

Article

Generative AI and Sociorhetorical Views of Writing

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools increasingly influence writing practices in educational contexts, yet writing studies expertise is too often sidelined in current discussions. This paper presents core insights from rhetorical genre theory and genre-based pedagogy to inform the teaching of research and writing in relation to generative AI tools. Our analysis focuses on three key concepts that are of central concern: *intention*, *process*, and *trust*. These terms bring relevant conceptual dynamics into the foreground—including the role that intention plays in pragmatic analysis, the way that process matters in studies of writing, and the attention that trust receives in philosophy of science. We argue that focusing on these concepts during pedagogical decision-making helps us navigate between extreme hype and grave concern about generative AI tools in the context of research writing. We draw on recent empirical research to demonstrate how longer-standing insights about intention, process, and trust relate to contemporary conditions. Our analysis contributes to ongoing conversations about the role of AI in writing pedagogy by arguing for the continued assertion of deep disciplinary expertise and its attendant pedagogies. As we show, writing studies has the potential to lead—rather than react to—these conversations.

Keywords: Generative AI; Rhetorical Genre Studies; Writing Studies; Writing Pedagogy

So, @elsevierconnect.bsky.social added an AI question and answer to my article in *Computer & Education*.

The answers are wrong!

They did not ask permission!

The answers are WRONG!

How is this science?!

(Dubé, 2025)

Writing as Preamble

Writing matters. Through writing, we develop self-knowledge, self-reflection, and self-expression. Written forms are an essential part of institutions, organizations, and systems. We build institutional infrastructure through documentary forms as textual genres secure societal functioning. Writing shapes our world and brings other possible worlds into being. As language and communication instructors, we have an abundance of experience about what writing does and can do, both inside and outside our classrooms. As researchers, we work from empirical insights on the situated purposes, processes, and possibilities for writing and its practice. In direct and indirect ways, agentive tools increasingly impact “how we write, what we write, and the networks and assemblages in which we write” (Bedington et al., 2024, p. 1). Growing access to artificial intelligence (AI) applications changes the affordances with which students and instructors plan projects, generate ideas, and structure their documents. As these changes are underway, instructors encounter “much under-informed punditry” making assertions about writing pedagogy, with neither formal study nor experienced teaching to support or guide those assertions (Majdik & Graham, 2024, p. 224). A core challenge we face as scholars and teachers of writing is not that there is too little extant research and understanding about what writing is or does. Rather, the issue is that this research is not prominent enough. So, what does our collective writing studies knowledge suggest in relation to this newly animated topic of writing about, with, or against generative AI tools? This paper asks: which of our core disciplinary insights are most relevant at this moment and how do they help us frame the teaching of research and writing in relation to generative AI tools? Given both authors’ research and teaching backgrounds, this analysis focuses on conceptual structures and empirical insights provided by rhetorical genre theory and genre-based pedagogy.

First, a note on terms. We recognize there is a tendency for terminological drift in discussions on artificial intelligence. Defining something that appears to be in flux and changing is, quite frankly,

daunting. Nonetheless, for this paper we understand *artificial intelligence* to refer to an interdisciplinary field of research and practice, typically associated with computer science and concerned with prompting computers or computational systems to perform tasks traditionally considered to be “human” (Nucera & Onuoha, 2017). We use the phrase *generative AI* to refer to the *AI systems* and *tools* encompassing various components which include one or more *AI models* (such as LLMs or generative adversarial networks) and which can be trained to perform a variety of tasks (Bengio et al., 2025). While large language models (LLMs) are generative AI, the reverse is not true—not all generative AI systems are built on or employ LLMs. In most cases, pedagogical concerns are focused on LLM-enabled tools, given how they excel at “generating text and public controversy” (Omizo & Hart-Davidson, 2024, p. 272). In this paper, generative AI refers to systems and tools that are considered “general-purpose AI” because they can be prompted to perform different tasks, though not necessarily in multiple modalities (not to be confused with artificial general intelligence, or AGI, see Bengio et al., 2025).

In research contexts, these tools can generate metadata, develop data management plans, create plain language summaries, and assist with documenting research, editorial, and technical workflows (Hosseini et al., 2025). These tools can also help with visualising text-heavy collections of data, like a corpus of dissertations (Amell, 2023; Miller, 2022), archives of emails (Green, 2025), or census data and economic reports (Gupta et al., 2025). Other uses can include generation of computer code, reflection prompts, or synthetic data, as well as translation of texts and suggestion of revisions (Breuer, 2023; Fecher et al., 2023). While these tools have significant potential, they create many challenges and, in some cases, harm (Broussard, 2023; Buolamwini, 2023; Noble, 2018; O’Neil, 2017; Redden et al., 2020). AI systems and models are widely criticized for their tendencies to perpetuate bias and systemic inequities, flatten and erase nuance, produce errors, and make things up. Despite this, generative AI tools are also optimistically discussed—as well as over-hyped and excessively marketed (Bender & Hanna, 2025)—for example, when they are referred to as the fourth industrial revolution, a solution to all of humanity’s problems, or the technology that will replace humans in most of what they do. Hype cycles are not without consequence; they create false hopes and play “a direct role in encouraging errant usage” of generative AI tools (Andrews et al., 2024, p. 2).

Between the pressures of extreme hype and grave worry, our analysis aims to control the temperature. On which longer-standing insights from writing studies and genre pedagogy can we draw as we orient our teaching under these changed conditions? What does recent empirical work suggest about the limits and possibilities for integrating generative AI tools into research and writing processes? Our discussion is structured around three key terms—*intention*, *process*, and *trust*. We

adopt these terms because they have repeatedly surfaced in our conversations with researchers from various fields, including during pedagogy workshops and conference presentations, in discussions on social media platforms, and while reading blog posts and opinion pieces. These three concepts seem to resonate when instructors think through why or why not and how or how not to integrate or problematize generative AI tools in university courses. We highlight these terms also because they bring relevant conceptual dynamics into the foreground, including the role that intention plays in pragmatic analysis, the way that process matters in studies of writing, and the attention that trust receives in philosophy of science. Every day, writing instructors are making detailed pedagogical decisions. We argue that questions of intention, process, and trust should be central to these decisions, along with the continued assertion of disciplinary expertise and its attendant pedagogies.

Writing with Intention

Why do universities emphasize writing instruction for undergraduate students? Many Canadian postsecondary programs encourage students to take courses on writing and communication, sometimes by making it a university-wide requirement. Certain professional degrees must include instruction in professional genres as a condition of maintaining accreditation and many programs offer discipline-specific teaching of communicative practices (Andre & Graves, 2013; Garbati et al., 2015; Landry, 2016; Lum et al., 2018; Reave, 2019). Quite obviously, what these kinds of courses ask of students—through program requirements, across years of instruction, in capstone projects—is more than the mere production of written texts. In other words, universities do not have writing requirements because the world is in dire need of more student papers. To some degree these writing requirements exist because of the mistaken idea that the completion of obligatory writing credits will provide students with as much “writing as a skill” as their degrees require (Mitchell, 2024). Scholars in writing and communication are very critical of that assumption. A better, much more supported, view is that these requirements exist because students benefit from using writing to think in complex ways, to orient themselves within disciplinary possibilities, and to interact with other minds.

While most student writing might be perceived as not yet acting in the world—just schoolwork, not quite the real thing—it is nevertheless a consequential form of speech, including within its direct setting. Degrees are granted, scholarships are awarded, and students’ futures are shaped in part by how they perform on written assignments. Further, writing is consequential for students’ experience of agency, for how exploring a chosen topic makes them feel about their sense of efficacy and place in the world (Alexander et al., 2020; Jiang, 2024; Kaler & Evans-Tokaryk, 2019; Wisniewski et al.,

2018). Ideally, writing can function for students “as a way of making sense of themselves and the world around them” (Yagelski, 2012, p. 189). In other words, there are distinct purposes—many of them—behind instructors’ requests for students’ production of written text. Some but not all these purposes are captured in course learning outcomes and assignment rubrics. Others remain more hidden (Doody, 2024; Lancaster, 2016), are not exactly operationalizable (Anderson et al., 2015; Kimball et al., 2015), or extend outside the course (Melzer, 2014; Tremblay et al., 2024).

There are also intrinsic motivations behind how students take up these requests for producing the documents that are asked of them; just as students have their own motivations for submitting something unexpected, or for writing nothing at all (Amell, 2022; Burford, 2017). These purposes and motivations matter, as does the way they affirm and support, or are in friction and at odds, with each other (Artemeva, 2005; Seror, 2011; Windle et al., 2024). As curriculum designers, as instructors, we continuously reflect on why we ask students to write in certain ways, why students would want to take us up on those requests, and how else they might want to write. These are perennial considerations. They gain new and different exigence when there is significant change in the demographic composition of our students, in the political conditions for our institutions, or in the technological culture of our society—the latter being the case with the advent of LLM-enabled chatbots and other AI tools.

If we are honest with ourselves, many of our assignments tend to be overloaded with presumed goals. Educational policymakers, curricular designers, individual instructors have many expectations for what student writing can accomplish—to demonstrate, often simultaneously, reading comprehension, conceptual understanding, knowledge application, disciplinary languaging, reflective learning, process development, ethical positioning, and so on. More expectations are layered on as institutions develop new strategic plans and respond to changing societal pressures. Generative AI tools only add to such proliferation. Directly and indirectly, these tools do their part in increasing the potential for conflict between differing goals and intentions. Contrast, for instance, the goal of preventing students from relying on these tools during assessment to that of teaching how to use applications which are integral to future work. Consider how asking students to show their thinking independent of a particular technology can conflict with demands to increase their understanding of digital tools and evaluate these tools’ relevance for analytic and expressive processes.

At the same time, our best teaching links these curricular goals to students’ intentions and desires. Intentions, like desires, are “necessary for any kind of life to be lived” and, as Caroline Bassett notes, “without desires there is nothing human” (Bassett, 2023, p. 259). Our grasp of students’ desires relies

on languaged and embodied expression (Alexander, 2020). An avenue in which desire may come to the surface is through signs of communicative intent, or illocution as speech act theory calls it (Austin, 1962; Recanati, 1986; Schiller, 2021). Written language is only one part of linguistic activity; languaging more broadly abounds with intentions and desires in its “active, dynamic, and embodied” ways (Birhane & McGann, 2024, p. 5). Intentions become part of the force with which speech acts operate when they are recognized or taken up (Freadman, 1994; Strawson, 1964). As teachers, we can ask what signs of students’ intentions are noticeable in their texts or embodied utterances and how those intentions are related to students’ desires. Part of reflective practice is to examine how our teaching responds to students’ intentions and desires, as far as we can know them.

Speech act theory uses the term perlocution for the subsequent—and sometimes indirect—effects that are also part of an interaction but that can occur at more distant remove. Through uptake by others, intentions can receive perlocutionary force—they can be recognized, made real, put into action, including through further dialogic interaction. Synthetic, AI-extruded text is “not grounded in communicative intent,” and if it feels like there is intent, then what is taken up are the user’s own thoughts projected onto the machine (Bender et al., 2021, p. 616). And so, the gesture of submitting a synthetic text with one’s name attached comes with the submitter’s frame of intention, not the machine’s text-embedded one. A submitted assignment communicates a student’s intentions and receives perlocutionary force from the instructor’s or other readers’ responses which take it up—the same relationship holds from prompt to assignment submission and from submitted assignment to feedback commentary (Thieme, 2022). We might wonder, then, to what degree such intentions and desires are recognized, validated, or shared among participants, as well as how these intentions and desires relate to the involvement of various technologies and their possibilities of automation.

Writing studies scholarship is quite accustomed to thinking about how, through symbolic interaction, mutually recognizable intentions are enculturated, can be made explicit, and might become co-constructed; as well as how they are in tension with each other or may be subject to subjugation and repression. Analyses of pragmatic features in research publications have been able to highlight intentionality in the use of, for instance, citation, self-mention, or modality (Giltrow, 2005; Hyland, 2001; Thieme & Saunders, 2018). Studies of how graduate students experience supervisors’ responses to their writing—including through instruction about how to cite, self-mention, or modalize—illustrate the disciplining nature of these interactions and surface the tensions they hold between offering new paths for agency and limiting what it is possible to say (Badenhorst et al., 2022; Inouye & McAlpine, 2019; Kağıtçı Yıldız & Uysal Gürdal, 2025). Many of the questions writing instructors ask when making pedagogical choices are about how, in variously

diverse classrooms, some desires are made possible, how others are foreclosed, and how intentions among students and instructors may develop, be validated, become shared. More radically, we can ask how the teaching of writing invites subjugated desires to gain relevance, presence, and visibility in the communicative contexts into which students enter (Condon & Young, 2016; Currie & Hubrig, 2022; Kynard, 2023; Maraj, 2024; Waite, 2017).

Desires which are newly shaped by the promotion of generative AI tools easily diverge and conflict among students and instructors. In a study of nearly 400 students and 200 university teachers, Cecilia Ka Yuk Chan and Louisa H.Y. Tsi (2024) find that whereas students' expectations of AI technologies "tend to be overly optimistic," teachers are more concerned about "potential negative impact of AI on the development of generic and transferable skills" (pp. 9-7). Some of the teachers in that study raise the issue of generative AI tools violating academic integrity as well as hindering "students' potential for new and original discoveries" (Chan & Tsi, 2024, p. 9). Despite the unending talk of chatbots in education, it seems that instructors and students continue to hold a lot of what they think and do in that regard away from each other. Students often feel that use of generative AI tools happens "in a gray, uncertain zone, and we students need more clarity" (Bedington et al., 2024, p. 9). In their interviews with chatbot-using knowledge workers, Timothy Laquintano and Annette Vee (2024) find that the concept of voice acts as a "point of resistance against AI" and plays a "structural role in rhetorical decision-making" when writers rely on LLMs (p. 529). These professionals attempt to preserve their "investment in human voice and authorship" by "hiding machine-generated contributions" which they themselves have prompted (Laquintano & Vee, 2024, pp. 531, 529). Similarly, students might now be faced with the added expectation that their writing should sound more unique, human, or personal than what chatbots typically produce, while also being unsure how their instructors draw those distinctions (Amell & Thieme, n.d.).

Shifts in writing technologies introduce new affordances and constraints which in turn can shape the intentions we bring to our writing. For instance, the introduction of wall-to-wall whiteboards into a classroom enables the pedagogical decision to ask students to share some of their writing on those boards—visible to the entire class, thereby bringing new intentions to it. However, perceptions of such technology-related intentions can differ. Students may not see the same affordances and constraints as instructors do when it comes to shifting from one technology to another; they have their own experiences of and will attach their own intentions to this technological use. Differing perceptions of technology-imbued intentions and desires are not a new phenomenon—students are always writing themselves into futures instructors might only begin to imagine. Use of and decisions around generative AI are increasingly becoming part of the writing processes of knowledge workers

and students alike. Open-endedness and uncertainty are to be expected. And yet, for the purpose of teaching, it is also necessary to understand and articulate the varying sociorhetorical conditions in which choices regarding writing are made and how they can be critically assessed. Generative AI technologies' materiality, affordances, and ideologies can "shape the way we write ourselves into being," and thus require ongoing, critical evaluation (Darvin, 2025, p. 5). As we argue in the next section, scholars and teachers in writing studies are well equipped to examine how these generative AI tools support or undermine the processes of writing ourselves into being.

Writing Through Process

Writing in university courses is framed in a few different ways, and these frames matter to what kind of learning might happen in the process of producing such writing. Is this a first-year writing class that introduces students to university culture more broadly? Or does this course take research writing as its aim, perhaps at a higher-year level and possibly narrowing it to a particular discipline? Is writing on this syllabus focused on self-reflection and storying the self within certain cultural contexts? Is this a course where students serve members of a community, maybe one other than their own, while writing in collaboration? Or is this a course that focuses on writing as part of analyzing types of data with specific methods? Does the writing here need to respond to accreditation demands and technical requirements? Or is it conceived of as offering expressive play and inviting creative experimentation?

The framing of writing in a course inflects the processes by which such writing is produced and how available tools will be judged as more or less of service. In writing studies, emphasis on process is part of a historical contrast to product-oriented approaches of writing instruction (Badger & White, 2000; Fulkerson, 2005). A more detailed alternative—in line with the above questions of framing—is to consider writing processes in their sociorhetorical context, where attention to genre helps grasp the recurring aspects of rhetorical situations through the emergence of typified, repeated, and thereby recognizable forms (Artemeva, 2006; Freedman & Medway, 1994). From this sociorhetorical view, writing scholarship examines the habits practitioners develop in various fields, how they integrate tools and interact with others when they write, what purposes the produced genres serve, as well as how they participate in identity and community formation (Giltrow, 2003; Paré, 2019).

We are particularly interested in situations where research practices and their knowledge-making genres are taught. In the design of courses which serve these aims, instructors routinely look to active research communities as models to emulate—how do professional researchers do this work, what

are the reasons behind the choices they make, and how can their practices be adapted within the timeframe and curricular requirements of a writing course? With ethnographic curiosity, research on existing processes for producing knowledge within networks of genres and interactions has enriched earlier ideas about process and genre (Guillen-Galve & Bocanegra-Valle, 2021; Hart-Davidson et al., 2006; Lillis, 2008). Ethnographic curiosity can reveal how the learning of research practices fosters ongoing decision-making along nodes shaped by organizational histories and disciplinary habits. These iterative paths for decision-making also involve tools for composing. Sometimes tools are chosen because they enable field-attuned interactions and collaborative workflows, other times because they secure validation and meet ethical demands. Different types of technological features might be needed for information management than for creating analytic possibilities. These are, again, perennial questions, to which more recently can be added: under which of these conditions are researchers legitimately relying on LLMs, generative AI systems, and custom agents for their knowledge-making work?

For some research projects, controlled uses of specialized generative AI tools and agents is part of how data is collected and analyzed; most of the public discussion and educational pressure, however, is aimed at practices of searching, reading, and composing that broadly cut across fields. When looking for published insights on researchers' newly adjusted practices regarding the latter, we may want to distinguish between fictions of imagined, future situations and reference to tools which are becoming routinized. The fictions offer speculative directions for anticipated future use of generative AI tools and often confidently project that these models will become "deeply integrated into the scientific process, taking on roles similar to a collaborator with whom one can develop and discuss ideas" (Binz et al., 2025, p. 2) or that the concept of writing as "co-created by human and artificial intelligence is becoming prevalent and will soon become the norm" (Eaton, 2023, p. 3). Perhaps. But also, just as much as there is "no good reason to presuppose AI used in education will work as expected," we do not need to presume it will work as imagined for future research writing (Williamson, 2024, p. 97). Instead, we are better advised to focus on the current "specificity of technology and what it does," to consider the "responsibilities of the human actors building and using the technology," and to evaluate available evidence when there are attempts to compel the use of certain tools (Williamson, 2024, p. 98).

A tenor in existing empirical studies on generative AI tools in knowledge work is that writers require a significant level of prior expertise to be able to use these tools in trustworthy ways. In a quantitative analysis of survey and interview responses from over 600 respondents, Michael Gerlich (2025) finds that among these professionals, increased AI tool usage "correlates with lower critical

thinking scores” and reliance on AI-generated content can “diminish users’ critical thinking abilities,” particularly as they may “accept information and recommendations without thorough scrutiny” (p. 22). Gerlich (2025) views these results as a sign that trust in generative AI tools “creates a dependence on AI for routine cognitive tasks” and that reliance on these tools takes away necessary opportunities for engaging deeply with information as it is being processed (p. 22). Similarly, Hao-Ping Lee et al. (2025) note that those who regularly access generative AI tools are likely to “produce a less diverse set of outcomes for the same task” while displaying a “lack of personal, contextualised, critical and reflective judgement of AI output” (p. 2). By surveying over 300 knowledge workers, they find “higher confidence in GenAI is associated with less critical thinking” but also that prioritising critical thinking “might be misaligned with their overall task motivations or job objectives” due to lack of time and incentives as well as due to obstacles that prevent enactment of critical insight (Lee et al., 2025, pp. 14, 11).

Lisane Bainbridge’s (1983) “Ironies of Automation” rear their heads: through automation of routine tasks, knowledge workers are deprived of necessary practice for critical judgment. In identifying key themes of automation that appear in recent generative AI user studies, Auste Simkute et al. (2025) highlight four central usability challenges. One, automation—because of generative AI or other tools—shifts a humans’ role to tool monitoring while also reducing the situational awareness that is required for effective oversight. Two, in the presence of generative AI tools, human workflows are disrupted and a sense of task sequence is lost. Three, the generative AI tools’ poor timing and unwanted suggestions further interrupt human work. And four, automation can make easily routinized tasks easier but cognitively demanding tasks become more difficult because monitoring the tool and managing its output are added onto the workload (Simkute et al., 2025, p. 2900). Some pedagogical studies show similar effects. Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, can create dependence on the tool while undermining metacognitive understanding and preventing deeper learning. Short-term task performance might be improved but knowledge gain and transfer show no significant effects (Fan et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2025).

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that seasoned researchers can be skeptical about relying on generative AI tools in their work. David Douglas (2025) interviewed 18 scientists and applied scientists whose work involves automation; these researchers use automation for precise practical reasons while being otherwise hesitant to employ it. Douglas’ (2025) analysis identifies two themes that cut across all interviews. One theme is emphasis on “explainability in experimentation” and the other is “need for maintaining a ‘human-in-the-loop’ in scientific research” (Douglas, 2025, p. 10). As for explainability, this need is less pronounced if the automated system is “following procedures

defined by human researchers,” that is if the system is performing the same tasks that could be performed by a human experimenter (Douglas, 2025, p. 12). Explainability becomes more crucial, however, “when the automated system (such as an AI/ML model) is the subject of experimentation itself” as models necessarily simplify or omit parts of the process and researchers need to know what has been left out (Douglas, 2025, p. 12). As a result, maintaining the principle of human-in-the-loop is essential for trustworthiness of scientific findings.

Among current students, however, such skepticism is less entrenched and more optimistic adoption seems to be common even after initial hesitation (Bedington et al., 2024; Manierre et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2025). In an analysis of two courses where students were asked to compose their assignments with the help of various tools, Blaine Smith et al. (2025) argue that while the process limited students’ creative control it also encouraged them to think critically about generative AI outputs. Students’ engagement with what their prompts produce might make them understand “what they want to produce and the tools with which they will produce it” (Smith et al., 2025, p. 13). Or, receiving a chatbot’s vague feedback might help students “discern between confidently delivered bad advice and substantive, thoughtful feedback” (Taylor & Marino, 2024, p. 116). Analyzing writing instructors’ brief descriptions about how they use generative AI tools with their students, Rebekah Shultz Colby (2025) conceptualizes these approaches as a “dialectical game” where students question the algorithm and critique its writing, “querying it further until the writing improves” (p. 3). She believes that the “collaborative joining of human and machine” brings “pleasures of epiphany,” “moments of aleatory fun” which may lead to creative insights (Colby, 2025, p. 9). Others note that students’ positive ratings of chatbot exercises are not necessarily linked to learning given that these exercises “exhibited no effect on students’ sense of efficacy over their writing” (Manierre et al., 2025, p. 2). In Stacey Pigg’s (2024) study of YouTubers’ tutorials, generative AI use for research writing is “disparate, fragmented,” engaging “complex and often conflicting beliefs” (p. 2). For scholars and teachers of writing it is worthwhile to examine such conflicting beliefs. So far, we have suggested that situated relationships between intention and process should be of central concern. In the next section we turn to questions of trust.

Writing Toward Trust

Writing is genre practice: social acts are performed in recurring ways through written forms and become recognizable by the typicality of their expressions. In this view, writing functions as an “adhesive of trust that stabilizes institutions through its documentary and communicative

affordances” (Laquintano & Vee, 2024, p. 527). Across fields, research practices are now firmly understood to be social processes which are maintained through typical, recurring interactions—even as this social dimension varies by field or project in its shape and intensity. Given the social dimensions of research, matters of trust and integrity “reach beyond individual researchers to encompass the institutions and broader contexts in which and for which they operate” (Roberts et al., 2020, p. 358). It accords well with this view that Ben Williamson (2024) urges us to consider “the social life of AI,” including the “complex social factors involved in the production of AI” as well as how the use of generative AI tools “produces complex social and educational implications” (p. 99).

Many writing courses attempt to instantiate research as a social and dialogic practice such that students may collaborate, contribute their divergent strengths, learn from each other’s work, and seek feedback—all part of identity formation and disciplinary participation for student researchers (Baumvol et al., n.d.). Like in any community, these interactions require measures of trust to allow conditions in which participants can meet their communicative desires and knowledge-making aims, where through ongoing dialogue and rich interaction students can build sufficient trust in the community, its leadership, and each other. Trust relationships are not symmetrical and require deferral—when someone else asserts something that is beyond our understanding, knowledge, or access, we are called on to trust them by deferring to them. We cannot be knowledgeable about everything; and so there can be “much at stake” in who we defer to given that “our trust puts us in a position of vulnerability” (Whyte & Crease, 2010, p. 412). Risks, costs, and harms arise if this trust is not warranted.

For questions of epistemic trust, Jill Fellows (2016) highlights three beliefs for adjudicating trustworthiness: one, that the other bears us good will; two, that the other makes honest knowledge claims; and three, that the other is both acknowledged as an expert and supported by the community they represent (p. 59). Here, the other is human. When dealing with research genres, the adjudication of these three beliefs hinges on the process of deliberating the following question: by which typified or intentionally varied textual and multi-modal signs do participants assess whether a situated document communicates good will, honest knowledge claims, and expertise that is backed by community (Thieme, 2025)? These adjudications of trustworthiness come into play across situations in which teaching of writing occurs, including when instructors choose course readings, when students engage with required materials, when group members rely on each other’s contributions, and when instructors respond to students’ work.

In a comparison between human-written comments on Reddit and outputs generated using ChatGPT, Margo Van Poucke (2024) finds that although ChatGPT provides more expansive responses,

its constructions limit open discussion, display a peremptory attitude, attribute higher credibility to itself, and present Western cultural assumptions as factual knowledge (p. 14). In contrast, Van Poucke's analysis of the comments on Reddit demonstrates how users are more inclined to employ explicitly subjective constructions, to showcase self-perceived expertise about the topic at hand, and to attempt to persuade interlocutors. Human redditors are also more likely to dismiss others' views, but while doing so they employ epistemic modals (like "may," "might," or "must") as a way to build solidarity and encourage mutual exchange (Van Poucke, 2024, p. 14). These pragmatic features—addressing others to invite them into an exchange of views, experiences, and knowledges—are linguistic signs of situational awareness. Following Fellows' (2016) points above, we can also describe these as signs of trust-building. In contrast, chatbots lack contextual awareness; this becomes noticeable when they offer irrelevant and incomplete information or when they are wrong about communicative intent, particularly in response to "questions imbued with irony or sarcasm" (Mahowald et al., 2024; Van Poucke, 2024, p. 14).

Text-extruding machines mimic language signals that are already associated with conventional genres, including knowledge-making ones. Through probabilistic generation, synthetic text "draws on typified forms in training data" (Mehlenbacher et al., 2025, p. 164). It is by such mimicry that users come to trust chatbots on the knowledge claims they appear to make. When users anthropomorphize chatbots by attributing traits of intelligence to them—traits such as remembering, deciding, communicating, and knowing—they are more likely to accept the machine's advice (Colombatto et al., 2025; Inie et al., 2024). The recurrence of conventional genre features enables chatbots' reliable reproduction of some of these conventions (Omizo & Hart-Davidson, 2024, p. 282). In a way, "genre is all we need" when trying to understand why "the current crop of LLMs work as well as they do," but also why they cannot do what some expect of them (Hart-Davidson & Omizo, 2017; Omizo & Hart-Davidson, 2024, p. 283). For instance, chatbots cannot do Hip Hop rhetorics writes Carmen Kynard (2023): they do not recognize Blackness and Black knowledge; they cannot know "sound, beats, and rhythm"; they are "totally disembodied from real bodies and real histories and real struggles" (para 11); they produce a "school literacy, white English, academic discourse" that has become "so standardized and robotic that robots do it better now" (para 6).

In other words, there are limits to how much knowledge-building can be automated, even when the resulting writing sounds standardized or robotic. For instance, knowledge-production in generative AI fields favours "codified technical expertise" over social and embodied knowledge (Widder, 2024, p. 1295). Such favouring is the result of active processes which delegitimize lived and embodied experience and entrench the "epistemic power of quantification" (Widder, 2024, p. 1300).

Such assertions of epistemic power obscure underlying dimensions of research as an embodied, cumulative, experiential, lived, contested, negotiated, triaged practice. Writing is part of this practice. Further, research writers need to have a sense of the social or consensual stock of knowledge, particularly if they want to be able to claim that their work is novel, original, or makes a contribution. That is, they will need to represent what they think “everyone knows” (Kaufer & Geisler, 1989, p. 290). This sense of who everyone is or might be, as well as what they might or might not know, is developed through social networks, relationships, listening, reflecting, and reading. Even then, writers in the same community “differ in their internal inventories of ‘what everyone knows’ because they join in different networks, read different texts, and come to different synthetic constructions of their experiences” (Kaufer & Geisler, 1989, p. 290). Research writers “must often persuade their readers in the very points of consensus they ultimately wish to break” (Kaufer & Geisler, 1989, p. 290). Such intention to persuade comes through in language choices and genre signals and is arguably not something that can be automated.

Where human writers can be linguistically varied, contextually attuned, and individually intentioned, generative AI tools “regularly fail to achieve the variety of genre signalling” of human-authored text (Omizo & Hart-Davidson, 2024, p. 283). Socio-rhetorical views of writing emphasize the role that contextual awareness plays in developing rhetorically felicitous communication. Contextual awareness involves an understanding of the people, objects, and relationships that inhabit a rhetorical situation—who is or is not connected to whom, which ideas are or are not circulated, what tools are or are not commonly employed. Through uptake by others, speech acts can be recognized, made real, put into action, and invite further dialogue. If there is no one listening, no one reading, no one writing, links in that chain are dropped.

Some might argue that linguistic variation, contextual attunement, and individual intentions do not matter or will matter much less in a bright world of future research writing. Indeed, there exists the speculative narrative that knowledge will be made faster, higher, stronger if we decide we do not need “scientific journals to continue being for human readers and led by human editors” and if we choose “AI as the main readers and curators of scientific advances” (Bagenal, 2024, p. 119). Yet in 2023, the year after the introduction of ChatGPT, the number of retractions of research articles rose sharply, outpacing the rate at which the number of publications grew (Van Noorden, 2023). Visible signs of automated writing were part of what led to some of these retractions (Abalkina et al., 2025; Lei et al., 2024). We cannot afford to ignore that the capacity of generative AI tools to produce and distribute disinformation is significant—they can “simulate ‘knowledge’” by perpetually re-arranging bits of information (Mehlenbacher et al., 2025, p. 164). At the same time, their output still

stands apart from the experiential and varied languaging of human knowledge workers. Xinwan Kong and Chengyu Liu (2024) note that in pursuing local rhetorical aims in particular contexts, research writers—but not text extruders—combine “different rhetorical moves into a single long complex sentence” or employ terms “specific to certain research contexts and policy-related vocabulary” (p. 11). As researchers who seriously pursue trustworthiness in our work, we are well-advised to strengthen the auditing mechanisms and communicative interactions which produce trust by maintaining good will, honest knowledge-making, and community-supported expertise.

Writing for Conclusion

In this paper, we have highlighted insights from our collective knowledge in writing studies to support more grounded engagement with the newly animated topic of writing about, with, or against generative AI tools. In particular, we have focused on how the pedagogical demands brought about by generative AI tools stand in tension with well-researched tenets of writing studies. We echo Zoltan Majdik and Scott Graham (2024) in noting that writing studies has a “wealth of prior knowledge about writing classrooms and developmental writing,” that this knowledge must be centered in our conversations about generative AI tool, and that we must counter and resist when surveillance-driven and privacy-violating technologies “run roughshod over our carefully designed pedagogical spaces” (p. 224).

The teaching of research writing happens at the intersection of various sets of values. One such set of values are those of equity and inclusion, of fostering students’ rights and agency, of guiding all students—especially those from marginalized positions—in their sense of belonging within academic worlds. Inclusive practice involves listening to students’ needs and desires, helping them find and pursue their intentions, particularly where those do not match normative practices of current disciplinary communities. These values are linked to the playfulness with and enthusiasm for possibilities of generative AI tools that speak from some recent research in digital composition. Another set of values is that of accountability and conscientiousness in knowledge-making practices, of serious pursuit of questions of epistemology in relation to writing, and of building disciplined insights based on available evidence with thoughtfully chosen methods. In that regard, professional researchers can be very skeptical of the involvement of general-purpose AI tools in knowledge-making processes; and for similar and other reasons some writing scholars are advocating for forms of refusal (Fernandes & McIntyre, 2025; Sano-Franchini et al., 2024; Zong & Matias, 2024). When it comes to the demand for integrating generative AI tools into university writing, there is some tension

between these sets of values and the ways in which they are associated with synthetic text production.

Throughout this paper, we have focused on three central terms—*intention*, *process*, and *trust*. We offer them as relevant frames for navigating these tensions in our process of re-orienting and re-asserting what it means to teach writing. We have linked communicative intention to the question of desire—the need to recognize students’ desires as well as to notice the patterns in which they are or are not taken up. Generative AI tools do not have communicative intent in the way human language users do. They should not get in the way of instructors’—and other participants’—efforts of grasping and responding to students’ intentions, nor should they limit or direct students’ capacity to shape the way and who they write themselves into being. Questions of process are key to developing dialogic interactions through writing. In the service of both learning and knowledge-making, writing practices are best aimed toward deep engagement with relevant materials, critical thinking along disciplinary lines, and cognitive grappling with challenging questions. Accountability becomes a concern when automating machines are used to take over certain aspects of this process, as does the loss of capacity for critical judgment that can result from dependence on automation. Though it is also possible that, through a certain measure of attentive interaction with chatbots, students may recognize the critical role that processes of writing and details of genre signalling play within knowledge-making practices.

In either case, the social nature of research means that awareness of our relations—to other researchers, to community members, to larger audiences—matters to the quality of our research and writing. This is where trust comes into play, through recognizable signs of good will, honest knowledge-making, and reputable expertise, as readers are called upon to defer, at least in part, to what is being written. Under the pressure of profit-driven paradigms, where “enchanted determinism” of generative AI initiatives is “taking precedence over core academic values,” we need to reaffirm those values and insist on the central insights of our disciplinary pedagogies (Felten & Forsyth, 2025; Xiao & Bozkurt, 2025, p. 2). Of course, the assertion of disciplinary pedagogy assumes that we can retain autonomy when it comes to using or refusing AI, which—as always—depends on how well we organize and advocate in response to undue pressures.

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