

Exploring AI for Teaching at Brandeis: First Year Writing Study Using an AI Writing Assistant

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Goals of Study

- Integrate an AI Writing Assistant (Lex) into the first year writing curriculum research unit in Spring 2024 semester
- Assess student and instructor experiences
- Determine future path based on student and instructor end-of-semester surveys



What is Lex?

- Looks and functions like a google doc
- Tied to ChatGPT 3.5 (free version)
- Does not use customer data to train LLMs
- Special features: “Ask Lex,” checks, download to Word, pdf
- Approved by Brandeis IT



Study Design: Participants

- 1 CSEM instructor
- 10 UWS instructors
- 20 Sections of First Year Writing
- Approximately 350 students



In-class Preparation for Lex

Discussed how students have used AI as well as issues regarding:

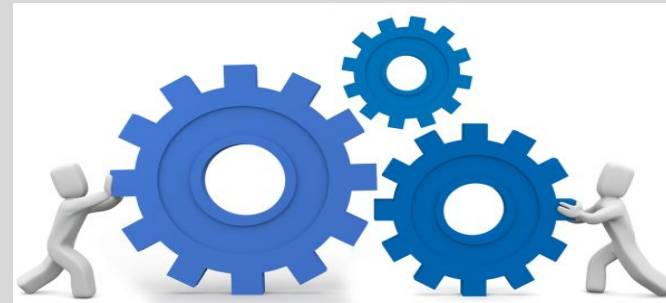
- Privacy concerns
- Copyright infringement
- Inaccurate information/fake sources
- Lack of critical thinking
- Importance of asking instructors about AI policies



Study Design: Implementation

Lex was introduced in the research unit to assist with:

- Identifying research topics
- Identifying research questions
- Narrowing research topics and identifying key words
- Giving broad-based feedback
- Editing



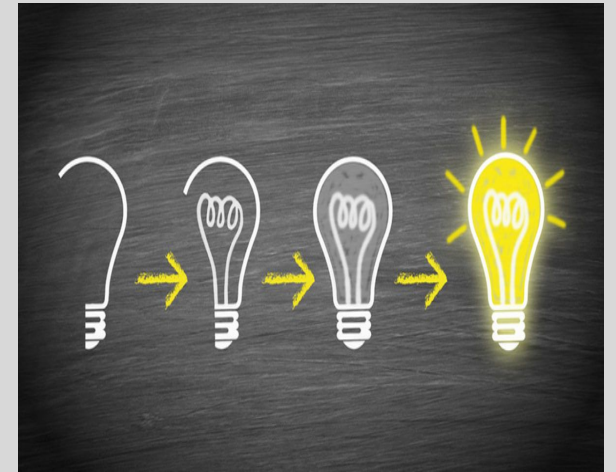
Student Reflections on Using Lex for Research Drafts

- I used Lex to help formulate research questions, which gave me subtopics to use in OneSearch to find articles. Lex was also helpful for understanding the articles. What did not work as well was helping edit my paragraphs for grammar and smoothness because the suggestions were unclear or changed the meaning.
- I didn't use Lex too much in my research process, but I did use it to check my topic sentence and thesis statement.
- I didn't use Lex for this essay (n=5/18).



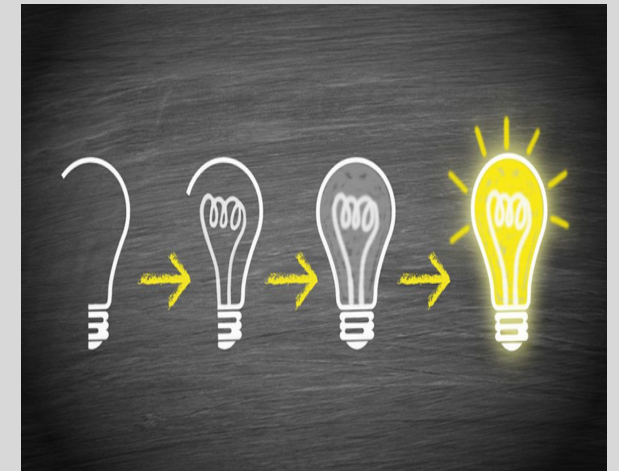
Lessons Learned

- Students have less experience with AI than you might think
- Students are skeptical about AI use
- Teaching students to use AI will not cause them to cheat; if they are so inclined, they will cheat regardless
- **Require URLs for all citations!**



Lessons Learned (cont'd)

- Students were receptive to using AI for broad areas, such as conceiving research topics, research questions, identifying key words, and getting overarching feedback
- Students largely rejected AI at the editing level because they were protective of their voices and felt that AI changed the meaning
- What you get out is only as good as what you put in
- There is a steep learning curve for instructors



NEXT STEPS

- Evaluate surveys from students and instructors. Last two questions:
 1. How did Lex affect your writing experience?
 2. Do you think Lex/AI should be incorporated into the first year writing curriculum?
- Get instructors' feedback on their own and students' experiences
- Decide as a Program if and how to incorporate AI into the curriculum

