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Chat(GPT)-ing about the Affordances Generative AI Tools Offer for ADHD Writers

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Increasingly, there has been an ever-blooming bouquet of discourse surrounding generative AI (genAI) writing tools and Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT and their place in the academy, particularly within writing classrooms. Points of interest in these conversations range from dystopian murmurings of sentient LLMs being able to replace writing teachers– breeding concern about things like job security and subject matter expertise concerning legislation, institutional policy, and curriculum– to pedagogical questions about the degree to which genAI-based tools belong in writing classrooms altogether. These conversations are packed with pedagogical nuances and raise questions about authorship, academic dishonesty, assessment, and even what qualifies something as writing, creating a space for us to think about writing processes and course goals more closely (Vee). I am interested in leveraging these recent conversations about the integration of genAI into our classrooms to explore the numerous benefits doing so may have for disabled students, particularly neurodivergent student writers (NDSW) with ADHD. Particular components of the writing process like drafting, scaffolding, and revision, often neglect to consider the specific needs of neurodiverse learners that are informed by the ways we experience time, absorb information, draft and compose, and even embody class spaces (Hubrig and Barritt), and many of these components require the use of cognitive processes and executive functions that ADHD learners struggle with. Such executive dysfunctions related to information processing, organization, temporality, motivation and initiation, affect the ways we engage with and carry out most tasks. I draw from existing Writing Studies research about neurodivergent writers, and my own experience as a disabled PhD student and instructor with diagnosed ADHD, to demonstrate some of the affordances genAI tools such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Whisper (an automatic speech recognition transcription tool) have to help better support ADHD writers. I'll articulate how genAI functions as an equitable tool to support ADHD writers with writing related tasks that are difficult for them because of the symptoms and executive dysfunctions they experience, by automating various parts of the writing process– a set of various nonlinear actions and iterations of brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing.

Further, we as writing instructors can leverage the recent discourse about genAI-based writing technologies to consider the ways the genAI landscape requires the modification and revision of our own pedagogical moves and objectives and prompts us to examine who they're working for. The affordances I point to help us consider the ways in which the contextualization of genAI tools as a welcomed intervention for ADHD students promote the centralization of accessibility in our courses, simultaneously answering a

call to re-examine our pedagogical practices and who they're working for. While there is an increasing amount of work about both the capabilities of genAI technologies and cautionary perspectives regarding environmental and pedagogical risks associated with genAI use, there is less work about the benefits of genAI as writing tools for disabled students, particularly NDSW with ADHD. I affirm that we should rely on disciplinary knowledge and continue to carefully think about the risks and responsibilities involved with committing to the use of genAI to any degree as Jennifer Sano-Franchini, Megan McIntyre, and Maggie Fernandes so thoughtfully outline in their guide "Refusing GenAI in Writing Studies: A QuickStart Guide." It is important to think just as carefully about the affordances and benefits embracing such technologies can have for neurodiverse students.

This exigency is in part impelled by the lack of Writing Studies scholarship about NDSW and their writing processes, and identifies the need for supplemental empirical research where Critical Disability Studies intersects with computation and writing. Data about NDSW and their engagement with the writing process is limited, and existing research about NDSW often groups together the experiences of students with autism, ADHD, and other types of neurodivergences. While there are overlapping symptoms that may lead to shared writing-related experiences between them, it is important that we also work with these populations individually to better understand both the shared and unique experiences of each group. For the sake of this article, given my own experience as an ADHD learner, I will focus primarily on writing process related to ADHD writers, in order to avoid minimizing or misrepresenting the experiences of people with other forms of neurodivergence.

Following Conversations: To Chat(GPT) or not to Chat(GPT)

Like many Composition instructors, I've found myself in the middle of various conversations about the use of genAI in our writing classrooms. During a series of interdisciplinary generative AI workshops I was invited to attend at University of Pittsburgh between the 2023 and 2024 academic year, conversations quickly emerged about the degree to which ChatGPT should or should not be welcomed into our classrooms and teaching practices. Attitudes ranged from total ban, to somewhat restricted use, to a more enthusiastic welcoming of such tools, but much uncertainty about procedure and ethics lived on. Some instructors feared that permitting the use of ChatGPT, whether in their own instruction or for student use, would mean an open endorsement of cheating, plagiarism, and inauthentic work. Conversations about navigating the current genAI landscape are being amplified in the field across various Writing Studies flagship conferences and journals. The 2024 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) hosted dozens of panels about genAI, and WAC Clearinghouse, an open-access peer reviewed Writing Studies publishing forum, published published "TextGenEd:Teaching with Text Generation Technologies," which is a collection of teaching activities and resources related to genAI technologies.

The work being carried out in the field to date suggests that folks are already experimenting with ways they can integrate genAI into their writing classrooms. However, this shouldn't signal a carefree application of genAI where any consideration of ethics and regulatory use are absent. LLMs like ChatGPT are good at producing language, but understanding how LLMs operate in order to articulate the distinctions between human interpretation and meaning making, and machine-produced language, is important. As Byrd cautions, LLMs, while seeming to be effective, "have really created mathematical formulas to predict the next token in a string of words from analyzing patterns of human language. They learn a form of language, but do not understand the implicit meaning behind it" (136). ChatGPT doesn't "understand" language in the way that we as humans do. It is using a very large corpus of data to essentially predict sequentially what comes next, but we as humans can "make productive use of uncertainty" (Vee 2) and engage in critical inquiry by asking and answering questions informed by students' own knowledge and lived experiences, something an LLM can't do.

It's unsurprising that we are starting to see institutions adjust their policies because it is clear that AI is here to stay (Morgan). However, while advocacy for the use of genAI tools in Writing classrooms is growing, there are nuanced considerations that span beyond those who believe embracing genAI will "damage student learning by shortcutting the writing process" (Sano-Franchini et al). Some scholars are thinking about risks associated with genAI use like upholding white supremacy and white dominant literacy practices (Bender et al.; Byrd; Sano-Franchini et al.), perpetuating environmental racism and the lack of regulations in place for the big tech companies that own them (Bender et al.; Sano-Franchini et al.). Like any pedagogical initiative we choose to fold into our instruction, there is a degree of responsibility that exists when it comes to the resources we choose to utilize, and we should treat genAI technologies no differently.

Jennifer Sano-Franchini, Megan McIntyre, and Maggie Fernandes, the authors of "Refusing GenAI in Writing Studies: a QuickStart Guide," offer a framework for instructors to make discretionary decisions about using genAI, grounding the rationale for degree of engagement in disciplinary knowledge, risks, and long term implications. This guide offers a valuable framework for thinking about the ways genAI can significantly change the ways we teach writing, who is affected, and refusal as a sliding scale. Ultimately, they close with "it is a rational and principled choice to not use GenAI products unless and until we have determined that their benefits outweigh their costs" (Sano-Franchini et al.). This claim has prompted me to think further about consciously weighing some of those benefits. We can advocate for informed and responsible uses of genAI, while working to determine *if* the benefits outweigh the risks. GenAI tools can benefit NDSW by automating the parts of the writing process they struggle with, that do not "shortcut" the learning or writing process (Graham). Investigating the ways ADHD symptoms and executive dysfunctions materialize as obstacles within the writing

processes is worth considering to avoid overlooking the benefits genAI may have for neurodiverse writers, while aiming to center accessibility in our teaching.

Neurodiverse Writers and Their Processes

People with ADHD struggle with executive cognitive functions or "mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully" ("Executive Function & Self-Regulation"). I include the full list of executive dysfunctions recognized by the Cleveland Clinic ("Executive Dysfunction") because of how each of these manifests and affects our ability to engage in various parts of the writing process. Executive dysfunction can look like any or all of the following:

- Inability to focus on just one thing.
- Focusing too much on just one thing.
- Daydreaming or "spacing out" when you should be paying attention (such as during a conversation, meeting, class, etc.).
- Trouble planning or carrying out a task because you can't visualize the finished product or goal.
- Difficulty motivating yourself to start a task that seems difficult or uninteresting.
- Struggling to move from one task to another.
- Getting distracted or interrupted partway through a task, causing you to misplace items or lose your train of thought (like leaving your keys in the refrigerator because you wanted a snack, but your hands were full, so you put your keys down inside the refrigerator and forgot about them).
- Problems with impulse control, like snacking when you're trying to manage your diet. Struggling with thinking before you talk, causing you to blurt out the first thing that pops in your head without considering that it might hurt someone's feelings.
- Having trouble explaining your thought process clearly because you understand it in your head, but putting it into words for others feels overwhelming.

Many of the executive dysfunctions ADHD writers experience are due to decreased levels of dopamine; writing related tasks like organizing, staying on task and within scope, giving and receiving feedback are difficult, so thinking about the ways in which we are asking neurodivergent students to engage with the writing process is important. Automating some of these steps (i.e. portions of planning, organizing, and revising) have helped me manage and reduce some of the executive dysfunctions I experience throughout my own writing process. Prioritizing students' rights to their own language (CCCC; NCTE) must include affirming their voice and autonomy as a means to their own language processes (Hubrig and Barritt 215). As instructors, we can support students by allowing them to compose in the way that makes sense to them (Hubrig and Barritt 221). The utilization of GenAI as a tool to automate parts of the writing process that executive dysfunctions make difficult legitimizes alternative knowledges by recognizing them. Recognizing students' identities and processes is a method of

supporting students with other identities and literacies (Ubbesen, *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*), and can help build self-efficacy by giving them the option to explore methods and strategies that may better work for them.

Combining ADHD symptoms and examples of neurodivergent writers' processes offers an opportunity to centralize accessibility in our classrooms. Disability scholars like Ada Hubrig, Anna Barrit, and Christina Cedillo share experiences and insights about the nature of their own neurodivergent writing processes**.** Barritt says her "brain works a bit more chaotically. I prefer to gather a lot of ideas, quotes, and concepts, and roughly organize them in the general structure I imagine for the paper. Then, I spend several hours 'binge-writing' and voila! There's an essay!" (222). Cedillo notes that she has struggled with conforming to neurotypical norms, at times questioning if this profession is even for her (216). Hubrig comments about various parts of scaffolded assignments leading to additional labor for them, saying, "could I make an outline first? No. But I'd draft a more completed form of my essay and go back and produce required artifacts like an outline" (212). This illuminates a certain degree of invisibility within the writing process, and we should consider how we can recognize this labor. For example, during my 90-minute commute, I often rely on voice recordings and other non-traditional forms of notetaking to compose my rough drafts. Like these other scholars, my process looks different than a more traditional, scaffolded approach. Asking me to produce a written rough draft would be asking me to conduct a substantial amount of additional labor. In a way, this inherently rejects my production medium, diminishing the value of my non-written draft. I ask us to consider how we might think about genAI processes to imagine a space where such tools can act as interventions to help us re-center which parts of the writing process are important to writers developmentally, asking ourselves what we value and want students to learn.

In Praxis

While it is understood that not all writers engage in writing in the same ways, nor do they have the same writing processes, the use of genAI tools can alleviate writing-related obstacles that result from certain ADHD symptoms and executive dysfunctions. Calling attention to various parts of the writing process where automation can lead to more productive development of content by equitably redistributing labor and energy also promotes a sharpened sense of self efficacy and trust in students by acknowledging and validating their knowledges and processes. While learning new technologies may be a concern for some instructors because it requires varying degrees of temporary additional labor upfront, this is an instance where embracing the benefits of such technologies allows us to begin to consider how the benefits may outweigh the risks. Further, this is already labor we regularly carry out when we revise and refresh existing course materials as we continuously learn from our students, educational communities, and other scholars in the field. We are well equipped to do this work because we are already doing it as we regularly facilitate ways for our

students to explore new ideas and processes through regular feedback to build upon their autonomy and self-efficacy.

I've broken down this section into two categories to illustrate how students can use ChatGPT and Whisper to automate parts of their writing processes. While the writing process is not linear, and certain components will occur and reoccur cyclically throughout the process, the next two sections provide examples of automating tasks related to labor, drafting, revision, and feedback.

Labor and Drafting

We have established that people with ADHD struggle with motivation and task initiation due to decreased levels of dopamine. People with ADHD often experience time as either "now" or "not now," which, as you can imagine, affects everything we do. This temporal outlook makes deadlines, routines, and prioritization difficult. It isn't that we struggle with the inability to plan or strategize, but rather, we struggle with the ability to initiate various steps in the routine, and end up doing it all in one fell swoop just before the bell rings. Hubrig and Barritt's problematization of certain types of drafting and scaffolding affirms this particular struggle. I can remember having an outline due, but instead of writing the outline, I would write the draft. And when the rough draft was due, I would produce something that was closer to a final draft. Then, I would have to spend extra time intentionally messing up the draft I had in front of me to more closely resemble the rough draft I was expected to turn in. This often resulted in frustration and avoidance because I was being asked to draft in orders that felt unnatural, tedious, and impossible. These are precisely the kinds of moments that allow us to examine parts of the process that are valuable in different ways for different writers, and ones that can be used as bargaining chips in exchange for more productive areas to focus our attention.

In addition to the way we experience time, things like organization, structure, accountability, and formatting can produce other challenges that make writing difficult. The time it takes to compose across other mediums can be recognized and recovered by automating parts of the writing process to create a written version of the draft. For example, a student who has an audio or video recording can use Whisper to transcribe their files. They can then take the transcription and put it into ChatGPT and ask it to extract the main points, create a summary, or to put it into a specific format that makes sense to them during this stage of the process. Organizationally, students may use ChatGPT to create a schedule for them, both saving them time and helping them see the steps involved.

Those who experience the inability to focus on just one thing, fall victim to extreme hyperfocus, or struggle to move from one task to another can have trouble dealing with scope. Because at times it can be easy to get lost in one thing, we lose the ability to move ourselves forward and grapple with compulsion. This can manifest in writing in a number of ways, but can look like a lack of meaningful or efficient synthesization of

scholarship. The writer may spend too much time engaging with only one or two sources, conducting a comprehensive overview of them, but losing the thread that was supposed to tether them to other conversations and the overall argument intended to be made in the first place. For me, this happens often and looks like a reference overload; not even within the paper itself, but reading other articles, books, and dumping them in another random Google document that I probably forgot to name (because surely opening my Zotero is too many steps to deal with), and before I know it, hours have gone by and I've made no traceable progress on the page in front of me despite putting in hours of work that would eventually shape a later draft.

Other executive dysfunctions causing inattention to detail may translate to avoiding writing tasks that require extra steps, like putting off standard formatting, in-text citations, or references. Multi-step tasks are especially laborious to complete because each step feels like a separate project on its own. While we may be great at generating ideas and seeing big pictures, it can be easy to run into scope-related obstacles. Students may choose to use ChatGPT to help mitigate some of this by generating a schedule or plan to identify goals and to visualize exactly what they're working on to avoid scope creep. This creates an opportunity for the instructor to step in and talk with the student about their process and to recognize drafting patterns, working as an intervention to plan, create, and/or modify assignments that work for them. Similarly, using ChatGPT to automate the citation process can be helpful because people with ADHD often struggle with task initiation. This process can be more time consuming and more difficult both mentally and emotionally for them, and automating this step can help alleviate these symptoms.

Feedback and Revision

Even if a student is left with wonderfully kind, effective, thoughtful feedback, it can be overwhelming and difficult to know where to start when trying to implement that feedback. Recently, I have encouraged my students to think about ways we may be able to make this simpler, bypassing some of the wheel-spinning I've suggested they use ChatGPT to help them find a place to start by copying and pasting their collection of comments into the prompt box and asking it to summarize the feedback. The result may look like a concise summary where comments exist in one space. Having the comments exist in one space can help students feel less overwhelmed because it reduces the organizational overwhelm and avoidance that may stem from such an initially daunting set of revision related tasks. Students may prompt ChatGPT to group like comments that are similar or repetitive in content/suggestion to focus their attention to specific tasks to focus on with the intention of reaching a clearer and more attainable goal. They may also prompt it to compress them into a specific formatting style that they know is preferable to them (summary, bullet-point list, a story, etc.).

Further, Whisper and ChatGPT can be accommodating for students who struggle with focus, distraction and interruption/interrupting, daydreaming or "spacing out" during

tasks or conversations, trouble filtering/expressing their thoughts, or verbally explaining their thought processes even if they understand it clearly in their head. It can be challenging to wrangle everything if you experience one of these things, let alone a combination of them, so utilizing Whisper for recording and transcription can help reduce the burden of trying to remember, say, everything discussed during a conference or feedback session. Students can again use transcription tools to help transcribe, summarize, organize, or extract arguments and key ideas, and this may be especially helpful orienting oneself when providing or receiving feedback. Additionally, having an accountability partner to work alongside is another useful strategy to mitigate symptoms and promote boosted task initiation, soundboarding, and productivity. When I have the opportunity to pilot my ideas with someone, I find it extremely beneficial because they act as a soundboard that helps organize ideas, redirect focus, ask pointed questions, and help extract what is important now and what may be "for another project," leaving me with a much clearer sense of direction and scope. Soundboarding is one of the most important steps for me in my writing process because it creates a space where brainstorming, synthesis, and revision can begin to blossom in a productive way, and it stimulates my mind and keeps me engaged in ways working independently does not. However, as grateful as we are for them, sometimes, we might not have access to a feedback or accountability partner, and in those times, we can use ChatGPT to replicate a number of the things we seek from circumventing and sharing our ideas with another person.

It is important to have conversations with our students and ourselves as we consider the ways we'll use ChatGPT, careful not to obfuscate its perceived functionality. In this scenario, the specific affordance here is leaning into the LLM as another agent involved in our writing process that "chats" with us to simulate particular attributes we value from working with human accountability partners. While these attributes include recognizing the features intentionally built into ChatGPT to mimic conversation like the fact it is a "chat" box and as you input things into the prompt box, it shows the user texting bubbles, emulating the act of chatting and imposing a sense of presence on the other end, the affordance may be useful for students who have previously worked with accountability partners to assist with initiation, accountability, and soundboarding.

Conclusion

Welcoming such affordances can help build student autonomy and self-efficacy by recognizing alternative forms of knowledge more broadly. Using genAI as tools to soundboard, brainstorm, organize, initiate, and generate personalized plans and schedules can make writing more equitable for ADHD writers. Identifying the parts of the writing process that are disrupted by various executive dysfunctions that ADHD students experience allows us to understand how certain affordances genAI tools offer can make writing less challenging. While this article primarily focused on the affordances of OpenAI's ChatGPT and Whisper, we can look to other genAI-powered tools to explore additional benefits that may serve writers beyond the ADHD population

in order to continue to center accessibility in our teaching practices. This work is a jumping-off point that brings forth opportunities to better understand how neurodivergent writers engage with the writing process. Finally, this illuminates a call for additional empirical research to be conducted about ADHD writers while simultaneously encouraging the re-examination of our current pedagogical practices and who they prioritize.

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