

Editorial Writing

State Meet • 2023



You are a reporter for the **Leaguetown Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School. From the given information, write an **editorial** as you would for the high school newspaper.

Remember that as an editorial writer, you should **support or oppose** policy or action; you should not sermonize. You have **45 minutes**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 1,700 students enrolled in grades 9-12. This month, junior AP U.S. History students were assigned a research paper to count as their final exam in the course. For the assignment, students were required to conduct thorough research on one aspect of the United States' involvement in the Cold War. Students were to provide a thesis, personal analysis and provide a bibliography with multiple sources.

At the conclusion of the assignment, AP U.S. History teacher James McGowan used an online artificial intelligence content detector to determine that five of the 108 papers submitted to him had a significant portion of the assignment written using an AI generator, such as ChatGPT. These students each received a zero on the assignment, with the opportunity to resubmit it for a 50. They also received compulsory expulsion from the National Honor Society. Per the student code of conduct, which each of the five students signed along with their parents, teachers may offer grade reductions as a consequence for cheating or plagiarism.

All five students have written a formal appeal to the sponsor and faculty advisory committee for National Honor Society, asking to be reinstated in the organization. The NHS faculty advisory committee will issue a response to their formal request for appeal at its next closed session meeting on May 24. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Monday, May 22.

THOSE SUPPORTING THE STUDENTS' APPEAL

Using an artificial intelligence tool is not the same thing as plagiarism. It can help a writer generate words, but the writer must still generate good ideas. Students who completed this assignment using AI still had to do research and learn the material. They should not be punished because a teacher and the school don't yet understand the newest tool at students' disposal. This is a tool that is not going away. The school should encourage students to use the best tools to achieve the best work, which will better prepare them to use AI effectively when they go to college or enter the workforce.

THOSE OPPOSING THE STUDENTS' APPEAL

Students signed a code of conduct at the beginning of the year. They knew the consequences of plagiarism when they started this assignment. They also knew "character" was one of the key pillars of NHS, and plagiarism could cause them to be removed from the organization. These students used software to write their paper for them. Now they are facing the consequences. Students go to school to do one thing — learn. A teacher can't evaluate student work if the student isn't the person completing the assignment. Now, those students should face the consequences.

■ **JAMES McGOWAN, AP U.S. History teacher**

“I knew this was coming, but I didn’t know it would be this year and with some of my top students. I heard a few of them talking about how AI works one day, so I had a hunch they might be thinking of trying it. A lightbulb went off. I looked up some free AI detector tools and ran some of the papers through a couple of the programs. The first two didn’t do anything, but sure enough, when I got to the third paper, two different detection tools told me that the student had not written most of the paper. They got an AI program to do it for them instead. From that point on, I checked every paper. Not only were the papers generated by artificial intelligence easy to spot — they also weren’t good papers.

“Writing an essay isn’t only about words. It’s also about logic and creating and supporting an argument. As an educator, I was disappointed in the situation. I have always taken academic integrity seriously. I want my students to be successful on the AP test, in college and when they go to work. This means the work students submit should be done by the student — not a computer.”

■ **CAROLL HATHAWAY, junior**

“I was one of the students who used AI. I did all my own research about the Soviet arms race and created an outline for the paper. I wrote a strong thesis. Then I asked ChatGPT to write a 2,500-word research paper about the United States’ involvement in an arms race with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It didn’t generate a very good paper. So I went back and asked the software about specific topics of each paragraph I wanted. I made several edits to the final product. I don’t know how Mr. McGowan was able to tell I used ChatGPT, but I think this paper was pretty good. I still learned about the Cold War, which was what the assignment was asking us to do.

“I have done more than 500 hours of community service this year. I have all A’s. I plan to apply to several Ivy League schools next year. Removing me from National Honor Society is needlessly cruel. Maybe the school wants to establish itself as the dominant superpower, like the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War.”

■ **DOUG ROSS, assistant principal**

“One of the cornerstones of education is that students learn the most when they are active participants in the learning process offered by their teachers. This AI-generated essay situation presents a number of difficulties. On one hand, it is not traditional plagiarism because it is not outright copying of the work of another. However, it is like plagiarism because it uses ideas that don’t originate with the student, even though the student had to supply the AI tool with the parameters to write the essay. When we investigated the situation with the teacher, it was clear that the students did not write their own essays. The students admitted to using AI, and administrators investigated. Removal from NHS is an automatic consequence for academic dishonesty.”

■ **JUANA GUTIERREZ, senior**

“I understand why the teachers and administrators reacted the way they did, but it’s not fair to these students to change their grade and remove them from NHS. People don’t understand how ChatGPT works. It’s not like they were cheating. ChatGPT can’t simply write a good essay. The students had to do a lot of work to generate the papers they created. If they didn’t set up the parameters of the argument, the output would have been trash. I’m about to be our valedictorian, and I’ve used ChatGPT several times to help me formulate my thoughts on an assignment. It’s a good tool that’s not going anywhere. We should embrace it.”

DO NOT PASS OUT TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST

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Editorial Writing Contest Tips and Sample Stories

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critiquing/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Lead with a statement of the situation and then take a clear, definitive staff stance. The situation is whether or not NHS should reverse the decision to remove five students from the club.
2. As a general rule, use third person. If you must use a pronoun, use first person plural (we, meaning "we, the newspaper staff"). Do not use first person singular (I, me, mine) or second person (you). Avoid unnecessary use of pronouns. Rather than "We believe the district should..." write instead, "The district should."
3. Don't waddle into the editorial. Get right to the point and, as a general rule, don't ask questions. An editorial should answer questions, not ask them. Above all, remember that your purpose is to make thoughtful, logical arguments in support of your position, not to engage in a tirade. The editorial should not be long — 450 words at the most. Although it's not recommended all the time, sometimes a writer could use a feature opening to grab the reader's attention and draw them into the story.
4. Look for the future angle. Your paper comes out before the school board meeting.
5. Once you've stated your position/stance, the body of the editorial should support your stance and refute the opposition.
6. After the body of your editorial, complete the editorial with a specific solution.
7. Avoid direct quotes unless the quote adds substantially to the editorial. You can pull information from these quotes, as has been done here, but it's not necessary to attribute that information unless the person has substantial credibility.
8. Watch for factual errors. Pay attention to minor details. Also, stay focused.
9. Don't clutter up the editorial with clichés or trite phrases such as "adults don't understand teens" or any variation thereof. Also, edit out the name of the school unless it is necessary for clarity. It isn't necessary to say "Leaguetown Independent School District" or "Leaguetown High School." Students know the name of the school. They don't need to be reminded.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/SUPPORTING

Five students have written formal appeals to the National Honor Society advisory committee asking to be reinstated to the organization after they were expelled for using AI generators to help write their AP U.S. History final papers. The committee will issue a formal response to the students' requests at its next closed meeting on May 24.

NHS should accept the students' requests and reinstate them back into the organization.

AI generators, such as ChatGPT, usually require the user to know about their topic before generating good writing. When students were using this tool, they were learning.

It is unclear in the student code of conduct if AI generators are plagiarism or not. Therefore, unless it was clearly stated, students should not be subject to expulsion from the club. The students did not use the AI generators as a form of academic dishonesty but rather as a learning tool.

AI is the future of science and technology, but it can also be a great tool for studying liberal arts. Sometimes writing is difficult, and students can feel stuck with words. AI generators help to give writers options for how to phrase things differently so their words are clear and effective, almost like a teacher would.

AI generators are already used across the country by university students and professionals. It is undeniably a good tool to accomplish writing goals and check writing for clarity and grammar. Teachers should teach how to use ChatGPT as a learning tool rather than trying to weaponize it.

If AP U.S. History teacher James McGowan had a problem with students using AI, he should have confronted them when he heard them talking about it in class originally. If he had used the conversation as a teaching moment and warned them about the possible consequences of using AI in his class, the students might not have done it.

The five students should be reinstated into NHS instead of being removed permanently. It doesn't take much intelligence — artificial or otherwise — to see that.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL/OPPOSING

Five students have written formal appeals to the National Honor Society advisory committee asking to be reinstated to the organization after they were expelled for using AI generators to write their AP U.S. History final papers. The committee will issue a formal response to the students' requests at its next closed meeting on May 24.

The NHS committee should reject the students' appeals for reinstatement into the club.

The National Honor Society has the word 'honor' in its name. It would be an embarrassment to the organization to have these students reinstated after an investigation confirmed they did use AI generators to write their papers.

AI generators are plagiarism because some of the information the AI uses is from its vast knowledge from the internet, which goes uncited when the generator creates it.

The students signed a code of conduct at the beginning of the school year, and the use of AI generators in a paper students claim to write themselves is the very definition of academic dishonesty.

AI can be helpful for science, math and technology, but when it comes to writing papers, AI is unable to analyze and add depth to a paper like humans can. The use of AI shows that the students took shortcuts when it came to really diving into the meaning of the paper.

The students may have college applications or internships on the line with this expulsion, but the real world has tough consequences for cheating and plagiarising. The automatic expulsion reflects that.

There's nothing honorable about plagiarism. The NHS faculty advisory committee knows that. If the students' lives go on without missing a beat, they will never learn a lesson about why using AI generators is wrong. This punishment fits their actions, and the committee should not reinstate them.