

As AI develops, we need to rethink how we assess (i.e. modes of assessment) and what we assess (learning outcomes) to minimise the risk of AI-generated answers and to encourage authentic, meaningful, student engagement with assessment.

This guidance forms part of a broader package of CLT support for course teams to review their assessment strategies. It is important that changes to assessment are grounded in pedagogical principles ([LBU Course Principles](#)) rather than being driven by technological developments. However, the rapid growth in availability and functionality of generative AI technologies means that we need, as a priority, to address our current academic practices to ensure that we are validly assessing student attainment.

As we move towards different modes of assessment, it is sensible, in the **immediate** term, to rework current modes of assessment. This guidance aims to support course teams currently using essays as part of their assessment strategy, to make small adjustments to their essay questions so they become less vulnerable to AI-generated answers.

The guidance is created based on current AI tools and their capabilities. AI technology is advancing rapidly making some of the suggested changes less impactful over time. The changes suggested should be seen as immediate, short-term response while more significant changes are considered and planned.

Craft essay titles that take account of AI capabilities and limitations

In the short term, to effectively rework essay questions to be less AI vulnerable we need to understand the current capabilities and limitations of AI. Generative AI tools, such as CoPilot, can generate coherent and relevant text-based responses to prompts. However, currently, these models often lack deep understanding, critical thinking, and personal insight. It is sensible to amend essay questions to focus more on these areas of AI weakness (Revell, T., Yeadon, W., Cahilly-Bretzin, G. *et al*, 2024). While asking students different questions, the skills and requirements should still reflect the academic level being assessed and that any change to assessment wording should still work towards to the module/level/course learning outcomes.

1. Focus on higher-order skills

Essay questions should emphasise higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These skills demand that students go beyond mere regurgitation of information and demonstrate their ability to connect concepts, critique arguments, and propose original ideas. For example, instead of asking "What are the key points of Hamlet's soliloquy?", a more AI-resistant question would be "Analyse how Hamlet's soliloquy reflects his internal conflict and contributes to the play's overall theme."

2. Include a requirement for personal reflection and experiences

Incorporating elements of personal reflection and experience can make essay questions less susceptible to AI-generated responses. Questions that ask students to relate course material to their own lives or opinions can provide answers that AI cannot easily replicate. For instance, a question like "Describe a time when you faced a moral dilemma similar to a character in Hamlet. How did you resolve it?" or "Describe a time when you encountered a contractual issue in a personal or professional context. How did you resolve it, and what legal principles guided your decision?" requires personal insight and a specific situation that AI can struggle with.

3. Use questions that require different viewpoints

Open-ended questions that require students to view the questions from different viewpoints can reduce the likelihood of AI-generated answers. These questions encourage students to explore different perspectives and provide in-depth analysis. "Compare two perspectives on the environmental impact of industrialisation. Which one do you feel more aligned with and why?"

4. Incorporate multimedia elements into the question

Multimedia elements, such as images, videos, or audio clips, can be integrated into essay questions rather than just text-based sources. This approach requires students to engage with different types of media that may not be as easy for AI to process. A question like "Analyse the portrayal of Anne Frank's character in the provided video clip from a film. How does this interpretation differ from the book that this film is based on and other contemporary sources?"

Provide clear guidance on what to include:

Providing more specific requirements for an assessment can also help make the use of AI less suitable and can make assessments more inclusive for all types of learners.

1. Provide clear instructions

Giving clear and detailed instructions when providing the assessment brief can help all students understand the expectations for their submissions. Specific information that outlines the required components can help reduce AI usage. For example, "In your essay, discuss the following points: the significance of I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, its impact on the audience at the time, and its wider place in history." rather than just "discuss the impact of I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." or "Imagine you are a public health official addressing an outbreak of a new contagious disease. What steps would you take to control its spread, and what public health principles would guide your actions?"

2. Ask for supporting evidence

Specific criteria that require students to provide supporting evidence from the text or other reliable and recognised sources can make it harder for AI to generate plausible answers. By asking students to back up their claims with specific examples from the reading list can identify that students have engaged with the provided material. For example, "Use at least three quotations from 'Hamlet' to support your analysis of his character development."

3. Use comparative analysis

Asking students to compare and contrast different elements, can foster deeper engagement with the material and is a much smaller range of information that an AI tool can use, relying more on the student's own interpretation. These questions challenge students to identify similarities and differences and draw connections between concepts. A comparative analysis question might be "Compare and contrast the structures of DNA and RNA. How do these differences affect their functions in genetic processes? Support your points with specific referenced examples?"

4. Use problem-solving scenarios

Integrating problem-solving scenarios into essay questions can encourage critical thinking and originality. A problem-based scenario requires students to apply their knowledge to hypothetical situations, making it difficult for AI to generate appropriate responses. "Picture yourself as a performance coach evaluating Rachel Reeves' actions and behaviours during the recent Spring statement. What personality traits and body language indicators did she exhibit, and would you suggest any ways to improve the performance in future situations?"

Bibliography

<https://rl.talis.com/3/beckett/lists/7E26D3F4-C102-3FDA-D0B3-D000A17A5A83.html?lang=en-GB>