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From Brainstorming to Boundaries: Writing Center Tutors' Use of Generative AI

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***Abstract*—The increasing presence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in higher education has created new challenges and opportunities for writing centers. Peer tutors are now encountering student work that has been shaped, in whole or in part, by AI tools. Responding to this development requires balancing the pedagogical goal of supporting students' learning with institutional expectations for academic integrity. This study examines how peer tutors at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) Writing Center employ AI tools in their sessions and the boundaries they set. Data were collected from a focus group discussion, a collaboratively authored staff document, and a follow-up staff meeting. Thematic analysis of these data reveals that tutors use AI selectively for purposes such as generating ideas, clarifying language, and simplifying complex readings, while avoiding uses that would replace students' own writing or promote the use of AI. The study offers practical insights for writing centers seeking to integrate AI in ways that preserve the collaborative nature of tutoring while supporting ethical and effective student writing.**

***Index Terms*—generative AI tools, writing centers, peer tutoring, tutor training, academic integrity**

I. Introduction

Writing centers have long been spaces where students work one-on-one with peer tutors to develop their ideas, clarify their arguments, and refine their writing. This work depends on active dialogue and a shared commitment to student ownership of the writing process. At the American University of Sharjah (AUS), an English-medium university in the United Arab Emirates that serves a linguistically and culturally diverse student body, this work takes place within a multilingual context. The AUS Writing Center, modeled on the American writing center tradition, provides individualized academic writing support across disciplines through peer tutoring sessions that address a range of academic tasks, including essays, research papers, oral presentations, laboratory reports, and postgraduate theses. The center employs approximately twenty-five peer tutors and facilitates between 3,000 and 3,500 appointments each academic year, with most sessions held in person during the working week and synchronous online consultations offered on weekends.

In this setting, where peer tutors work closely with students on developing ideas and language, the arrival of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has disrupted established dynamics and raised new questions about authorship and originality. The speed of this change has required tutors to adjust quickly, often without established guidelines or a substantial body of research to guide their decisions. In writing center sessions at AUS, tutors are frequently among the first to engage with student writing shaped by AI tools, which require them to respond to these texts in real time while maintaining the educational value of the tutorial.

In an earlier study (Eleftheriou et al., 2025), peer tutors at AUS discussed the challenges they encountered when students brought AI-generated text to their sessions. Tutors often faced unethical requests to "humanize" AI-generated text, which were complicated by inconsistent university guidelines. To navigate this, tutors encouraged transparency about AI use to build rapport and trust, which helped them understand students' motives and tailor guidance. This openness allowed tutors to discuss the benefits of AI for brainstorming and organization while discouraging uncritical copying.

Since that study, the use of AI in higher education has expanded, and conversations have shifted from focusing solely on misconduct to exploring how AI might be incorporated constructively (Ahmad et al., 2024; Al-Alami, 2024; Al-Smadi et al., 2024; Eljack et al., 2025; Jamshed et al., 2025). However, research on AI in writing centers remains limited, particularly on how tutors integrate these tools into individual sessions without compromising the educational value of their interactions. This lack of scholarship is notable because tutors are often among the first to engage directly with student work shaped by AI. Concerns about voice, identity, and authenticity are now central, particularly for multilingual writers who move between languages and styles (Sandstead & Kibler, 2025). Tutors help students navigate both human and AI language while encouraging growth without losing individuality.

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The present study builds on earlier findings by examining how AUS Writing Center tutors are using AI during tutorials. Drawing on data from a focus group, a collaboratively written staff document, and a follow-up staff meeting held more than a year later, the study offers an account of how tutors negotiate the role of AI in their work while supporting students' learning and meeting institutional expectations.

II. Literature Review

A. Challenges in Integrating GenAI in Writing Center Practice

Scholars caution that AI can displace the reasoning and reflection writing center tutorials are meant to build if students let it handle idea development, phrasing, or planning (Lingard, 2023). For multilingual writers, AI often pushes writing toward a standard academic voice, limiting translanguaging and lexical variety and distancing students from their own language resources (Barrot, 2023). This concern connects to Sandstead and Kibler's (2025) work, which shows that L2 writers' "voice," or sense of self in writing, can be lost when AI-generated phrasing replaces personal expression. They emphasize that keeping writing authentic and reflective of students' own thinking helps multilingual writers shape their voices instead of adopting AI language.

These stylistic pressures sit alongside writing center concerns about authorship and academic integrity: tutors report uncertainty about when to intervene when students present AI-shaped drafts or ask to "humanize" machine text (Roustio, 2025; Aikens & Weildon, 2025). In response, the literature points to practical solutions: keep invention and revision decisions with the student (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Gillespie & Lerner, 2008), have students analyze AI output and then rewrite in their own voice (Lingard, 2023; Barrot, 2023), and verify any research that uses AI, since it can be wrong and fabricate citations (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). Our earlier study aligns with these concerns and practices: tutors described students concealing AI use, requests to "humanize" AI text, and uneven course policies. In turn, they emphasized transparency and consent in sessions and redirected work toward rewriting in the student's own language (Eleftheriou et al., 2025). These findings also reflect broader trends in higher education, where guidelines are emerging to promote transparency, AI literacy, and integrity (Moorhouse et al., 2023). Together, the scholarship suggests using AI selectively, with disclosure and verification, to support invention, reading comprehension, genre analysis, and language growth while authorship and final decisions remain with the student.

B. Opportunities Using GenAI in Writing Center Practice

Research shows that integrating AI into tutoring sessions can support students' literacy while maintaining the engagement and critical thinking central to writing center pedagogy.

(a). Brainstorming and Generating Ideas

A significant opportunity AI presents in writing is its ability to support brainstorming and idea generation. In her in-depth analysis of ChatGPT's feedback, Lingard (2023) argues that while AI has many weaknesses, such as biased, generic, and often inaccurate responses, it can serve as a practical starting point when writers begin to draft. It can suggest titles, create outlines, and help writers visualize different approaches to structuring a piece by providing multiple outline examples. Writers can then analyze and compare these options and select the most appropriate ones for their writing. Lingard recommends using "incremental prompting" to focus ChatGPT's responses and make them more helpful in brainstorming specific ideas. She illustrates this by sharing her own experience: by using ChatGPT's outline for her writing, she was able to conceptualize different sections of her paper and organize her ideas. Scholars note that AI supports prewriting and brainstorming when used critically, helping writers overcome blocks and organize ideas while tutors guide reflection (Barrot, 2023; Lingard, 2023). However, uncritical dependence on AI-generated phrasing can weaken students' reflective engagement with the writing process (Lingard, 2023; Roustio, 2025), which highlights the need for guided use. In a similar example, Krasova and Othman (2024) describe a workshop at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) where tutors identified brainstorming as the most constructive and ethical use of AI. Drawing on studies showing how students use ChatGPT to generate ideas and plan structure (Tsufim & Pomerleau, 2024) and reviews that place AI support across brainstorming, drafting, and editing (AlAfnan et al., 2023), the workshop emphasized how conversational prompting can spark thinking and help writers overcome early writing blocks. For multilingual writers, brief explanations or translations in their first language helped them clarify ideas before switching to English. Tutors encouraged students to use AI for generating possible directions, titles, questions, or outlines while relying on their own reasoning and language choices for the actual writing. They also stressed the importance of acknowledging AI assistance openly to maintain transparency and academic integrity (Krasova & Othman, 2024). This role of AI as a brainstorming partner aligns with Mahapatra's (2024) finding that ChatGPT provides formative feedback that helps students shape and refine ideas. For multilingual writers, it offers early support without replacing human judgment.

(b). Assisting With Research

In addition to brainstorming at the topic and outline stage, AI can help students with research and writing. Researchers have discussed ways in which AI tools can assist students in the research process by facilitating research tasks (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024; Ringo, 2025; Larios Soldevilla et al., 2025). Khalifa and Albadawy (2024) claim that

AI brainstorming can lead writers to innovative research questions by identifying gaps in the literature and steering their research in new directions. Additionally, they argue that AI can assist students in organizing literature reviews by suggesting logical structures and helping outline the flow of ideas to ensure clarity and cohesion. It can also reduce the time students spend searching for relevant articles by efficiently summarizing them; this approach enables quicker engagement with large amounts of academic literature. However, scholars consistently caution that human oversight remains essential, since AI tools can misrepresent sources and fabricate citations (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). This idea aligns with growing evidence that tutors and instructors can use AI tools to support research-related literacy while emphasizing the importance of human guidance (Moorhouse et al., 2023). As university guidelines increasingly acknowledge AI's role in academic writing, ethical integration rather than restriction is becoming a key focus in tutor education.

(c). Supporting Multilingual Writers Through AI Feedback

AI tools can play a critical role in developing multilingual students' writing skills. The interactive space of ChatGPT has positively impacted multilingual learners by improving their reading, writing, and vocabulary skills (Monika & Suganthan, 2024). Barrot (2023) explains that by offering automatic, specific feedback on written work, AI can guide multilingual students on issues they typically struggle with, such as coherence, cohesion, and text organization. AI allows tutors to focus on higher-order aspects like argumentation and structure. This adaptive support, as Mahapatra (2024) observes, helps learners refine syntactic and lexical skills while receiving context-specific feedback. Researchers have also found that AI is particularly effective for vocabulary acquisition. Monika and Suganthan (2024) found that ChatGPT was effective for vocabulary acquisition when ESL learners were exposed to diverse, meaningful contexts. This exposure allows students to encounter and practice new words naturally, supporting long-term retention. These findings reflect Abdelhalim and Alsehibany's (2025) study with Saudi EFL learners, which demonstrated that ChatGPT-based vocabulary scaffolding significantly improved productive vocabulary and confidence in word choice. Their participants emphasized that AI's interactive correction and context-rich prompts made language practice both more engaging and more reflective of honest communication.

Similarly, Alharbi and Khalil (2024) emphasize that ChatGPT's real-time feedback enables students to make and learn from errors on the spot. The interactive nature of these tools also makes vocabulary learning more engaging, encouraging consistent practice. Recent research in writing center studies expands this perspective. Lundin (2025) found that tutors notice multilingual writers using ChatGPT to bridge gaps in language ability, observing that "a student wants to see how a sentence might be reframed, and the reframing of that sentence is beyond their linguistic capability at that moment." This process enables writers to test and expand their linguistic repertoire much as they would when encountering new vocabulary through exposure and experimentation. Nevertheless, Lundin cautions that overreliance on AI may reinforce standardized or "colonial" forms of English, which demonstrate an ongoing tension between linguistic empowerment and conformity. These concerns echo Sandstead and Kibler's (2025) advice for instructors to help multilingual students retain authorial agency and cultural identity in AI-assisted writing, encouraging them to negotiate their authentic linguistic voices rather than suppress them.

(d). Toward Ethical and Reflective AI Use in Writing Centers

While concerns about AI's potential to reduce students' engagement with writing are valid, a growing body of research highlights its pedagogical promise when used critically and transparently. ChatGPT, for instance, can "support bottom-up writing skills, freeing up time, space, and energy for more advanced aspects of composition" (Daniel et al., 2023, p. 37). Mahapatra (2024) explains that when ChatGPT is used as a form of dialogic feedback, it encourages reflection, self-monitoring, and independence in learning. This approach complements the peer and tutor feedback models that are already central to writing center practice. Mollick and Mollick (2023) describe multiple ways students can use AI as a writing partner, from receiving real-time feedback to refining style and generating creative prompts that encourage fluency. These studies, along with initiatives such as the IUP workshop described by Krasova and Othman (2024), highlight a growing recognition that AI can serve as a productive and ethical aid in writing instruction when used to support learning rather than replace it. Their professional development model demonstrated how tutors can analyze both human and AI feedback, discuss challenges collaboratively, and co-create policy frameworks that emphasize transparency and student ownership of writing. Despite these promising developments, little is known about how peer tutors themselves apply such principles during real tutorials, a gap this study addresses.

III. Methodology

This section describes the research design and outlines the study context, participants, data collection methods, and analysis procedures.

A. Research Question

We address the following research question: To what extent do writing center tutors incorporate AI tools into tutoring sessions?

B. Participants

The participants were drawn from the peer tutoring staff of the AUS Writing Center. Peer tutors at the center are generally bilingual and demonstrate high academic achievement. Most are recruited from advanced undergraduate writing composition courses, while others are graduate students enrolled in the Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages program. All tutors undertake a semester-long, credit-bearing training course before beginning their work. This training equips them with the practical skills and pedagogical knowledge needed to support students effectively in one-on-one sessions.

C. Instruments

The three instruments used are the "Focused Group Discussion", "Collaborative Staff Document", and "Transcript of Fall 2024 Staff Meeting". All materials underwent reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The datasets were read multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content. Coding proceeded inductively, with initial codes generated from meaningful units of text and iteratively refined through constant comparison across sources. Codes were then organized into themes, which were reviewed against the coded extracts and the complete data set before being defined and named. Coding, memoing, codebook versioning, and data retrievals were managed in ATLAS.ti, including use of code–co-occurrence queries and memo links to support transparent theme development.

The two researchers checked the codes and themes and resolved differences through discussion. We kept dated notes during the analysis to show how our ideas and themes developed over time. We triangulated across data sources and across time. We also examined counterexamples to test and refine the themes.

D. Data Collection Methods

Three qualitative data sources were used to answer our question: a focus group discussion, a collaboratively authored staff document, and a transcript of a Fall 2024 staff meeting. Using multiple data sources enhanced triangulation and credibility.

(a). Research Design

Approval of the research was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All procedures complied with IRB requirements for informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data handling. Purposive sampling was then used to identify tutors with experience with GenAI in their tutorials who wished to participate in the study. This strategy ensured information-rich cases aligned with the research aim (Patton, 2015). An initial survey was distributed to the whole tutoring staff. The survey asked whether tutors had worked with students who had used AI and whether they were interested in joining a focus group to discuss this experience. Ten tutors participated: this number is consistent with recommendations in the literature that suggest a group of six to ten participants provides a balance between diversity of viewpoints and the opportunity for each person to contribute meaningfully (Freitas et al., 1998). The final group reflected variation in academic major, tutoring experience, and linguistic backgrounds to maximize heterogeneity and perspectives (Table 1).

In addition, two naturally occurring professional-development data sources were included: a spring 2024 workshop that produced a collaborative document in which tutors jointly outlined strategies and guidelines for responding to AI in student work and listed the tools they incorporated into sessions; and a Fall 2024 follow-up meeting that generated a transcript capturing shifts in tutors' perceptions, their strategies for addressing AI-related issues, and their discussion of how they use AI tools in sessions.

(b). Focus Group Discussion

The focus group was held in March 2024 in a quiet room within the writing center and lasted two hours. Ten tutors participated after providing written consent. Participants received an information sheet explaining the study's aims, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, and all data were anonymized. A semi-structured interview protocol guided the discussion, balancing consistency across core questions with flexibility to probe emergent issues. Questions invited tutors to describe challenges they faced when students used AI, outline strategies they found compelling, and reflect on ethical concerns. The conversation was audio-recorded in full and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes captured key gestures and context to deepen understanding. Participants for the focus group discussion are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR THE FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS

Variables		N	Percentage
Major	Architecture	2	20
	Computer Science	2	20
	English	2	20
	Industrial Engineering	2	20
	Journalism	1	10
	Psychology	1	10
	Total	10	100
Standing	Junior	6	60
	Senior	3	30
	Fifth Year	1	10
	Total	10	100
Writing Center Semesters	1	1	10
	2	4	40
	3	1	10
	4	3	30
	4 >	1	10
	Total	10	100
Sex	Female	9	90
	Male	1	10
	Total	10	100
Nationality	Egyptian	4	40
	Indian	1	10
	Lebanese	1	10
	Palestinian	1	10
	Pakistani	1	10
	Sudanese	1	10
	Tunisian	1	10
	Total	10	100

(c). Collaborative Staff Document

In April 2024, approximately one month after the focus group, we held a staff meeting in which tutors contributed ideas to a shared Google document. The activity was a 60-minute structured professional-development exercise with a brief orientation, two contribution rounds, and a final synthesis round. Its purpose was to gather practical suggestions for handling common AI-related scenarios in tutoring sessions. Prompts were derived from the focus group's preliminary codes and then reviewed by the two researchers for clarity and alignment with the study aims. Prompts asked tutors, for example, how they might respond if a student concealed AI use or requested that AI-generated text be revised to appear more human, and they also invited tutors to list the AI tools they used in sessions and to comment on the observed impact of those tools. The format allowed participants to add ideas in real time, build on one another's responses, and record a broad range of strategies. Access to the document was restricted to attending tutors and the research team, and all entries in the research corpus were de-identified and imported into ATLAS.ti as a primary text; individual entries and comment threads were treated as meaning units and linked to analytic memos for transparency. Portions of this dataset were analyzed in a prior publication (Eleftheriou et al., 2025). The present paper extends that work by focusing on tutors' accounts of the tools they incorporated into sessions and the perceived effects on students' research and writing. The document also served as a naturally occurring institutional text for triangulation and for time-based comparison with the Fall 2024 staff-meeting transcript. Details about the tutors who contributed to the collaborative discussion and document appear in Table 2.

TABLE 2
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR THE COLLABORATIVE DOCUMENT GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Variables		N	Percentage
Major	Biology	2	9.5
	Chemical Engineering	1	4.8
	Computer Engineering	1	4.8
	Computer Science	1	4.8
	Economics	1	4.8
	English	4	19
	Environmental Science	1	4.8
	Industrial Engineering	4	19
	International Studies	3	14.2
	Journalism	1	4.8
	Psychology	2	9.5
	Total	21	100
Standing	Junior	12	57.1
	Senior	9	42.9
	Total	21	100
Writing Center Semesters	1	6	28.6
	2	5	23.8
	3	3	14.3
	4	2	9.5
	4 >	5	23.8
	Total	21	100
Sex	Female	19	90.5
	Male	2	9.5
	Total	21	100
Nationality	Egyptian	4	19.0
	Indian	5	23.8
	Lebanese	2	9.5
	Pakistani	2	9.5
	Palestinian	5	23.8
	Sudanese	1	4.8
	Tunisian	1	4.8
	Turkish	1	4.8
	Total	21	100

(d). Transcript of Fall 2024 Staff Meeting

The Fall 2024 meeting was designed to revisit AI in tutoring sessions after more than a year of institutional and technological change. It served as a follow-up to the Spring 2024 focus group and collaborative document. The discussion brought together members of the tutoring staff and explored whether earlier strategies remained effective, how faculty policies had shifted, and what new challenges had emerged. The meeting followed a semi-structured agenda circulated in advance, and the director facilitated the discussion. It is important to note that not all staff participated in this meeting. Because attendance was partial, findings from this meeting reflect the perspectives of those present. Triangulation with the Spring 2024 focus group and the collaborative document helps mitigate this constraint.

The session lasted sixty minutes and was conducted online via Google Meet, a university-approved platform. With participants' consent, the discussion was audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The research team verified transcription accuracy.

The transcript was uploaded to ATLAS.ti and analyzed alongside the earlier focus group and the collaborative staff document. Cross-source comparison supported data triangulation and allowed identification of both recurring and newly emergent themes. This additional data source made it possible to trace developments over time, revealing areas of continuity, adaptation, and change in tutors' perceptions, ethical reasoning, and practices related to GenAI. Demographic information for the staff meeting is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR THE STAFF MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Variables		N	Percentage
Major	Architecture	1	10
	Biology	1	10
	Computer Science	1	10
	Environmental Science	1	10
	Industrial Engineering	2	20
	Journalism	1	10
	Physics	1	10
	Psychology	2	20
	Total	10	100
Standing	Junior	3	30
	Senior	7	70
	Total	10	100
Writing Center Semesters	1	4	40
	2	2	20
	3	2	20
	4	1	10
	4 >	1	10
	Total	10	100
Sex	Female	10	10
	Male	0	0
	Total	10	100
Nationality	Egyptian	2	20
	Indian	4	40
	Lebanese	1	10
	Saudi Arabian	1	10
	Sudanese	1	10
	Turkish	1	10
	Total	10	100

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Using AI as a Tool in Sessions

The section below explores the response to our research question, "To what extent do writing center tutors incorporate AI tools into tutoring sessions?"

Educators have cautioned against using GenAI tools in the writing process. However, as Stowe (2023), a writing center director, writes, "As long as tutors are very careful about checking the information they find, these programs could be useful when helping students with research. They work, in some ways, as quick search engines, and as long as you check the information you find, that might be a place to use them in a practical way in our centers" (para. 2). Our findings align with his idea. Tutors revealed the various ways they integrate AI into their sessions across all datasets: they incorporate GenAI with caution, promoting its use for acceptable purposes while ensuring it complements, rather than replaces, student learning. Similarly, Mollick and Mollick (2023) argue for structured exploration that helps tutors evaluate AI's usefulness while maintaining human agency. These shifts suggest that tutors are becoming innovators, but their work must remain guided by pedagogical and ethical principles.

Comparable developments are evident in the workshop by Krasova and Othman (2024) at the Kathleen Jones White Writing Center. Their professional development initiative, "Overview of AI Technology and its Relevance to Writing Center Support," invited tutors to examine benefits and risks, try tools in a guided way, and compare ChatGPT feedback with human feedback on the same student paper. Tutors noted that AI feedback tended to focus on surface-level edits, while human feedback supported rhetorical development and writer confidence. The closing activity asked tutors to draft a shared AI policy that encouraged transparent use of AI while preserving student agency. This structured reflection helped tutors clarify ethical boundaries in ways that mirror our participants' priorities.

By comparison, AUS tutors reached similar conclusions through collaborative discussion and reflection on real tutoring experiences. Both contexts show that when tutors engage critically with AI, they arrive at a shared position: AI can help with brainstorming, clarifying ideas, and modeling feedback practices, but it cannot replace real conversation and connection in tutoring. This finding also aligns with Mahapatra's (2024) argument that ChatGPT functions as a dialogic feedback tool that helps students reflect and self-regulate during writing.

B. Brainstorming and Generating Ideas

In the focus group discussion, tutors described using AI for brainstorming; they found it helpful for stimulating discussion. Additionally, it proved valuable for suggesting titles and initiating conversations about effective choices. As Roha explained during the focus group discussion, many students end sessions unsure how to title their essays, so she tells them, "Ask ChatGPT—it's amazing at titles. Don't waste your time on that; focus on the writing first, and if you're stuck at the end, you can ask ChatGPT for a title." This approach shows tutors see AI as useful for minor tasks while

focusing on substantive writing. Some tutors used ChatGPT to prepare for sessions on unfamiliar topics. For example, in the focus group discussion, Sahar said that ChatGPT helped her prepare for a session with an engineering student because she lacked knowledge in the field, and she felt better prepared after learning from it. Similarly, tutors mentioned brainstorming in the collaborative document. Jamila explained, "I would encourage them to implement some of the ideas they received from ChatGPT but use their own voice." This highlights how tutors encourage students to use AI as a creativity booster while ensuring that the student's original voice remains central to the writing process. Tutors at other writing centers have also started incorporating AI into their sessions: Tutors at the University of Connecticut experimented with AI and demonstrated how it can assist in unblocking writers, refining thesis statements, and generating conclusions (Deans et al., 2023). In these cases, the tutors emphasized the importance of using AI as a complement to human input, rather than a replacement for it. At the same time, in the transcript of our Fall 2024 staff meeting, Roha and Jamila expressed reservations about AI-supported brainstorming, noting that it can omit the exploratory talk and free-writing that typically lead to stronger ownership of ideas. They indicated a preference for traditional brainstorming (paper lists, clustering, tutor-led questioning) and described it as more creative and a better model of the thinking process. For these tutors, the work of generating, sorting, and revising ideas with students felt more authentic and transferable than prompting an AI tool. Their views align with research emphasizing the role of tutor modeling and back-and-forth conversation in building genuine idea development (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016) and with findings that students often value the spontaneity and co-construction of traditional brainstorming over computer-generated ideas (Kim et al., 2024). Similarly, Mollick and Mollick (2023) argue that while AI can serve as a creative partner, its results may narrow imaginative exploration when over-relied upon, making human collaboration and reflective questioning crucial for deep learning. Studies by Barrot (2023) and Krasova and Othman (2024) note that while AI can efficiently generate prompts, authentic creativity and rhetorical awareness still emerge most strongly through tutor guidance and human conversation.

C. Assisting With Research

Data from both the focus group discussion and the collaborative document revealed that tutors use AI as a scaffold for academic research to simplify complex scholarly sources and assist with keyword generation. As tutors noted in the collaborative document, AI can "simplify a scholarly paper into simpler words for them to understand," allowing students to access the key ideas without being confused by dense language. Sana expanded on this point in the same document by observing that "you can use ChatGPT to help explain sources if they are written in complicated words or jargon. You can copy paste some paragraphs… to help explain it in simpler terms." By transforming complex language into summaries, tutors help students build confidence to engage with academic texts and reduce the cognitive load that often accompanies difficult readings. However, this form of support still requires students to engage directly with sources to interpret, evaluate, and accurately cite scholarly ideas. This finding aligns with Khalifa and Albadawy's (2024) description of AI's ability to support comprehension and content development by clarifying specialized academic language and providing accessible paraphrases that serve as entry points to deeper learning. It also connects with Mahapatra (2024), who views AI as a formative feedback partner that supports reflection, and with Sandstead and Kibler (2025), who emphasize the need to preserve authenticity and voice even when AI simplifies complex academic material.

Tutors also identified AI's usefulness in generating search terms and noted that it can help students identify relevant keywords and refine their research focus. As Jamila said in the focus group discussion, "ChatGPT is great for coming up with search terms when students are stuck. It helps them find the right direction when doing research." She also described the collaboration this process creates: "We went to ChatGPT and asked for a few keywords, and what I found is that it enhances the session because you work more collaboratively—I just thought that it's kinda like teamwork." In this way, AI serves as a shared prompt that both the tutor and the student examine together. It gives them a starting point for discussion, lets them test and refine terms side by side, and keeps decision-making visible. This collaborative use aligns with the writing center's mission to support learning through conversation while keeping ownership with the student. This use of AI aligns with Kim et al.'s (2024) observation that generative tools can facilitate research discovery by enhancing students' ability to navigate databases and identify conceptual links between topics. Through these practices, tutors are not replacing critical inquiry but showing how AI can support the early stages of research from conceptualization to information gathering.

D. Assisting With Grammar

Data from the focus group discussion and collaborative document showed that tutors promote the careful use of ChatGPT for grammar correction and phrasing improvement. While this was not as central as other forms of AI use, tutors recognized its pedagogical value when integrated thoughtfully. As Samira explained, "I told her, 'You have to use it in a way that helps you build the skill because like 'teach me how to fish, don't give me fish.'''' This reflective stance ensures that students learn from the revision process rather than relying on AI as a shortcut. For multilingual students at AUS, grammatical accuracy often represents a persistent challenge, and tutors observed that AI can help students recognize and self-correct errors through immediate, example-based feedback. This aligns with research showing that AI-generated feedback can enhance language awareness by making grammatical structures more visible to learners and improving syntactic fluency (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024; Kim et al., 2024). Tutors emphasized that this

support must contribute to deeper learning, not only surface-level correctness. This is consistent with research showing that AI grammar tools can strengthen accuracy and promote learner autonomy, but only when students actively engage with feedback rather than apply changes without reflection (Mohebbi, 2025).

In the collaborative discussion, Adam explained that decisions about AI use must be tied to course learning outcomes. He explained that "it is possible to connect contexts to the learning outcomes and engage in reflection on whether particular GPT use violates those learning outcomes. For example, using Grammarly for WRI 001 [beginner-level writing course] is not okay, but for ENG 204 [advanced writing course] it is. The way we identify is based on what the purpose of the course is." His insight demonstrates tutors' ethical awareness of developmental differences and of the assignment's purpose when shaping AI-supported writing. Ultimately, tutors positioned AI grammar tools as a formative support, a starting point for discussion rather than a final product. This approach ensures that students remain active participants in their linguistic development, which is a core principle of writing center pedagogy and ethical AI integration.

E. Generating Model Texts

Across the collaborative document, focus group, and staff meeting, tutors described using ChatGPT to generate model texts that students could learn from rather than replicate. In the focus group discussion, Samira recounted asking ChatGPT to produce an introduction for a genre of essay on a different topic, which helped a struggling student understand how introductions are typically structured. Once the model text was generated, she told her student, "Okay, now that you figured it out from ChatGPT, try applying the same concepts on your own ideas." This example shows how tutors frame AI output as a learning scaffold, a temporary support that helps students develop independence in their writing.

In the collaborative document, Samira described a guided approach to using AI models: "Learning from AI, if there is a particular aspect they like about the generated text, we analyze it together and learn to incorporate it intentionally into original writing." This practice treats AI output as a scaffold students study and then rewrite in their own voice. This practice is consistent with Mahapatra's (2024) argument that structured feedback helps students reflect on and internalize patterns rather than imitate them (Mahapatra, 2024). By stressing analysis and tailoring to the student, tutors do what Roustio (2025) describes: they shape the conversation, so students use AI responsibly and keep their agency.

The staff meeting data further reinforced this trend. Roha explained, "Instead of telling them to start from scratch, I tell them, 'Find one general [AI-generated] paragraph that you like.' And then we'd walk through it to outline the major points in the paragraph—for example, the topic sentence, the source, the explanation." Hania agreed and described a similar practice: "I take the model paragraph and have students try to structure their sentences like that." These practices align with Khalifa and Albadawy (2024), who found that GenAI supports content development by illustrating clear organizational models that students can emulate. Likewise, Kim et al. (2024) show that such guided engagement with AI models promotes metacognitive awareness: students begin to reflect on how texts are constructed and what makes them effective.

F. Assisting With Vocabulary

Tutors described using ChatGPT for quick lexical support during sessions, especially when students could not find the right word in English. This pattern appeared across the focus group, the collaborative document, and the staff meeting, and it is relevant in a multilingual setting like AUS. In the focus group, Layla discussed the limits of the process and the importance of student ownership. However, she allowed targeted language help: "Most of the processes of writing should be off-limits, maybe brainstorming or vocabulary retention (what's the word for….?), I would even be okay with sentence generation, so long as they rephrase it before adding it to their essay." In the collaborative document, Sana took a similar position, using AI as a helper rather than a writer: "I'd probably use a lot of the same approaches of trying to promote original writing. I think I'd also maybe try to point out ways in which ChatGPT could be helpful like [with]…vocabulary." Tutors emphasized that this use should remain interactive and critical. Their approach parallels Abdelhalim and Alsehibany's (2025) findings that AI-supported vocabulary practice can expand lexical range and confidence when used reflectively. During the staff meeting, tutors reported asking for lexical assistance that keeps ownership with the student. Noora explained that she tells students, "You can use ChatGPT in …scenarios where you want to ask for it for like transition words, or maybe like, just asking if the sentence is flowing well…but just don't trust this input all the time, because it doesn't give you the right answers every time." Across all datasets, tutors use AI to prompt vocabulary and keyword possibilities, then ask students to rephrase and integrate choices in their own voice. This keeps the efficiency benefits of AI while supporting language development, originality, and clarity for multilingual writers.

These accounts show a consistent approach: tutors use AI to expand vocabulary in the moment, then return the writing to the student through guided discussion and rewriting. This aligns with research that treats AI text as material for analysis rather than text to adopt, a stance that helps protect multilingual voice and invites metalinguistic reflection (Barrot, 2023; Lingard, 2023). Studies with multilingual learners report that immediate, example-based feedback can support vocabulary growth and confidence when students review suggestions critically and then rephrase in their own words (Monika & Suganthan, 2024; Kim et al., 2024). When AI suggests vocabulary or simplifies a challenging passage, tutors can model verification and source-aware phrasing so students do not copy formulations that may be

inaccurate or out of context (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). This practice is also consistent with writing center principles that prioritize student ownership and collaborative conversation, keeping invention and revision decisions in the student's hands (Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016; Gillespie & Lerner, 2008), and with multilingual pedagogy that values movement across languages to develop precise academic vocabulary (Zhang & Huang, 2024).

G. Modeling and Consent: Navigating Ethical Boundaries in AI Use

A consistent theme in the staff meeting, a year after our focus group discussion, was tutors' apprehension about modeling the use of GenAI during sessions. Several worried that visible use could normalize or encourage it. Banaa explained, "I haven't used or encouraged ChatGPT because, like what Hania said, I'm scared it makes them think they can use it for writing the whole paper." Roha agreed, "Let's say we want to learn how to write an introduction using a ChatGPT-generated paragraph. I feel like it would be an incentive for students to use ChatGPT after the session. I feel like I'd be promoting its use for their introduction." Jamila added, "Because we cannot monitor AI use, we will not know the extent of how they are using it or whether they are using it correctly".

As a result, many tutors resisted presenting ChatGPT as a publicly endorsed tool in the writing center. Noora even concealed her own occasional use to avoid signaling approval: "ChatGPT gives me a list of transition words. I read it as if it is not from ChatGPT." Her acknowledgment of its usefulness, paired with deliberate concealment, captures a central tension in the data. Tutors want to draw on helpful resources without encouraging dependency or undermining student ownership.

Equally important, tutors stressed that any in-session use of AI should be limited to the student's explicit consent. They viewed transparency and consent as essential safeguards that protect the collaborative nature of tutoring and preserve the student's agency in the learning process. This emphasis parallels writing center scholarship that situates ethical tutoring in practices of openness, reciprocity, and shared decision-making (Gillespie & Lerner, 2008; Fitzgerald & Ianetta, 2016). In the context of AI, recent studies have similarly stressed that transparency and consent are key to maintaining equitable and ethical engagement (Aikens & Weildon, 2025; Roustio, 2025). These values also align with broader ethical frameworks for AI in education that highlight human agency, accountability, and informed participation as foundations of responsible use (Floridi & Cowls, 2021). When tutors decide to demonstrate an AI tool, they should first explain its purpose, clarify how it will be used, and ensure the student agrees. This practice situates AI as a shared pedagogical choice rather than a unilateral decision made by the tutor.

Reflexive note. Although not part of the formal dataset, unsolicited student feedback to the writing center survey after the study echoed these concerns. One student reported that a tutor "simply copied everything into an AI tool to find answers," adding that they "showed no interest in reading or understanding the material herself," and described the session as "a frustrating waste of time." While anecdotal, this feedback emphasizes the importance of student consent and transparency when AI is used in real-time. Visible, uninvited use can compromise trust and the perceived authenticity of the session, reinforcing tutors' view that AI should only be introduced through open discussion and mutual agreement.

V. Conclusion

A. Findings

This study contributes to the growing scholarship on GenAI in writing centers by examining how tutors at the AUS Writing Center integrate these tools while maintaining student-centered learning. Across all datasets, tutors described AI as a valuable support for brainstorming, language development, and research, while emphasizing that human interaction remains central to the tutorial. Their selective use of ChatGPT reflects a careful balance between pedagogy, ethics, and transparency.

These findings show that tutors are not simply responding to technological change but actively shaping responsible practices for AI use. Through reflection and collaboration, they position themselves as guides who help students navigate new writing technologies. More broadly, the study shows that core writing center values such as collaboration, reflection, and student ownership continue to guide tutoring practice even as tools evolve. When used thoughtfully and transparently, AI can support these principles.

B. Implications

These findings have several implications for writing center administration and tutor training. Tutor education can include AI literacy and ethical reasoning so that tutors can evaluate when AI use supports learning. Writing centers can also develop clear guidelines for AI use that align with university policies while still allowing tutors room for professional judgment. Further, given the linguistic diversity of students at AUS and comparable institutions, training should include strategies for using AI to support multilingual writers without replacing meaningful language learning.

Finally, this study contributes a regional perspective to international discussions about writing, authorship, and the role of AI in higher education. Documenting tutor decision-making in a multilingual Middle Eastern context highlights the importance of including diverse experiences in shaping the future of writing center work in the age of GenAI.

C. Recommendations for Future Research

As a single-site qualitative study, the findings reported in this paper are not intended to be generalizable. The perspectives represented reflect the experiences of peer tutors at one English-medium institution, and the data draw primarily on tutors' self-reported accounts rather than direct observation of live tutorials. These limitations point to several directions for future research.

Future studies could complement tutor perspectives with student input to further validate and contextualize findings related to AI-integrated writing center sessions. Incorporating student interviews, surveys, or reflective feedback would allow us to examine how students perceive the usefulness of AI-supported tutoring, how they understand the boundaries between human and AI contributions, and whether these boundaries align with tutors' intentions.

Additionally, observational approaches can be used to examine how AI use is negotiated during actual tutoring sessions. Observing tutor–student interactions would enable researchers to analyze how decisions regarding transparency, consent, and the appropriate use of AI unfold in real-time, rather than relying solely on retrospective accounts. Taken together, triangulating tutor perspectives with student experiences and observational data would strengthen the technical soundness of future research and offer a more holistic understanding of how AI is integrated into writing center practice.

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