

AI Writing and Beyond

November 5, 2024

Last week, I wrote 269 words for the back cover of a book I recently completed. After some edits, I thought it was a solid piece. A few days ago, these words were fed into an artificial intelligence (AI) package by my editor. Nothing else was given to the AI software, just my write-up. In fractions of a second, the AI code produced 240 words for this script that were clearly better than mine.

I had read many articles about the power of AI. But with this personal experience, it was evident that AI was overcoming my writing imperfections with some very smart software that grinded away toward perfection. AI was executing its code to cover up my flaws.

It was fascinating and sobering. I was wondering what the AI package would do with the manuscript of the book? I could have submitted my copy to the AI software, but I did not.

Truth is, I did not want to see the results of this process, because I already knew the outcome. And my ego also got in the way. The thought came to mind that my writing creativity, such as it is, could be rendered irrelevant by AI. ...As well as an immense number of jobs, occupations, and lifestyles of many humans.

This experience put me into a funk. Not only personally but beyond my own self-interests. I had been reading about AI for many years, but from a layman's perspective. Now, I had before me actual proof, not someone else's experience or opinions, of the power of AI.

My past experience as a software programmer led to my interest in AI. During this time, I became concerned with the fact that no one really had a handle of what AI was doing, much less what it might do in the future. So, I wrote four articles about AI, describing its power, its positive potential, and its potential dangers. (If you wish to read these articles, send me an email at UBlack7510@aol.com, and I'll send you links for downloading PDF copies.)

Tip of the Iceberg

We are at the tip of the AI iceberg. The technology is relatively new, yet growing in use at a phenomenal rate. Each day, announcements are made about AI being used in more systems and applications. It is becoming nearly ubiquitous.

Along with this growth, various technical and political associations in the Western world are issuing guidelines on how to use AI safely. I refer you to <https://www.credo.ai/responsible-ai/iso-42001> for information on the ISO/IEC 42001 standards. They are setup to establish "...international foundational practices for organizations to develop AI responsibly and effectively, while promoting public trust in AI systems with a standard that can eventually be certified through a third-party audit."

It is too soon to know if third-party audits will solve the problems inherent in AI technology. For now, I stand by the points I made in my previous articles. As well, for more information, I also refer you to <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/heres-why-ai-may-be-extremely-dangerous-whether-its-conscious-or-not/>.

For the remainder of this article, let's return to the idea of AI, the software writer, replacing Uyless Black, the human writer.

Growing use of AI by Students

A recent survey by the Digital Education Council found that 86 percent of students use AI in their studies. Of these students, 28 percent use AI to paraphrase documents, and 24 percent use AI to create first drafts.¹ Another study states: In the spring of 2023, 27 percent of students used AI for their course work. By the fall of 2023, the number had risen to 49 percent.²

Writing Increases Intelligence

I am smarter than I was thirty years ago. Not just because of my day-to-day experiences, although they are certainly factors in my mental development. This came about largely because of my writing. Year after year, day after day, I worked at writing.

Yes, worked. Writing is not easy. It takes work, mental work, to compose script that is intelligible. If not, why are so many students, cited earlier, using AI instead of their own minds to write?

If I am to create trustworthy prose, writing forces me to spend more time and effort...more work...to compose sentences, to select the words for the sentences, such that the output is reflective of what is going on in my gray matter and intelligible to a reader. In short, writing requires thinking, and thinking improves my mind. As it does for everyone.

As Paul Graham, a computer scientist, said, “The reason so many people have trouble writing is that it’s fundamentally difficult. To write well, you have to think clearly, and thinking clearly is hard.”³

The Rusting Away of Mental Iron

The well-worn adage, “If you don’t use it, you’ll lose it.” Pertains to the growing dependence on AI. Those students, as well as this writer, will lose their ability to write. And with this loss, their ability to *mentally work*. Our brains rust if not used. They atrophy.

But the AI phenomenon goes beyond mental rusting. It is going to influence how we humans work and play---live---in the future. As mentioned, we are at the tip of an iceberg of unknown depth and unknown consequences of dependency on AI.

One of my colleagues wrote, “It concerns me that people may...stop writing and we will miss the basic intelligence of mankind. ...Imperfections are what makes (life) interesting.”

Based on AI effortlessly “fixing-up” my book’s back matter, it could be that AI perfecting our imperfections might lead us humans toward a less interesting life. No writing for Uyless? I suppose there’s always Netflix. I’ve read that many of today’s movie scripts are being prepared by AI. ...There’s no escape.

¹ *HomeWorld News*, November 3, 2024. This reference does not explain which students (university, etc.) were in the survey.

² <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/tech-innovation/artificial-intelligence/2023/10/31/most-students-outrunning-faculty-ai-use>. This reference does not explain which students (university, etc.) were in the survey.

³ *Ibid.*, *HomeWorld News*.