

## WSJ Print Edition

*The machine can bolster your thinking if you know what to delegate and what you need to do yourself.*

# AI Makes Me a Better Writer

By Allison Stanger

Is artificial intelligence the enemy of creativity? It doesn't have to be. AI didn't write this article, but it helped me write it. I have been writing with AI since the release of ChatGPT in 2022. Here are some pointers I've developed:

- Never outsource the truly important parts. My argument, my structure, my memories and thoughts—those are mine to write, because they are what writing is for. Properly understood, writing is a means to learning who you are and what you value. The father of the bride who lets a chatbot draft his toast has hollowed out the ritual.
  - Use the machine as a reader, not a writer. The most useful thing AI does for a writer is adversarial. It is a fast, tireless, unflinching critic that will tell you your best evidence is thinner than you think and hand you the objection you skipped. I ask it to attack my drafts, defend the opposing view, and flag every transition that limps. Then I decide which complaints land and rework the piece to address them. Writing is thinking made visible: The sentence that resists you does so because the thought inside it is unfinished.
  - Treat every factual claim AI conveys as suspicious. The more perfect the find, the more careful I am to check it. A quotation that fits your argument exactly, from a source nobody else has ever cited, is either a gift or a fabrication. Only the original document can tell you which. I ran a full fact-check of my forthcoming book with two different AI systems. One flagged doubtful citations, the other assesses each flag, and I adjudicated every call against my archived sources, across 566 end notes.
- The machines failed in opposite directions, often instructively. When one invented author names, the inventions weren't random; they drifted toward the demographic center of the training data, quietly erasing the female and nonwhite thinkers who had written the sources. At one point both systems insisted that something I had personally experienced never happened. When push came to shove, the human with the archive was always right.
- Hand the machine the mechanical work without apology. Format--ting, finding repetition, smoothing transitions, the structural diagnosis of a chapter that won't cohere—this is where the hours go. Writers have always had to break the spell of composition to inspect their creation's seams. With a machine on call, you can stay inside the dream longer, spending more time on the work only you can do. Make yourself a cup of coffee while the machine flags your shortcomings and be courageous about facing them.
  - Know your own voice and defend it. These systems have tics—em-dashes sprinkled everywhere, flattery, frequent resort to antithetical contrast—repeated until they become wallpaper, but the problem is greater than that. A machine has never gone anywhere or been anyone. It can't supply the trace of a particular consciousness making particular choices, which is what voice is. If a sentence could have been written by anyone, it was written by no one.

AI, used well, can strengthen thinking. When computers surpassed chess grandmasters 30 years ago, humans didn't stop playing; they trained with the machines, and the generation raised on them is the strongest field of human players in history. AI can have the same effect on writing if writers use it wisely.

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