

## How can we best use AI to support reading and writing?

In 1956, at Dartmouth College, John McCarthy, Marvin Minsky, Nathaniel Rochester and Claude Shannon initiated a summer research study looking at artificial intelligence. They stated the following: **“An attempt will be made to find how to make machines use language, form abstractions and concepts, solve problems....*We think that a significant advance can be made in one or more of these problems if a carefully selected group of scientists work on it together for a summer.*”** (If you would like to read a summary of this study in AI magazine 2006, click [here](#))

Nearly 70 years later and after the invention of the internet and social media, we are seeing an existential growth in AI. Whilst I have seen many examples of influencers using it within social media posts, I am fully aware that it is probably being used far more beyond my field of knowledge. An area, beyond social media, where I have seen it being used, is within education, therefore, I felt it useful to delve into this a little more. There are many exciting opportunities available in terms of its use in the classroom, but there also many challenges.

### DfE Guidance

In 2024/2025, I was fortunate enough to see one of the early drafts of the DfE Writing Framework and was given the opportunity to provide feedback on it. Within my response, I noted that there were no links to AI and suggested that it was mentioned in the document, given its growing presence in the classroom. I had also observed poor use of it in designing classroom resources so felt guidance on its effective use was needed. Interestingly, the writing framework now contains a section on ‘Automated Writing Evaluation’ which offers readers a useful overview and awareness of it. Within that section, there is also reference to the DfE’s policy paper, [‘Generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in education.’](#) The DfE policy paper gives greater detail about ‘generative AI’ which is the area I am most interested in as it is the common use of AI I see used in schools.

### What is generative AI?

Essentially, it is where teachers use something like Chat GPT, Microsoft Copilot or Google Gemini to create content, predominantly for a lesson. ‘It refers to technology that can be used to create new content based on large volumes of data that models have been trained on a variety of sources.’ The most common approach is for teachers to use AI to create text-based resources, however, this has evolved further and can include audio, simulations and videos. One of my particular favourites is suno.com where you can take text and turn it into a song! As I recently launched my [Support for Spelling](#) programme, I decided to ask it to write a song about learning to spell. [Here](#) is what it made.

Interestingly, generative AI is an area where there is limited evidence about the impact of it, but it is comforting to know that the DfE are ‘working with the education sector, educational technology industry experts and academics’ to build more evidence and guide the profession. I feel this is essential if we are to use it as an effective tool in designing teaching and learning experiences for our pupils. Whilst there have been huge gains in using AI to reduce administrative tasks, there is still more to do on using it effectively to support what happens in the classroom.

## Ineffective use of generative AI

In a recent training session, I was informed that AI should only do 80% of the work and the human does the remaining 20%. For example, AI creates 80% of the material but we still have to work on it to produce the outcome. Interestingly, from my experience, the main examples of AI being used ineffectively, usually resulted from practitioners letting AI do 100% of the work. Let us consider a typical example: The teacher requires some reading material for a reading lesson and would like to connect the content to the Romans, as it is an area they have been studying.

They decide to type 'Create a 200 word information text about the Romans.' This is what they get:

The Romans were one of the most influential civilizations in history, originating in the city of Rome, Italy, around 753 BCE. Over centuries, they expanded their territory, forming the Roman Republic and later the Roman Empire, which at its height controlled much of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Roman society was advanced in many ways. They developed impressive engineering techniques, building roads, aqueducts, amphitheaters, and public baths, many of which still stand today. Latin, the Roman language, became the foundation for many modern European languages, including Italian, French, and Spanish.

Romans were also known for their strong military, organized government, and legal system, some of which still influence modern law. Emperors like Julius Caesar and Augustus played major roles in shaping the empire's power and legacy.

Religion in Rome changed over time, starting with a belief in many gods and later adopting Christianity, which became the empire's official religion in the 4th century CE.

The Western Roman Empire fell in 476 CE, but the Eastern Roman Empire, also known as the Byzantine Empire, lasted nearly another thousand years. The legacy of the Romans continues to impact architecture, language, government, and culture in the modern world.

Whilst the outcome has saved considerable time for the teacher, there are some challenges to be aware of:

- The complexity of the sentences varies considerably across the text,
- Chat GPT made selections about the topics contained within the text,
- Chat GPT made selections about the vocabulary,
- This is just a block of text,
- It contains American spelling. E.g. Organized.

If we consider these challenges, we understand why the practitioner has further work to complete, before this resource is ready to use in the classroom. If they do not do this, they might see the following impact:

- The complexity of some sentences is too challenging and without adequate reading fluency guidance, many readers might struggle to comprehend the content within them. This will impact on self-esteem, their motivation and thoughts about reading.
- The topics covered might not correlate to what has been learned in history, therefore, children will only be able to develop a superficial understanding. E.g. "Romans were also known for their strong military, organized government, and legal system, some of which still influence modern law."
- A lot of tier 3 vocabulary is likely to be contained in an example like this but other tier 2 vocabulary might also need to be considered. E.g. 'Legacy...foundation of...'

- If we were to lift this text and put it into a resource, it would not be very appealing to the reader.
- If American spellings are left in the text, we are likely to then see them in children’s writing.

### A suggested approach

I am by no means an expert in using AI, but I can use the challenges above to help guide practitioners and offer a framework for generating text. Whilst my example refers to generating texts for a reading lesson, it is also relevant for when a teacher wants to create a ‘mentor text’ for writing.

<b>Sentence construction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I always find that Chat GPT produces better texts if I tell it to write it for a particular reading age. E.g. “Write...for someone with a reading age of...” Whilst it is not 100% accurate, it does improve the selection of sentences. Click <a href="#">here</a> to watch a video of me demonstrating this and showing you how to use AI to support reading lessons.</li> </ul>
<b>Topic selection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The key thing to do here is get your prompt right. I use the following: “Write a ...word text about... Primarily focus on ...”</li> </ul>
<b>Vocabulary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above, focus on the prompt. Use a phrase like “Include the following words...” This is also great if you want to include names from your class when getting it to write a story- Great for engagement!</li> <li>• Also, copy the text into Word or a similar programme. Then read it through and make any required alterations.</li> </ul>
<b>Blocks of text</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the children will access the text on paper, consider using a website like Pixabay to add images.</li> <li>• Think about spacing, font size, bolding and italics.</li> <li>• If the children will access the text on a device, consider adding hyperlinks to other content. E.g. A dictionary definition. A video to set the context of the text.</li> </ul>
<b>American spelling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the prompt ‘Use English spelling rules’ within your prompt.</li> <li>• Always proofread the AI response.</li> </ul>

In terms of mentor texts for writing, we know the practitioner wants to draw the children’s attention to choices writers make. Therefore, in my opinion, we require AI to do even less work. Whilst it might provide an initial text that has been organised for the teacher, they will still be required to think about what they want to draw the children’s attention to. This is likely to mean that they need to add those features in to add to help achieve the purpose of the text. Whilst we could try various prompts in terms of what we might put in an AI tool, I believe it is essential that the teacher helps shape the text themselves. The DfE Writing Framework on page 105 offers some useful advice on creating ‘mentor and WAGOLL texts.’

In summary, generative AI is currently the most common use of AI in reading and writing lessons. Whilst this will evolve over the coming years, we still need to focus on getting it right. In terms of getting it right, I feel it should reduce teacher workload whilst also adding to effective

teaching and learning in the classroom. Being aware of the challenges and what we can do about them when creating texts for reading and writing lessons is a great start-point in my opinion.

If you have any thoughts or reflections about this article, feel free to email me via [info@theliteracyadvisor.co.uk](mailto:info@theliteracyadvisor.co.uk)

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

*Carl Pattison*