



Second Century

Writing with AI

Did you notice my column last month? I decided to use AI to take the first stab at writing my column! I did not like the writing at all. Although it was factual, it lacked any kind of voice. I wondered whether my editors would notice. I took the piece as written by AI, substantially changed it to take into account my voice and personal perspective, then passed it through for review by colleagues. After a round of edits, the piece read fine and delivered the message I wanted: Hamvention was a big success, and our National Convention at the Huntsville Hamfest is going to be another great event.

How often do you think ARRL receives articles that were substantially or entirely written using AI? It's actually pretty often! How does an editor know whether the piece is an original work or written using AI? Of course there's now software that uses AI to make a guess at that question. For editors, though, there are plenty of "tells." First of all, the text that AI generates tends to be in sentences and paragraphs of the same length. It uses a very balanced structure — so balanced that it can sound bland or even robotic. The writing also tends to be very uniform and general. Every paragraph is at the same level of depth — usually pretty shallow. There's no personal experience, and no "human touch," because a human didn't write it. AI also likes to use lists of facts that support a sentence or concept it has presented in the piece — especially lists of three items. It also uses lists as a way to pad a piece based on how many words you've indicated the final product should be. And when it comes to amateur radio, it loves to use the word "operator" wherever and whenever it has to refer to a ham.

There's one other big tell: the writing is not original. It has been taken from other people's works or posts. We are not interested in publishing pieces that, after full scrutiny, appear to be little research projects or someone else's op-ed piece, especially if someone's copyright or intellectual property is being violated. Another aspect of this regurgitation of online research is that some of the results may be dead wrong! It takes the silly notion of "I read it on the internet so it must be true" and delivers it eloquently, written in the blink of an eye!

So, if you want to write an article for ARRL and use AI, what is the best approach? First and foremost, it is to do the writing yourself, and use AI as a writing

partner. You have to bring the meat of the work to the project. Start with your own outline. Bring in the facts that you yourself have to present from your own experience: firsthand operating experience, personal observations, and successes and lessons learned — that's mainly what we look for in every manuscript, and it's the "human element" that AI can't deliver. The writing doesn't have to be perfect. As you look at each section individually, give your AI tool the opportunity to take in what you've written and supplement it. How you structure the AI prompt is everything. And writing those prompts is an interactive and iterative process! Zooming in on your piece with AI may lead you to change direction based on something it has made you aware of, or you may simply take some of its suggestions and integrate them into your piece in your own words — *your own words* being the operative idea here. Ultimately, you need to feel proud of the work you have done to create the piece, fully knowing the small part that AI played in contributing to your final product.

We love to see your ideas, projects, and innovations shared with the ARRL community! We publish four different magazines and have the bandwidth to take on new books. Be radio active and choose to write for ARRL, leveraging the power of AI responsibly. Be a connector and encourage others to join you, especially in writing a book together. I'll be looking forward to reading your submissions!

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