Thwarting AI by Going Old School: Timed, Handwritten, In-Class Exams
Prof. Katie Hern, Skyline College, Spring 2024

Like many college faculty, I am now using handwritten in-class exams as a way to ensure students' writing and thinking are their own. Students take the exam during class with all electronic devices stowed away. The exams build on prior class discussions but students don't know the exact questions in advance.

Advantages:

- Good way to assess students' understanding of course readings
- Good way for students to practice critical thinking skills like analysis, evaluation, making connections, and synthesizing texts
- Good way for students to practice organization techniques like thesis statements, PIE paragraphs, basic introductions/conclusions
- Good way to get avoidant/procrastinating students to write and submit assignments
- Faster to grade than papers

Recommendations:

- **Be intentional about supporting students with learning disabilities.** At least 2 weeks prior, let students know the test date and encourage them to work with EAC on accommodations like extra time, distraction-reduced environment. Share EAC forms.

- **Keep the timed context in mind when grading.** I prioritize content, use of class readings, thesis, and organization. I don't penalize for proofreading issues, English language errors, style (though I may point out these issues in my comments).

- **Provide a re-take opportunity for students who missed exam or didn't perform well.** After grading the exam, we review sample Pass and High Pass exams during class. Then anyone who'd like to go for a higher grade can do the re-take, scheduled during class. The retake uses different questions but same format, texts. Lower grade is thrown out.

- **Think about how students will integrate quotes/specific content from course readings.** This is key because many students use electronic copies of class texts. Some options:

  - If the exam focuses on a shorter text, encourage students to print out copies and annotate them to prepare. Bring some extra copies on exam day.
  - Have students prepare a quote sheet to use during the exam with key ideas from the major texts (e.g., 1 page, front and back). Bonus: Good way to study!
  - Distribute copies of a master quote sheet on day of test to support all students, including those who didn't bring one of their own.

Sample Exam – English 110: Gothic Literature – Hern
Students brought in printed, annotated copies of the two short stories.
As a back-up, I had a small set of printed copies made by SkyGap.

Choose ONE of the following questions for your essay.

1) Edgar Allan Poe believed that a poem or short story should convey a primary emotional effect to readers and that every element of the story should contribute to that effect. **Write an essay analyzing the "unity of effect" in "A Rose for Emily."** Your thesis should describe the main emotional impact you see in this story, and your essay should analyze how at least three elements help achieve that effect: a) the setting (e.g., descriptions of Miss Emily's home and the town, the post-Civil War timeframe), b) the unnamed, first-person plural narrator, and c) Miss Emily's murder of Homer Barron.

2) Miss Emily Grierson appears to be the main character in "A Rose for Emily," but is she really? Write an essay exploring the idea that the true main character is the town itself. What does this story convey about Jefferson, Mississippi in the years after the U.S. Civil War? In your answer, be sure to talk about the gossipy town narrators, the different townspeople featured in the story, and their attitudes and actions toward Miss Emily.

3) Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a very political person, giving speeches and writing manifestos questioning the romanticized notion that women belong in the home and arguing for women to have economic independence and the right to vote. One literary critic says Gilman "considered her writing a tool for promoting her politics, and herself a one-woman propaganda machine." How do you see Gilman's politics in "The Yellow Wallpaper"? What political critique(s) is the story making?

4) In "The Yellow Wallpaper," what do you think is motivating John, the narrator's physician husband? Is he genuinely trying to help her? Is he focused on maintaining control and power in his marriage? Does he want to keep her at a distance, not be burdened by her emotional needs? Something else? Use a close-reading of the story to analyze his character's motivations.

Guidance
- Your essay should analyze/interpret the story, not simply summarize what happens
- Be sure to support your analysis with LOTS of detail and short quotes from the story
- Your thesis statement should sum up your answer to the question you picked
- Your essay should be at least 5 paragraphs:
    o Introduction – briefly introduce the story & give your thesis
    o 3+ focused PIE-format body paragraphs (Point -> Illustration -> Explanation)
    o Conclusion – wrap up discussion, perhaps comment on the story's significance
- Write so that someone who has not read the story can follow your essay

This exam focused on key concepts students would need for the upcoming research paper.
Students prepared "quote sheets" (1 page front and back) with key passages from the readings. I also made a master quote sheet and handed it out to everyone at start of exam.

Each answer will be scored on a scale of 0-4
4 = Excellent   3 = Good   2 = Minimal Pass   1 = Off Track/Incomplete   0 = Not answered

OVERALL GRADE RUBRIC
High Pass = 17-20 points   Pass = 11-16 points   Needs Work = 10 or fewer points

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Answer at least 5 of the following questions (your pick).
If you answer more than 5, your final score will be your 5 BEST answers.

1) Explain what an "automatic association" is and give an example of one that other people often have about a group you belong to (e.g., race/ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, appearance, economic class…)

2) Adichie says that power is key to the "single stories" we get about other people: "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person." Write a paragraph explaining how this idea relates to a "single story" about a group you belong to. Who has the power to make this "the definitive story"? How do they do it?

3) In her essay, Filipina Melissa de la Cruz writes about the time she and her white husband went to Comic-Con with their daughter, who was dressed up as Harley Quinn. When the child was with her husband, "They get stopped all the time by people who tell them how cute she is." But when her husband went to a panel, and he handed the child to de la Cruz, "I walk the entire floor with my daughter. No one talks to me or tells me how cute she is" (93). How do you explain what's happening here? In your response, make a connection to one of these three class texts (your choice): Blindspot, Adichie, or Dr. Sue.

4) Banaji and Greenwald write, "Part of what the IAT tells us when it reveals hidden biases…is that the membrane that divides the culture 'out there' from our mind 'in here' is permeable. Whether we want them to or not, the attitudes of the culture at large infiltrate us….Our minds pick up a lot of what's out there, and it seems nearly impossible to resist the pull toward culturally rooted stereotypes" (67-68). In your own words, explain what this means and provide a specific example.

5) Brent Staples writes, "I now take precautions to make myself less threatening. I move about with care, particularly late in the evening. I give a wide berth to nervous people on subway platforms during the wee hours, particularly when I have exchanged business clothes for jeans….And on late-evening constitutionals I employ what has proved to be an excellent tension-reducing measure: I whistle melodies from Beethoven and Vivaldi and the more popular classical composers." In your own words, explain what Staples is saying and connect it to the *Blindspot* concept of "automatic associations."

6) Explain how the Bechdel test relates to Adichie's idea of a "single story"?

7) Why is it important to understand how our automatic and reflective minds work? Explain your answer with specific examples.

Papers Written Outside of Class:
What If I Suspect a Student Has Used AI?

Common Signs: Officious prose that is often overly broad, light on detail, and has no errors or student colloquialisms. Occasional "AI hallucinations" or wild inaccuracies, such as referring to a character in an insane asylum when there is nothing like that in the novel. May ignore specific parts of the assignment (e.g., not include texts/ideas discussed in class, no quotes from other students' discussion board prompts).

1) **I run segment(s) of the text through multiple AI detection programs.**
   This is important because it's common to get an incorrect "human generated" result.

   https://copyleaks.com/ai-content-detector
   https://writer.com/ai-content-detector/
   https://www.scribbr.com/ai-detector/
   https://contentdetector.ai/
   https://gptzero.me/

2) **If the detectors show a strong probability the text was AI-generated, I assign no credit and write a note to the student in Canvas:**

   "This didn't sound like you, so I ran it through AI detectors, which found a 98% probability that it was AI generated. Because of this, the assignment receives an Incomplete. This class is about supporting you to grow as a thinker and writer, which can't happen if you're not writing your own papers. Please remember that if you use AI on a major assignment, it will receive a failing grade and you won't be allowed to revise."

   - Sample response to AI on a low-stakes exit ticket (graded Complete/Incomplete)

3. I follow up with a quick conversation before or after class.

   "Did you see my note in Canvas about the AI?" Students typically admit they did it and provide context. Once a student denied using AI and showed me their Google doc version history, and this was sufficient for me. If this didn't resolve my concerns, I'd have a conversation to assess their grasp of the vocabulary and ideas in what they submitted.