



## National Institute on Artificial Intelligence in Society

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# Incorporating AI Literacy Instruction into Rhetorical Analysis Assignments

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## Context

In Sacramento State University's English department, graduate teaching assistants (TAs) serve as instructors of record for English 5, Accelerated Academic Literacies, a course that fulfills required area A2 general education requirements. During the Spring 2024 semester, TAs observed numerous instances of students using generative artificial intelligence (gAI) unethically to complete writing assignments and struggled to respond to this technology. During Summer 2024, the TA Coordinator, in consultation with the TAs, revised the English 5 curriculum to incorporate instruction in AI literacy into the course. In Fall 2024, four TAs, two of whom were teaching for the first time, taught a rhetorical analysis assignment that integrated gAI, introducing AI literacy to ~100 students. The rhetorical analysis is the second major assignment that students complete in English 5. It runs for four weeks, during weeks 4-7 of the course.

## Learning objectives

The primary learning objective for the gAI-related components of the rhetorical analysis assignment is to help students critically analyze gAI outputs using rhetorical terms and concepts.

In Fall 2024, the rhetorical analysis assignment included 4 gAI-related components:

- **Assignment 1:** Identifying Rhetorical Moves: This assignment introduces students to rhetorical moves that are common, optional, and uncommon in published academic arguments.

- **Assignment 2:** Create a Class-Generated Rhetorical Moves Chart: During this whole-class discussion, the class identifies common, optional, and uncommon rhetorical moves across a range of published academic arguments, creating a chart to serve as a class resource.
- **Assignment 3:** Learn how to prompt ChatGPT and recognize the rhetorical moves it uses: The purpose of this assignment is to learn how to prompt ChatGPT and to analyze its output based on rhetorical moves.
- **Assignment 4:** Draft a comparison/contrast essay: In this assignment, students compare and contrast the rhetorical moves used in a human-authored and ChatGPT authored argument on the same topic to determine whether ChatGPT can write an effective academic argument.

## Description of assignment or activity (4 assignments)

**Assignment 1:** Identifying Rhetorical Moves: Students are assigned to read [one of the articles published in the spring 2023 issue of Composition Studies on the topic of “Where We Are: AI and Writing.”](#) After reading the article closely, students draft responses to the following questions: 1) What is the title of the article you analyzed? 2) Identify how moves help carry out the genre’s actions: What is the purpose of the article? What argument does it make about writing and AI? Who is the audience for your article? What is the context of this article? How is the article organized? 3) Identify rhetorical strategies: How does the article use logos, ethos, and pathos? Which of the rhetorical strategies is used most? How does the predominant strategy contribute to the argument the author makes? What sources are cited? Are these real sources--can you find them online or in the library? How do the sources cited contribute to the argument the author makes? 4) Identify language features: How is language used to carry out the moves you’ve identified so far? 5) Critique rhetorical moves: What are the strengths and limitations of this article?

**Assignment 2:** Rhetorical Moves Chart: Students participate in a whole-class activity during which they share their observations from the identifying rhetorical moves assignment, focused on creating a whole-class table of rhetorical moves.

To create the table, begin by discussing: 1) typical moves identified in the sample articles read for Assignment 1, 2) how moves help carry out the genre’s actions, 3) options and variations, 4) common language features, and 5) critique the rhetorical moves. After thoroughly discussing the rhetorical moves across a range of articles, create a table, using the template provided below. Come up with at least 15 moves so you can identify a range of types of moves (obligatory to rare) and so students will have lots of “moves” to consider in their rhetorical analysis papers.

Move	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3	Article 4	Obligatory, common, optional, or rare?

Credits: Rhetorical Moves Chart assignment adapted from Jacobson, Brad, Madelyn Pawlowski, and Christine Tardy. (2021). Make your “move”: Writing in genres. *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 4*.

**Assignment 3:** Using ChatGPT: Students sign up for an Open AI account. They develop a prompt asking ChatGPT to explain and argue for where the discipline of writing studies currently is with regard to AI—written for an audience of writing studies scholars and teachers. Students then evaluate the results and try at least two more prompts. They select the

output they find is the best response to the prompts and analyze that output using the rhetorical moves chart created by the whole class.

**Assignment 4: Rhetorical Analysis Essay:** In a 750-1000 word rhetorical analysis, students compare and contrast how the human-authored article they analyzed from *Composition Studies* and the AI-authored article they generated using ChatGPT use rhetorical moves to develop their arguments, using the rhetorical moves chart created together in class as the basis of their discussion. They focus their analysis on what the rhetorical moves analysis of the two texts indicate about the ability of gAI (like ChatGPT) to write effective academic arguments.

Criteria	Assessment
Identifying Rhetorical Moves	<p><b>Complete:</b> Thorough and thoughtful response to the assignment prompt, meeting the length requirement.</p> <p><b>Incomplete:</b> Incomplete response that perhaps does not meet the length requirement.</p> <p><b>Missing:</b> No response provided.</p>
Rhetorical Moves Chart	<p><b>Complete:</b> Present in class and prepared to contribute to the whole-class chart.</p> <p><b>Incomplete:</b> Unprepared to contribute to the whole-class chart.</p> <p><b>Missing:</b> Absent from class.</p>
Using ChatGPT	<p><b>Complete:</b> Thorough and thoughtful response to the assignment prompt, meeting the length requirement.</p> <p><b>Incomplete:</b> Incomplete response that perhaps does not meet the length requirement.</p> <p><b>Missing:</b> No response provided.</p>
Rhetorical Analysis Essay	<p><b>Complete:</b> Length of 750-1000 words, comparison/contrast essay using the rhetorical moves chart created in class, a thesis statement that explains whether gAI is able to write effective academic arguments, the analysis is developed using specific details, concrete examples, and direct quotations and paraphrases from the texts that support your argument, writing has been edited for clarity and correctness, the ideas and insights presented are unlikely to be generated by AI without significant human input.</p> <p><b>Incomplete:</b> might not meet the length requirement, comparison/contrast does not make use of the rhetorical moves chart, the thesis statement could be unclear, missing, or fail to address whether gAI can write effective academic arguments, the analysis would benefit from additional development, the writing might contain errors that make it unclear, and the ideas presented could be generic, predictable, or resemble AI-generated outputs without significant human input.</p> <p><b>Missing:</b> No draft provided.</p>

## Evidence of student learning

Perhaps the best evidence of student learning was the significant reduction in unethical uses of gAI following its integration into the rhetorical analysis assignments. TAs who taught in Spring 2024 and Fall 2024 reported a notable decline in such instances, with one TA observing a drop from approximately 25% of students submitting AI-generated work in the spring to just one case in the fall. The TA attributed this decline to proactive strategies such as explicitly introducing gAI in class, teaching students how to use the technology ethically, and reframing the conversation around gAI from prohibition to constructive engagement.

In another TA's class, unethical use of AI was defined as submitting assignments that consisted of verbatim outputs from gAI software without meaningful personal input. For the first major assignment in the Fall 2024 semester, a literacy narrative essay, the TA suspected that 4–5 students engaged in unethical AI usage. By the second assignment, the rhetorical analysis essay, that number dropped to 2. In her class, this TA emphasized the importance of using gAI ethically,

guiding students to view it as a tool for brainstorming, feedback, and proofreading rather than as a substitute for original thought. Students were encouraged to explore gAI's strengths and limitations, particularly through assignments that required them to compare scholarly-written texts with AI-generated outputs.

A third TA observed a similar decline in unethical gAI usage, from ~15% in Spring 2024 to less than 5% by Fall 2024. This decline was linked to deliberate course design changes, including dedicating time early in the semester to discuss ethical gAI use and encouraging students to experiment with gAI tools for specific tasks. For example, the rhetorical analysis assignment tasked students with analyzing both human-written and AI-generated texts, comparing their effectiveness. Students overwhelmingly found the scholarly texts more nuanced and compelling, demonstrating critical engagement with the material. They noted that while gAI could generate content quickly, it lacked the rhetorical depth and credibility of human authorship.

Throughout these assignments, students developed a deeper understanding of gAI's capabilities and shortcomings. Many noted that gAI's tendency to produce fabricated citations and limited rhetorical sophistication made it unreliable for academic research. Feedback from students ranged from frustration with gAI's inaccuracies to appreciation for the opportunity to learn about its practical applications and limitations. Some students, previously unfamiliar with gAI tools, expressed newfound confidence in using them responsibly.

The TAs also benefited from integrating gAI into their teaching practices. One TA reflected on how teaching with gAI reframed their relationship with students, shifting from policing gAI use to collaborating with students to explore its ethical and effective applications. By acknowledging gAI's presence and utility, students were encouraged to share their experiences openly, which fostered a more transparent and constructive classroom environment. For instance, when students learned to prompt ChatGPT to generate articles on gAI in writing studies, they analyzed the outputs critically alongside scholarly texts, recognizing the human-authored works as more rhetorically effective.

Incorporating gAI into the rhetorical analysis assignment not only reduced unethical use but also enhanced student engagement and critical thinking, fostering a deeper understanding of how gAI can be used responsibly in academic and professional contexts. This approach provided both instructors and students with valuable opportunities to critically explore gAI's capabilities and limitations, shifting the focus from prohibition to informed use.

## **Conclusions and reflections**

Integrating instruction in AI literacy into rhetorical analysis assignments successfully reduced the incidence of unethical use of gAI in first year writing and provided a starting point for graduate TAs to work with their students on gAI. The reduction in unethical gAI usage that TAs observed highlights the value of proactively teaching AI literacy and embedding it into assignments that require critical analysis and comparison. As gAI continues to evolve, writing classrooms must adapt to prepare students not only to use such tools responsibly but also to critically evaluate their outputs.