

Writing Without a Who: Reclaiming Authorship in the Age of Generative AI

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Abstract

The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT presents an ontological and ethical disruption to writing in education. As machines increasingly produce human-like texts, the meaning of authorship, originality, and the learner's presence in their own writing comes into question. This concept paper explores the implications of AI-mediated writing through the dual philosophical lenses of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. Heidegger's concept of enframing reveals how AI transforms writing into an efficient, optimized output, severing it from its poietic and disclosive potential. Arendt's theory of action elaborates the risk of writing devolving into mere labor, stripping students of the opportunity to appear, speak, and act meaningfully in the world. A rehumanised pedagogy is proposed—one that reclaims writing as an act of becoming, relational presence, and political appearance. In this framework, AI is repositioned not as a surrogate author, but as a reflective tool within the learner's dialogic and developmental space.

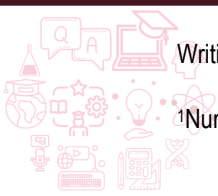
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Background

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems such as ChatGPT into education has ushered in a moment of profound epistemological and pedagogical uncertainty. In April 2025, OpenAI's ChatGPT-4.5 reportedly surpassed the Turing Test, with human evaluators unable to reliably distinguish its responses from those of human writers (Independent, 2025). This development blurs the boundary between human and machine-authored text, forcing educators and scholars to revisit foundational questions: What does it mean to write when machines can write convincingly? Can a student's written output still be considered original if it is shaped—or even authored—by an AI system? These questions are no longer hypothetical. They strike at the heart of how we conceive of learning, authorship, and the ethical purposes of education.

This paper takes these concerns beyond surface-level debates about plagiarism or assessment integrity and instead grounds them in a philosophical inquiry into the nature of writing, originality, and the learner's relationship to language. Writing is not merely a means of communication or skill acquisition; it is an existential and political act—a process of becoming, of making oneself known to others, and of engaging with the world (Foucault, 1980). From this standpoint, the introduction of generative AI into language education is not a neutral innovation but a reconfiguration of the conditions under which learners encounter themselves, others, and the world through words.

In the wake of generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems such as ChatGPT, the educational landscape has entered a moment of profound epistemological and pedagogical uncertainty. These technologies, capable of producing fluent, coherent, and seemingly original written outputs, are rapidly being integrated into language learning contexts across the globe. While they promise increased efficiency, personalized feedback, and equitable support for learners with varying linguistic competencies, they also provoke deeper philosophical questions: What does it mean to write in an age where writing can be simulated? Can language learning remain an authentic process when textual production is mediated—if not outsourced—to machines?



Research Method (Arial Narrow, Bold, 11pt)

This article employs a conceptual-philosophical method, drawing on primary texts by Heidegger (1977) and Arendt (1958, 1961), and integrating them with contemporary debates in education and digital literacy. While no empirical data was collected, the research is supported by critical literature in AI ethics, educational technology, and pedagogy. The aim is to develop a synthesis for re-evaluating the pedagogical use of AI tools in writing education, informed by both ontological and political-philosophical concerns.

Result and Discussion: Philosophical Groundings of Heidegger and Arendt

The table below synthesises the philosophical insights of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt as they pertain to writing in the age of generative AI. While Heidegger foregrounds the ontological transformation of writing into a technological process—what he terms enframing—Arendt critiques the erosion of political agency and plurality in the learning space. These two lenses are not contradictory but complementary: Heidegger helps us understand how AI changes the being of writing, while Arendt highlights what is lost when writing no longer functions as a relational and public action. The synthesis clarifies the philosophical stakes of AI in writing pedagogy and helps guide the development of more ethically and ontologically responsive educational practices.

Table 1: Synthesising Heideggerian and Arendtian Perspectives on Writing in the Age of AI

Philosophical Perspective	Key Concepts	Interpretation in Writing Context	Implication for AI-Supported Education
Heidegger	Enframing (Gestell)	Writing becomes functional, efficient, and calculative	AI risks reducing writing to automated, de-authored output
	Poiesis	Writing as an act of revealing and becoming	Writing must remain a creative, thoughtful process
	Standing-reserve (Bestand)	Language becomes resource, not relational practice	Learners treated as users, not authors
Arendt	Labor vs. Action	AI reduces writing to labor, not political appearance	Need to preserve writing as an act of presence and voice
	Plurality & Appearance	Writing enables the learner to appear before others	Writing tasks should include public or dialogic components
	Crisis in Education	Loss of worldliness when students are shielded from risk and difference	AI must not displace encounter with others or the world

Source: Synthesised by author based on Heidegger (1977) and Arendt (1958, 1961)

Martin Heidegger: Technology, Enframing, and Poiesis

Martin Heidegger's seminal work *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954/1977) is often cited for its provocative claim: "The essence of technology is nothing technological." Heidegger urges us to look beyond the instrumental view of technology—as mere tools for human use—and instead consider how it discloses or reveals the world. He distinguishes between two modes of revealing: poiesis, the creative bringing-forth of something into presence, and enframing (Gestell), a technological mode of revealing that orders the world as a "standing reserve" (Bestand)—resources to be optimized, controlled, and predicted.

Applied to the context of AI-generated writing in language learning, enframing helps us see how writing is increasingly reduced to a process of functional output—evaluated by coherence, grammar, or prompt responsiveness—rather than an act of self-expression, risk-taking, or discovery. The student becomes not an author in the existential sense but a user of optimized linguistic templates. In this view, AI systems do not merely assist learners in writing; they restructure what writing is—as calculable, iterable, and efficient. Thus, the ontological status of writing shifts, from poietic expression to algorithmic replication.

Yet Heidegger's notion of poiesis remains vital to rethinking the place of writing in education. Poiesis is not productivity but disclosure—a revealing that allows beings, including the self, to emerge into presence. For a language learner, writing can be a poietic act: it externalizes thought, makes the self-encounterable, and invites



interpretation by others. AI's ability to simulate this act prompts a deep philosophical challenge: Is the learner still revealing anything when the machine does the writing?

Hannah Arendt: Labor, Work, and Action in the Human Condition

Hannah Arendt, while indebted to Heidegger in her conceptualization of being and worldliness, parts ways with him in her insistence on the political and educational consequences of human activity. In *The Human Condition* (1958), she distinguishes between three categories of human activity: labor, work, and action. Labor is repetitive and necessary, sustaining biological life. Work creates lasting artefacts—products with durability. But action is distinct: it is the unpredictable, plural, and relational engagement with others in the public realm. Action is where freedom and identity are actualized.

When students engage in writing, particularly in language learning, it has the potential to be an act of action—a space where they narrate who they are, confront the unfamiliar, and enter the world of others through discourse. However, under the pressure of educational performance metrics and the growing reliance on generative AI, writing risks regressing into labor—a functional activity performed to meet assessment criteria or imitate desired output. The learner no longer writes to disclose their perspective but to fulfil a prompt with minimal resistance.

Arendt also warns in *The Crisis in Education* (1961) that modern pedagogy may fail if it does not respect the world as something new learners must encounter. Introducing AI into this already fragile relationship risks further insulating students from the public world of speech and action. If writing becomes a private, optimized interaction between a learner and a machine, it loses its potential as a political act—one that asserts presence in a shared reality.

Originality, Artificiality, and Authorship

The concepts of originality and authorship have long occupied a central place in education, particularly in the teaching of writing. They are not merely ethical categories—used to differentiate plagiarism from integrity—but also philosophical constructs that ground the learner's relationship to language, knowledge, and identity (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). In the age of generative AI, however, these categories are being unsettled. When a machine can generate essays, narratives, or even reflections that mimic human expression with startling fluency, what becomes of the learner's role as an author? Is originality still a meaningful or attainable goal?

From a Heideggerian perspective, the problem is not that AI-produced writing is “fake,” but that it exemplifies the logic of enframing. Writing becomes a systematized task—triggered by input, optimized by pattern recognition, and evaluated by metrics. In such a system, the student may still appear to be a writer, but the act of writing no longer unfolds as poiesis. There is no existential “bringing-forth” of thought or perspective; instead, writing is reduced to the reproduction of plausible form. This renders originality superficial—a matter of novelty in structure or phrasing, rather than ontological authenticity.

Heidegger's notion of authenticity is not about being unique in a stylistic sense, but about disclosing one's being-in-the-world. Thus, if students rely on generative AI to mediate or even substitute their engagement with language, they risk forfeiting the opportunity to encounter themselves through writing. The output may be grammatically correct or rhetorically impressive, but what is absent is the experience of authorship as a moment of revealing.

Meanwhile, Arendt's distinction between work and action deepens the critique. AI-generated writing might be considered a form of “work”—producing an artefact to be submitted, evaluated, and archived. But it lacks the spontaneity, irreversibility, and unpredictability of action, which for Arendt are the conditions under which speech becomes a world-making event. When students write only to satisfy a prompt or produce a polished product—with AI smoothing over uncertainty and error—the writing ceases to be a space of initiation, where the learner appears in the world through their words.

Furthermore, Arendt's insistence on plurality—that we exist among others who are different from us—highlights the danger of automated language flattening the individual voice. AI systems are trained on massive datasets that produce language modeled on the average, the likely, the already-said. In relying on such systems, students risk losing the capacity to think and write in ways that are unexpected, idiosyncratic, or politically daring. The

artificiality of AI writing is not just technical; it is philosophical—it represents a withdrawal from the conditions of appearance, risk, and authorship that make writing a humanising act.

The tension between originality and artificiality in AI writing tools is not merely about output quality or academic honesty. It is about what kind of subjectivity is being cultivated. Are we teaching students to write as authors, engaged in poesis and action? Or are we producing language operators, whose task is to curate and submit machine-assembled text?

The Onto-Pedagogical Problem

The adoption of generative AI in language education presents not only technological or curricular challenges but an onto-pedagogical dilemma: it alters the very being of writing and reconfigures the conditions of learning. This section explores how the use of AI systems—intended to support linguistic development—risks eroding the existential and political dimensions of writing, thereby impoverishing both the learner's formation and the educational task itself.

At its core, writing is an act of becoming. For the language learner, it is a site where linguistic competency, personal identity, and cultural imagination coalesce (Gert Biesta, 2010; Peters & Jandrić, 2018). Yet when AI intervenes—particularly in generating or completing student texts—it reshapes writing into a transactional exchange: prompts are submitted, outputs are received, and evaluations are rendered. This transformation reflects Heidegger's notion of enframing, where technological systems redefine education through a logic of efficiency, predictability, and optimization.

In such a system, learners are no longer writers in the poietic sense, but rather users of language tools—operators within a techno-educational apparatus. Their engagement with language becomes instrumental, goal-oriented, and risk-averse. Reflection, struggle, error, and revision—those critical phases of intellectual and personal growth (Illich, 1971; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006) — are displaced by seamless generation. The pedagogical promise of discomfort, of not-knowing, is replaced by the comfort of ready-made answers. As Heidegger might put it, the learner's relationship with language becomes calculative, not meditative.

Arendt's concerns sharpen this critique. If writing is to be an act of appearance—of speaking into a world shared with others—then AI use in writing tasks risks short-circuiting that appearance. A student's voice may be syntactically correct and thematically aligned, but it may no longer be theirs in a meaningful sense. Here the distinction between labor and action becomes vital: when writing is mediated through AI for the sake of efficiency or compliance, it becomes laborious—a task performed under pressure, repeated without consequence, and invisible in the public realm.

This leads to a deeper educational concern: the erosion of the learner's presence in their own learning. As Arendt argues in *The Crisis in Education*, education is not about preserving the world as it is, but preparing the young to engage with a world that is always new and in need of renewal. If AI systems normalize the outsourcing of voice, originality, and intellectual labor, then writing risks becoming a non-event—a form without substance, an act without an actor.

The implications for pedagogy are profound. Assessment rubrics may still function; grades may still be assigned; but the ontological and ethical purpose of writing education—to nurture authorship, critical thought, and relational selfhood—may be lost. Students may become fluent in language, yet alienated from their linguistic expression. What is at stake, then, is not only how students write, but who they become as they write.

Toward a Rehumanised Writing Pedagogy

If generative AI tools risk reducing writing to mechanised production, then the educational response must move beyond simplistic binaries of resistance or acceptance. The core issue is not whether to use AI, but how its use reshapes the learner's relationship with language, self, and the world. A more ethical and transformative response requires educators to reclaim writing as a deeply human act of becoming—what Heidegger would call poesis, and Arendt would describe as action. This means designing pedagogies that preserve the learner's agency, voice, and presence, even in AI-mediated contexts.

From a Heideggerian standpoint, the danger of AI is not in its technical capabilities, but in how it subtly shifts writing from an expressive act to a predictable output. Heidegger (1977) warned that modern technology tends to reduce the world to standing-reserve—a set of resources ready for use. In educational settings, this logic manifests when writing is treated as a task to be completed efficiently, rather than as a space of disclosure and emergence. AI systems such as ChatGPT, which generate grammatically flawless and rhetorically persuasive texts, embody what Heidegger termed enframing (*Gestell*): they produce language that is functionally adequate but ontologically shallow.

To counter this, AI can be repositioned not as a substitute for human thought but as a provocation for reflection. For example, when students are asked to compare their own drafts with AI-generated responses to the same prompt, they enter a process of interpretive discernment. This echoes Heidegger's call for meditative thinking—a slower, more reflective mode of engagement with language (Capurro, 2000). Instead of passively accepting AI output, students are invited to interrogate it: What sounds artificial? What lacks nuance? What would I say differently?

Complementing this, Hannah Arendt's (1958) political philosophy foregrounds the relational and world-building aspects of human activity. Writing, under her framework, is not simply a cognitive task but a form of action—an event in which the individual appears publicly among others through speech. If writing is automated or privatized through over-reliance on AI, this condition of appearance is lost. The learner becomes technically proficient but politically invisible, submitting text without truly speaking.

Arendt's distinction between labor, work, and action further illuminates the stakes. When AI is used to fulfil tasks quickly and repetitively, writing risks being reduced to labor—performed under pressure, isolated from lasting meaning or public consequence (Arendt, 1958). A rehumanised pedagogy, by contrast, must recover writing as action: unpredictable, relational, and situated within a shared world where the learner matters. Arendt's critique of modern education in *The Crisis in Education* (1961) is particularly prescient here. She warns that when schools prioritize functionality over thoughtfulness, they fail to introduce students to the world as something worth entering. AI, if uncritically used, may amplify this risk.

Pedagogical Strategies for Rehumanising Writing

The incorporation of generative AI into educational contexts must be understood not merely as a technical innovation but as a cultural and epistemological shift with profound implications. As Neil Postman (1993) argued in *Technopoly*, modern societies increasingly surrender cultural authority to technology, allowing machines to dictate the terms of meaning-making. In the case of writing, this surrender is evident when AI-generated texts are accepted as pedagogically equivalent to human-authored work. Selwyn (2011) cautions that educational technologies are never neutral; they embed particular values and ideologies, often privileging efficiency, automation, and standardisation over ambiguity, struggle, and reflective thought. Such concerns echo Stiegler's (2010) critique that contemporary youth are increasingly “dispossessed” of their ability to care for their own intellectual development, as algorithmic systems shape their rhythms of attention and thought.

This mechanisation of learning not only displaces authentic authorship but also fragments social relationships. Turkle (2011) notes that digital tools have paradoxically led students to expect more from technology and less from human presence, creating educational environments where meaningful dialogue and personal expression are diminished. Yet, as Vygotsky (1978) reminds us, learning and higher-order thinking are inherently social and mediated through tools—provided those tools are embedded within zones of proximal development rather than substituting for cognitive effort. Therefore, AI must be integrated critically, supporting rather than replacing the learner's dialogic, creative, and self-formative engagement with language.

To operationalise these philosophical insights, educators can adopt practices that re-situate AI within a pedagogy of authorship, reflection, and plurality. These practices affirm the learner's presence in the act of writing, rather than outsourcing it to machinic fluency.

a. Reflective Authorship Logs

Students maintain a log where they narrate their writing process, including how they used AI and how it influenced their thinking. This exercise not only fosters metacognitive awareness but restores authorship as a

narrated journey rather than a mere submission. Research on self-regulated learning confirms that such reflection strengthens writing performance and learner agency (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

b. Collaborative AI Critique Exercises

Students work in groups to analyse AI-generated responses to shared prompts. They critique aspects such as tone, clarity, and authenticity. In doing so, they exercise rhetorical judgment and develop critical data literacy, a key 21st-century competence (Selwyn, 2011; Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2019). These discussions help demystify AI as neutral or superior, showing students they can contest, not just consume, machine language.

c. Dialogic Writing Assignments

Writing tasks that require engagement with others—such as opinion pieces, open letters, or peer responses—anchor writing in Arendt's vision of action, where students appear before others in a space of plurality and response. Writing ceases to be a solitary task and becomes a public utterance, where voice and judgment are exposed to others.

d. Error as Ontological Insight

Rather than letting AI instantly correct all grammatical errors, teachers might invite students to analyse their own errors as indicators of evolving thought. Ellis (2005) argues that such reflective error analysis supports language development more meaningfully than correction alone. In this view, error is not failure but the trace of becoming.

e. Public Authorship Projects

Publishing student work—on blogs, in zines, or through school exhibitions—restores the public dimension of writing. As Biesta (2006) contends, education must create spaces for students to appear as subjects who matter. When students write for authentic audiences, they encounter writing not as completion but as contribution.

These strategies do not treat AI as an enemy but as a context to be critically navigated. They ensure that while machines may generate text, the act of writing remains tethered to human judgment, reflection, and plurality. They guard against the risk, identified by both Heidegger and Arendt, that technology might obscure the very conditions that make education human.

Ultimately, writing must remain an act of disclosure and engagement. While AI can simulate the form of language, it cannot assume the existential and political weight of speech. A rehumanised writing pedagogy insists that the student is not merely a prompt-giver or a user, but a speaker in the world—one whose words arise not from code, but from care, risk, and thought.

Conclusion: Writing in the Age of Generative Machines

The emergence of generative AI presents an undeniable shift in the landscape of language education. What was once an exclusively human process—writing—can now be simulated by machines that produce grammatically sound, rhetorically structured, and semantically coherent texts within seconds. But this shift demands more than pragmatic adjustments to curriculum or assessment. It calls for a deeper interrogation of what it means to write, to learn, and to appear in the world through language.

This concept paper has argued that the challenge posed by AI in writing education is fundamentally ontological and political. Through Heidegger's concept of enframing, we see how technology can reduce writing to function, stripping it of its poietic potential—its capacity to disclose thought, identity, and presence. Through Arendt's notion of action, we understand how writing is more than a skill: it is a moment of becoming visible in a shared world, of inserting oneself into the plural fabric of human discourse.

When students rely on AI to write, they risk forfeiting authorship—not in a legal or disciplinary sense, but in an existential one. They may submit texts, but not appear. They may produce language, but not speak. In this context, the role of the educator is not simply to regulate AI use but to create pedagogical conditions in which learners can still write as human beings—in uncertainty, with error, through dialogue, and toward others.

This is not a call for nostalgia or technological retreat. AI, like all tools, can be positioned in service of deeper learning. But only if its use is critically framed, ethically integrated, and philosophically grounded. The goal is not to eliminate artificiality but to safeguard originality as an act of presence, not just novelty.

In an era where machines can speak, education must ask: Who is listening, and who is being heard? If writing is to remain a site of learning, becoming, and human appearing, then we must rehumanise it—not by rejecting AI, but by ensuring that the words our students write still carry their voice, their risk, and their claim to the world.

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