# AI essays lack personal engagement that characterises student writing, study finds



A recent study from the University of East Anglia (UEA) has provided insights into the ongoing debate surrounding the capabilities of artificial intelligence in writing, particularly when compared to the work of human students. The research compared essays produced by 145 university students with those generated by ChatGPT, a prominent AI language model, revealing significant differences in engagement and personal touch.

The study aimed to evaluate how effectively AI can mimic human writing, specifically focusing on what researchers termed "engagement markers." These markers include rhetorical questions, personal commentary, and direct appeals to the reader—elements that tend to enhance the interaction and persuasiveness of academic writing. According to Professor Ken Hyland from UEA's School of Education and Lifelong Learning, while the AI-generated essays were coherent and grammatically accurate, they noticeably lacked the personal engagement typically exhibited in students’ work.

Prof Hyland noted: "The ChatGPT essays, while linguistically fluent, were more impersonal. They mimicked academic writing conventions but did not inject personal perspectives into the text." The AI essays avoided using questions and limited personal commentary, resulting in a style that was deemed less engaging and persuasive. In contrast, student essays showcased a wide range of engagement strategies, which contributed to their effectiveness in argumentation.

The findings have broader implications for educators who have expressed concern over the potential misuse of AI writing tools among students. Prof Hyland remarked on the anxiety surrounding the possibility of students leveraging ChatGPT to complete their assignments, suggesting that such practices might undermine essential literacy and critical thinking skills. He emphasized the importance of developing critical literacy and ethical awareness in today's digital landscape, especially considering the current lack of reliable tools to detect AI-generated texts.

Despite highlighting the limitations of AI writing, the study does not propose the complete dismissal of such technologies in educational contexts. Instead, the researchers advocate for the use of tools like ChatGPT as supplementary teaching aids to promote learning rather than shortcuts that could compromise skill development. "When students come to school, college, or university, we're not just teaching them how to write; we're teaching them how to think—and that's something no algorithm can replicate," Prof Hyland added.

This research, conducted in collaboration with Prof Kevin Jiang of Jilin University, China, has been published in the journal Written Communication under the title "Does ChatGPT write like a student? Engagement markers in argumentative essays." The findings not only contribute valuable insights to the field of education but also underscore the evolving relationship between human creativity and artificial intelligence in writing.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/97952/> - This is the official publication of the University of East Anglia's study titled 'Does ChatGPT write like a student? Engagement markers in argumentative essays,' which compares essays produced by 145 university students with those generated by ChatGPT, revealing significant differences in engagement and personal touch.
2. <https://research-portal.uea.ac.uk/en/publications/does-chatgpt-write-like-a-student-engagement-markers-in-argumenta> - This page provides detailed information about the study conducted by the University of East Anglia, focusing on how AI-generated essays differ from human-written ones in terms of engagement markers like rhetorical questions and personal commentary.
3. <https://edintegrity.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1007/s40979-024-00161-8> - This article discusses a study comparing AI-generated essays with human-written ones, highlighting differences in content depth and the ability to analyze poetic features, supporting the claim that AI essays often lack the personal engagement found in student essays.
4. <https://mededu.jmir.org/2025/1/e62779> - This study examines the ability of experts to distinguish between AI-generated and human-written medical student essays, providing insights into the challenges educators face in detecting AI-generated content.
5. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10616290/> - This research compares human-written and ChatGPT-generated essays, noting differences in discourse markers and lexical diversity, which supports the claim that AI-generated essays lack the personal touch of student work.
6. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2304.14276> - This large-scale study assesses the quality of AI-generated essays compared to human-written ones, highlighting differences in linguistic characteristics and supporting the claim that AI essays often lack the personal engagement found in student essays.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMiekFVX3lxTE5fVmhWckNKbkpSMWhEd184bU0xZ2J1bkVLN2ZqM3JMODhOajBheUxHT1RicngzM0UyNjhZZnFMdlo2Y2JMQjdIZnpDb2pVRlYtWjZXQ05xeVVQbENzOEo3VmtCemRyOV92LVdxXzlkT2NzMDl3SVR5allB?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data