

REFLECTIVE PIECE

Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy into writing centre pedagogy: A reflective practitioner's perspective

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot are increasingly shaping how students write and learn in higher education. While these technologies offer valuable support for grammar, idea generation, and stylistic experimentation, they also raise complex questions about authorship, integrity, and access. Drawing on my experiences as a writing centre practitioner at a South African university of technology, I explore in this reflective essay how AI is transforming academic writing consultations, workshops, and tutor development. This essay identifies common student misconceptions, gaps in tutor preparedness, and tensions arising from unclear institutional policies. Building on these reflections, I propose context-sensitive strategies including consultation prompts, workshop activities, and tutor training interventions, to foster ethical and critical engagement with AI in writing support. The essay contributes to ongoing conversations on how writing centres in the Global South can mediate responsible and equitable AI use while nurturing student agency and academic integrity.

Introduction

The integration of AI into academic writing is reshaping the landscape of higher education. Writing centre practitioners increasingly encounter students whose texts have been generated or substantially edited by tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot (Raheem, Anjum & Ghafar, 2023). These technologies offer benefits, including enhanced grammar, stylistic alternatives, and idea scaffolding, however, they also introduce significant pedagogical and ethical challenges. For example, students may struggle to distinguish their own voice from AI outputs, over-rely on machine-generated content, or face uncertainty regarding institutional policies on AI use. Similarly, writing centre tutors often feel underprepared to navigate these challenges. Traditional consultation strategies have centred on argument development, clarity, and structure; however, tutors must now adapt to AI-mediated writing, requiring them to balance support, ethical guidance, and reflective engagement. These developments raise broader questions about academic integrity, student agency, and equitable access to digital tools.

This essay adopts a reflective practice approach to examine these emerging dynamics, drawing on personal experience, observations of student and tutor practices, and relevant scholarship on writing centre pedagogy, digital literacy, and AI in higher education. It addresses three key aims: (1) to illuminate common student practices and misconceptions regarding AI use, (2) to explore challenges faced by tutors and institutions, and (3) to propose practical strategies for cultivating AI literacy that is ethical, critical, and context sensitive.

This reflection positions the writing centre as a space of inquiry and innovation where writing practitioners and tutors critically examine their own practices to enhance student learning. Through integrating reflective insights with evidence-based strategies, the essay contributes to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) discussions on how practitioners in the Global South can mediate responsible, equitable, and pedagogically sound engagement with AI in higher education.

Students' use of AI in writing: Reflections and challenges

In recent years, I have observed a growing reliance on AI tools among students seeking writing support. Many arrive at consultations with texts that have already been shaped by platforms such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, or QuillBot. For some, these technologies offer valuable scaffolding: they assist with grammar, provide stylistic alternatives, and generate ideas when students feel uncertain

about how to begin (Hao, Fang, & Peng, 2024). However, for others, the use of AI introduces as many challenges as it resolves.

One recurring issue is the over-reliance on AI-generated text. In mid-2025, I was invited by a South African university to provide training on academic writing and AI. I began by asking students what they knew about AI and how they used it for their assignments. One student boldly stood up and said:

“I ask AI to write the assignment for me and then ask it to convert the file to PDF, which I simply download and submit”.

This illustrates that some students copy entire passages from AI tools and include them in their assignments with minimal revision or critical engagement. Mohammadkarimi and Qadir (2025) caution that such dependence can erode students’ capacity to develop autonomous writing practices. In my own practice, I have noticed that AI-shaped work often lacks coherence, intellectual depth, and a distinctive academic voice. My views are supported by Khalifa and Albadawy (2024), who claim that many students equate fluency with quality, mistaking the polished but superficial prose produced by AI for robust academic writing.

A second concern involves the erosion of critical thinking. When students rely on AI for argument development or paraphrasing, they risk bypassing higher-order cognitive skills such as synthesis, evaluation, and independent reasoning. Shum (2024) warns that uncritical acceptance of AI outputs can diminish reflective engagement with texts. During consultations, I have seen students shift from being authors of meaning to editors of machine output, weakening their voice, agency, and confidence as writers.

The use of AI also generates ethical uncertainty. Students frequently ask whether using AI constitutes plagiarism or whether they should disclose its role in their work. Institutional policies remain inconsistent, and in some cases, absent altogether, leaving students to interpret contradictory messages (Robinson, 2024). This uncertainty often produces anxiety, with students fearful that legitimate use of AI for learning might be perceived as misconduct.

Equity and access further complicate these dynamics. While some students have access to advanced AI tools and the digital literacy to use them critically, others struggle with limited resources or minimal exposure to such technologies. Namakula (2024) notes that these disparities mirror broader digital divides in South African higher education, where access to digital tools and reliable internet

remains uneven. In practice, this creates a gap between students who benefit from AI as a learning aid and those for whom it becomes yet another marker of exclusion.

These reflections accentuate that writing centres cannot overlook AI's growing presence in students' writing practices. Instead, they must respond proactively by embedding AI literacy into writing support. In this context, I define AI literacy as the capacity to engage critically, ethically, and reflectively with AI, while simultaneously valuing students' intellectual contributions. Without such guidance, students risk developing habits that undermine both their academic growth and their confidence as emerging scholars.

Within a SoTL framework, these observations serve as practitioner-generated evidence that invites collective reflection on teaching and learning. They remind us that supporting students' engagement with AI is not simply about technology adoption, but about cultivating the habits of inquiry, authorship, and ethical responsibility that underpin transformative higher education in the Global South.

Tutors' preparedness and emerging gaps

Students' use of AI is increasingly evident in consultations yet writing centre tutors often feel uncertain about how to respond. In my experience, many tutors lack confidence in their ability to explain how AI tools function or to advise on their ethical use. This gap creates a tension because students arrive with AI-shaped texts, yet the very staff tasked with supporting them sometimes feel ill-equipped to provide meaningful guidance.

One reason for this gap is the absence of structured training. Most tutors, including myself as a practitioner at earlier stages, have had to learn about AI informally through experimentation or peer discussions. Few institutions have yet incorporated AI literacy into professional development for writing centre staff. This mirrors concerns raised by Robinson (2024), who reports that educators across disciplines often feel underprepared to navigate the pedagogical and ethical challenges of AI integration.

A second gap lies in policy ambiguity: institutional guidelines on AI use in student writing are often inconsistent or contradictory, and some universities lack such policies altogether, creating a significant gap. Also, some universities prohibit the use of generative AI outright, while others adopt

more flexible approaches, permitting its use as a supplementary learning tool (Yang, Chen, He, Sun & Salas-Pilco, 2024). This lack of clarity complicates the work of tutors, who must advise students without being able to rely on stable institutional positions. As Talib (2024) notes, the absence of clear policy frameworks can foster confusion, leaving both students and staff uncertain about what constitutes responsible practice.

A further challenge is that tutors' traditional approaches to writing support do not always translate well into AI-mediated contexts. For example, consultations that once centred on argument development or paragraph structure now increasingly involve students presenting AI-generated drafts. In such cases, tutors must learn to recognise when a student is leaning too heavily on AI, and how to reframe the session to focus on the student's own thinking. This requires not only new skills but also a shift in consultation philosophy, from "fixing" (Sefalane-Nkohla & Mtonjeni, 2019) student writing to fostering reflective engagement with both human and machine-produced text.

Finally, the difficulty of detecting AI-generated text complicates tutors' work. Since AI can produce highly fluent writing, it is not always obvious where the student's contribution ends, and that of the machine begins. As Mohammadkarimi and Qadir (2025) caution, this can obscure assessments of students' actual abilities, and it risks undermining the trust-based dynamic of writing consultations. In my own practice, I have found that focusing less on detection and more on reflective dialogue helps tutors and students navigate this uncertainty constructively.

These gaps suggest that writing centres must invest not only in equipping students with AI literacy but also in preparing tutors themselves. Professional development, clear policy alignment, and new consultation strategies are needed if tutors are to guide students effectively in an era where AI is increasingly inseparable from writing practices.

Practical strategies for integrating AI literacy in writing centres

Writing centres occupy a unique position in higher education, bridging institutional policy, disciplinary expectations, and students' individual writing practices. To respond constructively to the growing presence of AI in academic writing, it is essential to adapt pedagogical approaches in ways that are both reflective and ethically grounded. Drawing on my experiences and the broader literature on writing centre pedagogy and digital literacy (Sefalane-Nkohla & Mtonjeni, 2019; Tinmaz, Lee, Fanea-Ivanovici & Baber, 2022), I propose several strategies for integrating AI literacy:

Embedding AI reflection in consultations

Rather than framing AI as a threat, consultations can encourage students to engage critically with AI outputs. Prompts such as “Which elements of this draft reflect your own thinking, and which were influenced by AI?” or “How did AI support you, and where did it limit your thinking?” foster metacognitive reflection and reinforce ownership of the writing process (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). While this approach promotes student agency, it requires tutors to balance guidance with inquiry, ensuring that reflective dialogue does not inadvertently shift the responsibility entirely onto students.

Developing targeted workshop activities

Developing targeted workshop activities would provide valuable opportunities for collective engagement with AI literacy. Such activities may include critical evaluation exercises where students assess the accuracy, relevance, and potential bias of AI-generated text in comparison with scholarly sources (Johnson, 2025). Paraphrasing and synthesis tasks can further emphasise the importance of transforming AI outputs into original academic discourse. Additionally, scenario-based ethical discussions would allow students to explore dilemmas such as how to appropriately acknowledge AI contributions in their assignments.

These activities not only demystify AI but also cultivate a shared vocabulary for discussing its ethical use. Nonetheless, workshops may be constrained by time, participant engagement, and institutional support, which must be considered when designing interventions.

Tutor professional development

Tutors themselves require structured opportunities to develop AI literacy. Peer-learning sessions, where tutors share experiences with AI-shaped drafts, can complement formal training on ethical and pedagogical considerations (Robinson, 2024). Professional development should address both technical competence and reflective facilitation skills; this will enable tutors to guide students without resorting to policing or over-correction. However, I acknowledge that a limitation is the uneven availability of institutional resources for such training, which may leave some tutors underprepared.

Accessible resource design

Students benefit from practical resources that integrate technical guidance with critical reflection. Writing centres can produce online guides, frequently asked questions (FAQs), or step-by-step instructions for responsibly using tools such as Grammarly or ChatGPT, while highlighting the importance of verifying AI-generated content (Yang et al., 2024). These resources should emphasise digital literacy and ethical awareness, recognising that students' prior exposure to AI tools and access to subscriptions vary widely.

Cross-faculty collaboration

Writing centres do not exist in isolation; they operate within the broader university project. So, they should engage with academic departments to align AI literacy initiatives with assessment policies and disciplinary expectations (Okada, 2025). Collaborative workshops, co-designed modules, or consultation guidelines can ensure consistency and contextual relevance, mitigating confusion arising from ambiguous institutional policies. Such collaboration also positions writing centres as active agents in shaping a campus-wide culture of ethical AI use.

To sum up this section, it is vital to highlight that while these strategies provide a starting point, their effectiveness is contingent on institutional support, tutor confidence, and students' willingness to engage. Writing centres must remain adaptive, reflecting on successes and limitations, and revising approaches as AI tools and student practices evolve. Integrating AI literacy is not a one-off intervention but an ongoing process of dialogue, experimentation, and ethical negotiation.

Ethical and pedagogical dilemmas in AI-assisted writing

The integration of AI into academic writing presents complex ethical and pedagogical dilemmas, which writing centres must navigate with both critical awareness and reflective practice. In this section, I discuss some of those.

Plagiarism and authorship

A central concern is whether AI-generated content constitutes plagiarism or misrepresents authorship. Research shows that students' perceptions vary: some regard AI as a neutral tool, akin to

grammar software, while others worry that generating substantive text with AI blurs ethical boundaries (Hao et al., 2024). From a pedagogical perspective, writing centres must help students distinguish assistance from substitution, emphasising that responsible AI use involves reflection and integration rather than wholesale adoption. However, without clear institutional guidance, tutors often negotiate these boundaries on a case-by-case basis, creating an ongoing tension between support and enforcement (Talib, 2024).

Equity and access

AI use can exacerbate existing inequalities in higher education. Not all students have access to subscription-based tools or the digital literacy to evaluate AI outputs critically (Mills, Ruiz, Lee, Coenraad, Fusco, Roschelle & Weisgrau, 2024). This digital divide can privilege already advantaged students, while marginalising those less familiar with or unable to access AI technologies, more especially in the Global South. Writing centres must therefore adopt strategies that are inclusive, providing alternatives and scaffolds that do not rely solely on high-tech tools, and fostering equitable opportunities for all students.

Risk of skill erosion

Over-reliance on AI can diminish students' engagement with higher-order cognitive processes, including argument construction, synthesis, and critical evaluation (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). In practice, I have observed students acting as editors of AI output rather than autonomous writers, resulting in texts that are technically fluent but lacking intellectual depth. Writing centres must reconcile the pedagogical challenge of preserving productive struggle with the benefits of AI scaffolding, supporting students in developing both competence and critical awareness.

Transparency and trust

AI complicates the trust-based relationships central to effective writing support. Since AI-generated writing can be difficult to distinguish from student-authored text, tutors may feel uncertain about evaluating contribution and progress (Mohammadkarimi & Qadir, 2025). My practice has shifted towards reflective questioning rather than detection, creating a dialogue that encourages students to disclose AI use voluntarily. Nevertheless, fostering transparency requires careful attention to institutional culture, potential punitive perceptions, and students' fear of academic censure.

Modelling responsible AI use

Tutors' own engagement with AI has ethical and pedagogical implications. In preparing this reflection, I drew selectively on an AI tool to experiment with phrasing and alternative framings, demonstrating that ethical use involves critical decision-making rather than uncritical reliance (Perplexity AI, 2025). By modelling transparency and reflective practice, writing centres can provide students with a framework for ethical AI engagement, reinforcing that disclosure is an aspect of responsible scholarship rather than an admission of wrongdoing.

In brief, these dilemmas reveal that integrating AI literacy is not a linear process but an ongoing negotiation between ethical considerations, pedagogical goals, and institutional context. Writing centres must remain adaptive, continually reflecting on emerging technologies, student behaviours, and policy shifts. The challenge is not to eliminate AI from academic writing but to cultivate varied, context-sensitive approaches that uphold academic integrity, equity, and student agency.

Implications and conclusion

Reflecting on my experiences as a practitioner, it is evident that AI has already transformed the landscape of academic writing. Students increasingly experiment with AI tools, often without sufficient guidance, while tutors are learning alongside them, sometimes without the resources or confidence to respond effectively. Writing centres (spaces committed to fostering ethical, critical, and reflective writing practices) are therefore well positioned to lead institutional efforts in developing AI literacy.

The implications of this work extend across three interconnected levels. For students, the challenge is to move beyond passive reliance on AI and to cultivate reflective habits that preserve their voice, creativity, and integrity. For tutors, there is an urgent need for professional development that builds both technical understanding and pedagogical confidence to guide critical engagement with AI. For institutions, the priority is to establish clear policies and equitable access to resources that support responsible practice across disciplines.

Writing centres can play a bridging role in these conversations. Through embedding AI literacy into consultations, workshops, tutor training, and cross-faculty collaboration, they can help universities navigate AI in ways that uphold academic integrity and meaningful learning. As Okada (2025)

affirms, digital literacy in higher education extends beyond technical proficiency, it demands metacognition, ethical awareness, and critical anticipation of how technology shapes learning. The dialogic and reflective ethos of writing centres uniquely positions them to nurture these capacities. This work, however, remains ongoing. Ethical dilemmas around authorship, access, and transparency will continue to evolve, and no single framework can fully resolve them. What matters is creating inclusive spaces where students and tutors can interrogate these dilemmas, experiment responsibly, and co-construct shared understandings of ethical AI use within their contexts.

In conclusion, integrating AI literacy into writing centre pedagogy is neither a rejection nor an uncritical embrace of technology. It is an invitation to reimagine writing support as a site of ethical reflection and transformative learning. By sharing these reflections, I aim to contribute to broader SoTL conversations that seek to preserve both the integrity of academic writing and the agency of student authors in an AI-mediated world.

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