

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

**ENHANCING 8TH GRADERS' WRITING SKILLS
THROUGH THE CRITICAL USE OF AI TECHNOLOGY
IN THE EFL CLASSROOM**
MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how ChatGPT, a generative AI tool, can be used to support 8th-grade EFL students in developing their writing skills while fostering critical and independent thinking. The theoretical part reviews recent research on AI in education, language learning, and teaching writing skills. The empirical study examines student experiences through classroom-based tasks, questionnaires, and interviews. The analysis highlights how AI can support writing when guided by thoughtful pedagogy. The discussion reflects on educational implications, limitations, and future directions. The study contributes to understanding responsible AI use in language education.

Keywords: AI in education, EFL writing, ChatGPT, critical thinking, language learning

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of writing skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, as well as in students' academic and professional lives, cannot be overstated. Writing is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition, providing learners with a crucial means to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and arguments coherently. In the context of EFL education, developing strong writing skills is particularly important, as it fosters deeper engagement with the language and supports broader linguistic development (Hyland, 2003). Writing in a foreign language presents unique challenges for learners, including issues related to language proficiency, time constraints and motivation (Song and Song, 2023). Addressing these challenges necessitates the implementation of tailored support strategies, including the integration of AI tools such as ChatGPT alongside teacher and peer feedback, to effectively assist learners in overcoming obstacles in foreign language writing. In my experience as an EFL teacher, I have observed significant discrepancies between students' spoken and written English skills, largely due to insufficient practice with writing tasks in the EFL classroom. A general decline in reading literature has been shown to negatively impact writing skills, as extensive reading supports vocabulary development, syntactic awareness, and content knowledge (Krashen, 2004).

ChatGPT, a language model developed by OpenAI and launched in November 2022, has gained global attention for its ability to generate coherent, contextually appropriate, and human-like responses (Panagopoulou et al., 2023). In EFL contexts, such tools offer considerable potential by providing personalised, real-time feedback that supports learners in developing grammatical accuracy and language proficiency—particularly in areas where students often struggle with linguistic nuance. This form of support enables a level of individualised learning that is difficult to achieve through traditional instruction alone.

This thesis investigates how AI technology can be meaningfully integrated into the EFL classroom to support 8th-grade students' writing development. It examines the role of AI in helping learners generate, revise, and refine texts while fostering their ability to critically assess AI-generated content. By exploring students' perceptions and engagement with AI tools, the study aims to identify pedagogical strategies that encourage both effective tool use and the development of independent, critical thinking in writing. In this context, critical evaluation involves guiding students to discern between helpful and misleading outputs, refine prompts, and maintain authorship and originality when using AI support.

The present thesis aims to answer the following research questions: How can teachers use AI technology to critically enhance 8th graders' writing skills in the EFL classroom? How does integrating AI into the writing process impact 8th graders' ability to improve their texts? How do 8th graders perceive the effectiveness of AI in supporting their writing? The research questions will be addressed through a comprehensive literature review and an empirical study conducted as part of this thesis.

The thesis comprises two primary chapters. The first chapter offers an overview of the traditional methods of teaching writing, examines the benefits and risks associated with the use of AI tools in writing instruction, and highlights the significance of fostering critical thinking when integrating AI tools into the EFL classroom. The second chapter details the research conducted, offering an overview of the process of introducing the theoretical background of AI tools and implementing scaffolded writing assignments with AI support during the brainstorming, editing, and revising stages. Additionally, this chapter outlines the data collection process, analysis, and the formulation of conclusions on how to effectively utilize AI tools in the EFL classroom.

1. INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL AND GENERATIVE AI APPROACHES TO WRITING

1.1 The importance of writing skills in EFL education

Enhancing students' writing skills can be ambiguous, as according to Hyland (2009) learning to write involves more than just receiving direct instruction; it is a process of discovery that requires a supportive and non-intrusive environment from teachers. Rather than dictating or providing preconceived notions, teachers should foster a space where writers can explore their own ideas freely. As Barrett and Pack (2023) argue, writing is a fundamental skill vital for academic and professional success, as it enhances rhetorical abilities and critical thinking. Coyle (2010) claims that proficiency in writing is essential for effective job performance, making the demonstration of employment-relevant writing skills a critical learning outcome within higher education curricula. As Hyland (2003) states, teaching writing focuses on helping learners develop skills in using established patterns, while responding to writing involves recognizing and addressing issues in students' command of the language. Many of these approaches continue to be prevalent in lower-level language proficiency classes, facilitating vocabulary acquisition, guiding writing development, and enhancing the confidence of novice writers. At lower proficiency levels, providing structured support through modelled patterns and targeted feedback fosters foundational language skills, scaffolds the progression from basic to more complex writing, and enhances learners' confidence and motivation to develop as writers. Outside the classroom context, where support from qualified teachers and peers may be unavailable, AI tools can serve as supplementary resources for developing the writing skills.

According to Danesi (2024), conceptual fluency theory emerged from the widely observed phenomenon that, although students in foreign language classrooms often display a solid command of grammatical structures and formal communication, their ability to express

ideas with the same depth and nuance as native speakers remains limited. While they can construct grammatically correct sentences and engage in structured discourse, their expressions often lack the richness of thought that comes from an intuitive understanding of the target language's conceptual frameworks. Instead of naturally thinking in the foreign language, they tend to rely on direct translations from their native language, using learned structures as mere containers for pre-existing concepts rather than internalizing the cognitive and cultural perspectives embedded in the new language. This disconnect can obstruct authentic communication, as language is not merely a set of rules but a way of shaping and conveying meaning that is deeply tied to cultural and conceptual systems. AI-scaffolded writing tasks may help bridge the gap between surface-level grammatical accuracy and deeper, more authentic language use (Danesi, 2024), supporting learners in moving beyond L1-based translation toward conceptual fluency – an advanced stage of development requiring meaningful exposure and internalization of the target language's conceptual and relational frameworks (Kecskes, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2018). Additionally, the demands of EFL writing require students to develop proficiency in vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and organizational skills (Baskara, 2023). Without these foundational elements, learners may find it difficult to construct clear and coherent texts. Therefore, supporting effective writing instruction in EFL classrooms requires a sophisticated approach – one that balances language proficiency development with opportunities for creative expression and critical thinking. By addressing these challenges, teachers can equip students with the necessary tools to become confident and proficient writers in English.

Baskara (2023) argues that teaching writing in an EFL context presents distinct challenges for teachers, as it requires students to engage with the language in a structured and meaningful way. One of the primary difficulties lies in the fact that writing demands a certain degree of linguistic competence, which can be particularly overwhelming for beginners or learners who

have had limited exposure to English. To express themselves effectively in writing, students must develop a solid foundation in various aspects of the language, including vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. In addition to mastering these technical components, they must also learn how to organize their thoughts logically and communicate their ideas with clarity and coherence. Writing in a foreign language is not simply about translating thoughts from one's native tongue; it requires an active engagement with the language's unique patterns, conventions, and stylistic norms. Without sufficient proficiency, Baskara (2024) argues, students may struggle to structure their writing appropriately, leading to difficulties in articulation, coherence, and fluency. In addition to linguistic proficiency, effective EFL writing development relies on cognitive, cultural, emotional, metacognitive, disciplinary, and technological foundations, all of which support learners in expressing ideas coherently, appropriately, and confidently across diverse contexts. Gayed (2022) argues that writing in a second language (L2) presents significant cognitive demands. Learners often engage in mental translation from their first language (L1) to L2 while simultaneously utilizing digital tools such as online dictionaries and translation applications to support their writing process. This cognitive load can impede their ability to concentrate on higher-order writing skills, such as structuring their work and revising content, which are essential for developing writing proficiency and producing well-organized, coherent texts. Furthermore, research indicates that learners with a more extensive and diverse lexical supply demonstrate stronger comprehension and expressive abilities (Nation, 2001).

The development of writing skills in EFL education is both essential and challenging, extending well beyond linguistic accuracy. As Hyland (2009) emphasizes, writing is "a process of discovery" that develops in environments encouraging exploration and self-expression. It supports academic and professional success by strengthening rhetorical and critical thinking skills (Barrett and Pack, 2023). Reflective writing helps students critically engage with their

experiences and knowledge, promoting metacognitive awareness and learning transfer (Cusack, 2024). Moreover, writing plays a key role in identity formation by allowing learners to articulate their voices. Together, these perspectives highlight writing as a powerful tool for cognitive development, self-expression, and academic growth in the EFL classroom.

1.2 Traditional approaches to teaching writing

Writing instruction has long been shaped by the perception that texts are independent entities, serving as evidence of a writer's linguistic proficiency and adherence to grammatical rules. From this perspective, students' compositions are viewed as demonstrations of their grasp of language structure and their ability to apply syntactic and lexical rules. Consequently, the primary objective of traditional writing instruction has been to ensure accuracy, and for many years, writing was largely considered an extension of grammar instruction (Hyland, 2009).

According to Hyland (2003), traditional methods of teaching writing have been deeply influenced by behaviorist learning theories, which emphasize habit formation through repetition and guided practice. Instructional strategies such as substitution drills and guided composition exercises have historically played a dominant role, requiring minimal context beyond the classroom. The teacher's role in this approach has been that of an expert who imparts knowledge to students, who, in turn, are expected to produce grammatically correct texts. This prescriptive view of writing remains prevalent in many educational settings and is still reinforced through style manuals, instructional books on effective writing, and some textbooks.

A key assumption underlying traditional approaches is that writing is a neutral vehicle for meaning transmission. This concept is rooted in the outdated conduit metaphor of language, which proposes that thoughts are encoded into words and transmitted to a reader, who then

deciphers them without alteration. This perspective assumes that meaning exists solely within the text and that comprehension is a straightforward process of encoding and decoding (Hyland, 2009). However, such an approach overlooks the interpretive role of readers and the contextual factors that shape communication. Writers inherently anticipate that their readers will bring prior knowledge and perspectives to the reading process, which contradicts the notion that writing is entirely self-contained.

Hyland (2007) asserts that "a text-based approach provides learners with the tools to understand and replicate the rhetorical structures of specific genres, which is particularly valuable in academic and professional contexts." For instance, EFL students may analyze an argumentative essay by examining its thesis, supporting arguments, and conclusion, then use these elements to structure their own writing. This method is especially advantageous for learners unfamiliar with English discourse conventions, as it helps them develop a solid linguistic and rhetorical foundation. Similarly, traditional writing instruction emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, and the development of independent writing skills. It also supports memory retention, discourages over-reliance on digital tools, and fosters ethical and authentic writing practices.

Despite these benefits, both the text-based and traditional approaches have faced critique. Some scholars argue that an excessive focus on form in text-based instruction may result in formulaic or mechanical writing, limiting opportunities for authentic self-expression and communicative engagement (Ferris, 2009). Likewise, traditional methods have been criticized for isolating writing from meaningful social contexts. In many classrooms, writing tasks are designed primarily to assess factual recall, with limited attention to real audiences or communicative purposes. Evaluation criteria often prioritize grammatical accuracy and coherence over the situated, social nature of writing (Hyland, 2003).

Furthermore, the belief that writing proficiency is achieved through imitation and practice of prescribed models reduces students to passive learners who replicate existing structures rather than developing their own voice. While exposure to model texts can be beneficial, writing instruction should move beyond rote reproduction and encourage learners to engage with texts critically and creatively. This necessitates a shift toward instructional approaches that recognize writing as a process, incorporating elements such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and peer feedback (Hyland 2003, 2009).

In contrast to the text-based focus on form, the reader-based approach prioritizes the audience's role in shaping writing. This perspective views writing as a dialogic process, where meaning emerges from the interaction between writer and reader (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996). For EFL learners, this approach encourages awareness of audience expectations, such as clarity, tone, and cultural appropriateness, which are critical for effective communication. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) highlight that "writing is not merely a solitary act but a social one, requiring writers to anticipate and address the needs of their readers". In practice, this might involve peer review activities where students evaluate each other's drafts for readability and engagement, or tasks that require tailoring a text to a specific audience, such as a formal letter to a teacher versus an informal email to a friend. Research suggests that this approach fosters critical thinking skills that are often underdeveloped in traditional EFL writing instruction (Ferris, 2009). Yet, it assumes a level of linguistic and cultural competence that some learners may not yet possess, necessitating scaffolding from instructors.

Instructional scaffolding provides a more dynamic approach to teaching writing. Scaffolding involves offering students targeted support as they develop new skills and gradually withdrawing assistance as they become more proficient. Within the writing classroom, this means

guiding students through different stages of the writing process and providing them with strategies to enhance their ability to compose effective texts (Hughes, 2023; Hyland, 2009).

The context-based approach positions writing within the broader sociocultural and situational frameworks that influence its production and reception. This perspective, informed by sociocultural theory, argues that writing is shaped by the writer's identity, purpose, and environment (Johns, 1997). For EFL learners, this means considering how factors such as cultural norms, institutional expectations, or real-world applications affect their writing choices. Johns (1997) argues that "effective writing instruction must account for the contexts in which texts are produced, helping learners navigate the sociocultural demands of their target communities". In an EFL classroom, this method might involve tasks like writing a job application tailored to a specific country's conventions or analyzing how cultural values influence persuasive strategies. For instance, a student in a collectivist culture might emphasize community benefits in an argument, while one in an individualist culture might focus on personal achievement. This approach bridges the gap between classroom practice and real-world communication, though it requires instructors to be attuned to learners' diverse backgrounds and goals (Hyland, 2007).

Each of the three approaches – text-based, reader-based, and context-based – offers valuable insights into EFL writing instruction. While the text-based approach ensures linguistic accuracy and structural coherence, the reader-based approach enhances audience awareness and communicative effectiveness, and the context-based approach situates writing within meaningful social contexts. Effective EFL writing pedagogy should integrate these approaches to address the diverse needs of learners, balancing structural support with opportunities for creativity and real-world engagement.

Ultimately, writing instruction should go beyond grammatical accuracy and equip students with the ability to adapt their writing to various contexts and audiences. Rather than viewing writing as a static product governed by fixed rules, teachers should embrace a more flexible and interactive approach that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and authentic communication. While traditional methods continue to influence writing instruction, they must be supplemented with strategies that acknowledge the complex and situated nature of writing.

1.3 Foreign language writing skills required by Estonian legislation

According to the Estonian national curriculum for basic schools, the goal of teaching is to develop students' age-appropriate foreign language competence, i.e., the ability to understand and interpret content presented in a foreign language, to communicate purposefully both in speech and writing while adhering to relevant cultural conventions; to understand and appreciate different cultures, their own culture, and the similarities and differences between cultures; and to recognize the necessity of mastering multiple foreign languages in life (Vabariigi Valitsus, 2011). According to the Appendix 8 (Foreign languages), "Foreign language learning is based on the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), its companion volume, and the language proficiency levels described in them. Learning outcomes for foreign languages are described on a unified basis following the CEFR. Implementing the framework's principles in teaching helps to motivate students to learn foreign languages and guide learners with different levels of progress. "The subjects within the foreign language domain each individually and collectively expand students' communication opportunities, help them understand and appreciate a multilingual and multicultural world, and foster their ability to continuously develop their foreign language skills throughout their lives" (Vabariigi Valitsus,

2011). By the end of the basic school, students are required to reach B1 level in English, with writing skills defined as "writes simple, coherent texts that contain specific information, opinions, and emotions", "writes everyday functional texts", and "writes discussions and detailed descriptions on various familiar topics" (Vabariigi Valitsus, 2011).

The requirements outlined above represent the minimum proficiency levels expected. However, schools with a strong emphasis on foreign language education often go beyond these standards by offering additional training and resources. These enhanced programs enable students to exceed the B1 language proficiency level and develop a deeper understanding of foreign languages.

1.4 Use of AI tools in supporting the development of writing skills in EFL education

According to UNICEF (2021: 16), "AI refers to machine-based systems that can, given a set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations, or decisions that influence real or virtual environments. AI systems interact with us and act on our environment, either directly or indirectly. Often, they appear to operate autonomously, and can adapt their behaviour by learning about the context." Among the most prominent developments in this field are large language models (LLMs), which generate human-like text through advanced machine learning. In November 2022, OpenAI introduced ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer), a conversational agent powered by natural language processing (NLP), designed to simulate human dialogue (Tlili et al., 2023; Danesi, 2024). Designed for interactive dialogue, ChatGPT enables users to tailor conversations by adjusting factors such as length, format, style, level of detail, and language. Built on the transformer architecture originally developed by Google, it has been

specifically optimized for conversational applications, allowing for more dynamic and contextually relevant interactions. These AI-driven interactions, while effectively simulating natural conversational English, have the potential to function as personalized instructional assistants in EFL classrooms. Komarlu et al (2023) found in their study that users generally welcome assistance from AI-powered writing tools, as they enhance the diversity of ideas and writing styles while ensuring grammatical accuracy and conciseness. Users reported that their sense of ownership over the final product remained unaffected, as they felt in control of accepting or rejecting suggestions and enjoyed the collaborative process. Additionally, the use of crowd-sourced data did not lead to biased results.

While still developing, AI shows significant potential to support learners' individual needs and help dispel misconceptions about its role in education. According to Shahzad et al (2025), integrating ChatGPT and similar AI tools into the classroom can enhance personalized learning by analyzing students' performance and providing targeted recommendations for improvement. These tools may also foster stronger teacher-student interactions and improve instructional quality. Ahmad et al (2023) list several beneficial features of using AI tools in supporting the development of writing skills, such as helping students to overcome writer's block, ability to critically analyze AI-written content and providing personalized support. The adaptation of AI tools is an effective approach to addressing the unique needs of individual students in enhancing their writing skills. Pelaez-Sanchez et al (2024) conducted a comprehensive review of 83 documents evaluating the impact of LLMs on education. Through qualitative data analysis using MAXQDA, eight essential thematic categories were identified. The overall impact of LLMs reported in the reviewed studies was predominantly positive. 23% of the studies indicated that LLMs, such as ChatGPT, enhanced learning efficiency and effectiveness by supporting student comprehension and fostering autonomous learning environments.

The integration of AI tools such as ChatGPT into EFL writing instruction offers both pedagogical promise and challenges. Oshima and Hogue (2007) stress the need for support throughout all stages of the writing process: pre-writing, organizing, drafting, and revising – support that AI can help provide through personalized feedback, prompts, structural guidance, and motivational input. Research increasingly highlights the benefits of such tools: Aldabarin et al (2023), Mohammad (2023), Song and Song (2023), and Utami (2023) report that AI enhances writing proficiency and learner motivation, while Marzuki et al. (2023) and Al-Raimi et al. (2024) find improvements in text coherence, fluency, accuracy, and self-correction. Moreover, Albadarin et al. (2023) note that students not only refined their academic writing but also became more critically engaged through AI-supported research. In journalism contexts, AI has aided in idea generation and deeper analysis (Villaseñor, 2023). However, as Barrios-Beltrán (2024) cautions, concerns persist over whether AI genuinely facilitates language development or simply performs tasks for learners. In response, scholars like Villaseñor (2023) argue for a critical pedagogy that equips students to engage with AI ethically, effectively, and creatively. As Al-Raimi et al. (2024) point out, the accessibility of these tools also supports autonomous writing practice. I align with those advocating for critical engagement with AI in writing tasks, as it not only strengthens learners' writing skills but also promotes independent, reflective, and responsible use of technology.

The use of ChatGPT in educational settings requires a balanced and critical approach, as its potential benefits are accompanied by significant ethical and practical concerns that must be addressed through responsible implementation. Tlili et al. (2023) point out that, as with any technology, ChatGPT presents both advantages and disadvantages, necessitating thoughtful analysis and open discussion rather than outright bans. However, user experiences suggest that these critical considerations are not always adequately addressed, resulting in problematic

behaviours such as dishonesty, manipulation, and the spread of misinformation. These risks are especially pronounced for users with limited information and communication technology (ICT) skills, for whom such tools may cause harm rather than provide meaningful support. It is therefore essential to prioritise the development of responsible, well-informed methods for integrating chatbots into educational contexts.

The integration of LLMs in EFL classrooms necessitates thoughtful pedagogical design and critical evaluation. Dwivedi et al. (2023) highlight that engaging students in comparing their own responses with those generated by ChatGPT can promote critical thinking and metacognitive awareness, as it requires learners to assess not only the accuracy but also the coherence, depth, and appropriateness of both outputs. Baskara (2023) notes that EFL writing poses challenges, as it involves mastering grammar, vocabulary, and the organization of ideas. However, ChatGPT can boost student engagement by offering interactive feedback and a supportive, low-stress writing environment (pp. 1, 4–5). Kasneci et al. (2023) argue that LLMs such as ChatGPT can support students in acquiring diverse writing styles and enhancing their comprehension by offering adaptable, context-aware feedback and explanations during the writing process (p. 3–4). Halaweh (2023) argues that "by combining ChatGPT and human authors, the output is superior in terms of creativity, originality, and efficiency than if either one was to work alone." (p. 5). Consequently, teachers should actively encourage the critical evaluation of AI-generated content to ensure that the use of LLMs is balanced with the development of learners' skills and the promotion of active, engaged learning.

Estonia has a strong tradition of implementing innovative, IT-based solutions in its education system. According to the Ministry of Education and Research (2025), in collaboration with President Karis, the ministry, and private sector entrepreneurs, the educational initiative TI-Hüpe (AI-Jump) 2025 will be launched on September 1st, 2025. This program, established

through a partnership between Estonia's public and private sectors, aims to provide Estonian students and teachers with free access to AI-powered learning applications. This highlights the recognition of the importance of integrating AI tools into the education system at both governmental and corporate levels.

1.5 Positive effects of using AI tools in supporting the development of writing skills

The integration of AI tools such as ChatGPT into EFL instruction presents significant pedagogical opportunities when implemented with careful guidance. According to Kasneci et al. (2023), LLMs support language development in middle and high school students by assisting with practice tasks, enhancing comprehension, and fostering analytical and creative thinking. They also facilitate the development of varied writing styles across subjects and contribute to improved vocabulary, grammar, and content organization.

Grounded in Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), AI can serve as an adaptive scaffolding mechanism, offering personalized, context-sensitive feedback that supports learners beyond their current proficiency. Song and Song (2023), Dwivedi et al. (2023), and Emerson (2024) argue that ChatGPT acts as a "virtual peer," providing tailored suggestions and real-time support. This interaction promotes metacognitive awareness, as learners are encouraged to evaluate and refine their language use in response to AI-generated input. Lys (2024) found that students using ChatGPT to learn German improved their accuracy and fluency, often finding it more effective than traditional resources. The chatbot's ability to process imperfect input also enabled more productive and accessible feedback loops (p. 222).

While much of the existing research focuses on university students, findings are beginning to emerge for younger learners. Empirical studies show that AI tools not only enhance writing proficiency but also support learner motivation, autonomy, and engagement (Song and Song, 2023; Marzuki et al., 2023; Mohammad, 2023; Baskara, 2023). Adams and Chuah (2023) further emphasize AI's potential to reduce writing anxiety and increase learner confidence by offering accessible and immediate writing support (p. 173, 180). Additionally, the flexibility of AI tools enables students to practice writing at their own pace, contributing to learner-centered instruction and improved retention.

However, the use of AI requires learners to engage critically and craft purposeful prompts. While AI cannot replace the pedagogical judgment and human insight of teachers, it can enhance instruction when integrated into a guided learning environment. As Villaseñor (2023) argues, students must be taught to interact with AI critically – learning how to prompt effectively, evaluate output, and incorporate it into coherent, original texts. This approach ensures that AI serves as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, independent thought and creative expression.

The effective integration of AI tools also hinges on ethical considerations and critical engagement. Tlili et al. (2023) highlight that ChatGPT presents both advantages and disadvantages, calling for thoughtful implementation rather than outright bans. Poorly guided use can lead to issues such as misinformation, manipulation, or over-reliance, especially among learners with limited ICT skills (Albadarin et al., 2023; Hicks et al., 2024). Therefore, as Dwivedi et al. (2023) and Mucharraz y Cano et al. (2023) suggest, it is crucial that teachers help students assess the accuracy, coherence, and appropriateness of AI-generated content to preserve the integrity of learning.

In conclusion, AI tools such as ChatGPT offer substantial benefits for EFL writing instruction, including personalized feedback, increased motivation, and adaptive learning opportunities. However, to ensure these tools support rather than undermine skill development, they must be implemented with critical pedagogy and ongoing teacher scaffolding. A balanced approach – one that combines the strengths of AI with reflective, learner-centered instruction – can foster both linguistic proficiency and responsible use of emerging technologies.

1.6 Potential Risks and Constraints of AI in Education

While AI tools offer considerable potential in EFL writing instruction, their integration necessitates careful evaluation of associated risks. A primary concern is the accuracy of LLMs such as ChatGPT, which can generate seemingly plausible but factually incorrect content - a phenomenon referred to as "hallucination" (Albadarin et al., 2023; Hicks et al, 2024). Hicks et al. (2024) argue that ChatGPT mimics human speech convincingly, which may mislead users into trusting its outputs. They further critique the term "hallucination" as misleading, noting that ChatGPT does not perceive or believe anything – it simply generates text based on statistical probabilities. As they explain, it operates as a "hard bullshitter," prioritizing coherence over truth. This design choice fosters unrealistic expectations and obscures the model's limitations in discerning factual accuracy.

In light of this, critical engagement with AI-generated content is essential. Students must be taught to question, evaluate, and refine AI outputs rather than accepting them at face value. A pedagogical focus on analytical thinking can help mitigate the risks of misinformation and overreliance on generative tools.

Beyond accuracy, concerns around academic integrity and ethical use are prominent. As Alharbi (2023) notes, AI-powered writing tools can undermine the authenticity of student work and hinder language development by reducing opportunities for independent production. Ahmad, et al (2023) identify further limitations, including AI's lack of contextual understanding, creativity, and interpersonal responsiveness. These constraints may negatively impact core academic skills such as problem-solving and research (Mucharraz y Cano et al., 2023). Moreover, because AI tools are unable to evaluate creativity or originality, their use in assessment can lead to unfair or misleading evaluations.

Ethical considerations extend to issues of bias and data privacy. Zhai (2022) warns that AI systems may reinforce societal biases embedded in their training data, leading to inequitable outcomes based on race, gender, or socio-economic background. The opaque nature of AI decision-making processes, combined with widespread data collection, raises serious concerns about transparency and student privacy. Song and Song (2023) also highlight the difficulty of preventing unintended plagiarism despite clear instructional efforts.

Another constraint involves the uneven adoption of generative AI (GenAI) among students and faculty. Dotan et al (2024) report that 50% of students use GenAI, compared to only 25% of faculty, revealing a significant pedagogical gap. This mismatch complicates the development of effective AI-related guidance and risks leaving students without proper instruction in ethical and critical AI use. As Villaseñor (2022) and Dotan et al. (2024) caution, without adequate training, teachers may rely on unreliable detection tools and inadvertently compromise academic values such as intellectual honesty and rigor.

To address these challenges, the present study implements clear ethical guidelines and best practices for AI use in the EFL classroom. These principles aim to promote transparency, safeguard academic integrity, and empower both teachers and students to engage critically and responsibly with AI-generated content. By embedding these strategies into instructional practice, educators can ensure that AI supports – rather than undermines – students' development as independent writers and critical thinkers.

1.7 Supporting the development of critical thinking skills using AI tools

According to Facione (1989), critical thinking is "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based. CT is essential as a tool of inquiry. As such, CT is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one's personal and civic life."

As Song and Song (2023) noted, critical thinking is a complex cognitive process that encompasses the ability to analyze, evaluate, and integrate information in a logical and reflective manner. It is particularly vital for EFL students' learning, as it equips them with the skills necessary to interpret intricate texts, formulate well-structured arguments, and participate in meaningful discussions. Rather than solely focusing on the acquisition of knowledge, critical thinking involves the ability to question assumptions, recognize biases, and make well-reasoned decisions based on credible evidence. In the EFL context, critical thinking plays a pivotal role in enabling students to use and comprehend the language effectively across diverse situations. Literacy practices are deeply embedded within social structures, and the development of critical thinking skills allows students to engage with these structures more effectively. By fostering

critical thinking, EFL learners gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and contextual dimensions of the language, ultimately enhancing their overall linguistic proficiency.

According to He (2019), scholars characterize an ideal critical thinker as someone who is inquisitive, well-informed, and fully aware of the issue at hand, exercising caution in judgment, openness to reconsideration, and a rational approach to evaluation. Critical thinking encompasses core skills such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, explanation, and self-regulation. Additionally, it involves key dispositions, including intellectual curiosity, attentiveness, a commitment to rational inquiry, and a focus on the reliability of information. Tseng and Lin (2024) found that incorporating AI into the writing course provided a novel opportunity for students to further develop critical thinking skills. By blending their own voices with AI-generated suggestions while maintaining authorship, students had to critically evaluate both the AI's input and their own work, leading to a deeper understanding of their narratives. While critical thinking has traditionally been fostered through engagement with books, films, and other materials, the use of AI introduced an additional tool for promoting reflective and independent thought. The course also fostered awareness of the implications of AI on originality and artistic integrity, helping students navigate the balance between technology and authorship. Ultimately, students developed a balanced approach to AI, demonstrating a responsible and reflective use of technology, an essential skill for contemporary writers.

According to Halaweh (2023), critical thinking and originality are essential to authentic learning and academic integrity. While generative AI like ChatGPT can accelerate plagiarism, it does not inherently cause it; responsible use, including proper attribution, prevents misuse. Educating students on ethical AI use and engaging them in discussions on plagiarism and authorship are key. In EFL contexts, critical thinking enables students to analyze texts, form arguments, and use language effectively. AI tools can support this development by providing

feedback and fostering engagement, but their impact depends on thoughtful, guided integration into the learning process.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed highlights both the potential and the challenges of integrating AI tools such as ChatGPT into EFL writing instruction. Research suggests that generative AI can serve as a form of digital scaffolding, supporting learners in idea generation, language refinement, and structural improvement. However, these benefits are maximised only when students are guided to use such tools critically and ethically. Studies also underscore the importance of maintaining authorship, fostering independent thought, and developing digital literacy alongside linguistic competence. Despite the growing body of research on AI in education, there remains a gap in understanding how younger learners, particularly in EFL contexts, engage with these technologies. This study seeks to address that gap by exploring how 8th-grade students interact with ChatGPT during the writing process, and how this interaction influences both their writing development and their ability to think critically.

2. AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE ROLE OF CHATGPT IN SUPPORTING EFL STUDENT WRITING

This empirical study investigates the integration of ChatGPT into the EFL writing classroom, with a focus on 8th-grade learners. The central aim of this thesis was to investigate how AI technology – specifically, the large language model ChatGPT – can be used to enhance the writing skills of 8th-grade EFL students in Estonia. The study focused on the integration of ChatGPT throughout the writing process, with an emphasis on critical and responsible use. It seeks to answer the following research questions: How can teachers use AI technology to critically enhance 8th graders' writing skills in the EFL classroom? How does integrating AI into the writing process impact 8th graders' ability to improve their texts? How do 8th graders perceive the effectiveness of AI in supporting their writing? By examining students' engagement with and perceptions of AI-assisted writing, the study aims to identify pedagogical strategies that promote not only effective tool use, but also the development of independent and critical thinking skills.

2.1. Data collection and methodology

To address the research questions, an action research study was conducted over an eight-week period from February to March 2025 with 8th-grade students at a basic school in rural Rapla County. The data required to answer the research questions was collected through questionnaires administered after two different lessons, semi-structured interviews with students, and observations made by the author during the lessons. ChatGPT as the AI tool was chosen for the EFL writing class due to its accessibility, being a free and widely-used platform, as well as its user-friendly interface, which facilitates seamless integration into the learning process for both

students and teachers. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the design and implementation of the study. Prior to the commencement of the course, a parent-teacher meeting was held to inform parents about the objectives, structure, and content of the lessons, which focused on the critical and responsible use of ChatGPT in EFL writing assignments. Written informed consent was obtained from all parents (Appendix 8), ensuring that participation was voluntary and that participants' rights and privacy would be protected. During the course, students engaged with ChatGPT as a tool to support various stages of their writing process. Upon completion of the writing tasks, students were asked to answer reflective questions and participate in a semi-structured interview to explore their experiences and perspectives. All data collection procedures adhered to ethical guidelines, emphasizing transparency, respect for participants, and the promotion of critical and independent thought.

The author of this thesis teaches English at a school that offers a specialized English language program, which includes five weekly lessons and a total immersion approach beginning in Grade 1. In addition to regular language instruction, we provide English literature courses and support students in completing specialized writing assignments, further strengthening their linguistic and analytical skills. This rationale supports the development of a program designed to enhance students' writing and critical thinking skills through the integration of AI tools. By incorporating AI into the writing process, the program aims to provide students with structured support, enabling them to refine their writing techniques, engage in analytical reasoning, and develop a more nuanced understanding of textual composition. The primary aim of the school in conducting this project was to familiarize students with the diverse ways in which ChatGPT can serve as an assistant throughout the EFL writing process. The school sought to equip students with the skills necessary to critically evaluate the support provided by AI tools, fostering an awareness of both the benefits and limitations of such assistance. Additionally, the initiative

aimed to promote the responsible use of AI-generated input, ensuring that students maintained ownership of their ideas and preserved the authenticity of their individual writing styles. Moreover, the initiative seeks to foster independent thought by encouraging students to critically evaluate AI-generated content, ensuring that they remain active participants in the writing process rather than passive recipients of technological assistance.

Building on Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), writing assignments are gradually developed with the support of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, which serve as personalised tutors or More Knowledgeable Others throughout the writing process. As argued by Song and Song (2023), Dwivedi et al. (2023), and Emerson (2024), AI tools can be utilised as virtual facilitators by providing real-time feedback, tailored suggestions, and contextual support, much like the assistance offered by more knowledgeable peers. The importance of guided learning, where progress is achieved with appropriate support, is emphasised by Vygotsky's theory. In this context, adaptive scaffolding is provided by AI tools during the stages of brainstorming, drafting, editing, and revising. The primary objective of integrating AI tools into the writing process is to support the gradual development of students' writing skills, confidence, and critical thinking. This approach aims to achieve outcomes that would be challenging to attain through traditional methods of EFL writing instruction.

In this study, two questionnaires were developed to examine various aspects of students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of AI tools. These questionnaires investigated the frequency of AI tool usage, the nature of feedback received, and the perceived influence on students' writing skills and critical thinking abilities. Additionally, the questionnaires sought to assess students' attitudes toward AI technology in the classroom, exploring their initial apprehensions, if any, and how these perceptions evolved over time with continued exposure to AI tools. This aspect is particularly significant as it provides insights into the acceptance and

integration of emerging technologies in educational contexts. To ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments, the questionnaires were pilot-tested with a group of four students, allowing for refinement based on their feedback before full-scale implementation. The findings contribute to evaluating the effectiveness of AI tools and understanding the experiences and perceptions of both students and teachers. Consequently, this data collection method was instrumental in formulating meaningful conclusions and providing informed recommendations for the integration of AI technology in educational settings.

2.2. Description of writing assignments

The first lesson introduces a theoretical framework for integrating AI into the writing process, focusing on the stages where AI tools can be effectively used, as well as addressing ethical considerations and potential risks. Since students are already familiar with essay writing, the fundamentals of composing an opinion essay are briefly reviewed. This is followed by an in-class writing task on the topic "Should teenagers get a summer job?", which is completed without the assistance of AI tools. Subsequently, students are tasked with revising their opinion essays with the assistance of an AI tool. By using a prompt designed to enhance grammar, clarity, and cohesion, students can generate feedback on their writing. They are then expected to critically evaluate the suggested modifications and make informed decisions on which changes to implement. The final version of the essay is thus a synthesis of the student's original work and the constructive feedback provided by the AI tool.

The second writing task involves composing a motivation letter for a summer job application. Students are presented with two distinct job advertisements, accompanied by sample motivation letters for each position: one of poor quality and the other of satisfactory quality. The

strengths and weaknesses of each sample letter are briefly analyzed. Following this analysis, students are encouraged to utilize AI tools to generate ideas for crafting their own motivation letters. Students will then proceed to draft their own motivation letters and are encouraged to utilize AI tools for revising and editing their work.

The third writing assignment builds on the skills developed in the previous two sessions. In this task, students will apply the knowledge they have gained to create a personal application for entry into a gymnasium. Given the highly individualized nature of the application, students are required to move beyond simply presenting an AI-generated version. Instead, they will use AI to assist in brainstorming and then craft a personalized application letter.

Following each writing session, students are encouraged to reflect on the assignment, the quality of support provided by the AI tool, the lessons learned, and their own perceptions of the effectiveness of using AI tools to enhance writing skills in the EFL classroom. The reflection is included in their process journal. Upon completing all the assignments, students will participate in a semi-structured interview where they will discuss their experiences, perceptions, and future plans.

2.3. Analysis

2.3.1 Description of the introductory lesson

The first lesson, conducted on 6 February 2025, introduced students to the use of AI – specifically ChatGPT – as a support tool in the essay-writing process (Appendix 1). The session combined a presentation with guided discussions and focused on integrating AI at various stages of writing: from brainstorming and structuring to drafting, revising, and finalizing. Emphasis was placed on using AI to enhance clarity, expand vocabulary, and develop ideas, while maintaining

the student's own voice, creativity, and responsibility. The activities were designed to promote critical engagement with AI-generated content, encouraging students to reflect on when and how to accept or reject its suggestions. By the end of the lesson, students were expected to demonstrate a foundational understanding of how to use AI meaningfully across the writing process and to evaluate its input critically. The lesson was process-oriented and highlighted how AI can complement – not replace – student thinking. Interactive tasks and real prompts supported practical engagement. Discussions revealed that those with prior experience mainly used AI for brainstorming or overcoming writer's block, although some hesitated to disclose this use, likely due to prevailing attitudes among teachers. One student raised concerns about "*being told what to write by a robot*," reflecting a critical stance on authorship. Clarifying the purpose of the session helped students view AI as a tool for support rather than substitution. The students participated actively, raising thoughtful questions about expectations and structure, which indicated a strong need for ongoing guidance in integrating AI responsibly into their writing.

2.3.2 Description of the first writing assignment

The first writing assignment, conducted on February 6th, 2025, required students to compose an opinion essay on the topic "*Should teenagers get a summer job?*" Initially, students wrote independently without the use of AI tools. After submitting their drafts, they engaged in a guided revision phase using ChatGPT, focusing on grammar, cohesion, and clarity. Students were encouraged to critically compare the AI-generated suggestions with their original work, deciding which to incorporate and which to reject. Based on this evaluation, they revised and submitted a final version. The key stages of this process are outlined in the flowchart below.

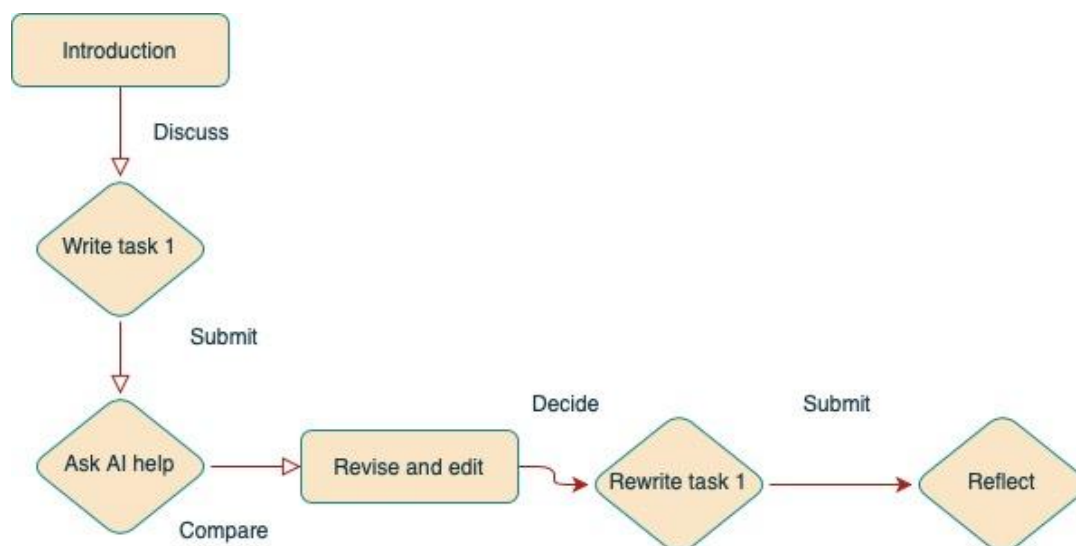


Figure 1. Flowchart describing the first writing assignment

After completing the writing assignment, students were asked to reflect on their work and fill in a short feedback questionnaire.

2.3.3 Analysis of the feedback questionnaire

Following the introductory lesson on using AI in the writing process, students were asked to complete a brief questionnaire assessing their prior knowledge of the topic as well as their initial impressions of the tasks.

Approximately one-third of the students reported having prior experience using AI to complete EFL writing assignments, while the remaining two-thirds indicated no previous experience with AI in this context.

The second question focused on the introductory portion of the double lesson, where students were asked: *"What did you learn from the discussion in the classroom?"* The responses varied across different levels of prior knowledge and experience with AI. Three students (n=3) indicated limited new insights, with answers ranging from *"nothing"* to *"I already know a lot*

about AI," suggesting they had either no or sufficient prior experience using AI for writing. Another group of three students (n=3) provided more general responses, such as, *"I learned how to use AI better."* The largest group (n=6) offered more specific and detailed answers. Some students highlighted the diverse applications of AI in the writing process, with one student stating, *"I learned that ChatGPT can be used for various things, not only getting answers. You can brainstorm, look for ideas, and get help when you run out of ideas. ChatGPT isn't just a software used to cheat on tests or get homework answers."* Others provided more technical insights, such as, *"I learned that ChatGPT can help people correct bad grammar and fix even the tiniest mistakes. It's great for making letters formal."* These responses suggest a range of prior knowledge, from minimal to self-assessed expertise, and demonstrate that students gained a clearer understanding of how AI can be utilized as a supportive tool in writing assignments.

The third question asked, *"What is your opinion on the writing task we started in class?"* to gather feedback on both the task itself and the revision process. Two students expressed a lack of enthusiasm for the task, stating, *"not a big fan"* and *"Not for my taste."* Two other students found the writing assignment to be insufficiently challenging, with one remarking, *"It was pretty easy and I dealt with it well,"* and the other noting, *"It wasn't very hard but it was a bit boring."* In contrast, the remaining eight students provided positive feedback. One student mentioned, *"It was okay, at first it was hard to get going. I like tasks that are different from the usual things we do in class."* Another stated, *"It is an important task teens should know how to write, because getting summer jobs helps finding new interests and new friends. The writing went well and I think I am starting to get the hang of it."* A third student commented, *"In my opinion, it was great and I learned how to use AI."* These responses suggest that students require an individualized approach to the task, with some potentially benefiting from a broader selection of topics. However, the majority of students found the experiment to be beneficial.

2.3.4 Analysis of the original and AI-revised essays

The students were instructed to write the original essay independently, without the assistance of AI. They were then asked to use AI to revise and enhance the cohesion of their work. Finally, students were required to produce their final essay after thoroughly reviewing the AI's suggested improvements, making informed decisions about which suggestions to accept and which to reject. The students were given the freedom to choose whether to retain their original essay, submit the version generated by AI, or edit and revise the original based on the AI's suggestions. Most of the students opted for the third version. One student's progress can be seen in Appendix 9. The progress from simple to more complicated structures is clearly visible, as the register develops from informal to more formal, grammar and structure move from less polished to refined grammar, introduces slightly more complex structures, and offers a more formal presentation of ideas and vocabulary evolves from basic to more academic and precise.

Student responses revealed varying degrees of engagement with AI-generated revisions. One student reflected critically, noting that *"AI uses fancy words and unique phrases instead of those used more often in real life. I'm happy with some of the changes... but some of the changes seem really unnatural and unnecessary."* Another student adopted a blended approach, stating: *"Both of the texts were good in my opinion, so I made a crossover... combining them makes the perfect structured but personal essay."* In total, seven students chose to incorporate AI suggestions to enhance structure and vocabulary, while four submitted the fully revised AI version, explaining that *"ChatGPT's text is longer and has a better and more advanced vocabulary"* and *"it sounds more formal... ChatGPT made better decisions with the words than I did."* In contrast, one student rejected the AI-generated text, asserting: *"I don't like robots*

changing my work." These responses highlight a clear division: while most students valued the improvements offered by AI, some preferred to preserve the authenticity of their original work.

2.3.5 Description of the second writing assignment

For their second writing assignment, students applied for a summer job, building on insights from their previous essay on the importance of summer employment. A brief presentation outlined how AI could support various stages of the writing process (Appendix 2). The session covered the structure of motivation letters, analyzing both a poorly written and a well-written example. Students chose between two positions: waiter/waitress in a restaurant or junior customer service associate in a fintech company, with advertisements provided (Appendix 5). They began the process by brainstorming with AI, refining prompts to gather ideas for their letters. After drafting, students revised their letters with AI support, focusing on grammar, cohesion, and clarity, before submitting their final version. The process is detailed below:

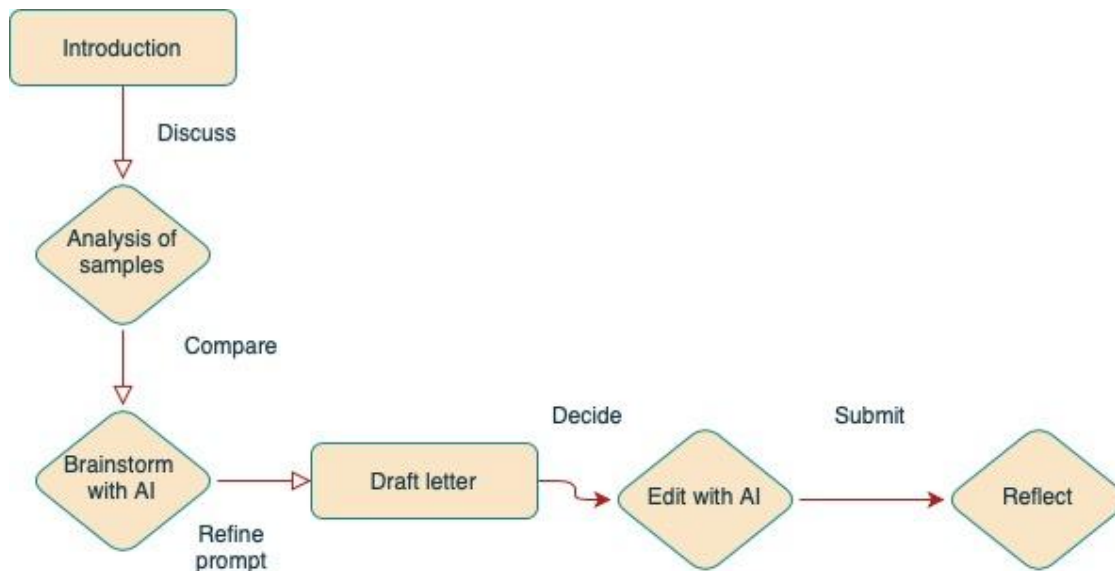


Figure 2. Flowchart describing the second writing assignment

2.3.6 Analysis of the second feedback questionnaire

Following the second lesson on using AI in the writing process, students were asked to complete a brief questionnaire assessing the task and providing brief feedback on the process. Nearly all students found the writing session useful, with only one response indicating otherwise.

The second question asked was, *"What is your opinion on using AI when writing a motivation letter?"* Two students responded with *"I really didn't use it,"* indicating a preference for their own writing process. In contrast, ten students provided positive feedback, stating that AI was helpful in various ways: *"It helped me brainstorm ideas," "AI makes the letter better and helps with brainstorming,"* and *"It is definitely useful as it helps to identify the best ideas and also correct grammar and vocabulary."*

When asked, *"Please describe your work process in 3–4 sentences,"* students provided brief descriptions of their approaches. One student explained: *"At first, I thought we would just use AI and let ChatGPT write our essays. Then we only used it to brainstorm and help us improve. Now I know how to use AI to help me get better at writing."* Another student shared: *"First, I read the motivation letters provided and chose one to use. After selecting the one I liked, I reread it and started writing my version, making it more personal and about me. Then I finished it, reread it, and sent it to the teacher."* A third student described their process: *"First, I think about the most important points I need to make. Then I brainstorm and add other, more complex ideas to them. Finally, I write everything down and check my grammar."*

Most students appeared to be successful with the task, submitting well-structured motivation letters that reflected their individual personalities. However, one student had a different experience: *"first i asked chat to help me brainstorm and looked at the example. I copied chats example and start chipping away at it untill i realised that it wasn't gonna work and erased everything written by chat and finished the motivation letter myself."* Overall, the writing

assignment was successful, with students exploring various ways of using AI as a personal assistant in the writing process.

2.3.7 Description of the third writing assignment

For the third and final assignment, students were tasked with composing a motivation letter as part of an imaginary application to "Old Town Gymnasium" (Appendix 6). This task was designed to consolidate and apply the skills and strategies developed throughout the writing unit, while also fostering students' ability to utilize generative AI critically and independently during the writing process. The assignment began with a class discussion on the characteristics of an convincing motivation letter. Students examined and analysed several sample letters, identifying key structural elements, appropriate tone and register, and strategies for effectively presenting personal strengths and interests. Particular attention was given to the importance of authenticity, coherence, and audience awareness in persuasive writing. Following the analysis phase, students were instructed to draft their own motivation letters, drawing on their previously acquired knowledge of academic writing. They were encouraged to reflect on their individual skills, experiences, and aspirations, and to craft a motivation letter that would present themselves as strong candidates for admission to the fictitious school. This flowchart outlines the process

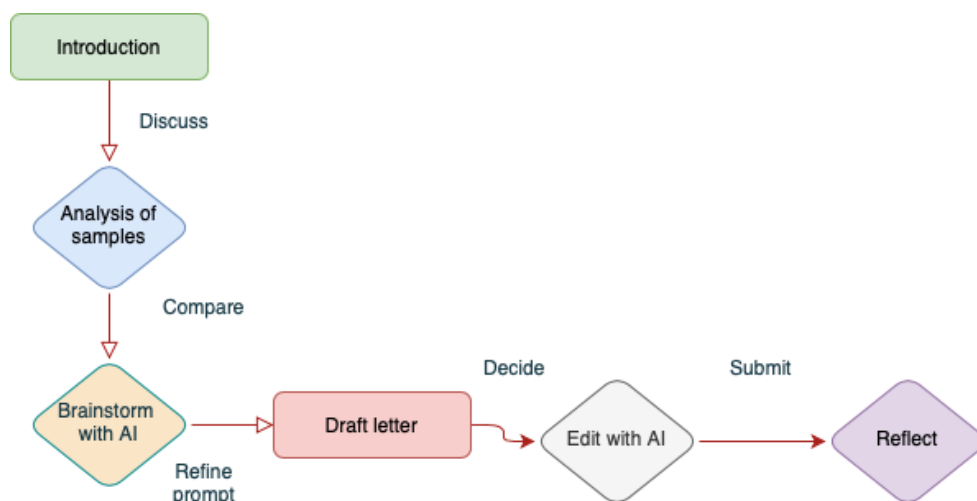


Figure 3. Flowchart describing the third writing assignment

Students were allowed to use ChatGPT during the brainstorming and editing phases of the writing process. In the brainstorming stage, they consulted the AI for ideas on structure, content, and language. During editing, they sought suggestions to enhance clarity, coherence, and style, while critically evaluating the AI's input. Students were explicitly instructed to ensure that their final texts authentically reflected their own voice and ideas, rather than relying uncritically on AI-generated content. Following the submission of their motivation letters, the class participated in a reflective discussion on the writing process. They examined the challenges and benefits of AI integration, assessed its impact on their writing development, and discussed strategies for preserving personal voice when using generative tools. This reflection underscored the importance of balancing technological support with individual authorship in academic writing.

2.3.8 Analysis of the semi-structured interviews

To gain deeper insight into students' experiences with integrating generative AI into the writing process, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all fifteen participants following

the final assignment (Appendix 7). Each interview was audio-recorded using the Voice Memo application and transcribed for analysis. The interviews explored students' perceptions of using ChatGPT across different stages of writing – brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. Participants reflected on the tool's usefulness, its impact on their writing development, the strategies they employed, and their intentions for future use. This section describes students' responses to the interview questions, identifying key trends, recurring patterns, and individual perspectives.

In response to the question asking students to describe their **overall feelings regarding using AI tools for writing assignments**, students' responses to using ChatGPT in writing assignments were categorized as positive, neutral, or negative. Most students found ChatGPT helpful for improving vocabulary, correcting mistakes, generating ideas, and enhancing writing style. For example, one student stated, *"It made writing easier, it enhanced my vocabulary and corrected my sentences,"* while another noted, *"It was a good practice and important for students to know how to use it for help."* Some students found ChatGPT interesting but not essential. As one student commented, *"I didn't feel it was necessary, but I still learned some new things."* Another reflected that it was *"different"*, but not transformational. A few students expressed distrust or concern about misuse. One remarked, *"I didn't like it because I don't trust robots,"* while another criticized overreliance by peers. Most students found ChatGPT beneficial for writing support, though some expressed neutral or critical views regarding its necessity and reliability.

When asked **which phase of the writing process – brainstorming, drafting, revising, or editing – was most beneficial when using ChatGPT**, students expressed varied preferences, with particular emphasis on brainstorming, revising, and editing. Brainstorming emerged as the

most frequently cited phase, with students highlighting ChatGPT's ability to generate ideas and ease the challenge of getting started. One student noted it was *"a good way to get ideas,"* while another remarked that ChatGPT helped *"get the ball rolling"* when unsure how to begin. Many also appreciated the tool's capacity to suggest relevant content when prompted with a specific topic. Revising was also identified as a valuable stage, particularly for addressing grammar issues and enhancing overall text quality. Students described ChatGPT as effective in identifying and correcting errors, with one commenting that it *"fixes everything and perfects the text,"* while another used it to *"correct grammar mistakes"* and then refine the output further. Editing was similarly appreciated for its support in improving sentence structure, clarity, and vocabulary. Students reported that ChatGPT helped articulate ideas more clearly and introduced more sophisticated vocabulary. As one student put it, *"it made my sentences more clear and fixed my vocabulary,"* while another noted improvements in structure and stylistic suggestions. Several students indicated that they used ChatGPT across multiple stages of writing, demonstrating a flexible approach to integrating the tool.

When asked **whether ChatGPT made writing easier or more difficult**, most students responded that it eased the process – particularly during brainstorming, vocabulary enhancement, and editing – though a few noted that it occasionally complicated their workflow. Eleven students emphasized that ChatGPT facilitated their writing by providing ideas, enhancing vocabulary, and assisting with editing. One student noted, *"it made it easier because when I brainstormed, I had ideas that I personally didn't think of."* Another reflected that, *"it helped me edit and helped me get some ideas."* Grammar support was another important aspect; one student mentioned, *"it made it easier; sometimes there were questions I wanted to know or maybe I just got a good grammar check."* For some, ChatGPT also reduced the effort required in the early stages of

writing: *"Much easier. I asked ChatGPT to make the draft from the ideas, and then I could put my own ideas in there."* Students with less confidence in English highlighted that ChatGPT helped improve both their writing and general language skills: *"I'm not a fluent English speaker, so it helped me learn how to make my writing better."* Two students indicated that the usefulness of ChatGPT depended on the subject or the stage of writing. As one student stated, *"probably easier, but it really depends on the subject."* Another student noted that while initially misusing ChatGPT to generate full texts was unhelpful, later using it for brainstorming proved valuable: *"I realized that you can just brainstorm with it and it gives you ideas; it doesn't have to do everything for you."* One student reported that ChatGPT made writing more difficult, explaining, *"it made it harder because I like to write my own thoughts... it made it harder to focus and sometimes to write."* This reflects a tension between independent creative expression and the influence of AI suggestions.

When asked **whether ChatGPT contributed to the improvement of their writing skills**, student responses varied. The majority reported positive effects, particularly in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and text structure, while a smaller number expressed neutral or critical perspectives, questioning the extent of the tool's impact on their overall development. Nine students noted that ChatGPT enhanced their grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. One student commented, *"it helped coherence and vocabulary and made my writing more professional."* Another emphasized vocabulary development, stating simply, *"Yes. Improved vocabulary,"* while a third noted, *"I could fix grammatical errors and the structure of some sentences became better."* Others highlighted how using ChatGPT helped them recognize and correct their own mistakes. One student reflected, *"When we first wrote our own thing and then corrected it with ChatGPT, I saw my mistakes and learned what I could make better about my*

writing style." Three students expressed ambivalence about the tool's effectiveness. One noted, *"50:50. I didn't think about sentence structures myself; ChatGPT wrote the sentences with my ideas,"* suggesting that reliance on AI may have hindered deeper learning. Another remarked that while ChatGPT was helpful, *"if you're a good enough writer already, then it doesn't feel like you did it yourself."* Three students stated that ChatGPT did not significantly improve their writing. One explained, *"No, I didn't really use it,"* while another criticized the lack of explanatory feedback: *"It didn't tell me what I did wrong, so I couldn't really know."* A third student described the experience as *"interesting,"* but concluded it *"did not change my writing."*

Overall, most students felt that ChatGPT helped improve specific aspects of their writing, particularly vocabulary, grammar, and structure, although a few reported limited or no impact.

When asked about **moments when ChatGPT's suggestions were unhelpful**, student responses were mixed. Some reported encountering irrelevant or confusing outputs, particularly when discussing personal experiences. As one student noted, *"Some ideas didn't make a lot of sense, so I needed to ask another way,"* while another remarked, *"the software suggested random things that didn't fit the essay."* In such cases, students demonstrated critical engagement by adapting or rejecting suggestions. One explained, *"I took the idea and made it my own way,"* and another added, *"I just used my critical thinking and checked things on the internet."* Approximately half of the students reported no major issues with ChatGPT's suggestions, with comments such as *"No, it was helpful all the time"* and *"There weren't any moments."* While some encountered minor issues, many either found the tool consistently useful or adapted its output effectively.

When asked **whether ChatGPT use encouraged more critical thinking about their writing**, student responses were mixed. Approximately half reported no significant change, with

remarks such as *"No"* or *"Not really,"* suggesting limited impact on their approach. In contrast, many students noted increased critical awareness, particularly regarding grammar, vocabulary, and the evaluation of AI-generated content. One student observed, *"It made me realise how wrong my grammar was,"* while another reflected, *"I realised how simple words I'm using,"* indicating that ChatGPT's feedback highlighted areas for improvement. Others described adopting a more analytical stance, with one stating, *"You just can't take ChatGPT's word for gold. You have to analyze the information,"* and another emphasizing the need to adapt AI-generated language to personal style: *"If it spits out something very posh, you have to adjust it to your own style."* Overall, while some students remained unaffected, many developed a more critical perspective on both their writing and the AI's suggestions.

When asked to **compare ChatGPT with other writing tools or feedback sources**, most students reported limited prior experience, often responding with *"No"* or *"I have only used ChatGPT."* A few referenced alternatives like Snap AI or Suno, though these were either unrelated to academic writing or considered less reliable. Some compared ChatGPT to general online resources or past feedback in Estonian but found these less accurate or not directly comparable. Overall, responses reflected ChatGPT's relative novelty in students' writing practices.

When asked about **future use of ChatGPT**, most students expressed a strong intention to continue using the tool, particularly for brainstorming, grammar checking, and formal writing tasks. Many highlighted its ability to simplify the writing process, with one student noting, *"it makes the task so much easier."* Others mentioned specific applications such as writing formal letters, CVs, and completing homework. For instance, one student shared, *"Every time when I need to make a formal letter, I will use it for brainstorming and checking my grammar,"* while

another reflected on its creative potential: *"I like to be creative... but sometimes I put the block in front of my writing and I just don't get any new ideas."* Although a few students remained uncertain, the majority viewed ChatGPT as a valuable tool for enhancing both efficiency and creativity in future writing tasks.

Students identified a **range of practical uses for ChatGPT beyond school**, particularly for job applications, personal advice, travel recommendations, and creative brainstorming. Examples included using it for *"job applications and such,"* getting suggestions for art projects, or solving everyday problems like fixing things or solving math equations. Some also mentioned using it for quick advice or entertainment ideas. However, a few students preferred traditional sources like Google or felt no need to use ChatGPT outside academic contexts.

When asked **if students generally supported the use of ChatGPT in writing assignments**, provided it was paired with ethical guidance and critical instruction, many saw potential for enhanced learning through brainstorming support, grammar correction, and writing style improvement, especially when teachers were unavailable. However, they also warned that overreliance could undermine independent thinking. One student recommended teachers receive *"special training"* to support students in ethical use. Students emphasized using ChatGPT as a tool for generating ideas and refining text, rather than producing full essays. As one participant noted, responsible use means *"rewrite it in their own words"* to ensure comprehension.

When asked about **using ChatGPT responsibly and avoiding overreliance on it**, a common view was that critical thinking must accompany AI use. Students recommended applying ChatGPT for specific purposes – brainstorming, clarification, or checking grammar – while ensuring the final product reflects their own voice. One student advised asking, *"How could*

I present this?" rather than requesting a finished text. Others emphasized that full reliance *"removes the personality from the writing."*

When asked if they **preferred writing with or without ChatGPT**, the answers varied. Some students appreciated its efficiency, saying it made writing *"faster, easier, and more efficient,"* while others preferred writing independently, associating it with creativity and authenticity. One remarked, *"I should just give my opinion, not ChatGPT's."* Others adopted a balanced approach, using the tool *"a little bit"* while maintaining ownership of the work.

When asked about in **which situations students preferred avoiding ChatGPT**, they mentioned tasks involving personal opinions, authenticity, or skill-building. *"ChatGPT can't know my opinion,"* one noted. Others highlighted the importance of independent writing for learning or complying with school policies.

When asked about **feeling in control while using ChatGPT for writing**, views were mixed. Some students felt more in control without ChatGPT, stating it cannot *"understand personal emotions or informal nuances."* Others saw no loss of authorship, as they could still edit the suggestions. A few welcomed the tool's support in easing the process, especially for grammar and vocabulary, but remained cautious about overreliance.

When asked about **ChatGPT affecting their creativity**, the views differed. Some saw ChatGPT as helpful for overcoming writer's block or idea generation, while others feared it could *"ruin everything"* by discouraging independent thought. The impact, they suggested, depends on how the tool is used.

When asked about **confidence while using ChatGPT**, the responses also varied. Many felt more confident writing independently, citing control and self-expression. Others found reassurance in ChatGPT's grammar and vocabulary support, depending on the task at hand.

When asked about the **strategies of determining which ChatGPT suggestions to follow**, students applied different methods for evaluating ChatGPT's suggestions, focusing on maintaining their voice and idea coherence. If suggestions were off-topic, too formal, or altered the meaning, they were rejected: *"If it changes the words, then it sometimes changes the text completely."* Some cross-checked information with Google, especially in content-heavy subjects like geography, noting, *"ChatGPT sometimes gives wrong answers."*

When asked about the **ways of determining misleading information given by ChatGPT**, most students recognized the need for critical thinking, especially to avoid factual inaccuracies and maintain authenticity. One explained, *"you lose your personality if you only use ChatGPT."* While a few felt it didn't require much thought, the majority believed thoughtful use improved outcomes.

When asked about **ensuring authenticity while using ChatGPT**, students commonly mentioned reviewing and editing ChatGPT's output. One stated they would use it *"if it sounded like me and had my writing style."* Others adjusted overly professional or vague phrases to match their level and tone.

Finally, when asked about **recommendations for ChatGPT use**, students advised peers to use ChatGPT selectively and critically. *"Don't solely depend on it,"* warned one. Others stressed originality, suggesting it be used mainly for brainstorming or grammar, and always with verification: *"ChatGPT doesn't always do it correct."* In summary, students viewed ChatGPT as a

helpful tool when used responsibly, but emphasized that critical thinking, authenticity, and personal effort must remain central to the writing process.

The student interviews reveal a nuanced understanding of the affordances and limitations of using ChatGPT in the writing process. While many learners acknowledged that the tool can be helpful for generating ideas, improving vocabulary, and correcting grammar, they consistently stressed the importance of maintaining control over their own writing. Students reported varying degrees of confidence when using ChatGPT, often expressing a preference for writing independently to ensure authenticity and personal voice. Critical thinking emerged as a recurring theme; learners described evaluating ChatGPT's suggestions based on tone, factual accuracy, appropriateness for the topic, and whether the language felt natural or overly formal. Several students emphasized strategies such as rephrasing, filtering out irrelevant content, and using ChatGPT selectively for brainstorming or language enhancement. Misleading or incorrect outputs were typically handled with skepticism, fact-checking, and revision, underscoring the students' awareness of the need to verify information. Overall, students demonstrated a developing sense of digital literacy, showing that while ChatGPT can support the writing process, it also demands critical engagement to ensure the final product reflects the learner's own ideas, language level, and purpose. These results form the basis for the following discussion, which interprets the findings in light of the existing literature and considers their implications for EFL pedagogy.

2.4. Discussion

The empirical data – including two sets of questionnaires, classroom observations, and fifteen semi-structured interviews – provided insights into students' evolving perceptions and uses of ChatGPT. The findings suggest that:

1. AI tools can positively support multiple phases of writing, especially brainstorming, revising, and editing.
2. Students value AI for improving vocabulary, grammar, and coherence, but often combine it with their original ideas to preserve personal voice.

Critical thinking is essential when interacting with AI-generated suggestions, and many students demonstrated reflective engagement with the tool. The degree of reliance on AI varied, with some students using it extensively and others minimally, often depending on the complexity of the task or their confidence in their language skills. Most students viewed ChatGPT as a supportive writing assistant rather than a replacement for their own work.

These findings directly contribute to answering the research questions. The data indicates that teachers can use AI to scaffold writing tasks, particularly by encouraging students to use AI for idea generation, revision, and grammatical revision. However, the integration must be coupled with explicit instruction on how to engage with AI critically – a pedagogical emphasis that was well received by the students.

When interpreted through the lens of existing literature, the study's findings align with research by Dwivedi et al. (2023) and Song & Song (2023), who advocate for AI as a dynamic scaffolding tool grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Similar to findings by Albadarin et al. (2023) and Villaseñor (2023), this study confirms that critical engagement with AI is more beneficial than passive reliance. Students who reviewed, questioned, and edited ChatGPT's outputs reported greater gains in writing skills and confidence. These results also resonate with Halaweh (2023), who emphasized the importance of maintaining authorship and ethical standards when using AI. Additionally, the data highlights that students were capable of

recognizing AI limitations, particularly when ChatGPT outputs felt too "robotic," irrelevant, or overly formal. Many chose to rephrase or reject these suggestions, indicating the development of metacognitive and evaluative skills. While some students admitted to using AI-generated content more extensively, most expressed a desire to maintain ownership of their writing and saw ChatGPT as a tool to improve, rather than substitute, their work.

This research is limited by its small sample size ($n=15$) and focus on a single Estonian school with a strong EFL program. The students involved were already linguistically advanced compared to national averages, and the results may not generalize to schools with less intensive language curricula. Moreover, since the teacher conducting the study was also the researcher, there may be subtle response biases, despite efforts to mitigate this through open discussion and ethical transparency. Nevertheless, the study offers relevant contributions to the field. It demonstrates that teenage EFL learners can use generative AI tools responsibly, and when guided, they can develop both writing proficiency and critical literacy. The study also provides a practical model for integrating ChatGPT into EFL instruction in a way that prioritizes process-oriented, reflective, and ethical writing practices.

Teachers should integrate AI into the EFL writing process through pedagogically grounded strategies, particularly for brainstorming and editing. By modeling effective prompt use and fostering dialogue on authorship, originality, and ethics, teachers can help prevent over-reliance. Encouraging students to compare their drafts with AI suggestions can further promote metacognitive awareness.

Future studies might explore longitudinal effects of sustained AI use on writing development over a semester or academic year. Comparative studies across schools with differing

language proficiency levels or instructional approaches could provide more generalizable insights. It would be valuable to investigate teacher attitudes and professional development needs related to AI integration in the EFL classroom.

This study illustrates that the integration of ChatGPT in the EFL classroom can meaningfully enhance students' writing skills when paired with explicit instruction and critical engagement. Far from promoting dependence, thoughtful use of AI encouraged many students to reflect more deeply on language, structure, and content. The key to successful implementation lies in framing AI as a thinking partner rather than an answer machine. When this is done, generative tools like ChatGPT have the potential to enrich both writing instruction and students' capacity for independent, confident expression.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate how ChatGPT, a generative AI language model, can be used to support the writing process of 8th-grade EFL learners in a way that not only develops linguistic competence but also fosters critical and independent thinking. The study was motivated by the growing presence of AI tools in educational contexts and the corresponding need to equip students with the skills to engage with such tools responsibly and reflectively. The study focused on the integration of ChatGPT throughout the writing process, with an emphasis on critical and responsible use. It seeks to answer the following research questions: How can teachers use AI technology to critically enhance 8th graders' writing skills in the EFL classroom? How does integrating AI into the writing process impact 8th graders' ability to improve their texts? How do 8th graders perceive the effectiveness of AI in supporting their writing?

The results indicate that, when implemented thoughtfully, ChatGPT can function as a valuable writing companion across multiple stages of the writing process – especially in brainstorming, revising, and editing. Further findings show that students were not only able to improve their writing with the help of ChatGPT, but also demonstrated an emerging awareness of authorship, tone, and language appropriateness. Importantly, many students displayed the ability to critically evaluate AI-generated suggestions, adapting or rejecting them based on relevance, coherence, and personal style. These findings contribute to closing a notable gap in current research – namely, how young learners in a non-native context engage with generative AI in a way that enhances, rather than replaces, their own thinking and writing.

This study contributes to the field by offering both theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, it reinforces the idea – aligned with Vygotskian perspectives and recent research (e.g., Dwivedi et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023) – that AI can act as a scaffold or More Knowledgeable Other when students operate within their Zone of Proximal Development. By interacting with ChatGPT critically, students were able to externalise and reflect upon their linguistic decisions, promoting metacognitive awareness. In doing so, the study advances our understanding of how generative AI can be meaningfully integrated into second language writing pedagogy.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that teachers can adopt AI tools like ChatGPT to support writing instruction, provided this is done with pedagogical guidance and ethical reflection. Specific actions teachers might take include modelling how to craft effective prompts, encouraging students to compare AI-generated and student-authored texts, and facilitating discussions around accuracy, bias, and originality. Teachers should also create opportunities for students to personalise AI outputs and reflect on their own voice within their

writing. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of fostering a classroom culture that values experimentation, self-correction, and critical engagement with digital tools.

While this study offers meaningful insights, it is not without limitations. The sample was small (n=15) and context-specific, based on students from a single school with relatively high EFL proficiency. As such, the findings may not be universally generalisable. Additionally, the dual role of the researcher as both teacher and interviewer may have introduced subtle bias, despite the ethical and reflexive safeguards in place. Nevertheless, these limitations do not detract from the study's overall value. Instead, they highlight the need for further inquiry and replication across diverse contexts.

Building on these findings, future research should explore long-term use of AI tools in EFL writing and how students' attitudes and competencies evolve over time. It would also be valuable to investigate the role of teacher training in this area – an aspect mentioned by students but not directly examined in this study. Given the increasing presence of generative AI in educational settings, it would be worthwhile to consider how AI-enhanced EFL writing instruction could be systematically integrated into EFL teacher training programmes. Equipping future teachers with both the technical understanding and pedagogical strategies for using AI tools would enable them to guide their students in engaging with such technologies meaningfully. This would not only support the development of students' language skills, but also support critical digital literacy, ethical awareness, and autonomous learning practices within the EFL classroom. Research could also examine how teachers develop confidence and pedagogical strategies for using AI in a way that supports both linguistic development and digital literacy.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that 8th-grade EFL students are capable of using ChatGPT not merely as a shortcut, but as a tool for learning and reflection. When scaffolded appropriately, generative AI can enhance the writing process while fostering the kind of critical engagement that is essential for responsible use. By providing a model for how AI can be integrated into EFL instruction in a pedagogically sound and ethically informed manner, this study offers timely insights for teachers navigating the rapidly changing landscape of language education. Ultimately, while AI will undoubtedly continue to evolve, the need for thoughtful, critical, and creative human writers remains constant. This study suggests that generative AI and human authorship need not be in conflict; rather, they can coexist in a mutually supportive relationship – one that empowers learners to become more confident, reflective, and autonomous writers.

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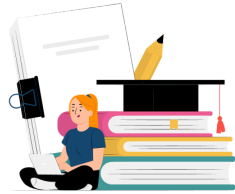
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Appendix 1. Lesson slides: AI in writing

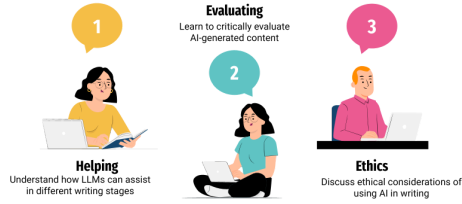
AI in Writing: A Critical Approach

A Guide to Enhancing Writing Skills with AI Assistance
6.2.2025



Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will learn about AI:



What is an LLM?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large Language Models (LLMs) are AI tools that generate text based on prompts Examples: ChatGPT, Bard, Deepseek, Grok 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They can assist in brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> However, they are not perfect and require human judgment
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Writing Stages & AI Assistance



Brainstorming with AI

Suggests topic ideas	Generates outlines	Provides background information	AI suggestions may be biased or irrelevant	Always cross-check sources
Provide a range of various topics for your essay	Compile an outline for your essay	Helps to find sources and background information	Always check for bias and relevance	Always check for authentic sources
"Suggest five creative essay topics about [insert subject]."	"Provide an outline for an informative essay about [historical event]."	"List five interesting facts about [scientific topic]."		

Most common types of essays

What types of essays do we use and why?



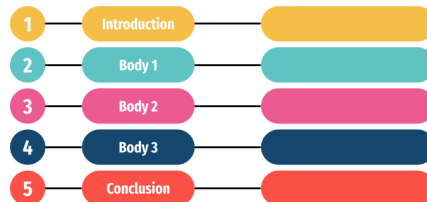
Most common types of essays

What types of essays do we use and why?



Steps to write an essay

Essay writing process



Steps to write an essay

Preparation for writing an essay



- 1 Understand your assignment:
- 2 Define a topic:
- 3 Do your research:
- 4 Come up with a thesis:
- 5 Create an outline:

Steps to write an essay

Essay parts 1. Stages of preparation



Define your essay topic

Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun and the smallest one in the Solar System

Come up with a thesis

Earth is the third planet from the Sun and the only one that harbors life

Do your research and gather sources


Venus has a beautiful name and is the second planet from the Sun. Venus is hot

Create an essay outline

Neptune is the farthest planet from the Sun. It's also an ice giant, so it's very cold

Steps to write an essay

Essay parts 2. Stages of writing



1. Draw the reader's attention
54% of American adults read below the equivalent of a sixth-grade level
2. Provide background on your topic
Reading ability has a considerable impact on both educational attainment and wider life outcomes.
3. Present the thesis statement

While reading can be tedious at times, regular reading contributes to intellectual development, as studies have shown that people who read books are more successful, happier and better off in life than those who do not read enough

Steps to write an essay

Essay parts 3. Stages of revision



- 1 **Return to your thesis**
Mars is actually a cold place. It's full of iron oxide dust
- 2 **Tie together your main points**
Venus has a beautiful name and is the second planet from the Sun
- 3 **Show your arguments**
Jupiter is a gas giant and the biggest planet in the Solar System

Drafting with AI



How AI can help
Expands ideas into paragraphs

Critical Thinking
AI-generated text may lack originality

How AI can help
Provides sample introductions and conclusions

Critical Thinking
Ensure your own voice is present

Editing with AI



How AI can help
Fixes grammar and punctuation

Critical Thinking
AI might introduce unnatural phrasing

How AI can help
Enhances vocabulary and tone

Critical Thinking
Over-reliance can weaken personal editing skills

Revising with AI



How AI can help
Improves structure and coherence

Critical Thinking
AI might overcomplicate sentences

How AI can help
Provides sample introductions and conclusions

Critical Thinking
Not all suggestions improve clarity

Ethical Considerations



Plagiarism
AI-generated text should not be copied without modification

Authenticity
Your writing should reflect your thoughts, not just AI's output

Bias
AI may reflect societal biases

Privacy
Be cautious when entering personal data into AI tools

Critical Use of AI in Writing



- Fact-check**
Always fact-check AI-generated content
- Assistant**
Use AI as an assistant, not a replacement
- Creativity**
Keep your own voice and creativity in writing
- Limitations**
Be aware of AI's limitations and biases

Key Takeaways



Critical evaluation
AI can support writing but requires critical evaluation

Academic integrity
Ethical use of AI ensures academic integrity

Voice and creativity
Writers should maintain their own voice and creativity

Appendix 2 Lesson slides: Enhancing writing with AI

Enhancing writing with AI

Using AI to Brainstorm, Develop, Write, and Revise
20.2.2025

Table of contents

01 Objectives	02 Brainstorming	03 Structuring
04 Arguments	05 Drafting	06 Revising

01 Lesson objectives

Lesson objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will:

- ✓ Use AI to generate and organize ideas for an essay
- ✓ Develop arguments and supporting evidence
- ✓ Write and refine their essays with AI assistance
- ✓ Evaluate AI-generated text critically

02 Brainstorming with AI

How to brainstorm with ChatGPT?

Methods for Generating Ideas:

- 1 **Mind Maps** – List pros and cons in a visual format
- 2 **Questioning** – Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- 3 **AI-assisted idea generation** – Use AI to suggest arguments, examples, and counterarguments

AI Activity:

- Prompt Chat GPT: "List five reasons for and five reasons against students having a summer job."
- Students select the most relevant points

03 Structuring with AI

How to structure your essay with AI?

Basic Essay Structure:

- 1 **Introduction** – Hook + Thesis Statement
- 2 **Body Paragraphs** – Argument + Example + Explanation
- 3 **Counterargument & Refutation** (optional)
- 4 **Conclusion** – Summary + Final Thought

AI Assistance:

- Ask AI to generate sample thesis statements
- Use AI to provide paragraph outlines

04

Arguments and ideas

How to develop your arguments and ideas with AI?

Example Body Paragraph Structure:
Topic Sentence: Having a summer job teaches students responsibility.
Supporting Details: Time management, customer service skills, financial independence.
Example: Sarah worked at a bookstore and learned budgeting skills.
Explanation: These skills prepare students for future jobs and responsibilities.

AI Activity:

Write a body paragraph outline

AI expands on their ideas for more depth

○○○

05

Drafting with AI

Drafting with AI

How AI Can Help:

- ✓ Generate sample sentences and structures
- ✓ Provide synonyms and varied sentence structures
- ✓ Offer different writing tones and styles

Task: Use AI for suggestions but modify the text to keep your voice

How NOT to Use AI:

- ✗ Copy-pasting full essays
- ✗ Relying on AI without thinking critically
- ✗ Ignoring personal voice and creativity

○○○

06

Revising and editing with AI

How to revise and edit using AI?

Self-Revision Techniques:

- Check clarity, coherence, and logical flow
- Improve word choice and sentence variety
- Ensure strong transitions between ideas

AI Revision Tools:

Use AI for grammar and style suggestions
 Ask AI: "How can I make this paragraph clearer?"
 Compare their version with AI's suggestions

Task:

Revise your drafts using AI feedback

○○○

07

Finalizing and reflecting with AI

How to finalize and reflect using AI?

Final Steps:

- ✓ Proofread for errors
- ✓ Read aloud for fluency
- ✓ Ensure a strong conclusion

Reflection Questions:

How did AI help you in this process?
 What AI suggestions were useful?
 What did you change or reject from AI's feedback?

○○○

08

Key takeaways

Using AI in Writing:

- ✓ Great for brainstorming, structuring, and revising
- ✓ Should be used critically, not as a replacement for thinking
- ✓ Helps improve vocabulary, grammar, and coherence

Final Thought: AI is a tool, but you are the writer! 🧠🚀

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Appendix 3. Feedback questionnaire I

Writing session feedback

Please provide short feedback on the writing task last week.

Have you used AI to complete your English writing assignments before this class?

*

What did you learn from the discussion in the classroom (the first part of the double lesson)?

*

What is your opinion on the writing task we started in class?

*

Appendix 4. Feedback questionnaire II

Feedback form

Feedback on motivation letter writing session

Was the writing session useful?

Yes

No

What's your opinion on using AI when writing a motivation letter?

Please describe your work process in 3–4 sentences

Appendix 5. Writing assignment II: motivation letter for summer job advertisements

Join Our Summer Crew at the Old Town Pub!

Are you a teenager looking for a fun and rewarding summer job? We're on the hunt for energetic and friendly waitstaff to join our team at one of the city's most charming Old Town Pubs!

What We Offer:

Fun Work Environment:

Work in a historic setting with a vibrant team and a lively atmosphere.

Flexible Hours:

Perfect for balancing school, sports, or hobbies while earning extra cash.

Experience & Skills:

Gain valuable customer service, teamwork, and communication skills for your future career.

Mentorship & Training:

No experience? No problem! We provide hands-on training to help you shine on the floor.

What You'll Do:

- Greet guests with a smile and deliver excellent service.
- Take orders, serve food and drinks, and ensure every guest has a memorable experience.
- Work as part of a supportive team to keep the pub running smoothly during busy summer days.
- Learn the ins and outs of the hospitality industry in a historic, one-of-a-kind venue.

Who We're Looking For:

Energetic & Enthusiastic: A positive attitude and a genuine passion for customer service.

Team Player: Willing to work with others and help out wherever needed.

Responsible & Reliable: Ready to commit to your shift schedule and learn the ropes quickly.

Age Requirement: Must be at least 14 years old.

Ready to Start Your Summer Adventure?

If you're excited to kick off your summer with a job that's as much fun as it is enriching, we'd love to hear from you! Send your motivation letter on why you'd be a great fit to oldtownpub@mail.com

Discover the charm of Old Town while building your future – join our team and make this summer unforgettable!

Apply Today and Raise the Bar on Your Summer Experience!

Summer Job Opportunity: Junior Customer Service Associate at CryptoBro!

Are you a tech-savvy problem solver with great communication skills?

Looking for an exciting summer job in fintech? **CryptoBro**, a cutting-edge fintech startup, is searching for a **Junior Customer Service Associate** to join our dynamic team!

♦ **What You'll Do:**

- ✓ Assist customers via email, chat, and phone – answering questions and solving issues.
- ✓ Write and update support wikis and FAQs to help users navigate our platform.
- ✓ Collaborate with the team to improve customer experience and streamline support.
- ✓ Learn the ins and outs of crypto and fintech – no prior experience needed, just curiosity!

♦ **What We're Looking For:**

- ♦ Strong communication skills (English fluency is a must).
- ♦ Tech-savviness – you don't need to be a crypto expert, but a willingness to learn is key.
- ♦ Problem-solving mindset – you enjoy helping people and figuring things out.
- ♦ Reliability & attention to detail – customers trust us, and we'll trust you!

♦ **What We Offer:**

- ☀ A flexible remote-friendly job – work from home or our modern office.
- ☀ Hands-on experience in fintech – great for your resume!
- ☀ A supportive, fun, and fast-paced work environment.
- ☀ Competitive summer salary and potential for future opportunities.

How to Apply:

Send your CV and a short motivation letter explaining why you'd be a great fit for the role to cryptobro@mail.com with the subject line "Junior Customer Service Associate – Summer 2025".

Apply now and kickstart your fintech journey with CryptoBro! 

Appendix 6. Writing Assignment III: Motivation Letter for Old Town Gymnasium

Objective:

Write a personal and compelling motivation letter to apply to Old Town Gymnasium. Your letter should highlight your strengths, interests, hobbies, and any volunteer activities that make you a great candidate for the school. Additionally, you should specify which specialty track you wish to pursue:

- Arts and Humanities
- Math and Engineering
- Biology and Medicine
- Economics

Instructions:

1. Format:

- Start with a proper salutation (e.g., *Dear Admissions Committee*).
- Write 3–4 well-structured paragraphs (introduction, body, and conclusion).
- End with a formal closing (e.g., *Sincerely, [Your Name]*).

2. Content:

- Introduction:

- Briefly introduce yourself.
- Explain why you want to attend Old Town Gymnasium.
- Mention which specialty you are interested in and why.

- Body Paragraphs:

- Describe your strengths and skills (e.g., creativity, problem-solving, leadership).
- Share your interests and hobbies that align with your chosen specialty.
- Mention any volunteer work, extracurricular activities, or academic achievements that support your application.

- Conclusion:

- Summarize why you believe Old Town Gymnasium is the best fit for you.
- Express enthusiasm and willingness to contribute to the school community.

3. Word Count:

- At least 300 words.

4. Tone & Style:

- Be *genuine and personal* – let your personality shine through.
- Use *formal language*, but keep it engaging and enthusiastic.

Checklist: Review Before Submitting

Format & Structure:

- [] Does my letter have a proper salutation and closing?
- [] Are my paragraphs well-structured and organized?

Content & Clarity:

- [] Did I introduce myself and explain my motivation to apply?
- [] Did I clearly state my chosen specialty and why I am interested in it?
- [] Did I highlight my strengths, hobbies, and volunteer experience?
- [] Did I explain why Old Town Gymnasium is the right fit for me?
- [] Does my conclusion summarize my main points and express enthusiasm?

Grammar & Style:

- [] Did I check my spelling and grammar?
- [] Did I use formal yet engaging language?
- [] Did I vary my sentence structure to make my letter interesting?

Word Count:

- [] Is my letter at least 300 words long?

Appendix 7. Semi-structured interview questions

Questions for semi-structured interview

General Experience with ChatGPT

1. How did you feel about using ChatGPT for your writing assignments?
2. Which phase of the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revising, or editing) was the most helpful when using ChatGPT? Why?
3. Did using ChatGPT make writing easier or harder for you? In what ways?

Effectiveness and Learning Impact

4. Do you think ChatGPT helped improve your writing skills? Why or why not?
5. Were there moments when ChatGPT's suggestions didn't make sense or weren't useful? How did you handle that?
6. Did using ChatGPT make you think more critically about your own writing? How?
7. How did ChatGPT compare to other writing tools or feedback you've used before?

Future Use and Ethical Considerations

8. Do you see yourself using ChatGPT for future writing tasks? If so, how?
9. In what situations do you think ChatGPT would be most useful for writing outside of school?
10. Do you think using ChatGPT in writing assignments should be encouraged in school? Why or why not?
11. How can students use ChatGPT responsibly without relying on it too much?

Preference for Traditional Writing vs. ChatGPT-Assisted Writing

12. Do you prefer writing with or without ChatGPT? Why?
13. In which situations would you rather write without ChatGPT?
14. Did you feel more in control of your writing when working without ChatGPT? Why or why not?
15. Do you think using ChatGPT affects your creativity? If so, how?
16. Do you feel more confident in your writing when you write on your own or when you use ChatGPT?

Critical Thinking in Evaluating ChatGPT's Help

17. How do you decide whether to accept or reject ChatGPT's suggestions?
18. Did you ever find ChatGPT's responses to be misleading or incorrect? How did you handle it?
19. Do you think using ChatGPT requires critical thinking? Why or why not?
20. What strategies did you use to make sure your final work truly reflected your own ideas and writing style?
21. What would you tell another student about the importance of thinking critically when using ChatGPT?

Appendix 8. Consent form for parents

NÕUSOLEKULEHT

Lugupeetud lapsevanem,

Soovime koolis pakkuda oma õpilastele tänapäevaseid ja tõhusaid õppemeetodeid. Seoses sellega plaanime inglise keele tundides kasutada generatiivse tehisintellekti (AI) tööriistu, et toetada 8. klassi õpilaste kirjutamisoskuse arengut. Kirjutamisoskuste arengu toetamisel AI tööriistade kasutamise harjutamine on osa minu magistritööst inglise keele õpetajana. Kokku olen plaaninud nendega läbi viia 10 tundi.

Õppetöö käigus tutvustan õpilastele tehisintellekti rolli kirjutamisprotsessis, sealhulgas ideede genereerimist, tekstide parandamist ning tagasiside analüüsimist. Samuti käsitleme AI kasutamise eetilisi ja kriitilise mõtlemise aspekte, et õpilased oskaksid tehisintellekti vastutustundlikult ning teadlikult kasutada.

AI tööriistade kasutamine toimub õpetaja juhendamisel ning eesmärk on arendada õpilaste iseseisvat ja loovat kirjutamist, mitte asendada nende enda mõtlemisoskust.

Palun Teie nõusolekut, et Teie laps saaks osa võtta nendest tundidest ja kasutada õpetaja juhendamisel AI tööriistu oma kirjutamisoskuse arendamiseks.

Kui olete nõus, palume täita ja tagastada allolev nõusolek. Kui Teil on küsimusi või soovite täiendavat teavet, võtke palun minuga ühendust.

NÕUSOLEK

Lapse nimi: _____

Klass: 8PT

Lapsevanema nimi: _____

Lapsevanema allkiri: _____

Kuupäev: _____

- Olen teadlik, et minu lapsele tutvustatakse inglise keele tundides AI tööriistu kirjutamisoskuse arendamiseks, ning annan selleks oma nõusoleku.
- Ma ei soovi, et minu laps kasutaks inglise keele tundides AI tööriistu kirjutamisoskuse arendamiseks.

Täname Teid koostöö eest!

Siiri Alberg

Appendix 9. Student's progress in editing an essay with the help of ChatGPT

Aspect	Variant 1 (Original)	Variant 2 (Revised)	Variant 3 (Further Revised)
Title	Should teenagers get a summer job?	Should Teenagers Get a Summer Job?	Should Teenagers Work a Summer Job?
Introduction	Mentions "many benefits and some cons."	Uses the phrase "there are several benefits and a few potential drawbacks."	Starts with "there are a number of different approaches" and adds "possible drawbacks."
Tone	Casual and informal, with direct statements and personal opinions.	More formal, academic tone with clearer structure and improved grammar.	More formal, slightly more complex vocabulary but retains clarity.
First Benefit	Emphasizes "experience" but with less depth in explaining why experience is important.	Elaborates on how a summer job teaches important skills like "responsibility" and "work ethic."	Focuses on gaining work experience and improving career prospects.
Example in First Benefit	Mentions "Malev" as an example but provides less detail.	Provides clearer explanation about how working at Malev helps with skills like "teamwork" and "punctuality."	Describes Malev's contribution to learning "teamwork, being punctual, and the importance of getting work done on time."
Second Benefit	Focuses on earning money and developing financial responsibility.	Emphasizes learning financial responsibility, such as "budgeting and saving."	Focuses on teaching teenagers the value of money, with a mention of "allowance" instead of "paycheck."
Example in Second Benefit	Mentions Malev without a deeper explanation of the financial aspect.	Clarifies that Malev not only provides work experience but also allows teens to earn money.	More formal wording of the financial benefits of working at Malev.

Con	The con is the lack of free time during the summer.	The potential downside is more structured: "the lack of free time during summer break."	Focuses on the lack of free time but rephrases the idea of how teens waste time indoors.
Turning the Con into a Benefit	Suggests that a summer job encourages teens to be more active and social.	Describes how the job helps teens be more active, outside, and develop life skills.	Similar explanation but emphasizes that working could keep teens "active and social."
Conclusion	Emphasizes the benefits of work experience and getting more active.	Adds more emphasis on long-term benefits, such as developing a strong work ethic.	Emphasizes both the work habits and financial management benefits, with an improved conclusion structure.

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Siiri Alberg

ENHANCING 8TH GRADERS' WRITING SKILLS THROUGH THE CRITICAL USE OF AI TECHNOLOGY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM**8. klassi inglise keele õpilaste kirjutamisoskuse toetamine tehisintellekti kriitilise kasutamise abil.**

Magistritöö

2025

Lehekülgede arv: 75

Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärgiks oli välja selgitada, kuidas aitab tehisintellekti kasutamine inglise keele tunnis toetada 8. klassi õpilaste kirjutamisoskuse arengut ning uurida nende seisukohti ChatGPT kasutamise kohta võõrkeelsete kirjutamisülesannete tegemisel.

Õpilastele (n=15) tutvustati kõigepealt kirjutamisülesannete sisu ning ChatGPT kasutamise võimalusi nende käigus. Ülesanded olid planeeritud järk-järguliselt kasvava tehisintellekti toega, kusjuures õpilastele tutvustati ka ChatGPT eetilise kasutamise põhimõtteid ja kriitilise mõtlemise tähtsust tehisintellekti kasutamisel. Pärast kirjutamisülesandeid täitsid õpilased veebis lühikese tagasisideküsimustiku. Lisaks tunnivaatlustele osalesid õpilased ka poolstruktureeritud intervjuul, mille vastuseid on analüüsitud arutelu peatükis.

Peamisteks järeldusteks oli, et õpilased hindasid tehisintellekti kasutamist ingliskeelsete kirjutamisülesannete tegemisel enamjaolt positiivseks ning kasutasid kriitilise mõtlemise oskust, et ChatGPT soovitusi oma töösse integreerida. Lisaks omandasid õpilased oskuse kasutada tehisintellekti kirjutamise erinevates etappides, näiteks ideede genereerimisel, toimetamisel ja grammatika parandamisel. Üldiselt hindasid õpilased saadud kogemust heaks ning jagasid oma tulevikuplaane tehisintellekti tööriistade edasise kasutamise osas nii õppetöös kui ka oma tulevast karjääri planeerides.

Märksõnad: tehisintellekt hariduses, ingliskeelse kirjutamisoskuse toetamine, ChatGPT, kriitiline mõtlemine, keeleõpe.

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

Mina, Siiri Alberg,

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) enda loodud teose

ENHANCING 8TH GRADERS' WRITING SKILLS THROUGH THE CRITICAL USE OF AI TECHNOLOGY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM,

mille juhendaja on Liina Tammekänd, PhD,

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Siiri Alberg

Tartus, 13.5.2025

Autorsuse kinnitus

Kinnitan, et olen koostanud käesoleva magistritöö ise ning toonud korrektselt välja teiste autorite panuse. Töö on koostatud lähtudes Tartu Ülikooli maailma keelte ja kultuuride instituudi anglistika osakonna oma õppekava magistritöö juhendist ning on kooskõlas heade akadeemiliste tavadega.

/allkirjastatud digitaalselt/

Siiri Alberg

Tartus, 13.5.2025

Lõputöö on lubatud kaitsmisele.

/allkirjastatud digitaalselt/

Liina Tammekänd, PhD

Tartus, 13.5.2025