

Article

# Avoid, Adopt, Adapt: Positions on GenAI in Canadian Writing Centres

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## Abstract

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools are transforming academic writing support in higher education, but student- and public-facing messaging from Canadian universities, and subsequently their writing centres, has been slow and inconsistent (Cheatle, 2025; Marcel & Kang, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). In the summer of 2024, two writing centre advisors conducted an environmental scan of writing centre websites and publicly available materials related to messages about GenAI literacy support. Documents were collected and assessed for 1) a “statement” or “policy” on GenAI use and assistance in the writing centre and 2) a stance toward using GenAI for writing, which we categorized broadly as able to assist with GenAI writing concerns (i.e., *adopt*) or disavowing use or assistance in the writing centre (i.e., *avoid*). Environmental scans facilitate discovery of opportunities and threats during times of change in the interest of making decisions and plans for the future. Our scan provides a snapshot of how writing centres, as well as the institutions they operate within, are positioning themselves within the current GenAI post-secondary landscape. This article contextualizes results within the current post-secondary landscape and offers recommendations and implications for the conceptualization of writing centre work.

Keywords: Generative AI (GenAI); writing centres; academic socialization; policy; environmental scan

The widespread availability of Generative AI (GenAI) tools and their use in higher education have initiated momentous shifts in the ways learning is demonstrated through writing and, by extension, the nature of writing support. Although AI tools like translation software, grammar checkers, and predictive text tools have long been available, none has been as holistic in scope as Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT. In just seconds, these tools can produce complete, human-like responses to assignment prompts (Kaliterna et al., 2024) that may be “indistinguishable from human-authored texts” (Marcel & Kang, 2024, p. 97). They can correct errors, summarize large amounts of text, generate outlines and thesis statements (Malik et al, 2023; Terry, 2023), streamline essay planning processes (Johnston et al, 2025) and act as an on-demand “academic coach” that “can be woven into the entire fabric of the writing process” (Lin, 2025, p. 3). These are tasks that writing centre tutors routinely engage in during consultations with student writers, and the widespread proliferation of GenAI has understandably caused great uncertainty and speculation among those who support academic writing and discourse socialization in higher education (Aikens & Wieldon, 2025; Essid & Cummins, 2025; Stanton, 2023). Recent studies estimate that 60–70% of post-secondary students are using GenAI tools in their composition processes (Essid & Cummins, 2025; Johnston et al., 2025).

In Canadian higher education, adoption of GenAI tools for written coursework and other academic tasks can vary across institutions, disciplines, and individual instructors and assignments, resulting in a landscape that is inconsistent and constantly in flux. Amid this uncertainty, researchers have called for institutional policies to regulate and shape GenAI use for teaching and learning (Hamerman et al., 2025; Perkins, 2023). However, higher-ed institutions are hardly nimble; they “move thoughtfully and deliberately, and politically through decision-making processes, especially those, as GPT does, that affect teaching and learning at fundamental levels” (Hotson, 2023, GPT Turn section, para. 2). Essid and Cummins (2025) agree that “deliberative process and deliberate pace typify academic work” (The AI invasion of 2022 section, para. 5) and suggest that this approach can neither fully keep up with or understand the rapidly shifting information landscape that GenAI has created.

The absence of an overarching “capital ‘P’ policy” at many universities and colleges across Canada and beyond has placed responsibility for guidelines on use largely on individual departments and instructors (Enaya & Seeley, 2025; IWCA GenAI Task Force, 2024). This absence leaves writing centres, as hubs for academic integrity queries and instruction, without clear guidelines or policies to refer to when working with students and others on campus who are using GenAI in their composition processes. An important result of this institutional variability and general uncertainty is that writers in search of information about what to expect from their writing centre may not find it

and therefore might have inappropriate expectations about their visit or decide not to pursue assistance from the writing centre at all for fear of being judged or penalized. This possibility should be especially concerning given the current state of writing centre precarity amid austerity measures that threaten writing centres' continued existence (see CWCA's 2025 "Statement on Precarity & Writing Support Programming" for a detailed overview).

The aim of this research was to gain insight into how writing centres are addressing GenAI-related changes in their work. I and a colleague, both professional advisors at a Canadian writing centre and sessional instructors of academic writing courses, had experienced changes in student writing processes and tutoring appointments since GenAI tools became widely available. We also noticed signs that these tools had begun to change how writing centre work is conceived of and conducted. We therefore embarked upon this project to gain a better understanding of how writing centres were responding to student use of GenAI tools for writing, and how they were communicating their ability and willingness to help with GenAI-related questions and content. This goal was accomplished through an environmental scan of writing centre websites and resources.

In the summer of 2024, we assessed 31 writing centre websites and attempted to ascertain their "stance" on GenAI. Broadly, we wanted to know if they were positioning themselves positively as a resource for students learning to incorporate GenAI into their writing process (i.e., "adopting" GenAI tools), or disavowing GenAI tools (i.e., "avoiding") either by explicitly refusing to support students with AI-generated text or by remaining silent. Our research questions were:

1. How many Canadian writing centres have public-facing mandates, statements, or resources that mention GenAI?
2. What messages do writing centre websites and resources communicate about their stance on GenAI use for writing? That is, are they ready to either "adopt" the tools themselves or assist students with their use, or are they "avoiding" in ways that might prevent GenAI-users the GenAI-curious from asking for assistance?
3. What factors might influence the availability of public student-facing messaging regarding writing centre positions on GenAI use?

This article provides a snapshot of writing centre statements and resources related to GenAI tools as they appeared in August of 2024. We situate this snapshot within current research connected to writing support and GenAI tools and invite consideration of implications regarding how these tools have already affected, and might be further expected to affect, the work of writing centres and how this work and those who conduct it are defined and valued within educational contexts. This article

concludes with preliminary results of a 2025 second environmental scan update of the landscape and suggests consequences for continued polarization of stances among Canadian writing centres.

## **Rationale for the Study**

Although we appreciated the need for care and slowness, we knew we were not alone in our “great hunger for information and guidance” in the absence of institutional policy (Marken, 2023, para. 2). A CWCA blog call for “snapshots” of writing centre responses to GenAI had only yielded two responses (Bermingham, 2023; Marken, 2023), providing valuable information but an incomplete picture of the writing centre climate.

Our centre was aware of a suite of thoughtful, practical GenAI guidance for writers at one Canadian writing centre, as well as a statement at another institution declaring that the writing centre did “not encourage” use of GenAI as part of a student’s writing process, “nor [would they] help [students] learn to use it.” Since these early statements and resources contained such polarized responses to GenAI, we anticipated that many other centres would have similar statements, and we wanted a more comprehensive picture of what actions other institutions across Canada were taking in the interest of informing development of our own statement and resources.

Our starting point for the environmental scan was also based on additional key issues we were aware of in the summer of 2024:

- 1) We had experienced many instances of in-person student appointments that resulted in productive conversations about GenAI use, as well as asynchronous written feedback requests that made us question our role (see Figure 1) when our concerns about a student’s use of GenAI were one-way interactions.

**Appointment Details**

**What course are you visiting us for?**  
 Health Information Science

**Is there anything you want me to know that would help me to support you during our session?**  
 There are two 5-page conference papers generated by ChatGPT and Gemini for comparison. The topic aims for the introduction of clinical decision support system to the new hired health administrator who doesn't have any experience in healthcare domain. I would like to get feedback, such as which paper is better and how to fix both papers.

*Figure 1.* Screenshot of written feedback appointment booking form field requesting feedback on AI-generated texts

- 2) Our institution, and our centre by extension, had no official overarching policy on GenAI use in student work (although guidelines existed within some departments and other campus entities, and our library had resources on ethical use, prompting, and citation guidelines).
- 3) Several studies had examined the state of institutional policies and resources on GenAI in Canada and elsewhere, but these were focused mainly on resources for faculty, and, to our knowledge, no such survey of writing centre policies or guidelines and resources targeted to students had yet been conducted.

## Literature Review

This review first outlines writing centre existence in Canada over the past 70 years as context for how GenAI tools might fit into or conflict with traditional mandates and practices surrounding supporting writers in higher education, and how they might disrupt writing centre ethos. It then examines current literature on GenAI and writing instruction and tutoring in higher education and concludes with an overview of research that has investigated the development of policies and resources related to GenAI for educational purposes.

### Writing Centres: A Brief Overview

Writing centres are a relatively new addition to Canadian higher education; the first was established in 1964, and, as of ten years ago, nearly 40% of the 142 writing centres in Canada were less than 10

years old (Bromley, 2017). Even in this short span, writing centres have already weathered momentous changes in student demographics and technology, and have evolved and adapted in the ways they support student learning. Traditionally, writing centres conducted face-to-face consultations involving a Socratic non-directive line of questioning that was meant to help the writer arrive at their own conclusions about the writing task (Brooks, 1991; North, 1984). This model valued collaborative learning and a process approach to writing, with tutors acting as “knowledgeable peers” (Bruffee, 1984, p. 646) who guide the uninitiated in the process of socialization into academic discourse (Duff, 2010).

Early training resources cautioned that correcting “lower-order” sentence-level errors involving grammatical, syntactical, and lexical issues constituted editing—not tutoring—and therefore violated institutional academic integrity policies concerning authorship and editing (see, for example, Reigstad & McAndrew, 1984 and Brooks, 1991). Writing centres have always struggled against labels including “laundrette” (McNally & Kooyman, 2017), “fix-it shop” (Moussu, 2013), and “sentence-scrubber-for-foreign-students” (Thonus, 1993). These labels implied that writers could submit work and later retrieve it, cleaned and cured, through little effort of their own—exactly the kind of result that GenAI tools are capable of.

By now, we acknowledge that traditional non-directive mandates and ways of working with student writers are ineffective and unwelcoming for students from non-English and non-academic backgrounds (Denny et al., 2018; García, 2017; Salem, 2016; Towle, 2024). Decades of exponential growth in multilingual student enrollment in Canada (Anderson, 2015) and calls to respond to diversity in student writers’ needs (Bukowski & Brueggemann, 2019; Eckstein, 2016; Salem, 2016) have prompted many writing centres to adopt a more relational, contextual, student-centred approach. Across North America, writing centres are redefining what it even means to be a writing centre in an increasingly multimodal (Bell & Hotson, 2020), asynchronous, post-pandemic world where the writing centre may no longer be represented by a fixed physical space (Camarillo, 2019). The proliferation of AI tools presents both an opportunity for imagining more equitable, efficient, and personalized writing support and a challenge to existing writing support approaches to which writing centres must adapt.

## **GenAI and Writing**

Current research on GenAI use in education tends to agree that such tools have the potential to transform writing. Since GenAI tools became widely available in November of 2022, publications on this topic have proliferated with mixed responses. Some articles advise how instructors who assess student learning through writing can leverage GenAI productively in their assignments (Hamerman et al., 2023; Kureth et al., 2025). Those who believe GenAI can replace tutors and other forms of human writing instruction and support have described GenAI as “the nail in the coffin” for first-year composition courses (Nicolas, 2023, para. 3) and the death of the essay (Marche, 2022). Their benefits for classroom application and streamlining writing tasks have been expounded (Lin, 2025), and it is difficult to ignore their potential to enhance linguistic justice and equity (Lindberg, 2025; Tai et al., 2023) and provide personalized, on-demand support.

Research on writing with GenAI also addresses limitations of and concerns with these tools, such as their ethical application, questions surrounding informed consent, and conflicts with institutional academic integrity policies (Chan, 2025; Dea, 2024; Deans, 2023; Eaton 2023; Marcel & Kang, 2024). The dangers of accepting AI-generated text at face value has also been considered, since the tools are known to “bullshit” and hallucinate (Hicks et al., 2024). Other scholars report negative effects on learning and cognition during writing processes (Dea, 2024; Kosmyna et al., 2025) and erosion of trust toward students (Riyeff, 2024), especially those who are most vulnerable (Dea, 2024). Several studies have examined the ability of GenAI tools to effectively replicate human language, with mixed results (Casal & Kessler, 2023; Kumar & Mindzak, 2024), underscoring both the importance of learning how to use the tools effectively and cause for academic integrity concerns, not to mention the possibility of promoting bias and producing error-free, linguistically homogeneous text at the expense of erasing students’ authentically diverse and unique voices. One measure of ensuring academic integrity and authenticity of student writing has been to encourage or require more handwritten, single-draft, in-class assignments and assessments (Alonso, 2025; Cohen, 2025), a practice that may limit students’ ability to use writing centre resources during drafting stages of the writing process.

Recent work has also addressed how writing centres are adapting to this new technology. Although Cheatle (2025) suggests that writing centres might be “unprepared” for the changes brought about by GenAI, others urge writing centres to prepare themselves to work alongside or “in tandem” (Dean, et al., 2023, Scenarios section, para 2) with AI tools to coach student writers to use

all available resources effectively and ethically. Bermingham (2023) likewise argues that writing centres are uniquely positioned, as frontline student writing support, to guide writers in post-secondary contexts in “productive and ethical” adoption of GenAI for academic writing processes. However, there are difficulties inherent in proceeding amid the absence of adequate institutional guidance and in different local contexts (Bermingham, 2023; Cheatle, 2025).

### **Current State of GenAI Policy Landscape in Higher Education**

Institutions of higher education need to respond and adapt to GenAI, but changes and guidance have come slowly given lack of consensus on acceptable use (Barrett & Pack, 2023). According to a May 2023 UNESCO report, only 10% of the 450 universities and schools that responded to a global survey had policies or official guidance on use of GenAI. Moorhouse et al.’s (2023) analysis of the 50 highest-ranking universities in the world found slightly higher rates of presence, with 30 of the 50 institutions’ websites containing GenAI guidelines, but only two were in Canada. This study, however, only considered content with an audience of instructors, not student writers. McDonald et al. (2024) conducted a similar survey of US R1 institutions’ GenAI guidance for faculty, finding that 14 of the 131 institutions examined contained no GenAI-related content. Of the remaining 116, 22 were categorized as “discouraging,” meaning they suggested that GenAI was “not welcome in the classroom” or they “aggressively emphasized the dangers” of using it (p. 18). Most institutions in McDonald et al.’s (2024) study, however, encouraged adoption of GenAI tools and provided guidance on their use. In the Canadian context, Marcel and Kang (2024) investigated GenAI policy alignment with academic integrity policies at 16 Canadian colleges and universities and concluded that institutions seemed to be “reluctant or hesitant to release policy statements or policy documents” (p. 109). The authors recommend shifting the responsibility for determining allowable GenAI from individual instructors to “institutional, departmental, and other professional levels” (p.111) and propose that institutions benchmark and share best practices for developing ethical, inclusive, and equitable frameworks for fostering GenAI literacy in higher education.

Writing-centre associations and other writing-related organizations have formed task forces and produced statements related to use of GenAI and other technologies (e.g., CWCA/ACCR, 2023; MLA-CCCC, 2023) that represent attempts at unified approaches toward principles and practices for writing centres and programs. These resources provide valuable guidance for writing support and have started productive conversations among members. However, they may not be of interest to

administrators from non-composition backgrounds, and are likely never shared with students, so they may have limited effects on how writing centre work with GenAI is perceived by outsiders. Overall, this review highlights a fragmented response landscape where many institutions still rely on ad hoc local policies, faculty discretion, or outdated academic-integrity frameworks that were not designed for GenAI-era realities. Such institutional fragmentation results in a similarly fragmented writing centre response landscape despite an urgent necessity to adapt and communicate in a clear and consistent way.

## **Methodology**

An environmental scan of Canadian writing centre websites and resources was conducted and writing centres were categorized as “adopt” or “avoid” based on the presence of a statement or stance toward GenAI tools. As a research strategy, environmental scan is a holistic and systematic evidence-based approach (Harris & Brooker, 2025) initially developed for business-related environments (Aguilar, 1967) that facilitates identification of trends, opportunities, and threats that can impact current and future programs and policies. Such a scan can be conducted either at regular intervals or continuously and should be conducted more frequently during times of greater turbulence or uncertainty (Choo, 2003). Environmental scans allow an organization “to understand the external forces of change so that they may develop effective responses which secure or improve their position in the future” (Choo, 2003, p. 8) and can help organizations to make short-or long-term decisions and plans in the interest of survival (Costa, 1995; Choo, 2003). The present environmental scan was conducted to obtain a snapshot of the current state of writing centre responses to and stances toward GenAI. This research can help writing centres make sense of the current landscape and inform decision making now and in the future as we adapt to this new environmental influence.

To start, 30 English-medium universities were selected for analysis based on institutional rankings and the existence of a writing centre or a study skills centre with a writing support component. Our resulting sample contained a range of institutional contexts and a mix of large research-intensive universities and mid-sized comprehensive universities from each province. We also included a few smaller teaching-focused universities from our own province whose writing centres we knew to be active in conversations about GenAI use within our local context. Finally, one online-only university was added with the rationale that a university without a physical writing centre might be more likely to communicate its stance via publicly available online resources. This inclusion brought the total

number to 31. From this sample, writing centre websites were investigated for mentions of GenAI in their mandate statements, site content, resources, and appointment booking pages. Site navigation and keyword search methods were employed to locate mentions of “Generative AI,” “GenAI,” “Artificial Intelligence,” and “ChatGPT.” We approached our search as if we were students with a question or concern about GenAI use, or looking for help with an assignment where GenAI use was required by the instructor—would the writing centre help us? Judge us for writing with GenAI? Turn us away? Findings were recorded in a spreadsheet (see Figures 2 and 3). We noted the existence of a statement on GenAI use and assistance, prominent terms associated with GenAI within the sites’ content, and details of any other relevant findings, including who authored the content and whether the content was housed within the writing centre’s resources or linked from other sites.

The terms “adopt and avoid” were initially selected based on our knowledge of existing content at the time of the study’s inception. In addition to the statements we were aware of, we observed that writing centres in other parts of the world were also subject to strong institutional stances, including complete bans on use. Others were optimistic and experimenting, such as one that had posted a series recordings of student appointments where tutors were “using ChatGPT in tandem with their usual strategies for handling situations that come up frequently in writing centers” (Deans, 2023, Scenarios in the center section, para. 2). Our awareness of these international contexts and resources informed the initial design of the study, but we limited our search to Canadian writing centres only. Figure 2 is a screenshot of our initial coding spreadsheet for presence of a writing centre statement regarding GenAI use and whether its stance could be broadly categorized as “adopt” or “avoid.”

Adopt or Avoid?		Responses to GenAI in Canadian Writing Centres		
Institution	Assigned to	WC Statement		
		Yes/No	Stance	Key Words (if any)
		No	N/A	
		No	N/A	
		No	Adopt	
		No	Avoid	
		No	CAUTION	
		No	N/A	
		No	N/A	
		No	N/A	

ADOPT  
 AVOID  
 CAUTION  
 N/A

*Figure 2.* Coding framework for statement on and/or stance toward GenAI.

Although we initially set out to code “statements” regarding GenAI use, we quickly realized that those statements already on our radar were among very few explicit declarations, or perhaps even the only ones. We subsequently adapted our analysis and broadened our search to include any other available GenAI-related resources, such as workshops, handouts, and links to policy or resources created by other campus partners. Figure 3 shows a screenshot of the types of available resources and our preliminary notes on those resources. We coded these according to whether a stance could be ascertained in the language it contained, and we noted any key words or phrases within those statements or resources that could be categorized as a stance or position on using AI tools for writing or the writing centre being able to assist with GenAI use.

WC Resources			
Yes/No	Type	Key Words (if any)	Notes
No	N/A		
Yes	Combination		Targeted workshop on Gen AI use. I also found a link to a radio program discussing genAI. (Possibly worth noting that UMan has an (re).)
Yes	Links to institutional supports/resources		resources (me e a writing
			ted as far as I a general
Yes	Other (see notes)	capabilities and limitations; ethical concerns; ethical considerations; documentation	A learning specialist has put together a comprehensive "writing help guide," which addresses a number of writing-related topics – including GenAI use. That guide is hosted on the library website (it's a writing-specific libguide). The writing guide provides an overview of GenAI and recommendations as well as links out to the library's more robust Gen AI-specific libguide.
Yes	Targeted Workshops	grad students	<b>Grad student workshop: "AI and the Modern Scholar: ChatGPT for Academic Writing";</b> "Writing Advice" page advises against even using MS Editor, but says nothing about other AI tools: "The grammar checkers built into word processors (again under the Review menu, usually grouped with spellcheck and thesaurus) are seldom useful. About half of grammar-check flags are wrong, and the explanations are not clear. It's best to leave the box blank for the offer to "check grammar." For usable advice on sentence structure and grammar, see the files in the Revising section of this website."

Figure 3. Coding framework for GenAI-related resources.

After surveying the 31 writing centre websites and finding resources on slightly more than half, we also conducted a similar search for GenAI resources from learning and teaching centres, libraries, and academic integrity policies. Expanding our search in this way allowed for speculation on whether and how writing centre stances might be influenced by or aligned with other campus units or an overarching institutional stance that controlled student support. Some of the related resources were found in links on writing centre websites, but most were found through searching broadly for GenAI resources within the institution's website, or through a web search for the terms "artificial intelligence" or "AI" or "ChatGPT" or "GenAI" and the name of the institution. Figure 4 shows the framework for institutional resources.

Institutional Resources			
Yes/No	Source(s)	Key Words (if any)	Notes
No			no mention in the academic integrity policy; the article from 2023 said there would be a working group and forthcoming guidelines, and in the meantime to ask instructors on a case by case basis. I can't find anything after 2023. Academic integrity resource last updated in 2017. Library has no mention at all.
Yes	LTC Statement and/or Resources	welcome and encouraged; unreliable; risks and considerations;	high-level advisory group on AI; detailed FAQ sheet that links to external resources (instructor feedback, specific guidelines); the latter points people to the Academic Integrity Policy behavior (but neither refers to the policy itself).
Yes	Combination	opportunities and challenges; adapt;	Teaching and Curriculum Development and Edtech pages have a bit of "how to" info and "tips" and links to external resources; Langara seems to have none of their own resources; nothing in academic integrity guide;
Yes	Combination	transparent accountability; culturally sensitive and inclusive fairness; pedagogy-centred design; misuse; constraints; reflective practice; deep fakes; cheap fakes; possibly useful; not so useful; no reasoning; pitfalls	2023 and produced a guide to citing LLMs and guide to citing LLMs.
Yes	Combination	false negatives/false positives; communication/conversation; thoughtful integration;	library as a resource in their "Quick Things for GenAI" page.
Yes	Combination		INTRODUCTION: Dalhousie does not currently have an AI tool that has been through a Privacy Impact Assessment. Therefore, while you and students may choose to use it, instructors can't make AI a required part of their courses* (CTL). Dal. has a "faculty statement" on GenAI that will ostensibly be updated as the situation changes (it's dated August of 2023...); found a link for a community of practice meeting around GenAI facilitated by the CTL (Jan. 2024); library offers guidance on citing AI use
Yes	Combination		Teaching and Curriculum Development and Edtech pages have a bit of "how to" info and "tips" and links to external resources; Langara seems to have none of their own resources; nothing in academic integrity guide;
Yes	Library Statement and/or Resources	privacy; ethics; limitations	libguide has "tips for using" and links to a bunch of external articles.

Figure 4. Coding framework for resources on and/or stance toward GenAI at the institutional level.

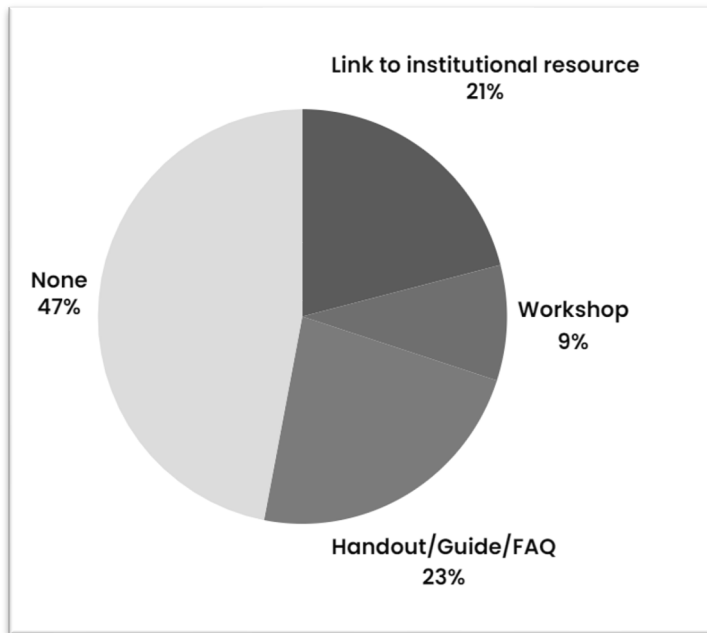
After collecting documents and categorizing them, we analyzed the documents for indications of a stance and keywords or themes associated with GenAI use for writing. These results are discussed in the next section.

## Results and Discussion

### Research Question #1: How Many Writing Centres Have Public-Facing Mandates, Statements, or Resources that Mention GenAI?

Our initial discovery process regarding whether Canadian writing centres were taking an “adopt” or “avoid” stance toward GenAI yielded fewer results than we had anticipated. Out of the 31 websites we examined, only one (the one we already knew of) contained a statement with a strong “avoid” stance, and only two (including the one we already knew of) communicated an “adopt” stance indicating that they were prepared to help student writers understand and work with GenAI tools. From the remaining 28 institutions, including our own, we could find no statement on GenAI; this means under 1% of the writing centres in our study communicated any message at all about it.

Our subsequent investigation and analysis of additional information or related resources, such as workshops, handouts, or links to other institutional partners who might offer guidance for writers working with GenAI tools, was more fruitful. The results are presented in Figure 5 below.



*Figure 5. Writing Centre GenAI Resources*

This analysis revealed that just over half of the writing centres we included had some type of resource, suggesting that the centre was prepared to assist writers with GenAI-related writing questions and concerns (*adopt* or *adapt*). Nearly a third of the writing centres offered information or guidance via handouts, guides, FAQ pages, workshops, or a combination of these writing-centre-created options, while a further 21% linked to other campus resources whose stances they might be assumed to operate in line with. These resources included learning and teaching centre statements and guides, academic integrity policies, library resources, and blog posts from various contributors. In some cases, these links and resources might have been influenced by the writing centre's location or affiliation with a particular unit, such as the library, the institution's learning and teaching centre, or a student resource hub or learning commons. The remaining 47% contained no resources, links, or mentions of GenAI, leaving site visitors unsure of the centre's stance or ability to assist, or assuming that it would not assist or engage with writers on GenAI-related matters (*avoid*).

## Research Question #2: What Messages Do Canadian Writing Centre Websites and Resources Communicate about Their Stance on GenAI Use for Writing?

### **Writing Centre Website and Resource Findings**

The analysis of writing centre resources revealed a more nuanced landscape of writing centre attitudes, as well as insight into how the writing centre might fit within the institution's network of other student and faculty supports and interact with its institutional academic integrity policy and broader institutional position on GenAI. Keywords and themes included some positive "adopt" framings of AI tools, including terms like "creative opportunities" and "collaboration," but "avoid" or "caution" stances were far more prevalent, with terms such as "responsible use," "fabrication," "accuracy," "limitations," "careful and critical," and "potential for misuse." Themes of academic integrity, ethical concerns, and the need for instructor clarification about permissible use were common, as were neutral explanations of GenAI's history as a technology and its uses, as well as guidance on how to document its use for assignments or publications. Overall, these resources tended to communicate a balanced message to students that their writing centre was knowledgeable about GenAI use and prepared to help navigate responsible use.

In a broad sense, writing centres that supply these types of resources can be classified as recognizing that students are using GenAI in their writing processes, so they are "adapting," even if they are not recommending or "adopting" the tools per se. Writing centres with strongly worded "avoid" statements or mandates, on the other hand, communicate a clear message that the writing centre is against GenAI use and will not support students in learning to use it. These stances might also communicate that the writing centre views students who use GenAI tools as lazy, dishonest, or incompetent writers and learners. Finally, the silence of writing centres with no resources or statements at all might communicate that they are unwilling or unprepared to have conversations about GenAI use, even if that might not be the reality during an appointment.

### **Broader Institutional Resource Findings**

Following our analysis of writing centre resources, we examined key terms in a selection of the institutional resources we were able to locate, focusing similarly on discourse that suggested a stance toward GenAI use. Comparable "adopt" language included "welcome and encouraged,"

“groundbreaking,” “curiosity and collaboration,” “creative opportunities,” and “maximizing learning.” Language associated with a negative stance included themes of academic dishonesty, concerns with bias, fairness, accuracy, and reliability, as well as cautions against “overreliance” and the possibility of “false results” and “harmful outputs.” There was also language that referenced AI tools as “tutors” that, as writing centre specialists, we found particularly alarming. Most institutions, however, took a “measured and balanced” approach with language such as “opportunities and risks,” or “risks and benefits.” We concluded that a “use with caution” approach was most common among the institutions and resources we scanned, and that only a few institutions seemed to present a stronger stance advocating for the enthusiastic “adoption” or strict “avoidance” of GenAI. Overall, the institutional resources emphasized educating and empowering GenAI users to take responsibility for their use of these tools and their output, to consider the capabilities and limitations of their chosen tools, and to thoughtfully and critically consider the implications and impacts of using AI tools for writing and learning. Although these themes underscore a need for student writers considering or already using GenAI in their writing processes to adapt and learn, few institutional resources directed students to their writing centre as a site of guidance and learning in these areas.

### **Additional Data**

When our search for writing centre content turned up so little, we contacted a few colleagues at other writing centres to get a sense of how they might be communicating with students about GenAI use. Aikens and Wieldon’s (2025) work suggests value in recording “behind the scenes” information, and the absence of public-facing information at our own centre was not indicative of an “avoid” stance per se; ChatGPT had been with us for nearly two years at this point, and we had seen many suspected and confirmed cases of GenAI use in student work. We were talking about GenAI all the time—at conferences and in webinars, at our staff meetings, and with our students. We knew other writing centre colleagues were having similar conversations, so we sent a few emails to gather further insight.

Through these informal conversations, we learned of at least one more “avoid” stance, several others that were leaning toward an “adopt” stance, but with caution, which is how we would have categorized our own centre’s position, and a variety of other internal resources, such as tutor training materials and scripts to use with students suspected of using GenAI without appropriate attribution or permission. We also learned of content used in faculty workshops and a variety of other types of resources that we were unable to access via our scan of website content. In the next section, we clarify

the reasons why writing centres might be slow to issue a public-facing response to GenAI and contextualize those reasons with reference to publications on this topic.

### Research Question #3: What Factors Might Influence the Availability of Public Student-Facing Messaging Regarding Writing Centre Positions on GenAI Use?

#### **Institutional Influences and Roadblocks**

A survey of current literature and a few email exchanges with other writing centres revealed that our centre was not the only one affected by institutional slowness to produce an all-encompassing policy. Writing centres are variously located within their institutional landscape and experience an accompanying vulnerability to precarity and “organisational interference” (Giltrow, 2016, p. 18). It is not uncommon for writing centres to lack autonomy or academic freedom when it comes to making decisions about policies and practices (Sabatino & Herb, 2021), and this extends to communicating statements on GenAI assistance that are in line with their centre’s existing ethos. For instance, in our study, centres within an institution’s library might have been operating in agreement with AI resources hosted on the library’s website (but created by the writing centre), whereas those operating as part of a learning and teaching centre might have been waiting for a green light from that unit, or might be assumed to operate in line with that unit’s statement (if one existed), even if neither unit’s website mentioned the other with regard to GenAI support. We did find it peculiar that institutional resources rarely, if ever, mentioned the writing centre; writing centres might contain links to institutional guidelines and resources, but those resources did not often mention the writing centre as a place to obtain further guidance or assistance with GenAI writing-related concerns, either for faculty or for students. Marcel and Kang’s (2024) scan of institutional GenAI guidelines at 15 Canadian universities found writing centre mentions to be similarly low, noting them in only two institutions’ documents. As Bromley (2017) indicates, because writing centres typically lack a “departmental home” (p. 34), they might have to advocate for themselves in terms of pedagogical centrality to the institution. The omission of writing centres as central to student learning about GenAI use underscores the need for more prominent positioning as relevant participants, and even experts and leaders, in the GenAI post-secondary institutional landscape, as well as the necessity of academic freedom to publicly communicate that status to students.

### **Concerns about Stigmatization**

Our conversations with colleagues also allowed us to identify and agree upon an obstacle that was very important to us: what kind of language could we use that would be read as non-judgemental if the student was embarrassed about using AI or struggling to use it well? Writing centres have always functioned as socially situated spaces—whether physical or virtual—where negotiation of scholarly identity occurs. In 2010, Harry Denny, in an extension of North's (1984) statement about writing centres producing "better writers," not "better writing," wrote that writing centre work

involves understanding the manufacture and dynamics of identity, a process that involves ongoing self discovery and reconciliation with collective identities and discourse communities. Just as the writing process is individual and recursive, so too is the process of coming to terms with and reinventing one's identity. Writing centers inevitably find themselves at the crossroads of that journey for students, tutors, and the other professionals that inhabit their spaces.

During their writing processes, student writers navigate multiple identities, including both those they bring with them when they begin their studies and those they acquire as they provisionally "try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 4). Thus, they figure out who they are (and who they aspire to be) as students and as writers during transformative academic discourse socialization experiences. Attention to identity negotiation is especially important to consider in this new technological era when GenAI use might be sanctioned, encouraged, or even required in some courses or departments that are eager to adopt these tools, but discouraged or viewed as cheating or cutting corners to circumvent learning in others that maintain a strict avoid stance. These conflicts can force students to oscillate between identities of GenAI "user" or "non-user" and therefore between associations with skillful prompting and productive use or lazy avoidance of learning, depending on the context.

We asked a few other writing centres whether they had considered adding content about assisting with AI use in their mandate, or whether they had thought about including a disclosure statement in their booking form, but none of those we spoke with had done this. From a tutoring perspective, it would be very useful to have students disclose to their tutor whether and how they had used AI in their writing and whether they had express permission for this use. Having them supply instructions related to how the tutor should respond to the GenAI-involved text would also enable pedagogically

effective support. However, requiring a declaration at the time of booking to the effect of “I have used a GenAI tool to generate content in this work and confirm that I have my instructor’s permission to use it in X way” might seem threatening and preclude potentially important conversations with students. We wanted to start conversations, not end them. We wanted students to feel safe approaching us with their questions and safe to disclose use of GenAI to explore possibilities and engage in critical evaluation of its use for writing, not scare them off. We did not want to suggest that students would be labeled as “lazy GenAI users” or “cheaters” before those conversations even began, but we wanted them to know that we were dedicated to learning, adapting, and helping them navigate challenges and questions. We wanted students to know these things, and yet our website communicated none of them; we were not “avoiding” GenAI at all, but to students searching for guidance, it might have appeared that way.

### **Appointment Modality**

Another prominent issue we encountered both in our email conversations and when we presented our findings at the International Writing Centers Association conference in the fall of 2024 was that centres that did not conduct many asynchronous written feedback appointments might not have felt a need for students to consider their writing centre’s response to GenAI use prior to an appointment. During in-person appointments there is space and opportunity to ask questions and engage in meaningful conversations about GenAI use. Alternatively, the one-way interactions that are typical of asynchronous written feedback appointments are a “two-way stab in the dark” (Castner, 2000), where we can probe about using evidence to support claims and ask questions about a shift in tone, but do not continue a dialogue in most cases. It was possible, we surmised, that centres conducting mainly in-person appointments might be content with their ability to address concerns about a student’s GenAI use; rather than stating their stance publicly, in writing, they might be better positioned to state it organically on a case-by-case basis.

### **Variety and Unpredictability in AI-Related Requests and Responsibilities**

Finally, our findings, combined with our personal experiences working with students and other members of the campus community on GenAI-related issues, indicate that creating a consistent and unified statement on how writing centres are prepared to assist with GenAI would be a complicated task. How would we demonstrate the variety of issues we are prepared to assist with? Over the past

year, we have encountered both student and instructor concerns that required not only our responses to texts themselves, but also a variety of other functions of our roles: introductions to other relevant campus services like the Ombudsperson; explication of academic integrity violation processes; and discussions about how GenAI tools work and how they can affect learning during the writing process. Some situations are summarized below:

- students who seem to be using asynchronous tutoring as a GenAI detector—to see if they can “get away with” submitting AI-generated work
- instructors who follow up regarding whether we advised a student about GenAI use
- students whose program allowed and encouraged use of GenAI who found themselves becoming dependent against their will
- an instructor accusing over 100 students of unauthorized use of GenAI because some discussion forum responses contained similar examples
- a student disclosing anxiety over another classmate’s unauthorized GenAI use on a group project

In the final two scenarios, the students had never used the writing centre before and arrived without an appointment. This indicates in a real and demonstrable way that writing centres should be, and already are, leading sources of guidance and academic socialization in conversations about GenAI use for academic work, even when students are unfamiliar with their writing centre’s operations and in the absence of a public-facing GenAI statement or resources. These scenarios highlight the need for additional student guidance, informed by consideration of the centre’s existing ethos and tutors’ boundaries and beliefs about their role. They also underscore the need for full transparency from writers so the writing centre can offer accurate and effective guidance and feedback. If these conditions are met, writing centres can position themselves as welcoming, expert sites of socialization and learning as we all adapt to a world where GenAI is being advertised as capable of doing the work of both the writer and the writing centre.

### **Limitations of The Current Study**

This environmental scan had several limitations. The first is that access to some resources at two institutions required an institutional login. In the future, we would survey writing centres directly to request a self-reported stance on GenAI, and copies of statement-containing materials and resources related to GenAI. This approach would result in a more robust and accurate dataset. However, we

maintain that our present study provides an accurate snapshot of the current state of public student-facing GenAI content in Canadian writing centres.

A further limitation was the timing of our environmental scan, which took place during the summer term of 2024; summer might typically be a time when writing centres are working to update materials and plan new programming and resources. In the future, an annual scan might be conducted each fall for a longitudinal perspective on writing centre responses to GenAI tools. Screenshots and full-text copies of website content will also need to be collected for future comparison. The authors of this article have already begun a 2025 re-scan, and preliminary results are included in the following section. Finally, future studies might also conduct thorough content and discourse analyses of resources and language surrounding GenAI guidelines in the interest of assessing not only explicit stance, but also implicit values and assumptions, since the present study only examined parts of selected documents for keywords and themes.

## **Fall 2025 Update**

As of fall 2025, our own centre's main web page now explicitly assures student writers that we can support them in navigating ethical and responsible GenAI use in their assignments. Since our initial scan, we have also participated in developing numerous other resources for student use. With our own additions in mind, we began a second scan of writing centre statements and resources in the fall of 2025. These preliminary results are summarized as follows:

- Of the 31 writing centre sites analyzed, only three contained a “statement” on GenAI use for writing in summer of 2024: one “avoid” and two “adopt/adapt.” As of fall of 2025, we have found two more “avoid” statements, and three more “adopt” or “adopt with caution” statements.
- The new “avoid” statements were different from the one we found in 2024, which articulated a thoughtful approach discouraging use and refraining from instruction on GenAI. These new ones simply stated that the centre will “not provide feedback on AI-generated content” or “will not help” if they “suspect” AI-generated work. No further guidance is provided regarding detection methods or further steps.
- Our scan of resources is still in progress, but thus far the number is only slightly higher than in 2024; some of the 2024 resources are now unavailable while new ones have appeared at a few institutions where there had previously been none.

These increases indicate that more writing centres recognize a need to communicate a stance on GenAI and have been successful in making that stance public. Continued environmental scanning can help writing centres better understand current trends in the interest of anticipating threats and challenges and making decisions that inform our future relevance and survival.

## **Final Thoughts about Current and Future Possibilities**

In spite of some changes over the past year, this research highlights that while most writing centres are actively engaging with questions about GenAI and writing practice with students, faculty, and each other, they are not consistently creating public-facing materials that send a consistent, or in some cases accurate, message about how they are prepared to support GenAI literacy. Our initial environmental scan determined that nearly half of the 31 writing centres we investigated offered no visible guidance on GenAI use despite nearly two years having passed since the release of ChatGPT. Over a year later, three years after ChatGPT was released, this number has increased only slightly. This silence is telling of both the pace of Canadian post-secondary changes and the complexities involved in communicating publicly how writing centres can (or can't/won't) support with GenAI-related writing concerns or provide feedback on AI-involved texts and assignments. Although so many of the writing centres we included in our scan have avoided including GenAI-related content on their websites, this omission does not mean they are unaware of its existence or avoiding conversations about it.

We cannot predict the future, but our findings suggest that writing centres (and the students they serve, as well as instructors and the institution as a whole) would benefit from a thoughtful, coordinated, public-facing response to assistance with GenAI use for academic writing. What does the future of writing centres look like if we continue to respond to GenAI in ways that are so divided? Since students often move between institutions throughout their academic journeys, it is important that writing centre assistance remain consistent across contexts. At the same time, writing centres must remain flexible and sensitive to their local institutional contexts and cultures, so a balance of unity and autonomy is essential in choices regarding stance and resource development. Clear descriptions of what to expect should be made public via writing centre websites, booking platforms, promotional materials, and resources. Writing centres have had policies and position statements regarding “editing” student work, assisting with English language development for EAL students, and other issues related to the limits of support offered for many years. Expanding these statements to

include new technological developments should be an expected part of continuous user needs assessment and evaluating our offerings to ensure relevance, especially in times of precarity and threats to our continued existence. Making our expertise regarding the limitations and possibilities of GenAI tools known to students and other campus stakeholders is paramount to instilling confidence in the writing centre as a site of productive and ethical AI-related assistance that supports student learning in ways that align with the institution's academic integrity policy and culture.

To conclude, although our initial environmental scan confirmed that the kinds of practical, transparent statements or stances we had hoped to find were scarce, and the 2025 rescan suggests that they remain so, we are encouraged and inspired by the conversations we had while conducting this work, as well as the work being done by writing centre and writing-centre-adjacent associations, task forces, and individuals. The CWCA has identified that “as scholars who study writing tools, including GenAI, writing centre tutors and writing instructors who are sufficiently resourced to address this rapidly changing field are well-positioned to advise and provide leadership on the role of Gen-AI in student learning” (Statement on precarity section, para. 5). Bryan (2024) agrees that “writing centers can expect to become sites of negotiation around questions of ownership of AI-(co)authored texts and the value of AI-supported pedagogies” (p. 16). Writing centres, therefore, remain vital sites of academic literacies development and socialization and are uniquely positioned to help students critically engage with GenAI tools and gain critical digital literacies (Birmingham, 2023; Bryan, 2024; Johnson, 2023) that will become increasingly essential in academia and beyond. Whether the instructors and students we work with choose to adopt or avoid, the way forward for writing centres is to adapt and continuously learn about GenAI advancements so that we can position ourselves at the forefront of fostering digital learning and advocating for intentional, human-centred responses to technological change.

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