing pedagogy.

Three Reflections on EAP Writing Pedagogy

Reconceptualising Writing Constructs

As defined by Downs and Wardle (2020, p. 4), a construct is "a mental framework that people build in order to make sense of the world around them." In the context of EAP, writing constructs refer to the shared, often tacit frameworks through which teachers, students, and assessors understand what academic writing is, how it should be practised, and what constitutes effective performance. Traditional EAP teaching and assessment have been built upon these constructs, which are treated as stable and self-evident. However, the advent of generative AI raises a fundamental question: What does it mean to be an effective academic writer in an era where texts can be co-produced with machines? This question compels us to re-examine the very constructs that have long supported EAP writing pedagogy.

Traditional writing constructs include authorship, process, accuracy, and textual product. In the AI era, it seems that they need to be reconceptualised. Single authorship can be shifted towards distributed authorship between humans and AI, as the core ability may not be working out content independently, but appropriate prompting, critical sifting, and semantic calibrating. The traditional linear process of drafting, revising, and editing may be shifted towards recursive human-AI dialogue which involves how to make detailed inquiries and how to integrate output through multiple rounds. Rhetorical effectiveness and pragmatic appropriateness of language rather than linguistic accuracy may be the focus of evaluation. EAP writing can move from knowledge telling to knowledge construction through critical engagement with AI. Traceable collaborative trajectories rather

than fixed textual products may be more valued. Such a reconceptualisation calls for a fundamental rethinking of how we define, teach, and assess academic English writing in the AI era.

Transforming Assessment Practices

Traditional EAP assessment frameworks have been built upon assumptions about authorial authenticity, the pedagogical value of cognitive engagement in the learning process, and the validity of independent writing performance. Now, it is increasingly difficult for these frameworks to preserve their conventional forms. Authorship, once a clear and simple concept, now involves distinguishing human work from machine contributions carefully, raising questions about how much of a text must be human-generated for it to be considered as the learner's own work.

Therefore, traditional assessment practices need to be transformed. Up till now, several assessment strategies have been proposed, such as process-oriented assessment, structured AI integration, etc.. Portfolios that record the evolution of a text, annotated drafts that reveal the writer's decision-making, and reflective commentaries that demonstrate writers' engagement with AI tools all help to present the authentic writing processes, which is what traditional product-oriented assessment lacks. These approaches shift the evaluative focus from the final product, which may be AI-generated, to the developmental trajectory that produced it. Structured AI use like permitting AI for research conceptualisation or revising but prohibiting its use for generating written content, integrated into clear ethical guidelines and supported by pedagogical policies, can enhance rather than undermine learning outcomes.

These assessment strategies are the tentative approaches to transform traditional assessment practices, which can be tried and improved gradually so that clear assessment frameworks capable of distinguishing between legitimate AI use and academic misconduct can be developed in the future.

Developing Critical AI Literacy as a Core Pedagogical Objective

Critical AI literacy refers to the skills needed to work with and through AI technologies, and the active awareness of its affordances and limitations (Giustini & Dastyar, 2024). Therefore, the user of AI, instead of a passive one, should be an active, reflective, and evaluative agent who understands the capabilities, limitations, biases, and epistemological implications of AI tools in the process of knowledge production.

In the AI era, perhaps the most significant pedagogical shift prompted by the AI transformation is the emergence of critical AI literacy as a core competence for both students and teachers, which extends beyond the technical skills of prompt engineering to encompass ethical awareness, evaluative judgment, and a sophisticated understanding of AI's capabilities and limitations. Thus, teachers should keep abreast of the times and learn to acquire critical AI literacy. They should realize the necessity of developing students' capacity to critically evaluate AI-generated content, recognize its limitations, and maintain authorial agency throughout the writing process besides teaching them how to use AI. Students should learn how to use AI legitimately and critically, developing critical AI literacy under the guidance of institutional policies and teacher instruction. In the author's academic English teaching class, quite some students expressed their doubts and concerns about how to use AI legitimately and critically in their writing process, which proves the necessity of cultivating critical AI literacy.

Conclusion

The advent of AI is not a crisis that should be dreaded. The task for the coming decade is not to resist AI but to learn to use it legitimately and integrate it thoughtfully and critically into EAP writing, preserving the

humanistic values—the development of critical and ethically responsible writers—while embracing the pedagogical opportunities that AI affords.

Future research can focus on the following three directions. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to trace how students' writing practices evolve as they interact with AI over time. Comparative investigations of AI policies can be made across institutions and disciplines. Assessment frameworks that can reliably distinguish between legitimate AI assistance and academic misconduct need to be developed and validated. It is believed that such research can bring more profound implications for EAP writing pedagogy in the AI era.

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