

AI in Writing Process – Script for the second episode

Hey everyone, and welcome back to AI in the Writing Process! I'm Chris, an AI voice.

And I'm Matilda, another AI voice. Today, we're diving into the very first phase of writing: planning and ideation. Or, as we like to call it, "figuring out what on Earth we're going to write about and when."

Exactly. And let's be honest—coming up with a good essay topic can be harder than writing the essay itself. That's where we decided to help ourselves with AI.

AI tools can be very helpful in brainstorming. They're always there for you, they can give you endless ideas, and they are very cheerful and supportive. AI truly likes all your ideas and develops them further.

However, it's good to keep in mind that it can be overconfident and get things wrong quite often. The ideas AI creates are also quite generic, so it really needs human input to create something meaningful and new.

Right! So here's how we approached it. First, we asked ChatGPT a simple question: "What could we write an essay about?" And guess what? The answers we got were... not great.

Wait, doesn't the University of Jyväskylä recommend using Copilot instead of ChatGPT? Why were we using ChatGPT?

Good question. At that point, autumn 2024, Copilot was not as advanced as it is now. Also, we didn't feed any personal, sensitive or classified information to ChatGPT, so we didn't break any rules.

Well that's ok then, thanks for clarifying! Back to business. Yeah, the essay topics ChatGPT suggested were super generic. Think "climate change," "technology in education," or "the importance of communication." All valid topics, but way too broad for a three-page academic essay.

So we refined our prompt. We told the AI that the essay was for an academic writing course, needed to be three pages long, and had to relate to academic writing itself.

That helped a bit. The suggestions became more relevant—like "objectivity in academic writing" or "the role of academic language." But still, they were too wide in scope.

Then we overcorrected. We asked for more focused topics, and suddenly we were looking at things like "the use of semicolons in scientific abstracts." A little too niche.

Eventually, we found a sweet spot. We asked the AI to combine some of the more interesting ideas, and we landed on a topic about using AI tools in the writing process—how meta is THAT?

Very meta! But we didn't stop there. We asked the AI if the topic would fit within three pages. It suggested a slightly narrower topic, and we kept refining it together.

That back-and-forth was key. It wasn't just about getting a topic handed to us—it was a dialogue. We shaped the idea together, and in the end, we had a solid title and direction.

Although if we had planned the prompt more carefully from the beginning, we would have needed fewer AI outputs, which would have had a smaller environmental impact.

Good point, and that's why mindful prompting is essential. We learned from this, and next time we'll know better—it's a learning curve.

That's right. Then, once we had the topic, we needed some background info. So we asked the AI to explain key concepts, like it was talking to a child. That helped us really understand the basics of our topic, but of course, we needed to move on to find actual academic sources.

That's why the next step was to ask for tips on how to search for sources. Some suggestions were helpful, but others... not so much. Like when the AI recommended itself as a research tool. Nice try, but we know better.

Exactly. That was a good reminder to stay critical. AI can support the process, but it's not a substitute for proper academic research. Of course, there are some reliable AI tools created for information search, like Keenious, but they are only meant to complement your own information-seeking process. Even the best AI tools have gaps and biases.

Then came the final step of the planning phase—scheduling. We asked the AI to help us build a writing schedule. We gave it all the details—the deadline, how much time we had, what times we were available to write, and what grade we were aiming for. We also described how much time we needed for different phases of the writing process.

The first plan it gave us? Not bad, but it missed a few things. Like our no-writing days and the fact that we needed more time for reading than writing itself.

So we gave it more feedback, asked for daily hour breakdowns, and got a pretty good plan on the third try or so. AI only got us so far, but we needed to tailor the plan to our specific needs. We kept tweaking the schedule ourselves. Eventually, we had a plan that worked for us.

And that's the point. We didn't just accept what the AI gave us—we used it as a starting point. It saved us time, but we still gave detailed input, which defined the desired output. We made the final decisions, and stayed in charge of the whole process.

So, to wrap up: AI can be a great brainstorming partner, a helpful explainer, and a decent project planner. But it's not perfect—and that's okay, because it's just a tool.

Writing is still a human process. Or in our case, it's a super collaborative effort with AI, but humans are still calling the shots.

Thanks for tuning in to AI in the Writing Process. Next time, we'll talk about how we used AI during the drafting phase. Until then—

Keep writing, keep questioning, and don't forget to save your work!

Hello from the creators! This podcast was created with the help of AI. Copilot was used to translate the original Finnish video subtitles into an English language podcast draft. This draft was then heavily edited to fit our needs and ideas. Then Elevenlabs was used to turn our finished script into the podcast you are now listening to.