# Faculty Resource: Documenting Student Writing Processes

## How do instructors and students benefit from having students document their writing process?

Instructors who wish to discourage the use of AI in student writing may find it useful to focus on the process of writing as much as, or even more than, the final product. Having students document their process makes it more difficult for them to quickly and mindlessly copy and paste text generated by ChatGPT; it also supports good analytical and writing processes by asking students to document their steps toward developing and expressing ideas and arguments. Focusing on process over product also gives you as an instructor insight into how your students understand their assignments; what questions they have about the materials; what aspects of the assignment they find most engaging; and where they might require additional guidance.

There are various strategies and tools you might use to have students document their thinking and writing for a particular assignment. Below are some suggestions for helping students embrace the “messy middle” of thinking and writing, not only to discourage the use of AI, but also to enhance students’ academic skills and facilitate instructor insight into student learning.

## Source Log

One way to focus on students’ writing process is to ask them to keep a source log wherein they document the sources they are using and their thoughts about the information they’re including in their assignment. Having students document their thinking and detail how they’ve written their assignment allows them to keep a record of their work should issues of academic integrity arise. If you are going to use this log, be sure to,

* Clearly convey to students well in advance of the assignment due date that you expect them to keep a log.
* Show them how to complete the log, identifying what kinds of information you expect them to document and where they should store it.
* Outline the circumstances under which you will ask to see their work log. Will all students submit their log with their assignment? Will logs only be required if you suspect plagiarism?
* Consider whether students will receive any extra marks on their assignment for completing this component. You may want to carefully mark the content of their logs, or, you may wish to give all students a small bonus for simply submitting their logs.

See the source log and instructions to students (available as separate documents) for more information.

## Saving Assignment Drafts

Instructors may also wish to have students save multiple drafts of their assignment as they work on it. Rather than submitting a polished essay or lab as the assignment’s final product, ask students to save their work at various stages. If you are going to ask them to do this, be sure to,

* Identify at what stages they should save their work. Do you want them to save their work at the note-taking stage? The outline stage? Just at the writing stages? How many drafts should they have saved?
* Delineate to students where they should save this work and how and when they are to submit it to you.
* One suggestion is to ask students to save their log and drafts in a Google Drive or OneDrive folder and include a link to that folder with their final assignment. This will allow you to consult their rough work as needed without cluttering your assignment dropbox.

### A Note on Google Docs:

If students are using Google Docs, their document will save automatically. Students can save multiple drafts by downloading a copy of each draft once they are done working on it, at which time it will no longer automatically save changes. Alternatively, previous work on an active Google Doc can be viewed by clicking on “file” and selecting “version history,” which shows each iteration of the assignment as it progressed.

### A Note on Word document formats:

* If students are using the desktop app of Microsoft Word, they can choose to manually save their work at particular times by going to “file” and “save” to save each draft as an individual document.
* If students are using the web app of Microsoft Word, their document will save automatically. Students can save multiple drafts by downloading a copy of each draft once they are done working on it, at which time it will no longer automatically save changes. Alternatively, previous work on an active Word Document file can be viewed by clicking on the file title and selecting “version history,” which shows each iteration of the assignment as it progressed.

## Additional Resources on Documenting Student Writing Processes

Dartmouth Writing Teaching Program. (2023).*Teaching writing as a process.* <https://writing.dartmouth.edu/teaching/first-year-writing-pedagogies-methods-design/teaching-writing-process>

Moon, J. A. (2006). *Learning journals: A handbook for reflective practice and professional development.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203969212

Northern Illinois University Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning. (2012). Reflective journals and learning logs. <https://www.niu.edu/citl/resources/guides/instructional-guide/reflective-journals-and-learning-logs.shtml>

University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, and Wilfrid Laurier University. (2023). *WriteOnline.ca: Academic writing*. <https://writeonline.ca/index.php>