

# 3 Student Reflections on Gen-AI and What We Can Learn From Them

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Conversations about generative-AI and education continue to be dominated by EdTech CEOs, AI companies, and AI influencers. Once in a while, an educator or a parent joins the conversation.

Rarely do I see students at the table.

That's why we need to listen very carefully when students write openly about their experiences with school and the rise of generative AI.

Here, I want to share three articles written by high school students about their uses of generative AI, what they see happening, and how it all relates to their lives. Each of these reflections goes beyond describing what tools they use and how, exploring how this technology has affected their private, academic, and social lives.

That's what makes these reflective pieces so impactful.

## **Assessment as Obstacle: William Liang**

William Liang is a high school student in California. He was recently profiled in [a Forbes article by Dan Fitzpatrick](#).

Here is what Liang said: "For most students, an assignment is not interpreted as a cognitive development tool, but as a logistical hurdle." He continues, "Right now, that mechanism [for overcoming the hurdle] is generative AI."

In Liang's view, for many students education has become a transaction. The goal is to get past the assignments as quickly as possible, securing better grades and (ostensibly) better futures without slowing down.

In many ways, Liang's approach is a natural product of the system. Fitzpatrick connects it to the culture of grading: "For decades, the system has screamed one thing above all else: grades matter more than understanding. When the goal is the A grade, and a tool exists that gets you there in a fraction of the time, why wouldn't you use it?"

When grades become the central focus, the shortcuts don't just become permissible. They become desirable.

Now, I don't think everyone needs to become an [ungrader](#). But I do think we need to think seriously about how grades enables the transactional model of education, which generative AI then plays into.

We need to design our courses and programs in ways that decenter grades.

## **Losing Power By Degrees: Olivia Han**

Liang helps us understand why students might flock to generative AI because of a larger system. Sixteen-year-old Olivia Han focuses on a different part of the experience.

In [a letter printed in \*The New York Times\*](#), she reflected on her ongoing use of generative AI:

"At first, I told myself I was being resourceful and efficient. It was working smarter to have you articulate my thoughts, so why should I work harder when you always had the answer? But slowly, your voice started to replace my own, and I couldn't write a paragraph without

wondering how you would say it.”

Olivia writes about a gradual progression. She uses generative AI to work smarter, not harder. She uses it to get her ideas out. But slowly and surely, she starts to depend on it. She gives away her voice — her power — inch by inch.

Learning to write is about exploring our own voices. For Olivia Han, the experience of writing with ChatGPT did exactly the opposite. It encouraged her to gradually give up her own voice, because there was always something more polished, more refined at her disposal.

What’s so encouraging about Han is that (1) she realizes what was happening to her and (2) she was able to step back. She writes about looking back at “things I wrote without you — an old essay, a birthday card, a journal entry of half-finished thoughts — and there’s something raw and unmistakably mine about them.” For Han, it’s about ownership. She chooses the more arduous road, because it comes with more ownership over her voice.

Good for her. But many students (and people in general) won’t make that choice. That’s what worries me. I suspect that many people would trade away their voice for convenience.

Han’s story expands our scope. It shows how the use of generative AI is about more than offloading some tasks. Using it encourages us to think and act in certain ways.

Our next writer will take that idea and show how high-stakes that makes things.

## **Epistemological Crisis: Mary Ruskell**

The effects of generative AI extend far beyond our students' academic lives. For many, it is changing the way our students connect with others.

Mary Ruskell, a high school student in North Carolina, writes compellingly about her experiences in [a CNN article](#).

She writes about how frustrating it is to be a teenager right now, not being able to trust anything that is shared online. She's finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction, not only for information she reads on the internet but for her digital communication with others.

She asks, "If mistrust becomes the default approach to life, what would be the point of doing anything for other people that you don't already know? Will we be able to get to know each other deeply, or successfully communicate?" These questions get us outside the classroom, connecting her encounters with AI-generated content to her own sense of purpose.

Ruskell then asks a question I think about every day: "Can you really build a life when you don't know what is real and what is fake, when you can never trust what you see, what you learn, or how the world works?"

That question resonates with me as an educator, as a parent, and as a human being. She's watching everyone around her use this technology and is experiencing an existential crisis as the boundary between reality and fiction becomes blurrier.

That perspective is essential if we want to build classrooms that prepare our students to "build a life." And isn't that what education is all about?

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As educators, we have a tall order. We need to support William Liang, Olivia Han, Mary Ruskell, and any other student who walks into our classrooms.

If nothing else, reading these student reflections on generative AI makes one thing clear. Our students aren't monoliths. On the contrary, they bring to the classroom very different ideas about how generative AI does (or does not) fit into their lives.

Recognizing this is step one in adapting to the Age of AI. In fact, I don't see how we move forward without it.