The Power of Personal Voice: Analyzing ChatGPT-generated Emails for Language, Meaning, and Use

Course Subject:	Culture and Communication Skills for Graduate School
Student Level:	First-semester international graduate students
Number of Students:	8
Developed by:	[Ilka Kostka](), Teaching Professor, College of Professional Studies

What Students Did

Outside of class, students watched two instructor-created videos that described how to write appropriate emails then completed a worksheet with comprehension questions based on the main ideas in the videos. In class, they practiced writing emails in response to a scenario (e.g., asking a professor for an extension). Students then compared their emails to ChatGPT-generated emails in order to analyze language, meaning, and use in context.

Learning Goals and Purpose

To construct email messages with proper etiquette and tone for various audiences in a university setting.

Assessment

This activity was done in class and was not graded. Students presented their work to the class, and I provided written feedback on both sets of emails.

Faculty Reflections

I sensed that some students had been using ChatGPT to generate emails, as their emails were written with language and a tone that sounded different from theirs. Because of this, I wanted them to explore the potential and limitations of ChatGPT specifically in terms of email etiquette. I think this activity went very well and taught students to pay attention to voice in writing, as well as language, grammar, and meaning. They also had the opportunity to reflect on how their relationship with the recipient may be impacted if they were to send ChatGPT-generated emails.

Through this lesson, I learned that exploring the use of ChatGPT together can go a long way in building trust with them.

Step-by-Step Student Instructions

Step 1	Outside of class, students watch two videos about the "dos and don'ts" of writing appropriate emails in a university setting. They take notes and use their notes to complete a handout with comprehension questions.
Step 2	In class and in small groups, students are given four minutes to write down everything they learned about email etiquette. They share their ideas with the whole class.
Step 3	Small groups collaborate to write an email in a Google doc based on a scenario supplied by the instructor (e.g., requesting an absence or a recommendation letter).
Step 4	The instructor projects each group's email to the class for group discussion, feedback, and questions. The instructor encourages students to consider language, meaning, and use, focusing on how language may vary based on the relationship between the sender and recipient.
Step 5	Groups prompt ChatGPT to produce an email for the same scenario. Students copy and paste the output under the original email they write.
Step 6	Students analyze the ChatGPT-generated email, and compare it to their original one, focusing on content, length, organization, tone, appropriateness, grammar, and mechanics.
Step 7	Students share their findings with the class and discuss which email they would send to their professor: the original one, the ChatGPT-generated email, or an email that combines content from both their original email and the ChatGPT email.