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'AI-Write' framework: Scaffolding use of AI in L2 academic writing

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ABSTRACT

International education and study abroad experiences are now widespread in higher education, requiring students to develop strong L2 academic writing skills to succeed. The use of GenAI to augment human writing skills offers support to students, yet its procedural, ethical, and pedagogical impact is fuelling an ongoing debate in various research and teaching contexts. In academic writing contexts, the effect of GenAI on academic integrity, authorship, critical engagement with sources and cognitive off-loading is concerning. To address this, we developed a conceptual framework based on a scoping review and transnational survey. The AI Write framework integrates development of critical AI literacies and knowledge of AI tools vis-à-vis writing development at discrete stages of the academic writing process. This article discusses the framework and how it can provide assistive scaffolding to international students in the ethical use of AI tools to develop their L2 academic writing in higher educational contexts.

Keywords: L2 academic writing, artificial intelligence, academic integrity, authorship, criticality, framework AI Write

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INTRODUCTION

International education and study abroad opportunities have become common in higher education over recent decades. In the European context, the Erasmus programme has enabled millions of students to obtain an international experience as part of their university education (European Commission, 2017), studying and following different university curricula in a language other than their home language. Furthermore, ongoing upward trends in internationalization of higher education, driven in part by globalization, has given rise to increasing numbers of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) programmes across a range of regions around the world (Macaro et al., 2018, p.37). The emergence of EMI programmes in non-English speaking contexts has been beneficial in widening access to disciplinary knowledge and providing opportunities to participate in the global academic community. However, many challenges exist, particularly for learners as they deal with the additional cognitive load involved in learning disciplinary content knowledge whilst also developing competence in a language of instruction that is not their first language. There is a growing body of research calling for development of appropriate pedagogical approaches that will support learners in developing both content and language knowledge (Aizawa et al., 2025; Nguyen, 2026; Rose et al., 2025; Macaro et al., 2018) and for universities to provide additional academic supports, especially for academic writing (Matikainen, 2024; Mc Kinley & Rose, 2022; Eldaba & Isbell, 2018).

In fact, research from EMI contexts has shown that L2 academic writing in particular, may pose one of the greatest difficulties for learners when studying through English and thus may be considered as a significant predictor of academic success in EMI higher education contexts (Kamaşak et al., 2021). Writing related issues are sometimes linked to proficiency in the language of instruction but research also suggests that writing difficulties also arise where international students are unfamiliar with the expectations and culture of the host university (Bradford, 2019). Surveys of students in EMI settings found that supports such as academic writing workshops and communicative learning activities have been beneficial (Moorhouse & Wan, 2023). Consequently, host universities have begun to offer resources such as writing centers and modules in academic literacies and writing to help international students to develop academic writing skills required to succeed in their programs. In addition to these more traditional student writing support structures, international students now have the possibility of using AI and GenAI tools to scaffold academic writing development. However, there is evidence to suggest that a process-based approach that includes development of critical AI literacy is needed (Warschauer et al., 2023; Gurney & Busteed, 2026) to support L2 writers navigate the linguistic and rhetorical demands of the written discourses they need to master in order to achieve academic success.

Therefore, there is a need to develop a framework to provide pedagogical guidance to the range of key actors within EMI university settings (writing instructors, academic English teachers, subject lecturers, writing center tutors) on how to integrate AI into academic writing instruction without compromising academic integrity, writer agency and student learning.

In this article we present a conceptual framework that has informed a pedagogical approach and development of open educational resources (OERs) that address the following questions:

1)How can writing instructors and faculty be supported in developing a pedagogical approach that takes a writing process and critical AI literacy approach to supporting (international) students in using AI tools in L2 academic writing?

2)How can this integrative approach be operationalized through the creation of open educational resources?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, a number of studies have highlighted the impact of integrating GenAI and AI-powered tools into writing processes (Nelson, 2026; Rosalina et al., 2026; Sanz-Tejeda et al., 2026). However, approaches to supporting the use of AI tools in academic writing must take account of concerns relating to inappropriate and non-critical use of these tools on human agency and development of an effective writing process (Busteed & Gurney, 2006; Gurney & Busteed, 2026). Some researchers have detected a decline in some of the critical and essential cognitive skills key to effective writing from regular use of AI-driven dialogue systems (Gerlich, 2025; Sanz-Tejeda et al., 2026). Another challenge lies in the impact that continuous exposure to AI-generated content might have on writing quality. According to Paschalidis (2025) increased exposure to AI-generated content in our daily lives has the potential to influence how writing is perceived, the wording that writers use (e.g., "delve into the intricacies of"), and the writing-style preferences (e.g., bullet-point lists, short paragraphs with headings) that may create linguistic flattening. Sun (2026) reported that GenAI use in English as an Additional Language writing instruction in a translingual context, improved writing efficiency and fluency but found reinforcement of monolingual norms and Western cultural standards leading to homogenization of written output. The potential threat of linguistic homogenization posed by uncritical GenAI use also points to the importance of developing writer identity and authorial voice through teaching students how this can be shaped through the use of a range of rhetorical devices that mark stance and negotiation of meaning during text development in order to mitigate the uncritical acceptance of GenAI suggestions and avoid homogenization of written discourse and loss of writer identity as discussed in McKinley (2026).

While there are many benefits for students when GenAI is embedded in writing processes, AI-assisted academic writing may also present specific challenges. Therefore, appropriate pedagogical approaches that are effective in supporting L2 writing development should be used when teaching students how to ethically and effectively use GenAI to support their writing. One such approach is based on writing process theory which was first proposed in the 1970s (Elbow 1973; Murray, 1972) as a framework to understand what writers do at discrete stages of the writing process (pre-drafting, drafting, revision, editing) during composition. It has been influential in informing writing pedagogy for both L1 and L2 writers in a variety of contexts (Fowler, 2002; Nunan, 1991) as it highlighted writing as a cognitively demanding iterative process supporting critical thinking, metacognition and writing autonomy. There has been criticism of the approach for lack of specific detail on what writerly activities look like at discrete stages of the process (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). However, in the age of GenAI, there have been calls for writing instruction that focus on process in conjunction with development of AI literacy (Gurney & Busteed, 2026). This might in some way allay concerns regarding diminution of critical thinking, loss of writer identity and epistemic agency from over-reliance of and uncritical use of AI tools (Gerlich, 2025; Simos et al. 2026).

Against this backdrop, the "AI Write Project" (https://www.uni-hildesheim.de/aiwrite/) has developed a framework to provide L2 writers with assistive scaffolding for the critical and ethical use of AI tools in developing their academic writing in higher education EMI contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

To inform the development of the conceptual framework to support integration of AI tools in writing instruction, the project adopted a mixed-methods design combining a qualitative scoping review, an analysis of AI writing tools, and a quantitative survey of writing instructors and tutors. As part of this process, a scoping review of the existing literature on the use of AI tools in writing instruction was conducted, resulting in a corpus of 193 journal articles published between 2019 and 2023 across 33

academic journals. The review identified 89 AI tools that were evaluated according to a number of criteria such as domain, type, accessibility, ethical considerations and writing phase in which they were used. This led to the selection of 16 AI tools for integration into the development of the OERs. In parallel, a quantitative survey was designed in Qualtrics following a descending ladder of abstraction (Aarons, 2021) to capture data regarding the prevalence of usage of AI tools in academic writing instruction, concerns of teachers (both users and non-users) about using AI tools to teach writing, the types of tools used, how tools are used and the training needs of teachers. The survey was distributed through social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn) and the professional networks of project partners (within and outside partner institutions). A sample of 218 higher-education teachers and writing tutors across various European countries involved in (academic) English writing participated in the study. Survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the findings were compared with the state-of-the-art of instructional practices and use of AI tools established in the literature review.

Findings of the scoping review, tools analysis and results of the survey data informed the development of the framework, identifying areas where instructors and students required support and highlighting knowledge and skills that needed to be developed when using AI tools. Stages of the academic writing process and their associated AI literacy skills emerged as important areas to include in the framework.

Once the AI Write conceptual framework was developed, a template was created to map it onto the OERs design. After the OERs were designed, a piloting phase was conducted, during which 77.2% of participants reported that English was not their first language. The data collection instruments used during the piloting phase included recordings of classroom observations of OER usage, student and instructor surveys (292 students responses and 79 instructors responses), interviews, screen recordings, and students' reflections. The data were analyzed quantitatively for the surveys and qualitatively for the rest, and the OERs were subsequently adapted based on the feedback gathered during the piloting phase. Equally, the results from the piloting allowed for the validation of the conceptual framework. (See Figure 1 for research design).

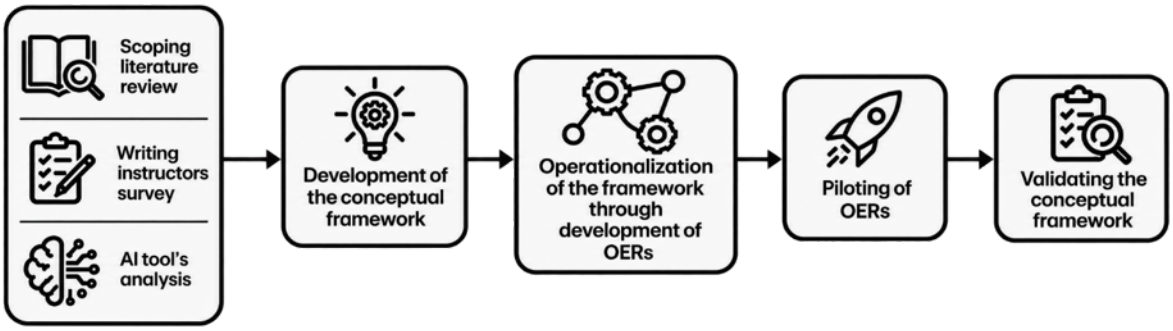


Figure 1. Research Design methodological process

RESULTS

Towards a conceptual framework: findings from scoping review and transnational survey

The findings from the scoping review, as presented by Strobl et al. (2024), showed that AI tools can enhance the quality of academic writing by improving syntactic complexity, writing accuracy and development of L2 writers' argumentation. The findings also showed that the use of AI tools can enhance

writers' development and process by helping them develop awareness of audience, build self-efficacy and improve self-regulation. Furthermore, interaction with GenAI tools positively impacted L2 writer motivation via AI-generated feedback received in combination with human feedback.

However, data from the scoping review also points to some negative impacts of AI tools on learner L2 writing. For instance, AI tool use was shown to negatively impact learner creativity when writers developed an over-reliance on tools which also negatively impacted writer agency, development of effective writing process and self-regulation strategies. Findings from the AI Write survey of writing teachers and tutors also chimed with the above concerns. Other concerns emerging from the scoping review and the AI Write survey include: the potential for academic dishonesty, concerns about data privacy and infringement of copyright, bias in GenAI output, equity of access and potential environmental impact.

All of the above has added to the growing body of research on the use of AI in supporting L2 academic writing development and has prompted the need to develop more effective pedagogical approaches to support writing instruction in the era of AI. Key areas of focus include: using a writing process-based instructional approach that also scaffolds learners in developing critical AI literacy skills such as critical fact-checking skills, awareness of bias in AI models, effective prompt-engineering skills and development of AI interactional competence.

Therefore, the need to develop frameworks to guide creation of scaffolded supports for writing instructors and learners that focuses on developing both L2 writing skills and critical AI literacy was recognized. To this end, we have drawn on the above findings, current existing literature and a number of existing models and frameworks to develop the AI Write framework to support L2 academic writing and critical AI literacy in higher education EMI contexts.

AI Write Conceptual Framework

The AI Write Framework conceptual framework (Figure 2), which is a synthesis of three frameworks, offers a research-informed and writing process-based approach to underpin the development of a series of open educational resources. The three frameworks drew on important elements of writing process theory, and AI literacy to expand an existing model for integrating AI into L2 academic writing. This provided a more holistic framework that under-pinned development of resources to support AI-assisted writing at discrete stages of the writing process whilst also developing critical AI literacy.

Thus, the framework first builds on the AI Literacy framework developed by Warschauer et al. (2023), which presents the knowledge and competences L2 writers need in order to benefit from using AI tools in their writing. These competences include: understanding writing context and functionality of AI tools; accessing and using tools appropriate to the writing need; developing effective prompt-engineering strategies; critical corroboration of AI output and ability to make critical and ethical judgements regarding integration of AI output in the writing process.

The second element of the AI Write framework is based on a writing process approach to writing instruction that was first advocated in the early 1970s (Elbow, 1973; Murray, 1972). We have drawn on an elaborated framework developed more recently by Grieshammer et al. (2019) who delineated a range of micro-stages or activities writers engage in during discrete stages of the writing process. This process over product approach to writing instruction helps novice writers see writing as a highly cognitive, iterative process of knowledge creation, argument development, audience engagement and development of authorial stance and identity that occurs as writers develop their texts. By developing effective writing processes, L2 writers can apply this fundamental skill across a range of writing tasks whilst harnessing tools and resources to support their process. This element of the conceptual framework prompted the design of OERs to support L2 writers in engaging in activities of varying degrees of cognitive demand at different stages of the writing process which. This approach can ultimately benefit L2 student writers by enhancing writer metacognition and self-awareness to help them become more autonomous and successful writers.

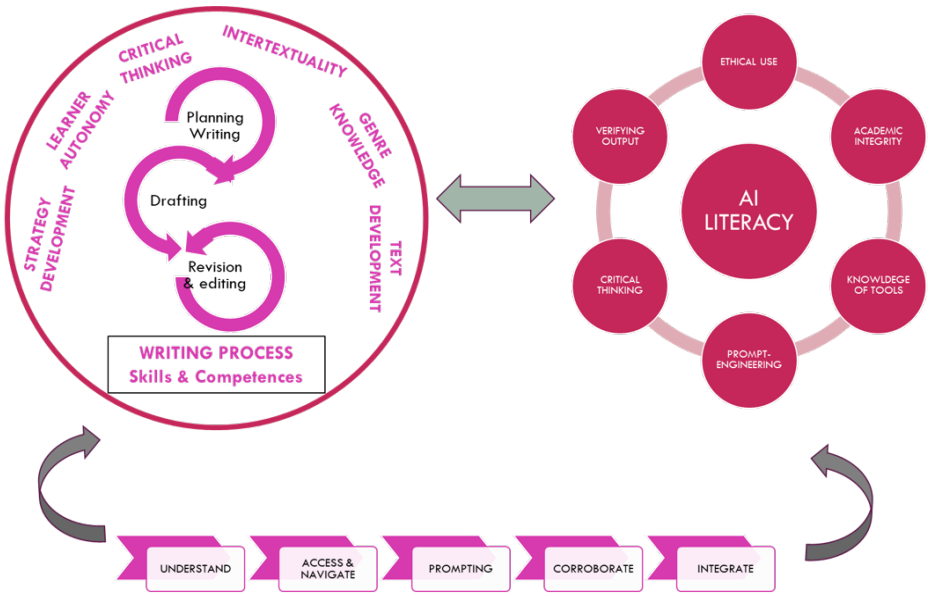


Figure 2. AI Write Conceptual Framework

Lastly, in order for writing to remain an engaging, cognitive and ethical process where writers construct texts without epistemic outsourcing to AI tools, the benefits of AI-assisted process writing can be ethically harnessed when writing instruction is accompanied by integration of critical AI literacy practices (Elturki, 2026; Simos et al., 2026), Therefore, the third element of the AI Write framework specifies the different knowledge and competencies writers need in order to develop the necessary critical AI literacy skills to assist them in using AI tools in critical and ethical ways to co-construct their writing without loss of author and epistemic agency or cognitive engagement during the writing process. Consequently, the AI Write conceptual framework includes different aspects of AI Literacy, namely, academic integrity, ethical use of AI and appropriate integration in the writing process, knowledge of the tools, prompt engineering skills, critical thinking and output verification. Some of these components are clearly aligned to the different competencies established by Warschauer et al. (2023), however, it adds important new dimensions, such as academic integrity, and gives a more prominent role to ethics and critical thinking competencies, which are essential to avoid risks such as epistemic outsourcing, cognitive offloading and loss of writer agency when interacting with AI tools during the writing process (Gerlich, 2025; Gurney & Busteed, 2026; Simos et al., 2026).

Due to the interconnecting elements in the AI Write conceptual framework, it has enabled the development of a range of OERs that take account of the varying degrees of cognitive engagement, knowledge construction and composition activities engaged in by writers as they move through the writing process and how AI tools can be ethically used to support these activities. Importantly, the framework also emphasizes the need for guidance on how AI tools can scaffold writing development in parallel with the development of critical AI literacy. Integrating writing process theory and critical AI literacy in OER design has been essential in taking into consideration potential threats to academic integrity, writer autonomy and cognitive off-loading that can arise through the inappropriate and uncritical use of AI tools.

OERs to support international students in AI-assisted writing: Operationalization of AI Write conceptual framework

Based on the framework described above, a set of OERs was designed to support teachers and students in integrating AI tools in development of L2 academic writing. The design of the OERs, which incorporated both knowledge-based and hands-on based pedagogical activities, accounted for diverse learning styles and accessibility by following visual and textual accessibility guidelines (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2015). As a result, resources were created in different formats, such as videos, infographics, presentations or text documents targeting students, educators or both. All the OERs were piloted, which served as validation of the different dimensions of the conceptual framework.

The resources are clustered in six different routes (Figure 3), representing the different domains associated with the AI Write conceptual Framework.

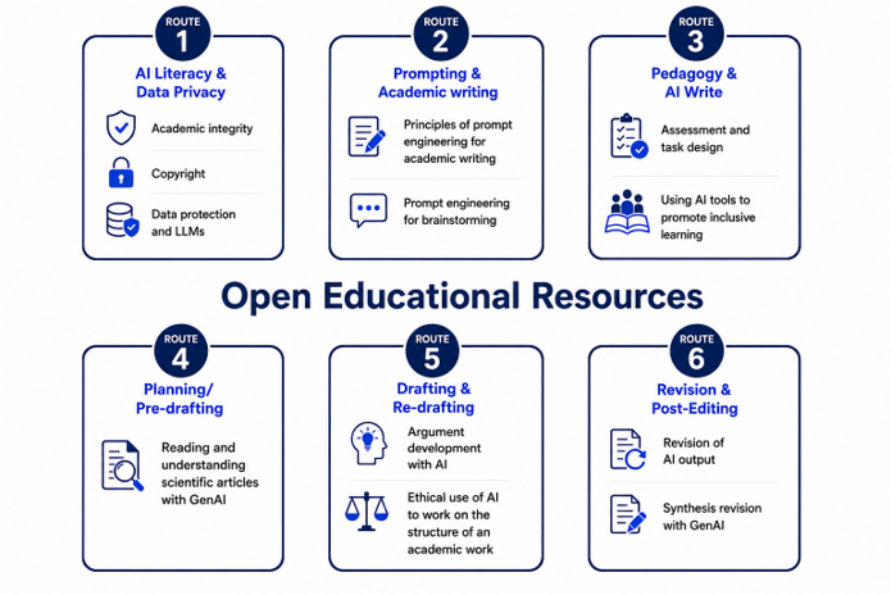


Figure 3. Six routes that thematically group open educational resources developed using the AI writing framework with examples of OERs

Route 1: AI Literacy & data privacy. In this first route, the OERs focus mainly on ethics and AI, with some resources that deal with AI literacy in general; others are more specific and address, for example, academic integrity issues in which students can test their ability to discern when GenAI is used or not within academic integrity standards; or the role of responsibility of their own written productions and AI-mediated writing. Besides, some attention is given to the role of data protection, privacy, and Large Language Models. Lastly, two OERs guide users in selecting the adequate AI tool for their practice and educational setting.

Route 2: Prompting for academic writing. These OERs help educators and students develop their prompt-engineering skills by providing examples of efficient prompts for different stages of the writing process. For instance, learners can learn how to enhance the micro and macro structure of a text through prompting or improve their prompting for effective brainstorming.

Route 3: Pedagogy & AI Write. Some attention is also given to assessment with an OER for educators on how to design effective tasks. In addition, this route also has an OER guiding educators and students how to configure AI tools to promote inclusive learning.

Route 4: Planning/Pre-drafting writing phase. Students will find support to read and understand scientific papers and work on prompts to facilitate bibliographic searches and brainstorming before starting to write.

Route 5: Drafting & Re-drafting writing phase. A variety of OERs were designed to support a range of tasks in this phase of the writing process, for example, argument development with AI or AI-infused academic writing strategies.

Route 6: Revision & Post-editing writing phase. For this stage of the writing process, an OER to support synthesis writing scaffolds learners in revision and evaluation of AI output with the option to improve their own synthesis writing and AI-assisted writing through reflective thinking. Another OER is designed to help learners use a genre approach to evaluate structure and argument development of the introduction section of a research paper.

CONCLUSIONS

The integration of concepts relating to writing process theory and critical AI literacy has informed the creation of a pedagogical framework to support development of GenAI assisted writing processes, which have become part of the current academic writing landscape in EMI higher education contexts. Grounded in a pedagogically sound approach that focuses on development of academic writing and critical AI literacy, it is hoped that the AI Write conceptual framework will guide and support students and instructors in the ethical use of GenAI tools in the writing process in ways that also maintain writer and epistemic agency. Emerging technologies, and particularly generative Artificial Intelligence, are rapidly reshaping education. Our proposed approach, however, remains resilient to these changes owing to its pedagogical grounding and focus on process, making it a tools-agnostic pedagogical framework. In addition, the operationalization of the framework is offered through a set of tested open-source OERs, offering a degree of proof-of-concept validation of the framework. Furthermore, developed OERs are now freely available to be used by students and educators (Erasmus+ AI WRITE Consortium, 2026).

However, the AI Write conceptual framework and developed OERs are not without their limitations. A more in-depth investigation of the efficacy of the OERs through longitudinal application of the resources in a variety of L2 academic writing contexts may offer further insights into GenAI-assisted writing processes and how these can be supported pedagogically.

In an increasingly mobile and globalised world, where emerging technologies are changing the way students engage with learning, providing international students with support in their AI assisted academic writing contributes to positive and successful academic experiences abroad.

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