



Empowering Today's Educators  
— with AI

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# AI Usage Guide *for* Instructional Design *and* Academic Integrity

*The 5 Levels of AI Use for Students*

(v 1.0)

AI is here, and students are using it.

Use this guide to determine how students may use AI in their assignments, clarify expectations, and ensure that AI is being used for learning—not replace it!

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## 5-Level AI Scaffolding Scale for Student Assignments

The following information is primarily based on the guidance from “Empowering Education Leaders: A Toolkit for Safe, Ethical, and Equitable AI Integration” (US DOE, 2024) and “Human-Centered AI Guidance for K-12 Public Schools” (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2024).

Levels of AI use for students can be best understood through a structured, scaffolded framework designed to promote ethical, purposeful, and progressively deeper engagement with AI tools.

The tiered level model below offers a graduated framework for student interaction with AI.

### The 5 Levels

Level	Title	Description
1	No AI Assistance	Students rely solely on their own skills. No AI tools are used.
2	AI-Assisted Brainstorming	AI is used only for idea generation. Final content is produced independently by the student. AI input must be cited.
3	AI-Supported Drafting	AI assists with generating a draft, but the final product must be significantly revised and refined by the student. Clear delineation between AI and student input is required.
4	AI-Collaborative Creation	AI-generated content may be used in the final product. Students must critically evaluate and transparently cite AI contributions.
5	AI as Co-Creator	Students integrate AI deeply in content creation. They must justify AI use, preserve academic integrity, and show original thought through citation and rationale.

This model emphasizes *human empowerment*, encouraging students to progress in their understanding and ethical application of AI—from passive users to active collaborators and evaluators of AI-generated content.

### Notes for Teachers

- At Levels 2–5, students must be taught how to evaluate AI output, ensure information and factual accuracy, and cite AI use.
- Tools should be school-approved, age-appropriate, and aligned with data privacy rules (e.g., COPPA compliance).
- These tasks should include structured reflection and teacher guidance to develop critical thinking and media literacy.

## The 5 Levels: Scaled Sample Activity

Here is a practical breakdown of the 5-Level AI Use Scaffolding using a 5th-grade unit on New Mexico History as an example. Each level illustrates how students can interact with AI tools responsibly and appropriately for their age while exploring state history.

Level	Title	Example in New Mexico History Unit
1	No AI Assistance	Students read a textbook chapter on the Pueblo Revolt and write a short summary in their own words, using only teacher-provided materials.
2	AI-Assisted Brainstorming	A student uses an AI tool like ChatGPT to generate a list of possible project topics (e.g., statehood, famous New Mexicans, Native tribes, Spanish colonization). The student selects one but completes all research and writing independently.
3	AI-Supported Drafting	A student asks AI to help write an outline for a report on Billy the Kid. The student then uses that outline to write the report, revising details, adding facts from class readings, and rewriting in their own voice. The student cites that AI helped create the outline.
4	AI-Collaborative Creation	A student works with AI to write a draft script for a skit about the Santa Fe Trail. The student edits and revises the AI's text to ensure accuracy, adds personal touches and dialogue, and cites AI support in a reflection.
5	AI as Co-Creator	A student and AI co-develop an interactive digital timeline of New Mexico history. The student feeds AI a list of key dates, and the AI helps write blurbs and generate quiz questions. The student justifies AI use, edits each AI-generated entry, and includes citations explaining their collaborative process.

## Explaining the 5 Levels to Students

High school students likely have broader access to AI tools than younger students, and the instructional activities may suggest higher levels of use. It becomes increasingly important to clarify not only what level of use is allowed but also what the various levels indicate. Modify this table as needed to explain to students how they can apply the 5 levels.

Level	Title	What It Means	Analogy	Schoolwork Example
1	No AI Used	You do the task completely on your own.	Writing a paper by hand, without internet.	You write a research paper on the Civil War using only books and your own words.
2	AI for Ideas	AI helps you brainstorm, but you do all the actual work. You must cite the help.	Asking a tutor for topic ideas, but writing everything yourself.	AI gives you a list of possible science project topics. You choose one and do all the work.
3	AI for Drafting	AI helps with early drafts or rough outlines. You revise and make it your own.	Having a friend help you outline your essay, but you write and polish it.	You ask AI to draft an intro paragraph. You rewrite it, check the facts, and add your voice.
4	AI as Collaborator	AI contributes text or content you include, but you must revise and explain how you used it.	You and a friend write a story together—you edit their lines to match your style.	AI helps write part of your draft. You edit it, fact-check, and explain where AI was used.
5	AI as Co-Creator	You and AI build something together. You stay in charge, explain your choices, and cite your process.	You direct a team project where AI is one of your teammates.	You and AI create a digital story or video. You write the prompt, guide edits, and submit a note on how AI helped.

### *Key Reminders for Students:*

- AI is a tool, not a shortcut. You're always responsible for the final product.
- Always cite your use of AI. Just like quoting a source, honesty matters.
- Human judgment comes first. If AI says something, you need to check it.
- Teachers may assign a required level. Some assignments may be Level 1 only.

## Levels 4 & 5 in Practice: Example Activities

### *Level 4: AI Collaborative Creation*

#### Historical Debate Simulation

- **Activity:** Students use AI to generate arguments for a historical debate (e.g., Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists). AI provides initial perspectives and counterarguments, but students must fact-check, refine, and present their arguments.
- **Objective:** Teach students to critically evaluate AI-generated content, improve argumentation skills, and enhance historical literacy.
- **How AI is Used:** AI suggests debate points, but students refine, expand, and present the arguments.

#### AI-Assisted Science Experiment Design

- **Activity:** Students input a research question into an AI tool (e.g., “What factors affect plant growth?”). AI provides experiment suggestions, but students must design and conduct the experiment themselves, interpreting results independently.
- **Objective:** Foster scientific inquiry, critical thinking, and hands-on experimentation.
- **How AI is Used:** AI suggests experiment designs, but students execute and analyze results.

#### Creative Writing Collaboration

- **Activity:** Students co-write a short story with AI. AI generates a story outline or character descriptions, and students must expand, modify, and complete the story, ensuring it aligns with a chosen theme or literary style.
- **Objective:** Encourage creativity, literary analysis, and structured storytelling.
- **How AI is Used:** AI provides inspiration, but students craft and refine the final narrative.

***Level 5: AI as Co-Creator*****AI-Generated Podcast on Social Issues**

- **Activity:** Students create a podcast episode where AI helps generate interview questions, summarize research, or suggest discussion points. Students then record, edit, and present the podcast.
- **Objective:** Develop media literacy, research skills, and effective communication.
- **How AI is Used:** AI assists with planning, but students produce and present the final work.

**AI-Powered Coding Challenge**

- **Activity:** Students use AI tools like ChatGPT or CoPilot to help generate code snippets for a game or app that solves a real-world problem (e.g., an AI-powered language learning tool). They must document their process and explain AI's role in development.
- **Objective:** Develop computational thinking and AI ethics awareness.
- **How AI is Used:** AI suggests coding solutions, but students refine and integrate them.

**AI-Generated Data Analysis for Business Proposals**

- **Activity:** Students use AI to analyze market trends and create a business plan for a startup. AI generates data insights, and students must interpret findings, develop marketing strategies, and present a business proposal.
- **Objective:** Enhance data literacy, entrepreneurial thinking, and decision-making skills.
- **How AI is Used:** AI processes data, but students draw conclusions and make strategic decisions.

## 4 Keys to Determining Which AI Level to Allow

AI tools are easily accessible to most students. When designing lessons, teachers need to account for the possibility that students will use AI. In fact, for some students and for some types of assignments, AI use might be encouraged. Following is guidance to help teachers determine the degree to which students may use AI, based on learning purposes, outcomes, and developmental readiness.

### 1. Connection to the Instructional Core

AI use should always strengthen, and never replace, the **instructional core**. To determine which levels of AI use might be appropriate, teachers should first determine the nature and purpose of the instructional activity or assignment.

Assignment Purpose	Levels	Rationale
Is the purpose to measure student mastery of a skill or concept? Is the goal to assess individual knowledge?	Levels 1–2	Students demonstrate their unaided ability or knowledge.
Does this assignment require students to reason, analyze, or create? Is the goal to assess process, reflection, or ethical judgment?	Levels 3–5	Students use AI to support higher-order thinking.  (Every AI-involved submission should include a student reflection or citation note identifying how AI was used.)

### 2. Learning Objective and Cognitive Demand

**Activity Type:** The type of instructional activity also assists in determining how students might use AI.

Type	Level	Example
Foundational skill or recall task	Level 1	vocabulary quizzes, basic computation, grammar drills
Idea generation or pre-writing	Level 2	using AI to list topics or generate possible hypotheses
Process-oriented writing, design, or coding task	Level 3	using AI to create an outline or first draft that students must heavily revise
Analytical or creative synthesis task	Level 4	co-developing a script or visual design where AI output is refined and cited
Capstone or innovation project	Level 5	students manage AI as a creative partner and justify its use as part of their reasoning

### 3. Student Readiness and Age

Student readiness to engage with AI at various levels provides a blanket determination of appropriate levels of use. Very generally, the following guidelines reflect students' ability to use AI purposefully and responsibly based on their cognitive development stages.

#### *Lower Elementary: Levels 1–2.*

Generally, younger students are not yet able to use AI (and justify its use) for higher-order analytical reasoning and collaborative development. AI use should be guided, playful, and engaging. Their use of AI should stay within levels 1–2.

#### *Upper Elementary & Middle School: Levels 1–4.*

As students' ability, conceptual understanding, and reasoning skills develop, they may be able to use AI for more complex reasoning tasks, such as structured drafting of content and evaluating information. Their use may extend into level 3, or even level 4 for more advanced students.

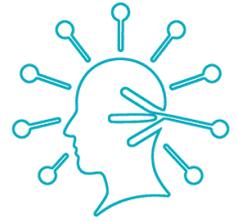
#### *High School & Post-secondary: Levels 1–5.*

These students typically have the ability to engage collaboratively with others, delegate tasks, synthesize information, and justify their process. These abilities are represented in level 5.

### 4. Teacher Role

- Clearly state expectations for AI use within each assignment, particularly for upper elementary through post-secondary students.
- Provide explicit expectations, critical thinking instruction, and structured support.
- Ensure that instructional activities and assignments that support various levels of AI use cannot be completed without personal contribution.
- Expect students to justify AI use and provide attribution for AI contributions.
- Review all AI-assisted work to ensure factual accuracy, ethical alignment, and appropriate / acceptable AI use.

# ARE YOUR SCHOOLS READY FOR AI?



Empowering Educators, Administrators, and Leaders to Harness Artificial Intelligence for Learning, Leadership, and Policy

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS HERE—ARE YOU READY?

Whether you're teaching in a classroom, leading a school, or building a learning community, AI can help you work smarter, lead more effectively, and raise student achievement. Professional development and consulting services provide practical and strategic support for integrating AI in your schools. From teaching students to developing AI policy, you need to be ready now!



### FOR TEACHERS

Work smarter, Teach better, Tailor instruction, Help students grow



### FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Lead instruction, Accelerate growth, Promote responsible use



#### Save Time

Write lesson plans, create rubrics, grade student work, and draft parent communications in seconds



#### Enhance Instructional Leadership

Analyze lesson plans, generate monitoring tools, tailor individualized teacher support, support the application of best practices



#### Improve Instruction

Get differentiated strategies, language scaffolds, and instant feedback ideas



#### Support School Improvement

Analyze data, set goals, create action plans, and guide school improvements



#### Boost Achievement

Analyze data, set goals, design authentic assessments, increase subject area mastery



#### Lead with Confidence

Understand education trends, strengthen knowledge, communicate clearly

*AI is more than a shiny new toy!*

*Use AI efficiently, effectively, and ethically to empower teachers and help students learn.*

## CUSTOMIZED WORKSHOPS - STRATEGIC PLANNING - POLICY CONSULTING

Training tailored to your needs and audience, from PreK teachers to school & district leadership to your school community. Support for instructional delivery, leadership, and AI policy development, based on **30+ years in education leadership at all levels!**

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