

Heisler, Rhee: MSMS teachers adapt as AI grows in writing

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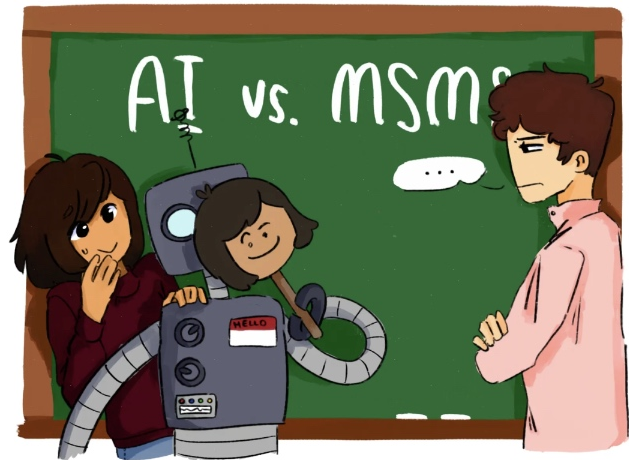
Across industries, newsrooms and workplaces, artificial intelligence has shifted from a futuristic concept to a daily tool. Businesses rely on AI to sort data, social media feeds are constantly shaped by the technology and it accomplishes menial tasks humans previously had to do. While successful in those fields, AI's role in education has become controversial.

As AI becomes more common in classrooms, questions about detection and fairness have followed. Studies suggest teachers are often not as accurate at identifying AI-generated writing as they believe, especially when they are not explicitly looking for it. AI detection tools have also proven unreliable, sometimes missing AI-written essays altogether or incorrectly flagging student work as AI-generated. Researchers and educators have warned these tools should not be treated as definitive proof, especially since newer AI models produce writing that closely mimics human tone, structure and voice. Over time, AI writing has improved significantly, making it harder to distinguish from student work and raising concerns about whether traditional methods of identifying plagiarism still apply.

While some schools have started drafting formal guidelines for AI usage in education, many policies remain vague, leaving enforcement mainly up to teachers. In Mississippi, there are currently no statewide rules for AI usage for K-12 classrooms, though schools are expected to follow existing academic integrity standards while navigating new technology. As a result, districts and institutions such as MSMS have created their own policies, outlining when AI tools may be used and when their use crosses into academic dishonesty.

Across the country, AI has already shown both promise and risk in schools. Some view it as a helpful tool that can make work and learning easier. Others, however, worry it blurs the line between genuine learning and automated results, citing students' dependence on AI to complete assignments for them.

To assess how well MSMS humanities teachers are prepared to put a stop to complete AI dependence, *The Vision* created a collection of 20 essays, half human-written and half AI-generated, using the same prompts as the human essays. *The Vision* then randomly selected a sample of five essays and asked teachers to identify which were real and which were generated. Each teacher received a different sample. While all of the human-written essays came from MSMS students, it was ensured no teacher read an essay they had previously seen. *The Vision* then interviewed each teacher about their results.



Rebecca Sun

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This teacher correctly identified three human-written essays and one AI-generated essay, attributing the other AI-generated essay to human writing. The style of writing was a key part of their analysis, they said.

“For the AI ones ... there were periodically some word choices that stuck out as unusual. It has a feeling of being artificial,” the teacher said. “For the ones that were the two student ones, I felt like I heard their voice ... and it was more personal.”

The teacher said they were surprised the essay they identified as human-written was actually AI-generated.

“I just thought it was a very good student essay because it didn’t send up any red flags for me,” the teacher said.

They said the experiment has made them reconsider how they evaluate AI usage in essays and think about the future of AI-generated work.

“I thought I was pretty good at spotting [AI-generated essays]. The one I missed is troubling,” the teacher said. “I wonder if I should use AI detectors, but I don’t know how well those work.”

“We as a faculty have had these discussions about AI. At first, they were especially easy to spot, but we’ve always talked about how that’s not always going to be the case, and that’s concerning,” they added.

Director of Academic Affairs Thomas Easterling said faculty discussions about AI have resulted in leaving the decision to the teachers.

“We decided faculty members should develop policies for AI individually and include those policies on their syllabi,” he said.

Teacher No. 2

Similar to Teacher No. 1, this teacher correctly identified all three human-written essays and one AI-generated essay but incorrectly identified an AI-generated essay as human-written.

The teacher said the results may have been different if the submissions were from students they know.

“When a student is completing work for a class, teachers have other writing samples from the student which help us understand the style as well as the capability and skill level of student writers,” they said. “Knowing what students have engaged in through class also informs what teachers expect and see from students.”

The teacher also said including the full assignment would also help in identifying essays as either AI-generated or human-written.

“The absence of the prompts and expectations for students completing the assignment makes it difficult to discern. The context for the written works also would be problematic for the results,” they said.

Teacher No. 3

This teacher correctly identified all three human-written essays and two AI-generated essays.

“The human essays had errors,” the teacher said about their identification process. “[The human essays] had more things they should not have than they should have. The [AI-generated essays] are almost too perfect. It sounds like how a robot would talk.”

They said the growth in AI is making AI-generated essays harder to identify.

“If we’re wondering if AI is getting better, it is. This AI essay is better than ones I used to read,” they said. “A lot of AI papers I’ve read don’t really say anything. This one actually has a point ... I can see the line of reasoning.”

The teacher attributed their successful results to the voice of the papers.

“I’ve read a lot of papers, but I’ve read a lot of human writing in general. There’s something mechanical about these AI papers,” they said.

The teacher said the experiment will make them more mindful of potential AI usage in papers.

"[I'll] probably apply more scrutiny to papers because, like I said, this AI paper makes more logical sense than they usually do," the teacher said.

Teacher No. 4

This teacher, rather than trying to identify essays concretely as human-written or AI-generated, explained what specific details in each essay were signs of human writing or AI-generation.

The teacher said previous signs of AI-generation are becoming less clear.

"The quirks of human writing are blurring into the quirks of AI writing," the teacher said. "With all the ways AI is getting 'better,' it may be becoming more advanced in how it mimics screwups."

The teacher attributed partial AI-generation to a human-written essay based on such signs.

"Everything else [in the essay] seems so formulaically informational – and without consistent use of a clear citation format – that I'd lean at least partially AI," they said.

They explained that speaking directly with students would help resolve their doubts about whether AI had been used on assignments.

"I don't take action on AI suspicions without conversations with students, and I think such conversations would address my 'issues' with any of these texts," the teacher said.

Teacher No. 5

This teacher correctly identified all three human-written essays but mistook one of the two AI-generated essays as human-written.

Similar to Teacher No. 2, this teacher said they prefer to reach a more accurate decision after having an in-depth conversation with the student suspected of using AI.

"It's hard to tell for sure when I'm looking at random samples, not the work of a student I know," they said.

In the normal classroom setting, the teacher relies on the student's usual writing style to accurately determine whether AI was used.

"If a paper raises my Spidey senses, the next thing I do is look at that person's previous writing, and I compare it," the teacher said. "If it seems wildly different, I call them [for an] in-depth conversation."

The teacher said it's students' decisions about what they are achieving.

"It's up to students whether they want to practice the skills that are being offered to practice in a class, or [if] they have other things they want to do with their time and brain cells," they said.

The teachers all had accurate results, showing they are well prepared to identify AI-generation in writing. A common sentiment among these teachers, however, is how AI is evolving and how they'll have to evolve with it. The ultimate role of AI in writing is decided by students.

"[AI growth] is a natural progression – one we knew was coming, but one that we're trying to fight off by hoping students see the value of the work on their own," Teacher No. 4 said.

