



Integrating Generative AI into journalism education: A class on prompt design and development

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of generative AI presents both challenges and opportunities for journalism education. This article explores a classroom activity designed to help journalism students engage with and understand generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Copilot, within a journalistic context. The activity aims to equip students with the skills necessary to effectively use these technologies while fostering critical thinking around the ethical implications of AI in journalism. This approach aligns with contemporary pedagogical goals and offers a fresh perspective on integrating emerging technologies into journalism curricula.

When we think of generative artificial intelligence (AI) that produces text, ChatGPT is often the first tool that comes to mind. Within just one year, ChatGPT has gained approximately 1.7 billion users and over 100 million monthly active users. Recent data indicates that ChatGPT now has over 180.5 million monthly users, with ChatGPT Plus reaching 7.7 million active users (DeVon, 2023; Singh, 2024). While ChatGPT is the most popular generative AI tool for text-based content, it is not the only one; many other tools such as Claude, Copilot, and Jasper exist in the market (Gozalo-Brizuela & Garrido-Merchan, 2023).

The International Center for Journalists suggests that ChatGPT could be a helpful tool, but at the same time, ChatGPT can misguide journalists with false information. Chat GPT can help journalists with interview questions, but at the same time, it

could produce an answer without knowing the answer (Hochstein, 2023). It is also important to know how to use generative AI. People who know how to communicate properly with generative AI, known as prompt engineers and journalists, need to adopt this skill to take advantage of generative AI (Sloyan, 2023). Future journalists who are good with prompt engineering will benefit most from generative AI, such as ChatGPT. On the other hand, journalists unfamiliar with prompt engineering will get frustrated with generative AI tools. We must understand the difference between searching on a website (Google search) and conversing with generative AI. In Google search, if you search for something, it will give you all the available results in the dataset, and you can choose according to your domain-specific knowledge. In the case of generative AI, it will provide you with one answer to your question, and there is a chance that it will

give you a wrong answer. ChatGPT can provide false information, and journalists should be careful when they use ChatGPT answers (Adami, 2023).

As generative AI tools like ChatGPT become increasingly prevalent, journalism educators must prepare students to navigate these technologies responsibly. This classroom activity introduces journalism students to the concept of generative AI, highlighting its potential applications in content creation, the ethical challenges it presents, and the design of effective AI prompts. The exercise not only equips students with practical skills but also encourages them to critically evaluate the role of AI in journalism.

The innovative aspect of this activity lies in its direct engagement with generative AI—a rapidly evolving technology that has yet to be fully integrated into journalism curricula. By focusing on prompt design, a skill crucial for effective AI use, the activity offers a novel approach to teaching AI in journalism, moving beyond theoretical discussions to practical application. Additionally, the integration of ethical considerations ensures that students become not only technically proficient but also aware of the responsibilities associated with using AI in journalism.

This activity is meticulously designed to meet several course objectives, all aligned with the stages of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 2010). It is particularly well-suited for undergraduate students at intermediate to advanced levels, especially those focused on digital journalism, media ethics, or content production. To participate effectively, students will need access to generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, or similar platforms, as well as computers or devices capable of running these tools with a reliable internet connection.

The activity begins with students developing a foundational understanding of generative AI and its relevance to journalism, corresponding to the knowledge stage. As they advance to the comprehension and application stages, students will explore ethical considerations and apply their insights to craft AI prompts tailored specifically for journalistic use. For example, a student preparing to interview a vulnerable source such as a whistleblower may use generative AI to simulate scenarios or role play interactions. This allows them to refine questions, anticipate sensitive issues, and approach the interview with ethical awareness and respect. In the analysis phase, students will critically evaluate AI-generated content, assessing it for quality, accuracy, and adherence to ethical

standards. The activity concludes in the synthesis and evaluation stages, where students refine their AI prompts based on peer feedback and reflect on the broader implications of integrating AI into journalistic practices.

This activity encourages students to actively construct their understanding of generative AI through hands-on experience and critical reflection. It also aligns with experiential learning theories (Kolb, 2014), as students directly engage with AI tools, experimenting with prompt designs and learning from the outcomes. Educators should provide supplemental readings on AI ethics, journalism practices, and the technical aspects of AI tools to ensure that students have a solid foundation. By integrating ethical discussions, the activity fosters values-based education, challenging students to consider the broader societal impacts of their technological choices.

Traditional journalism courses may touch on the implications of new technologies, but this activity integrates the use of AI tools into the core of journalistic practice. By doing so, it offers a more holistic educational experience, where students develop both technical skills and ethical awareness. The focus on prompt design also adds a new dimension to journalism education, emphasizing the importance of precise and thoughtful interaction with AI technologies.

As generative AI continues to influence journalism, it is imperative that educators equip students with the tools and knowledge to use these technologies effectively and ethically. This classroom activity offers a comprehensive approach to integrating AI into journalism education, ensuring that students are prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly evolving media environment.

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Appendix: Classroom Activity Handout

Exploring Generative AI in Journalism

Objective: This classroom activity is designed to help journalism students engage with and understand generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Copilot, within a journalistic context. The activity aims to equip students with the skills necessary to effectively use these technologies while fostering critical thinking around the ethical implications of AI in journalism. While the example provided focuses on a specific topic, instructors are encouraged to adapt the activity to suit a variety of journalistic scenarios or subject areas.

Learning Goals:

- Develop AI prompts tailored to realistic journalistic scenarios.
- Anticipate sensitive or ethically complex aspects of an interview.
- Critically evaluate AI-generated responses for accuracy, quality, and ethical soundness.
- Refine interview strategies through peer feedback and reflective practice.
- Consider broader implications of using AI in journalistic work.

Scenario: You are a reporter preparing to interview a vulnerable source such as a whistleblower, refugee, survivor or anonymous informant. Your goal is to gather truthful information while protecting the source's safety and dignity and avoiding any potential harm.

Tool Instructions: For this activity, you will be using ChatGPT. Over the next 20 minutes, you will engage in an ongoing conversation with the tool to help refine your interview strategy. This is an interactive, iterative process meant to deepen your understanding through guided experimentation.

Step 1: Context and Preparation

Choose one of the following roles for your interview simulation:

- A whistleblower exposing corruption within a government agency.
- A refugee recounting their experience with displacement.
- A survivor of a traumatic event speaking for the first time.

Step 2: Drafting AI Prompt

(Start the conversation with ChatGPT)

Briefly write a prompt that outlines the context of your interview. Include details such as who the source

is, what the interview is about, and why the interview is being conducted. Then, based on your chosen scenario, write a prompt you would use to start the interview. Your prompts should aim to:

- Practice asking sensitive but essential questions.
- Anticipate emotional responses or hesitation.
- Explore respectful ways of handling difficult topics.

Step 3: Running the Simulation

Begin the simulation by engaging in a conversation with ChatGPT. Ask additional prompts and continue the dialogue to explore how the source might respond in a real interview situation. As you engage in the conversation, pay close attention to any potential ethical concerns that may arise, such as issues related to privacy, emotional distress, or imbalanced power dynamics. Throughout this process, continue refining your prompts to improve your approach to conducting sensitive interviews. Use each exchange to build a deeper understanding of how to handle difficult conversations with empathy, professionalism, and ethical consideration.

As you review the ChatGPT-generated responses, reflect on the following questions both independently and through follow-up questions within the conversation:

- Are the responses realistic and logically structured?
- Do they suggest any ethical concerns or emotional sensitivity?
- Is the language used respectfully and suitable for someone in a vulnerable position?

Step 4: Critical Evaluation

Write a 300-word evaluation reflecting on your experience with the ChatGPT-generated responses. Do not use ChatGPT or any AI tool to write this evaluation. Instead, focus on expressing your own thoughts and analysis. You may use ChatGPT later to help edit or fine-tune your writing for clarity and grammar.

In your evaluation, address the following:

- Strengths and weaknesses of the ChatGPT-generated responses.
- Ethical considerations that emerged in the simulation.
- How you might change your questions based on what you learned.

Step 5: Peer Feedback

- Submit your ChatGPT conversation by using the “Share” option and posting the link in the designated area on Blackboard (LMS).
- You will be assigned a peer’s conversation to read and review.
- Take about 10 minutes to complete this peer review activity.
- After that provide your feedback verbally during the class discussion with your assigned peer.
- In your feedback, include at least one specific insight or idea you gained from reading your peer’s prompts or approach.

Deliverables:

Submit the following two items:

- Your Critical Evaluation (300 words) reflecting on the ChatGPT simulation.
- A brief summary of your Peer Review, including the feedback you gave and one key takeaway from your peer’s work.

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