

For the purposes of First-Year Composition (FYC), I group GenAI Activities into two conceptual categories: activities that invite students to (1) build GenAI literacy and (2) use GenAI to maximize critical thinking (rather than to manipulate the tool to generate polished, publishable output).

BUILDING GenAI LITERACY

By the time they complete their FYC requirements, students should have a baseline understanding of what GenAI is, how it works, and what its strengths and weaknesses are. Instructors should use class time for activities that deepen student knowledge about this emerging technology and that give students time to play with the tool and critique its output. There are infinite ways to do this. Below are just a few ideas.

Activity 1: Comparing Human and GenAI Summaries of Short, Basic Texts

Use this activity in the early weeks of the course not only to build GenAI literacy but to get students thinking about the complexity of summarizing as a skill. Choose a relatively short, online article from a reputable popular source to assign for homework one week. Make sure that the article pertains to the class focus so that you can discuss the content as well as use it for the activity. Engage in this activity after students have read the article and turned in some brief homework assignment in which they write or respond to questions about the article.

1. Explain that the purposes of this activity are to:
 - a. Think critically about how to compose a summary that highlights each of the important elements of some piece of writing
 - b. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of GenAI as a tool for summarizing
2. Ask students, individually, to take 5 minutes to write 2-4 sentences that summarize the major points of the article. They should do this quietly and alone.
3. Put students into groups of 3. Give them 7 minutes to first share and then merge their summaries into one. After sharing, they should reflect on what the most important parts of the article are and then combine their insights into one, new 2-4 sentence-long summary. They should upload their summaries onto your content management system or send them to you in some way.
4. Choose one group summary to show on the board and engage the class in a critique of the summary, asking what parts of the article, if any, are missing from the summary. Engage the students in discussing how the summary can improve or where it does a great job.
5. BEFORE CLASS, prompt any GenAI app to summarize the text of the article. Take screenshots of the prompt and the output OR open the app in class to demonstrate. Read the summary aloud to the students, and show it on the board for them to see/access.
6. In their groups of 3, ask students to discuss the following reflection questions:
 - a. What part, if any, of the summary was the most effective?

- b. What part, if any, of the summary was inaccurate?
 - c. How did the summary differ from the ones we wrote in groups?
 - d. What did this activity teach you about the process of summarizing?
 - e. What did this activity teach you about the strengths and/or weaknesses of GenAI?
7. Engage students in a whole-group discussion of the reflection questions.

Activity 2: Comparing Human and GenAI Summaries of Long, Complex, Nuanced Texts

In my class, students engage in this activity only after they complete a multimodal group project summarizing a 40-page chapter from an academic anthology that relates to our class-wide research focus. Students spend 2 weeks reading, annotating, and answering questions about the chapter then produce a 5-minute video in which they summarize the major points of the chapter and suggest why other university students should read it.

Before doing this activity, students should engage with a long, nuanced, academic text that (1) relates to your class research focus and (2) may be interpreted in slightly different ways by different audiences. They should also produce a summary of the text in some specified mode whether individually or in groups.

Also, to complete this activity, you will need access to a GPT that allows you to upload PDFs and prompt for a summary. ChatGPT 4 has this capability, but you must have a paid subscription. Other GenAI apps may facilitate this without payment. Be aware that this is a limitation before choosing this activity.

1. Get permission from students and share at least 2 of their academic chapter/paper summaries with the whole group. If the summaries are written, read them aloud. If the summaries are videos, screen them for the whole class.
2. Put students in groups of 3. After engaging with both summaries, ask students to reflect in groups on the following questions:
 - a. Compare the two summaries. How did they overlap, and how did they differ?
 - b. What important parts of the article, if any, did the summaries leave out or miss?
3. BEFORE CLASS, use a GenAI app that allows you to attach PDFs to your prompt. Attach the PDF of your class reading and prompt the AI to provide a summary of the text. Share the output with the students by reading aloud or by giving them access electronically to screenshots.
4. In their groups of 3, ask students to discuss the following reflection questions:
 - a. What part, if any, of the summary was the most effective?
 - b. What part, if any, of the summary was inaccurate?
 - c. How did the summary differ from the ones your classmates wrote?
 - d. What did this process teach you about the strengths and weaknesses of GenAI?

5. Engage students in a whole-group discussion of the reflection questions.

THINKING CRITICALLY WITH GenAI

In English 102, or the second of the two-course FYC sequence, instructors can develop activities that use GenAI to deepen student analysis and synthesis of primary and secondary research. What these activities highlight is that students must do a lot of deep thinking *before* they can reap any benefits from GenAI. First, they must engage in data analysis and think critically about their research to compose effective prompts. When students take time to reflect on their research findings and then compose detailed summaries to use as the basis of a GenAI prompt, students jumpstart the difficult work of synthesizing research findings. Instructors guide students to engage critically with the output, but the value of these activities lie in the cognitive load students must take on in the prompt generation as well as *before* they get to prompting. To help transfer that awareness to future writing contexts, instructors can ask students to reflect on the experience of composing the GenAI prompt, helping students notice that the time and thought they spent to craft the prompt has a direct relationship to both the helpfulness of GenAI's output and to their choice about how to incorporate GenAI's output into their final drafts.

Activity 3: Leveraging GenAI for Qualitative Data Analysis

Students should engage in this activity after (1) developing primary research tools such as surveys or qualitative research interviews, (2) executing the primary research, (3) learning about basic qualitative data analysis such as coding, and (4) spending some time analyzing/coding data by hand.

1. Explain to students that in this activity, they will turn to GenAI to look for additional patterns in their primary research data. Make sure to emphasize that GenAI can only be a second pair of eyes in the data analysis phase, and that the researcher must be familiar with the data first before turning to GenAI. Communicate that the purposes of this activity are to:
 - a. Explore how GenAI might enhance your perspective on primary research findings
 - b. Think critically about how to appropriately incorporate GenAI output
2. Ask students to choose ONE survey or interview question and to copy all recorded responses.
3. Supply students with three different prompts. Instruct students to prompt the AI with the following:
 - a. “Below I will paste survey/interview responses to the following question: [insert question here]. **Would you please summarize the different categories of responses?** Here are the responses: [paste the responses here]”

- b. “Below I will paste survey/interview responses to the following question: [insert question here]. **What patterns or themes exist in the responses?** Here are the responses: [paste the responses here]”
 - c. “Below I will paste survey/interview responses to the following question: [insert question here]. **What patterns or themes exist in the responses that might be relevant to [insert my audience here]?** Here are the responses: [paste the responses here]”
4. Instruct students to carefully read the output and then engage in reflection (written or discussion-based) using the following questions:
 - a. Compare the codes/categories *you* developed during your qualitative data analysis with the code/categories that GenAI suggested. How do they differ? Where are they the same?
 - b. What new ideas did you get from GenAI’s output?
 - c. What additional research or thinking will you need to do to verify/adapt/incorporate these new ideas?
 - d. What does this process teach you about how to use GenAI, if at all, in your research process?
 5. Emphasize to students that they should never take GenAI output and thoughtlessly incorporate it into their work; they should take time to reflect on how to verify and fact check then merge the ideas, should there be any, into the specific context of their research, personal voice, and perspective.

Activity 4: Leveraging GenAI for Research Synthesis and Thesis Drafting

Students should engage in this activity after (1) articulating research question, (2) conducting primary and secondary research, (3) engaging in some qualitative data analysis of their primary research, and (4) creating some kind of research synthesis outline or map. At this stage, students should either be ready to draft or have already drafted working thesis statements for their research papers.

1. Explain to students that in this activity, they will see what additional ideas GenAI might have about how to synthesize and draw conclusions about their research. Emphasize that the purposes of this activity are to:
 - a. Challenge yourself to cogently summarize your research findings in an effective prompt
 - b. Explore how GenAI might enhance your perspective on the research findings
 - c. Think critically about how to appropriately incorporate GenAI output

2. Ask students to use their research synthesis map to compose a summary of their research findings. The summary should include a clear articulation of major findings from academic sources and primary research. Consider providing an example summary.
3. Supply students with three different synthesis prompts. Instruct them prompt the AI with EACH of the three prompts using the same summary of research
 - a. “I have completed secondary and primary research on the question [Insert question here]. **Would you please review the following research information and articulate a conclusion that connects all the points?** Here is the summary of the research [INCLUDE SUMMARY HERE].”
 - b. “I have completed secondary and primary research on the question [Insert question here]. **What are some specific takeaways or conclusions that this research might lead to?** Here is the summary of the research [INCLUDE SUMMARY HERE].”
 - c. “I have completed secondary and primary research on the question [Insert question here]. **What conclusions could I draw from this research that might be relevant to [insert specific audience of the paper here].** Here is the summary of the research [INCLUDE SUMMARY HERE].”
4. Instruct students to carefully read the output and then engage in reflection (written or discussion-based) using the following questions:
 - a. What new conclusions/ideas/takeaways, if any, did the AI generate that you had not yet considered?
 - b. What additional research or thinking will you need to do to verify/adapt/incorporate these new ideas?
 - c. How might you modify your summary if you wanted to redo this process?
 - d. What does this process teach you about how to use GenAI, if at all, in your research process?
5. Emphasize to students that they should never take GenAI output and thoughtlessly incorporate it into their work; they should take time to reflect on how to verify and fact check then merge the ideas, should there be any, into the specific context of their research, personal voice, and perspective.