CHAPTER 24.

DISRUPTING THE WRITING PROCESS: HOW GENERATIVE AI HELPS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES COMMUNICATE

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Writing centers use the writing process to help students with academic work (Harris; Indriyani; LaClare and Franz). While writing processes can change from center to center, they typically follow a similar pathway from idea generation to proofreading. However, for students with disabilities, this linear approach to writing can become frustrating when disability interrupts the process (Wood 134). For example, a student with ADHD may struggle with tasks requiring executive functioning skills like organization, time management, and task prioritization (Rodden para. 4). This creates a significant barrier to the first phase of the writing process, which can involve scheduling and organizing, making it difficult for students with executive dysfunction to even get started. James Southworth writes that "reorienting writing pedagogy to the process of writing rather than the final product improves student learning—after all, that's where the thinking happens" (para. 8). Thus, to better support students with disabilities, I suggest a flexible approach that focuses on the recursive nature of writing rather than a linearwriting process (Abbruscato; Warne). Importantly, this approach incorporates generative AI (GenAI) as an assistive technology (Farhah et al.) so that students can take control of their own writing process through choice, creativity, and autonomy. Furthermore, while GenAI has its controversies, it can offer students with disabilities significant opportunities for efficiency with the writing process (Goldman et al.). Reframing the writing process as an inclusive and effectual tool in concert with GenAI helps counter ableist pedagogies (Dembsey) that create learning barriers for students with disabilities.

THE WRITE SITE

I am a writing specialist with Athabasca University's Write Site. Athabasca University (AU) is a publicly funded and accredited Canadian university offering

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online learning. Established in the town of Athabasca, Alberta in 1970 as the first Canadian university specializing in distance education, AU now provides online postsecondary learning to over 40,000 students worldwide. AU's writing center, the Write Site, comprises of a team of five faculty members with backgrounds in English, cultural studies and critical theory, education, linguistics, creative writing, and literary studies. Since the flexibility, accessibility, and comfort of online learning is an attractive option for students with disabilities (Reyes and Meneses), we developed a program with our Accessibility Services to support students with disabilities on a prioritized and ongoing basis. Supporting students with disabilities at the Write Site inspired my doctoral research. As a candidate in AU's Doctor of Education program, I am researching how to reframe ableist writing center practices and pedagogies that impact students with disabilities. I am interested in moving away from the dependence-independence binary that permeates writing center pedagogical literature (Dembsey) in that, through writing center engagement, a student can achieve academic independence as a writer. For students with disabilities, this may be unrealistic and should not be a focus when coaching students. In response to these long-held writing center orthodoxies (Jacobs), I designed a pedagogical approach called "parasupport" (Figure 24.1), inspired by Paralympians who train with supports but participate in the sports on their own.

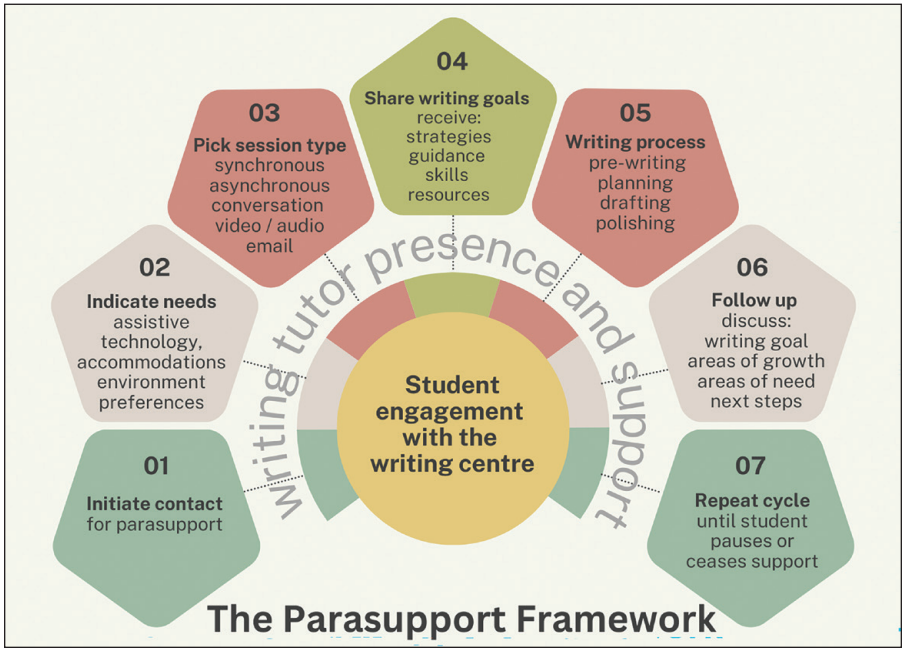

Figure 24.1. The Parasupport model.

In this sense, writing tutors do not determine the independence of a student, but rather the student determines what they need from the writing center. This promotes autonomy while acknowledging that some disabilities require lifelong support. This does not diminish the student's academic capabilities, but it does make "independence" an irrelevant goal. Disability "is part of being human" ("Disability") in that able-bodiedness can be precarious and presumptive. Disability can be intermittent, late-onset, congenital, or chronic; can co-occur with other disabilities; can describe identity or not; and likely will appear in most people's lives at some point. The multidimensionality of disabilities can simultaneously affect numerous domains like neurodevelopmental, physical, sensory, learning, and psychosocial ("Disability Types"). As well, hidden/invisible disabilities, where one's disabilities may not be discernable to others, making the person appear able-bodied (*Invisible Disabilities*), can cause stress due to feeling compelled to disclose alongside worries about marginalization and labelling (Hendry et al.). To this end, disability is a reality of the human biological experience and not an exception, and it is up to the individual to determine what it means to them and their learning and what they choose to disclose. Understanding this in the context of the writing center should encourage more inclusive pedagogical practices that resist assumptions that a student needs to be independent (Dembsey) or that a student is "normal" because they have not disclosed their hidden disability.

THE LINEAR WRITING PROCESS

As with the linear move from dependence to independence, the writing process also moves linearly from idea generation to submission. This process assumes that students can proceed through the steps one at a time, resulting in a finished product (Olive 126). For example, Figure 24. 2 shows our traditional writing process wheel.

This process progresses in three stages. The planning stage includes understanding assignment instructions, planning and pre-writing, developing ideas through research, and outlining. Next comes drafting, followed by revising, editing, and proofreading the final draft. For students who struggle with those initial steps requiring executive functioning skills like time management, scheduling, and organization, this writing process proves challenging to get off the ground. This can discourage students and promote negative coping mechanisms like procrastination, worry, and academic anxiety (Fatima).

Figure 24.2. The writing process at the Write Site (Athabasca University).

ALTERNATIVE WRITING PROCESSES, UDL, AND GenAI

The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) include multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression ("UDL Guidelines"). Ultimately, UDL offers choice, variety, and inclusive opportunities to customize learning (McMahon and Firestone 66). GenAI can assist students and challenge prevailing ideas that steer pedagogical choices in the writing center through such principles (McMahon and Firestone 70). We can offer flexible approaches to writing that do not rely on linear progressions but are inclusive to diverse ways of thinking and, even more importantly, listen to what the student articulates for their optimal learning.

Figure 24.3 illustrates multiple engagement points conceptualizing the core principles of UDL with the elements of the writing process. Aside from "refine", students can begin where they like, or with the easiest or most creative element to them.

Each element is augmented with GenAI choices to help with efficiency, which means this representation must be organic to reflect the proliferation of emerging technology. For example, the element "plan" suggests GenAI schedulers and task management software to assist with the time management of academic work. This is just one example of how to disrupt the writing process to offer choice in both interacting with the elements and assistive technologies that help make learning successful, while utilizing UDL principles (McMahon and Firestone 71).

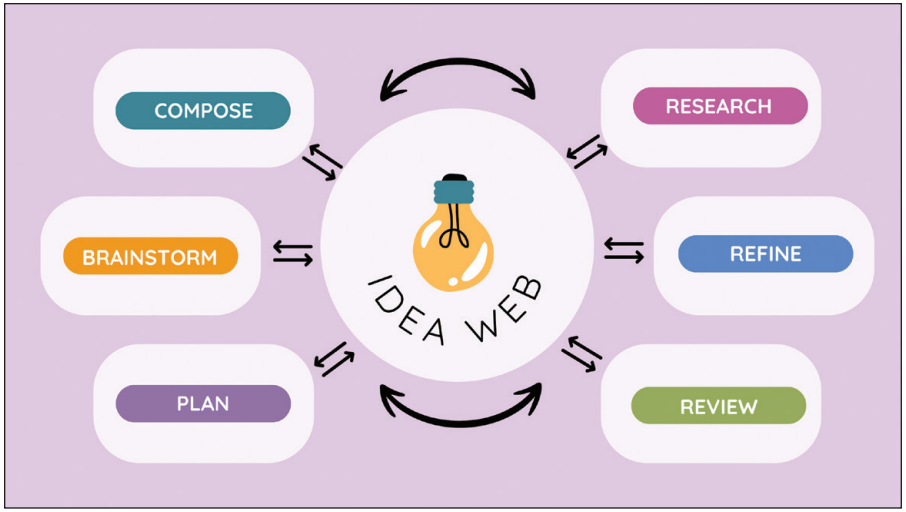

Figure 24.3. The idea web.

DISRUPTING THE WRITING PROCESS WITH GENAI

While GenAI deserves scrutiny for its usage in post-secondary learning, viewing it as a negative evolution of technology underestimates its capabilities, particularly with people facing learning barriers (see Chapter 27 for a discussion on how this can be a discriminatory attitude). Instead, proactive GenAI literacy can show students how informed and responsible use can benefit their learning without compromising their academic integrity (Benjamins). This shift toward a proactive engagement with GenAI implies that students become active participants in ongoing GenAI literacy education to make informed decisions about its use in an academic context. Further to this, critical thinking and dialogue around the problematic issues of GenAI is central to GenAI literacy. A starting place for students is the Modern Language Association (MLA) and Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Joint Task Force on Writing and AI's Student Guide to AI Literacy. This guide lists objectives to promote critical thinking for the "literate users of GenAI" (*Student Guide*), which includes necessary conversations about discriminatory and biased algorithms that sustain marginalization of oppressed groups like those with disabilities (Gama; Hacker et al.; Mack et al.).

GenAI literacy must include conversations around voice, particularly for those who identify as members of marginalized communities. ChatGPT can produce overwrought and wordy descriptions using vocabulary that may not reflect the nuance of an individual's natural way of communicating. Having conversations with students about the importance of retaining one's unique

voice and not allowing GenAI to subsume theirs is essential (Meyer). Wiebke Hutiri et al. list a taxonomy of harms to voice with GenAI, including identity theft, cultural dispossession, and collusion (366). GenAI produces content so efficiently that it will certainly advance the efficacy of assistive technologies (Welker), making it even more critical to encourage students to prioritize their unique voice over a generated one. Emphasizing one's authentic, writerly voice in the age of GenAI needs to be a critical priority for GenAI literacy in the writing center (Lubin).

THE IDEA WEB WITH GENAI ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

While traditional assistive technologies have clear benefits for postsecondary learners (McNicholl et al.), they can also be inefficient, like with the time needed to correct inaccurate translations. Integrating GenAI technologies into a UDL-based non-linear writing process offers students the opportunity to develop their own writing process through creativity when the linear writing process seems too "rigid" and "prescript[ive]" (Anderson 26). Thus, while the description of the idea web suggests technologies in this current moment, writing centers need to be "agile and adaptable, continuously evaluating and refining their AI integration strategies to keep pace with advancements" (Esfahani 1365).

COMPOSE

Using speech to text (STT) or dictation can help with drafting the essay. Speaking in one's natural voice helps create a defined writer's voice, a key goal for generating original work. GenAI speech tools like Voicebox assert that they can streamline dictation and, as a result, half the errors of traditional STT ("*Introducing Voicebox*"). As well, GenAI's realistic voices do not sound robotic (Kolekar et al.), making it an efficient tool for students relying on speech to compose. Now, with composition comes concerns with plagiarism, and the writing center can play a central role by prioritizing conversations around academic integrity and using GenAI responsibly. Countering ableist pedagogies in the writing center can help students with disabilities see themselves as valuable and contributing members to the academic world. Building confidence through parasupport can help students resist the temptation to use GenAI to produce work and value their own voice and ideas.

BRAINSTORM

Most writing processes begin with the idea generation stage, an innovative and creative time if a student is passionate about their coursework and topic.

However, a student with ADHD may generate too many ideas and then struggle with overwhelm and frustration in reducing the choices into a distilled vision for their paper. This shows how the linear writing process can get stuck on the first step if a student over-generates ideas and cannot figure out how to discern the most feasible option from the crowd. Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who struggle with social anxiety can use GenAI chatbots as a simulated social tool. Using GenAI-powered visual graphic organizers can also help students arrange and organize their ideas in a visual way that can help build meaning. Large Language Models (LLMS) can be used for brainstorming by grouping concepts, creating summaries, and ordering ideas (Zhao et al.). Tools such as these make this creative stage more heightened and exciting while promoting metacognition (Tankelevitch et al.). This exemplifies the imaginative ways ideas can be strengthened with GenAI but without taking over the student's creative license.

Plan

Introducing students to time or task management software may help with the organizing stage of the writing process. There are several free and paid task and time managers with GenAI technologies that can help streamline due dates and task deadlines. Using an assignment calculator to break down the tasks with deadlines and then importing those dates into a task manager like Notion or Clickup, can help students struggling with academic anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, or executive dysfunction feel more in control.

Students facing a new assignment type, like a critique or a literature review, can use a LLM as an initial tool to learn more about it. They can explore the definitions of action verbs that appear in the instructions and make it accessible and easier to understand. Students who experience difficulties organizing information can explore outline generators with GenAI, playing with different orientations to see which appeals to them the most. In this way, GenAI acts as a supplemental communication tool to describe, construct, and explain confusing or obtuse academic content. This way, students can then come to the writing center with a foundation of knowledge, of course understanding issues of inaccuracy with GenAI (Jensen). Some students with disabilities may also experience inflexible thinking (Hollander and Ferretti), which can result in rigid scheduling and all-or-nothing thinking. While this behaviour may also benefit from psychological treatment, writing centers can help students negotiate inflexible thinking with a strategy brainstorm session, using GenAI to generate agile schedules, and instruction around the iterative nature of the writing process.

Research

Students who struggle with memory retention can use GenAI to understand complex academic literature. A student of mine with a traumatic brain injury would copy and paste articles into ChatGPT and ask it to bullet the main points or to simplify sections. This made it easier for the student to digest the main points in a single study session and have a reference artefact they could return to when interacting with the article in the future. Once the student was attuned to the gist of the article, they were able to return to it and absorb more information instead of continually feeling lost in the chaos of academic jargon. Using ChatGPT to break articles down into main points, key terminology, top findings, isolate recommendations or list limitations in a concise way can help students with reading barriers, short-term memory loss or processing difficulties with retention and comprehension. To assist further, writing centers can share best practices with students using GenAI as a research tool. For example, providing students with guidelines like effective prompting, limiting bias, engaging GenAI in dialogue, and "iterating and refining" (Le), gives students the literacy to conduct responsible research.

Refine

Conversations around inaccuracies in GenAI editing tools (Jensen) can help students make informed choices as they revise their work. For example, students need to be careful about paraphrasing tools on GenAI editing platforms, as this can result in plagiarism. As well, students should understand that GenAI is not the only way to get feedback during the revision process—the writing center can provide real and human insights to help the student refine their work by sharing revision, editing, and proofreading skills, so that the student can try them on their own.

Tutors can use GenAI tools to help communicate feedback, like Speechify for students who prefer oral feedback, Deaf AI, which translates real-time speech into sign language, or Be My Image, an image-to-text/speech technology for students with low vision or visual impairments. For students with intellectual disabilities or language disorders like aphasia, "real-time captioning, virtual reality, and brain-computer interfaces" (Almufareh et al.), in addition to using ChatGPT to simplify text and create checklists, can help students manage feedback. While this is nowhere near an exhaustive list, it provides a snapshot of how GenAI may help students and tutors communicate at a more efficient level.

Review

Reviewing occurs throughout the writing process to remind students of assignment instructions, rubric categories, or feedback from general readers. This helps to keep the student on task and meeting the assignment's criteria. GenAI can play a significant role here, from creating checklists in task managers, explaining rubric vocabulary through chat engines, or asking LLMs to summarize feedback, make feedback more concise, or group and categorize feedback. These artefacts can help students with memory retention challenges or inattention to have an easily consumable record of tasks. Writing tutors can demonstrate how to use GenAI for these specific tasks in a responsible way. Of course, this may come down to institutional policy, in which GenAI taskforces or academic integrity committees would be enriched by including a writing center representative.

RECURSIVE WRITING

The idea web emulates the recursive nature of writing in that writing does not necessarily follow a linear process but is one of repetition, movement, and plasticity (Segarra). This becomes a metacognitive process where, through multiple rounds of drafting and revision, the student may realize that revisiting a writing phase changes how they think about another, deepening and enriching their understanding of knowledge. S. Scott Graham argues that, like the writing process, the engagement cycle with GenAI can also be recursive: "AI provides the opportunity to add multiple dimensions of recursion where prompt-engineering, output curation, fact-checking, and revision become an orthogonal dimension to traditional writing and learning processes" (166). In addition to a conceptual framework illustrating the recursive writing process, Graham created a similar one (see Figure 24.4) that cycles through the stages of prompt, revise, fact-check, and curate (167).

Integrating a GenAI process into the larger writing process creates a simple yet dialogic understanding of how to engage with GenAI recursively. It acknowledges the use of GenAI as an assistive technology, but one that requires critical thinking and GenAI literacy. The writing center can help with this skill acquisition so that students with disabilities have the freedom to drift between elements as they acquire, consider, and disseminate knowledge, as well as understand how to navigate GenAI in a productive and ethical manner. Developing this fluency can help effectuate how students with disabilities communicate their ideas.

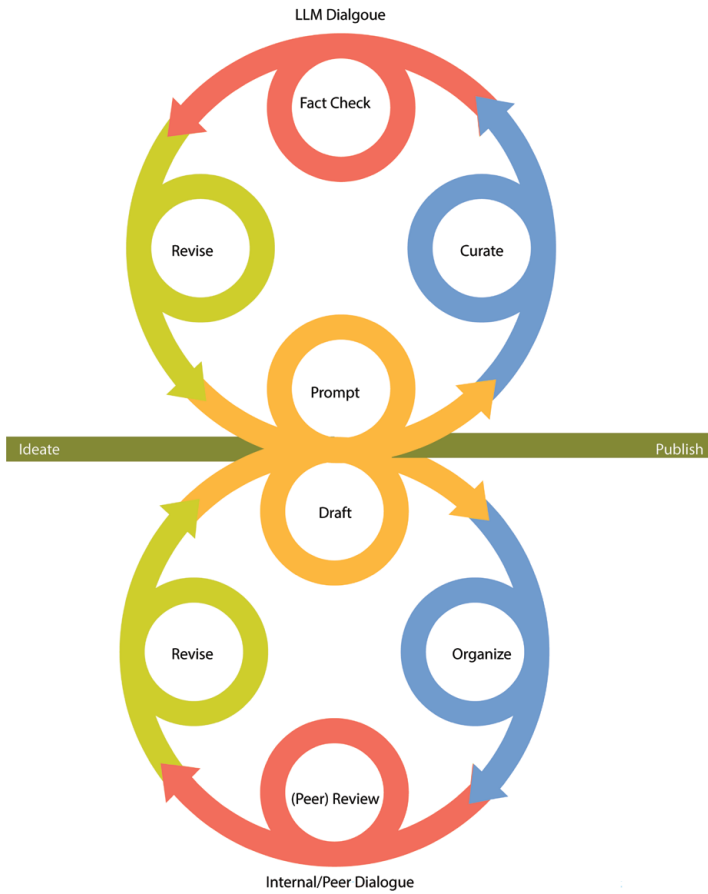

Figure 24.4. A multidimensional recursive AI-assisted writing process from S. Scott Graham's "Post-Process but Not Post-Writing: Large Language Models and a Future for Composition Pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

Allowing for flexibility and individualization with the writing process promotes efficiency with academic writing for students facing learning barriers. To then view GenAI in an assistive manner rather than as a co-author can offer writing center students, particularly those with disabilities, tools to efficiently navigate their writing process. However, while GenAI disrupts the writing process in ways that support learning, we need to emphasize the nuance of one's individual voice and how this cultivates critical thinking. For students from historically oppressed groups who experience silencing in society, the writing center must

encourage the rise of individual and unique voices and underscore their importance in the face of technology built to replicate it. Writing centers can play a critical role in supporting students with disabilities to engage with GenAI assistive technologies without losing their authentic voices.

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