



USING CHATBOTS IN A DISCUSSION BOARD ASSIGNMENT

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Illustrations: Adobe stock



ABSTRACT

- Students in a Public Relations course were challenged to provide an answer to an ethical dilemma, using a chatbot.
- On the LMS discussion board, they posted three prompts and the bot's responses, followed by their own polished version of the final response.
- They were graded on effectiveness of prompts, understanding of issues and audience, and quality of the final version.
- The exercise, worth a total of five points, yielded both expected and unexpected results.

THE PROJECT

- Who? Students in the Ethics in Public Relations course (an on-line, graduate course in the Public Relations and Communication Management programs at McGill University's School of Continuing Studies)
- Why? 1. Generative AI in increasing use in the public relations industry. All uses have advantages, but also ethical and reputational risks. Students must know these.
 - content creation
 - media monitoring
 - audience engagement on social media
 - pitching journalists
 - crisis simulation
 - data analysis
- Why? 2. They're going to use it anyway. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.
- When? Fall 2023



THE ASSIGNMENT

“Read [this article](#) about a new PR practitioner struggling to remain honest.

Provide advice to the writer on how they can adapt to the workforce without acting unethically.

Add illustrations, graphics, or links to related material if it makes the post easier to follow.

The twist: Use Chat GPT to answer the question (or any other AI tool of your choice, e.g. Bing Chat).

Prompt 1: Explain to the chatbot what this assignment is and ask for an answer.

Prompt 2: Get an improved answer through specificity (e.g., tone, level of detail, word count, etc.).

Prompt 3: Further improve the answer by refining your prompt skills.

Save all three answers (including the prompts) and post to the discussion forum, labelling each accordingly. You may edit the third answer to improve the final response so that it answers the blogger’s concerns. The final response will be graded.”

WHY THIS FORMAT?

- Discussion posts are worth only five points each
- Assignment needed to be low risk (experimental)
- Discussion board on LMS allows students to
 - see each other's posts
 - respond to them
 - see others' responses
 - see instructor comments and suggestions





GRADING AND EVALUATION

Grading

The discussion posts were graded according to the following rubric:

- Effectiveness of prompts: 2 points
- Demonstrated understanding of the issues and the needs of the ultimate audience: 1.5 points
- Quality and usefulness of the final version: 1.5 points

Evaluation

- Instructor's comments in discussion thread visible to all students for guidance
 - language was non-judgmental
 - treated the assignment as a learning experience rather than an exercise in mastery of the chat tool
- Instructor's comments in evaluation section of LMS - feedback and grades seen only by the individual student
 - feedback focused more on what the writer could have done to improve the post.

THE RESULTS

Expected

- students showed different levels of comfort with chat apps
- different levels of writing/editing ability

Unexpected

- Some confusion about terminology, notably what “prompts” were.
- Many students forgot about who the ultimate audience was (i.e., the blogger in The Guardian), and aimed the answers at the instructor, using language more appropriate for an academic paper.
- Very few took advantage of the opportunity to polish the final version. In one case, an excellent student-written version used the chatbot only as an inspiration. Another made few changes. Most trusted the chatbot output far too much.
- Some included the instructor’s suggestions – that they use illustrations and graphics – in the prompt, causing the chat app to include them as advice to the blogger.

STUDENT COMMENTS IN ON-LINE EVALUATIONS

Question: The Chat GPT discussion thread was useful and should be used again (with or without minor changes).

Responses - percentage:

- :44.4 % agreed. 44.4% strongly agreed. 11.1% (one student) strongly disagreed.

Responses – comments:

- - If I could suggest one change, it would be greater analysis into the use of Chat GPT and other AI generative tools to correspond with the unit on AI. It was my first time using the tool and it was interesting, but it was difficult to grasp in context whether we were being encouraged or warned off of AI at the time. The later unit on AI made it more clear that it's a nuanced discussion with ethical implications for consideration.
- - I think as AI is slowly being used by everyone, that tackling this subject is mandatory.
- - omg YES! I use ChatGPT now for my personal task! thank you so much
- - Yes, because we need to learn more about this application and the new invention that is currently developing very quickly.



ASSESSMENT OF THE EXERCISE

- Overall, the assignment was useful in familiarizing students with generative AI -- a tool essential in the field of public relations – and in honing their skills with it. Good student feedback.
- Some adjustments, however, will be made before the next iteration of the exercise:
 - Include a single, comprehensive but concise guide to using chat apps (including glossary) on the LMS website, rather than leaving it to students to follow the instructions provided by their chosen chat app.
 - This will probably be less needed in future years, as ChatGPT and similar apps become more commonly used. However, future students will still vary in expertise for some time, if only because their experience was for personal use rather than for the workplace. This can still be the case for social media in general, despite years of widespread use. (N.B. This has since been done, with the aid of a chatbot!)



ASSESSMENT OF THE EXERCISE – PART 2

- Re-write the instructions to be clearer and more comprehensive
 - emphasizing the option to re-write the final version.
 - A reminder to respond to the blogger's expressed needs may not be included, as this should be obvious to a PR & CM student.
- Illustrate the importance of questioning the output of the chat app, by posting examples on the LMS website².



THANKS FOR LISTENING
QUESTIONS?



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

APPENDICES – MATERIAL PLANNED FOR LMS

INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDENTS ON USING GENERATIVE AI

(THANKS, CO-PILOT!)

A Student's Guide As a university student with a post-secondary degree, you're likely familiar with the challenges of academic writing. Whether it's a research paper, essay, or creative piece, the pressure to produce high-quality content can be daunting. Fortunately, recent advancements in artificial intelligence have introduced powerful tools that can assist you in your writing journey. In this guide, we'll explore how to leverage language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT effectively while being aware of their limitations.

What Are Language Models?

Language models, such as ChatGPT, are sophisticated algorithms that learn patterns from vast amounts of text data. They can generate coherent and contextually relevant sentences, making them valuable companions for writers. Here's how you can make the most of them:

1. Crafting a Good Prompt

Be Specific: When interacting with an LLM, provide clear instructions. Ambiguous prompts may lead to unexpected or irrelevant responses. Specify the topic, tone, and any specific requirements.

Context Matters: Include relevant context. If you're writing about climate change, mention key terms like "global warming," "carbon emissions," or "renewable energy."

Crafting Effective Prompts

Creating effective prompts is crucial for getting accurate and relevant responses from ChatGPT. Here are some tips:

Be Specific: Instead of asking, "Tell me about World War II," try "Describe the impact of the Battle of Stalingrad during World War II." Specific prompts yield better results.

Provide Context: Give background information. For instance, "Discuss the ethical implications of gene editing in human embryos" is more effective than a vague "Gene editing."

Use Keywords: If you want a poem, include the word "poem" in your prompt. If you need a summary, mention "summary."

Iterate: If the initial response isn't what you expected, refine your prompt. Experiment with different phrasings until you get the desired output.

INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDENTS ON USING GENERATIVE AI – PART 2

(THANKS, CO-PILOT!)

2. The Power and Limitations of LLMs

The Good:

Creativity: LLMs can generate imaginative content, from poetry to fictional narratives.

Productivity: They speed up the writing process by suggesting ideas and sentences.

Inspiration: Use them to overcome writer's block or explore new angles.

The Caveats:

Accuracy: LLMs don't always get it right. Verify facts independently.

Hallucination: They might invent information that doesn't exist. Be cautious.

Bias: LLMs learn from existing data, which can perpetuate biases. Review critically.

Context Blindness: They lack real-world understanding. Provide context explicitly.

3. Responsible Usage

Inform Your Instructor: If you use LLM-generated content, disclose it. Honesty is crucial.

Fact-Checking: Double-check facts, figures, and references. LLMs can't guarantee accuracy.

Polishing: LLMs provide raw material. Polish the text, improve coherence, and refine arguments.

Plagiarism: Avoid copying verbatim. Use LLMs as tools, not substitutes for original thought.

4. The Human Touch

Collaborate: LLMs enhance your work, but human judgment is irreplaceable.

Editing: Revise, edit, and proofread. LLMs won't catch all errors.

Critical Thinking: Engage with LLM-generated content critically. Don't accept everything at face value.

Remember, LLMs are powerful allies, but they're not infallible. Use them wisely, and always prioritize your own understanding and creativity. Happy writing! ✍️🌟

EXAMPLE:

Elizabeth's prompt: Could you please generate a 200-word biography of Elizabeth Hirst, MA, APR, FCPRS, in Montreal, Quebec, including her recent publications after the year 2000.

ChatGPT's response:

Elizabeth Hirst, MA, APR, is a seasoned public relations professional based in Montreal, Quebec, with a distinguished career spanning **over two decades**. Holding a Master of Arts degree and accredited in Public Relations (APR), Elizabeth is recognized for her expertise in strategic communications, media relations, and crisis management.

Throughout her career, Elizabeth has made significant contributions to the field of public relations, both in academia and practice. **As an accomplished author, she has penned several influential publications since the turn of the millennium, focusing on emerging trends and best practices in the PR industry. Her recent works include "Navigating the Digital Landscape: Strategies for Effective Online Communication" (2015), which explores the impact of digital media on PR strategies, and "Crisis Communication: A Proactive Approach" (2019), a comprehensive guide to preparing and managing crises in the modern era.**

Same question, five minutes later:

Elizabeth Hirst, MA, APR, FCPRS, is a distinguished public relations professional based in Montreal, Quebec, renowned for her extensive experience and expertise in strategic communication and reputation management. With a Master of Arts degree and accreditation in Public Relations (APR), Elizabeth's career spans **over three decades**, marked by outstanding contributions to the field.

Highlighted text indicates errors by Chatbot.

EXAMPLES OF USES OF AI IN PR (THANKS, BING!)

- Creating various types of content, including press releases, blog posts, and social media updates.
- Scanning vast amounts of media coverage to identify trends, sentiment, and influencers relevant to a client or brand.
- Engaging with audiences, answering inquiries, and providing information through chatbots on websites, social media platforms, and messaging apps.
- Creating personalized pitches for journalists and influencers by analyzing their past articles, preferences, and social media activity, increasing the likelihood of securing media coverage and building relationships with key contacts.
- Simulating potential crisis scenarios based on historical data and current trends. PR teams can use these simulations to practice their response strategies, identify weaknesses, and refine crisis communication plans.
- Analyzing data from various sources to predict upcoming trends, events, or issues that may impact a client's reputation, allowing PR professionals to capitalize on opportunities or mitigate risks.