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Editorial Musings

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A couple of years ago, my Significant Other discovered he had a leaky mitral valve in his heart. Without treatment, he could easily die of congestive heart failure. We sought the advice of a physician who offered to enter my 86-year-old SO in a study, saying “You’ll have a 50/50 chance of getting mitral valve clips versus open heart surgery.” I said, “This is not a crap shoot. There will be no open heart surgery”—and out we walked. Later I found that this doctor received up to \$8000 for every patient he referred to this study. The motive for his recommendation was all too clear.

I subsequently published an article in the newspaper about the potential loss of trust in the medical profession if money was going to be the prime motivator for medical recommendations. A surprising number of readers sent messages relating similar stories. This potential loss of trust was in my mind when I wrote my last column in which I speculated on the looming influence of AI and Chat GPT on scientific research. Since that column, an enormous amount of material has been published on that topic, both positive and negative—with perhaps a preponderance of negative. As of this writing, it appears that even the creators of this game-changer have had second thoughts and have called for government oversight—although these same creators show no signs of desisting from their ongoing work to “improve” their creation.

Whatever may come of all this, the loss of trust in the originality and reliability of published articles, especially of a scientific nature, has already begun. How can anyone know at this point whether a published article is genuine or simply a product of AI? Publishers, it seems, are asking this very question and have begun to take steps to limit the potency and potential liability of AI in their publications.

I recently participated in several online presentations concerning this very topic, and I note that some guidelines have been put in place regarding scientific articles for publication. First in line is a distinction between the actual process of

writing a scientific article as opposed to the use of AI tools to analyze data and derive a theory as part of the research process. The guidelines I have seen to date emphasize that the ethical scientific writer should only use AI technologies to improve the readability and language of the article. The publication guidelines insist upon human oversight and control, including authorial review and editing of the manuscript. The fear, as expected, is that AI can generate authoritative-sounding output that can be incorrect, incomplete, or biased. AI is never to be listed as author or co-author, on the premise that a human author undertakes responsibilities and tasks that cannot ethically be attributed to AI. Any writer of a scientific article would be wise to check Elsevier's [AI policy for authors before attempting to publish](https://beta.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/publishing-ethics?trial=true). The website link for that policy is: <https://beta.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/publishing-ethics?trial=true>

Authors are required to “disclose in their manuscript the use of AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process” and are advised that “authors are ultimately responsible and accountable for the contents of the work” (Elsevier). This is an important advancement in ethical guidelines that any upcoming author, especially of articles of a scientific nature that could have long-term consequences, must heed. To attempt to take “AI shortcuts” in the production of an article is to invite risk, censure, and altogether negative consequences for both writers and readers.

And to return to my original assertion concerning the potential for disastrous loss of trust in scientific practices of all sorts, writers must determine to practice the most rigorous ethics to maintain the trust we still have. It is up to those of us dedicated to honest scholarship to maintain our integrity, our trustworthiness, and our ethical standards. Doing this might at least keep science and scientific writing above the AI fray, at least for the foreseeable future.

Bio:

Dr. Kendra Gaines received her doctorate in English Literature from Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois. She taught at Northwestern, as well as University of Michigan, before moving to Tucson. At the University of Arizona, she served for 16 years as Senior Tutor and Instructional Specialist in, first, the Department of English, and then at the UA's Writing Skills Improvement Program. Dr. Gaines has taught at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base for almost 30 years, teaching for Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Chapman University, Park University, and Pima College. Dr. Gaines teaches online as well. She is completing her seventeenth year teaching both English and Philosophy courses for Colorado Technical University. She has also been teaching online for Park University, work which has included several blended (both online and in person) courses and is a full Professor of English at Akamai University.

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