



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



Manifesto for the essay in the age of AI



Introduction

The sudden arrival of ChatGPT in November 2022 sparked widespread concern in university communities about the viability of the essay (and similar long form writing) as a form of academic production and assessment. On 18 June 2024, a group of academics from King's College London and the London School of Economics and Political Science came together to explore the future of the essay in the age of AI. While acknowledging academic integrity challenges posed by increasingly sophisticated generative AI tools, the starting point for the discussion was a broad acceptance of the value of the essay and a commitment to exploring ways to make the essay work in an AI enabled age.

The 10-point manifesto below synthesises the joint conclusions of the participants in the workshop and subsequent asynchronous exchanges and refinement. We use 'essay' in the broadest sense and assume "other long form writing" is implicit throughout. We also state that a defence of the essay includes and implies reflection on all assessment, the engagement with alternative, authentic and dialogic assessment in addition to use of essays and that where "writing as a way of thinking" is considered key, this does not in any way connote a belief that thinking must involve writing. The aim of the manifesto is to stimulate debate, foster reflection and provide educators and students alike with an analytical framework for reimagining the essay as a dynamic tool for learning and assessment in the AI era.

1. Purpose and value of essays

We believe that essays should engage students in a comprehensive process of research, critical evaluation and knowledge development. This process supports students in exploring complex ideas, constructing detailed arguments and communicating these in a structured written form, directly addressing learning outcomes and/or other clearly defined learning goals. Essays should foster higher level cognitive skills that are critical for academic, professional and personal development.

2. Diverse forms of written work

We need to adopt an expanded definition of essays, acknowledging that different disciplines may have divergent requirements and that different approaches will be valid in different scenarios and contexts. This expansion should reflect the evolving nature of production and communication in the digital age and embrace novel and evolving media in a range of formats. Articulating and then discussing these nuanced and evolving definitions with students is essential.

3. Critical reflection and in-depth exploration

We assert that essays should enable students to deeply interrogate their opinions, values and assumptions and develop critical thinking skills. Essay assignments should embed opportunities for reflective, iterative and/or dialogic engagement which value and highlight our students' successes and challenges during the process, as well as key learning points including in relation to use of generative AI and other tools where relevant.

4. Redefining essay purposes and processes

We commit to working with students to redefine and reframe essays as a learning and development opportunity, valuing both the product (the essay itself) and the learning and development that takes place as part of the process of working on the essay. Embedding reflection on, demonstration of and/ or review at different stages will be normalised aspects of the essay as assessment process.

5. Personalised and reflective assignments

We commit to designing assignments that offer more frequent opportunities for choice in topics and/ or approaches to the essay, that will foster creativity and innovative thinking and allow space for our students' diverse voices. Reflective components, opportunities for experiential application and authentic applications will be central.

6. Trust and Transparency

Open discussions between educators and students about the nature of assessments, the purpose of essays and the ways they are being evaluated will happen at every assessment stage. We will explore the pros and cons of common conventions such as anonymous submission and conceptualisations of writing and scholarship in the age of AI.

7. Integration of AI

We should engage with generative AI, where appropriate, as a tool. This should go hand in hand with explicit instruction on the effective and ethical use of AI, limitations and how to critically engage with AI-generated content including discussion of biases implicit in generative AI tools. Any tool has ways in which it works well and ways it does not: part of our role as educators will be to foster the development of our own and our students' understanding of what is appropriate, what works and what is detrimental.

8. Equity and access in AI integration

Responsible assessment design must acknowledge and respond to the diversity of our students' backgrounds and needs. Integration of AI into the essay process needs to include thought on how to ensure equity for all students. The design of assignments, essays and the assessment/marking criteria should take into account the need to treat students equally, recognising that ensuring equal access to all generative AI tools may not be feasible. What is controllable is the design of the assessment and the response of the marker to the use of these tools.

9. Institutional support

Institutions must invest in resources and training for staff and students including carving out time to support the craft of effective essay writing and the integration of generative AI as appropriate into curricula.

10. Continuous adaptation

Educators and institutions need to regularly reflect on the fundamentals of teaching and assessment, being open to challenging fixed and tacit definitions of cheating, plagiarism and the nature of writing. In doing so, they will review and adapt teaching methods, assessment/marking criteria and university policies and processes to remain relevant in the face of evolving AI capabilities. This includes monitoring the effectiveness, fairness and ethical implications of integrating generative AI tools into academic life, as outlined in the [Russell Group principles](#).



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Co-created by:

James Ackroyd, King's Foundations, KCL
Suki Ali, Department of Sociology, LSE
Ghita Berrada, Data Science Institute, LSE
Peter Bryant, Sydney Business School, University of Sydney
Virginia Crisp, Culture Media and Creative Industries, KCL
Margherita de Candia, King's Foundations, KCL
Jon Cardoso Silva, Data Science Institute, LSE
Mariam Ghorbannejad, King's Academy, KCL
Charlotte Goodburn, China Institute, KCL
James Galloway, Department of Inflammation Biology, KCL
Adam Hasan, Centre for Dental Education, KCL
A Haziz-Ginsberg, Liberal Arts, KCL
Cari Hyde-Vaamonde, Law School, KCL
Christopher Ince, King's Academy, KCL
Anat Keller, Law School, KCL
George Legg, Liberal Arts, KCL
Roy Litvin, Mental Health Nursing, KCL
Mary Malone, Nursing Methodologies, KCL
Susan Martin, War Studies, KCL
Ruth Murphy, Education and Learning, KCL
Melanie Nasseripour, Centre for Dental Education, KCL
Kieran Oberman, Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method, LSE
Helen Oram, Medical Education, KCL
Jame Parish, Law School, KCL
Gabriele Salciute Civiliene, Digital Humanities, KCL
Chloe Sheppick, Law School, KCL
Dorotya Sallai, Department of Management, LSE
Ellis Saxey, Eden Centre for Education Enhancement, LSE
Sora Zushi, King's Foundations, KCL
Svitlana Tubaltseva, Liberal Arts, Richmond American University
Preena Tailor, King's Digital, KCL
Brenda Williams, Basic and Clinical Neuroscience, KCL
Jon Wilson, History, KCL
Yang Yang, Eden Centre for Education Enhancement, LSE

Project leads:

Martin Compton, King's Academy, KCL, martin.compton@kcl.ac.uk

Claire Gordon, Eden Centre for Education Enhancement, LSE, c.e.gordon@lse.ac.uk