

Introduction

RESEARCH QUESTION: *How do DU writing students experience and articulate their rhetorical agency in light of the new and complicated landscape Generative AI models (GenAI) create? How do students define what is “theirs” in the writing process?* See more about this project:



Methods

Students in WRIT 1122 and 1133 (Spring 2026) were surveyed in Week 1 (64 responses) and Week 10 (51 responses) across four sections. Both surveys included additional questions about accessibility needs, learning styles, and past experiences with writing. The QR code below shows the open-ended survey questions pulled for this project:



Analysis: Responses were analyzed using a grounded-theory-informed process of initial coding, focused coding, and category development. Codes were compared across responses to identify recurring concepts, tensions, and relationships rather than imposing predetermined categories.

WRIT 1133: Week 1

Writing as a way to think

“Writing helps me discover my ideas because typing and looking back at what I wrote allows me to figure out and think of things I would not have without the time and mental space that writing gives me.”

Personal experience as the source of authentic writing

“In my experiences so far I've found that as a writer, I tend to write my best when I'm personally reflecting on an experience.”

A developing and sometimes fragile writerly identity

“I used to actually really enjoy writing, but since going to that school and having my writing completely torn apart by every teacher in every class all the time, I very quickly lost any interest in it.”

AI as scaffolding for getting unstuck

“When I use AI I often use it to help me start and then once I get in a flow I become much better.”

Writing exists in tension between meaningful activity and assigned labor

“At times if I am writing about a topic that I don't enjoy or find interesting writing can definitely feel like a chore.”

What would you say?

1. What role does writing play in how **you** develop or discover your ideas?
2. How (if at all) do **you** use tools like AI when you write or think?
3. What do **you** believe is yours in the process of writing (e.g., your voice, experiences, insights, or ways of thinking)?

WRIT 1133: Week 10

Writing as a way of developing ideas

“Writing allows me to express my ideas to others while also helping me better understand myself and the world around me.”

Claiming ownership through voice, experience, and perspective

“I believe my vulnerability is mine when I write, since I project a unique perspective that the audience can relate emotionally to.”

Personal writing as reflection and identity

“By beginning to write about a story about an event that shaped the way I think about myself, I started to work through something I was not willing to share... that helped me to lift a massive weight off my shoulders.”

AI as a tool rather than replacing thinking

“At times, I used AI tools to help brainstorm ideas, clarify concepts, or receive feedback on organization and grammar. However, I still believe that the most important parts of my writing are my own.”

Writing shifts between “task,” communication, and learning depending on purpose

“Before, writing felt mostly like a task, but now I see it more as a way to reflect and express my own experiences.”



Tensions and Complexities (not Conclusions)

(These patterns represent qualitative shifts in students' descriptions, not causal change.)

Students already understand writing as a way of thinking—but they are still negotiating what it means to be authors.

Their responses suggest that the central pedagogical opportunity is not simply teaching students to produce “better” writing. It is helping students recognize and develop the relationship among experience, thought, language, revision, and authorship in a writing environment where AI can increasingly supply the words.

Beginning of course:	End of course:
Writing helps me organize thoughts	Writing helps me discover ideas
“I am a good/bad writer”	More nuanced writer identities
AI helps me start/organize	More explicit boundaries around AI
Personal writing feels authentic	Voice articulated as authorship
Writing often feels like a task	Writing more often seen as learning

Students' accounts resist simple binaries.

Writing is not inherently meaningful or task-like; its meaning shifts according to genre, topic, choice, prior experience, and perceived purpose.

Students experience writing as:	But also as:
Thinking	Task completion
Personal expression	Academic performance
A source of learning	A means of communicating
Their own voice	Something AI can help produce