

GenAI Learning Lab – Topic 9: Using GenAI for Writing Feedback

Structure your prompts to get useful feedback and avoid AI sycophancy and bias

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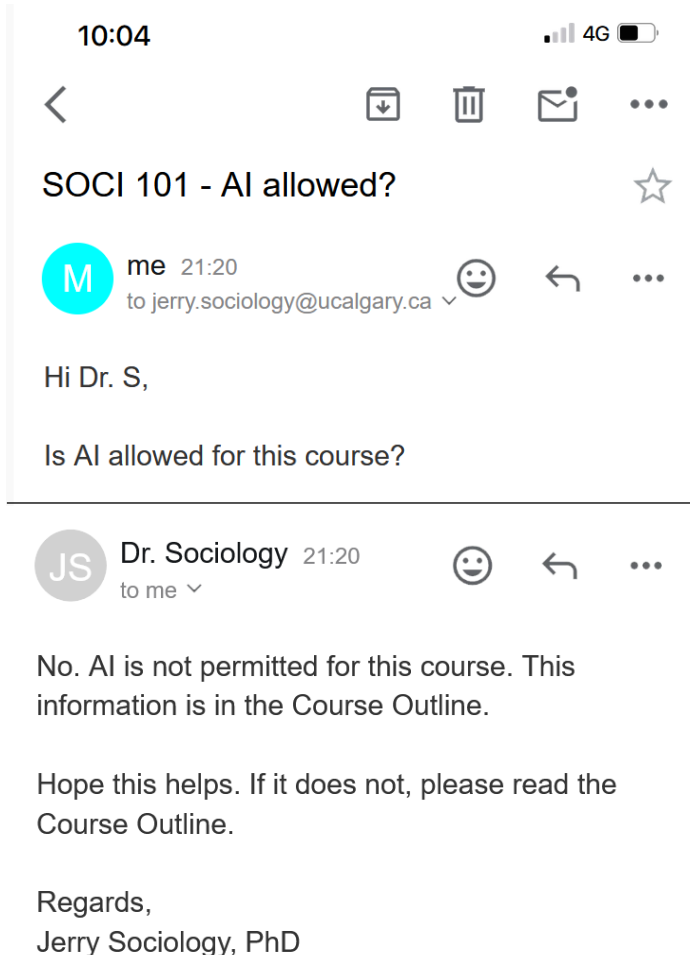
Writing Support – Chancellor Cuthbertson Student Success Centre



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Student Success Centre



Before Using GenAI:



- Ensure use of AI is permitted for your course!
- Not sure where to find this info?
 - → Check your assignment outline
 - → Consult the Course Outline/Syllabus
 - → Ask your professor



Using GenAI for Writing Feedback

- 1) How to Get Useful Feedback: Parameters and Context
- 2) Ask Follow-up Questions to Minimize Bias
- 3) Take Home Message



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Prompt:

Give me feedback on the first paragraph of my critical essay on Neil Postman's "*Amusing Ourselves to Death*."

"In Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, he talks a lot about how television is changing our society in a bad way. He argues that because we watch so much TV, we don't think deeply about important things anymore like politics or education. Postman compares our world to the book *Brave New World* and says we are being controlled by our love of pleasure and entertainment. This is a very interesting point because everyone uses screens today and it makes you wonder if he was right about the future. This paragraph will analyze his ideas and show how they still matter in the world today."



Prompting the AI with “give me feedback” yields a generic response with surface-level critiques

✦ Your analysis of Neil Postman's work touches on the most vital themes of his argument—specifically the shift in public discourse and the haunting comparison to Huxley’s *Brave New World*.

To elevate this into a truly **critical** academic introduction, you can refine the language to be more assertive and precise. Here is some feedback and a revised version to consider:

Areas for Improvement

- **Academic Voice:** Phrases like "talks a lot about" and "in a bad way" are a bit informal. Using verbs like "contends," "posits," or "critiques" adds more weight to your writing.
- **The "So What?" Factor:** Instead of saying a point is "very interesting," show *why* it is significant. For example, mention that the shift from typography to imagery fundamentally alters how we perceive truth.
- **The Thesis Statement:** Your last sentence is a "roadmap" (telling the reader what you will do), but it could be a stronger "thesis" (stating the specific argument you will prove).

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AI chatbots are trained to maximize user engagement, so they tend to “people-please”

If the user simply asks for “feedback”, it can provide surface-level feedback to minimize risk of hurting the user's ego

Adding Parameters

Give me feedback on the first paragraph of my critical essay on Neil Postman's "Amusing Ourselves to Death." ^

These are the criteria for the essay:

1. Theoretical Application and Synthesis
2. Depth of Critical Analysis
3. Argumentative Cohesion and Thesis
4. Evidence and Academic Rigor



Adding Parameters

Give me feedback on the first paragraph of my critical essay on Neil Postman's "Amusing Ourselves to Death." ^

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Even better: *Define* these parameters using information from your rubric (*e.g.* give examples of what a 1/5, 2/5, 3/5, ... *etc.* would look like for each)



Adding Parameters → More Useful Output



Criterion

Rating

1. Theoretical Application and Synthesis

Satisfactory

2. Depth of Critical Analysis

Developing

3. Argumentative Cohesion and Thesis

Satisfactory

4. Evidence and Academic Rigor

Developing

Summary of Ratings

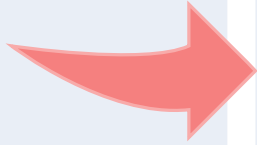
- **Theoretical Application:** You successfully identified the core comparison to *Brave New World*, though the synthesis of these ideas remains at a high level.
- **Critical Analysis:** The paragraph currently functions more as a summary of Postman's views rather than an original critique or exploration of his underlying logic.
- **Argumentative Cohesion:** The flow is logical, moving from the book's premise to its modern relevance, though the final sentence acts more as an announcement than a definitive claim.
- **Academic Rigor:** The language used is accessible and clear, but it currently leans toward a conversational tone rather than a formal academic style.

**The output is more
specific and
actionable**

Adding Context

Give me feedback on the first paragraph of my critical essay on Neil Postman's "Amusing Ourselves to Death." ^

These are the criteria for the essay:

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 2. Depth of Critical Analysis
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- 

Give me feedback on the first paragraph of my critical essay on Neil Postman's "Amusing Ourselves to Death." ^

This is for a Sociology of Education course typically taken by Sociology majors at the 3rd year undergraduate level. These are the criteria for the essay:

1. Theoretical Application and Synthesis
2. Depth of Critical Analysis
3. Argumentative Cohesion and Thesis
4. Evidence and Academic Rigor

Adding Context → Even More Useful Output



Criterion	Rating	Assessment
1. Theoretical Application	Satisfactory	You correctly identify the Huxleyan/Orwellian tension that Postman utilizes. The core concept—entertainment as a form of social control—is present.
2. Depth of Critical Analysis	Developing	The paragraph stays at the level of description. It describes <i>what</i> Postman says rather than analyzing <i>how</i> the medium of television reshapes the epistemology of education and discourse.
3. Argumentative Cohesion	Satisfactory	There is a clear logical progression from Postman's historical context to the modern "screen" era. However, the final sentence is a "roadmap" statement rather than a definitive, debatable thesis.
4. Evidence & Academic Rigor	Developing	The language is currently conversational (e.g., "talks a lot about," "in a bad way," "it makes you wonder"). Third-year sociology requires a more formal, objective academic register.

Detailed Evaluation

- **Sociological Scope:** For a Sociology of Education course, the draft would benefit from more focus on the **socialization** aspect—specifically how the transition from a typographic (print) culture to an image-based culture alters the way individuals learn, process information, and engage as citizens.
- **The Thesis Problem:** A strong 300-level thesis should go beyond saying "his ideas still matter." It should make a specific claim, such as how the "peek-a-boo" world Postman described has been accelerated by algorithmic or digital education platforms.
- **Terminology:** Academic rigor can be improved by utilizing Postman's specific sociological terms, such as "**Medium as Metaphor**" or "**Epistemology**," rather than general descriptions of "TV" and "screens."



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Follow-up Prompts → Weed Out Bias

- Implementing parameters and context in your prompts gets you *close* to honest and useful feedback from the chatbot
 - BUT Large Language Models have *inherent* bias grounded in people-pleasing
 - Being critical of the AI's output is crucial so you're not led astray by disingenuous feedback



Follow-up Prompts → Weed Out Bias

Follow-up questions can further address bias by serving the following purposes:

Clarification of feedback, *e.g.* →

You mention that my writing is "robust" and "impactful."
Provide exact examples from my writing where these are evident.

Identifying weaknesses in your writing, *e.g.* →

You mention only strengths in my arguments throughout. Can you suggest weaknesses in my argumentation?

Addressing your own critiques, concerns, and goals (or those that a writing tutor/TA/professor has pointed out) *e.g.* →

I want to improve on explication of quotes. Give advice using examples from my writing on how I can explicate better.



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Using GenAI for Writing Feedback

- AI Chatbots are trained to people-please and, as a result, can give sugar-coated or completely inaccurate feedback

<https://www.reddit.com/media?url=https%3A%2F%2Fpreview.redd.it%2Fsouth-park-on-ai-sycophancy-v0-r5jdj1q40rmf1.jpeg%3Fwidth%3D1170%26format%3Dpjpg%26auto%3Dwebp%26s%3Dfe747d846fdf69a2d115fc66c136133b61ec7d32>



Using GenAI for Writing Feedback

- AI Chatbots are trained to people-please and, as a result, can give sugar-coated or completely inaccurate writing feedback
- However, LLMs can provide useful writing feedback if you, the student, are **critical** of :
 - Your **input** (Does the prompt use parameters and give appropriate context?)
 - The **output** (Are the points of feedback well-founded? Are all weaknesses in my writing addressed? Are my personal concerns/goals for my writing addressed?)



Thank You for Your Attention!

Questions?

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