

Academic Writing Support in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Perspectives from Durban University of Technology Writing Centre Tutors

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed higher education, particularly academic writing support. This study explores the changing writing centre practice in the AI era through tutors' experiences with students navigating new digital resources. Academic writing has metamorphosed into a contested site where traditional literacy practices intersect with AI-mediated knowledge-generating processes, as students increasingly utilise platforms like ChatGPT, Claude, and Microsoft Co-Pilot for diverse writing tasks. This widespread adoption has generated debate on both developmental opportunities and risks, including concerns about academic integrity, critical thinking erosion, and overreliance on AI-generated content. This paper presents insights from interviews with nine tutors at the Durban University of Technology Writing Centre, who primarily work with students from the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment and the Faculty of Applied Sciences. These tutors occupy a unique vantage point, engaging students in consultations and observing emerging practices firsthand. Through their reflections, this study explores how AI tools shape students' writing processes and authorship perceptions; the many ways students utilise AI, from productive to problematic applications; and how tutors integrate AI into their practice, transforming traditional "writing companionship" in technology-mediated environments. This research provides ground-level insights into the practical challenges and opportunities that AI presents for academic literacy development in South African higher education.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Academic Writing; Writing Centre Tutoring; Higher Education; Generative AI Tools