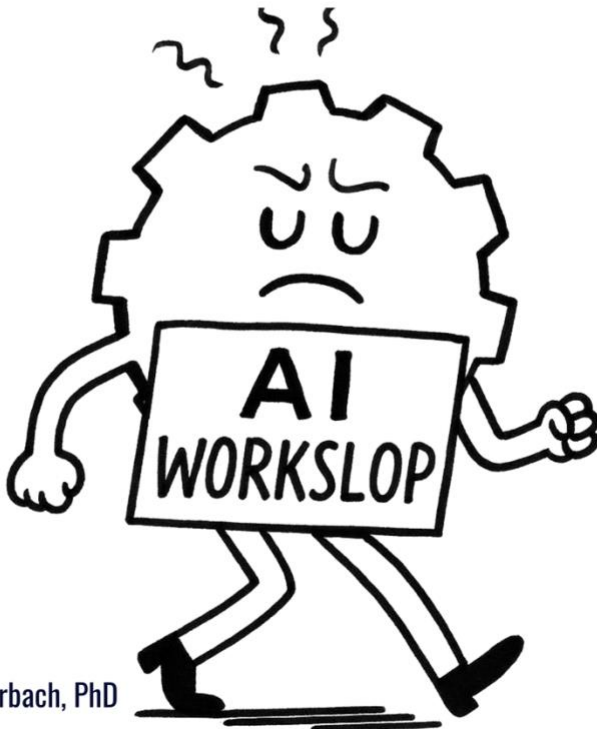


# AI WORKSLOP IN TEACHING

TIPS FOR AVOIDING  
COMMON AI PITFALLS



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## Introduction

A few days ago, I revisited Niederhoffer et al.'s (2025) article on workslop published in Harvard Business Review, and I couldn't help drawing a straight line from their findings to what many of us are experiencing in teaching right now. Their argument is simple and unsettling: generative AI makes it easy to produce work that looks polished but carries very little real substance. On the surface it feels efficient, but underneath it quietly transfers the burden of thinking to someone else.

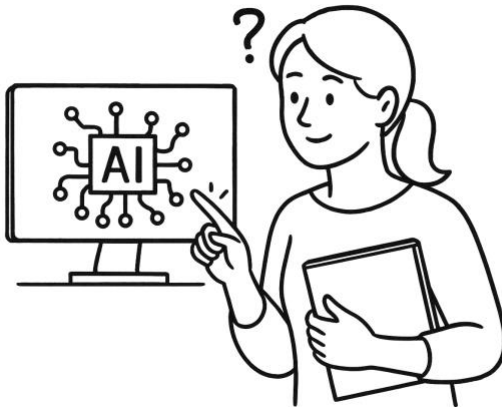
Has it ever happened to you that you're working on a collaborative project with your team and the draft you receive from a colleague is so clearly AI-generated that you spend more time fixing it than building on it? You open the document, read a few lines, and realize nothing quite connects. You start wondering what the original goal was, what the writer meant, and how much of the piece you now need to rewrite so it can actually support the work you're trying to do.

That feeling captures the heart of AI workslop. It looks complete at first glance, but the moment you dig in, the

shortcuts reveal themselves. Instead of moving the project forward, it slows everyone down.

In this short guide, I want to look closely at AI workslop, what it means for us in education, and how we can keep it from creeping into our daily practice. My argument is simple. Use AI and use it with confidence. Push it in your work, experiment with it, let it handle the heavy and repetitive tasks so you can redirect your time toward the parts of teaching that matter.

It can save hours you can put back into planning, reading, or your own professional development. But use it the right way. Avoid leaning on it lazily or letting it think for you. AI supports your practice; it should never replace the thinking that defines your work as an educator.



## What is AI Workslop?

According to Niederhoffer et al. (2025), AI workslop refers to "AI generated work content that masquerades as good work, but lacks the substance to meaningfully advance a given task." (para. 2)

In their survey of 1,150 full-time U.S.-based employees across industries, Niederhoffer et al. found that 40 percent had received AI workslop in the past month alone. Those who encountered it estimated that more than 15 percent of the content they receive at work fits this category.

Each incident took nearly two hours to sort out and creates what the authors call an invisible productivity tax that can cost large organizations millions each year. The emotional toll was just as striking: more than half of respondents said they felt annoyed or confused when receiving workslop, and many reported losing trust in the colleague who sent it.

In teaching, we don't have clear statistics yet, but we don't really need them to recognize the pattern. Most of us have already seen how AI shortcuts show up in lesson planning, team collaboration, or student work. The signs are familiar: materials that look fine at first glance but fall apart the moment you try to use them, drafts that require complete rewrites, or explanations that create more confusion than clarity. Our daily

experience tells us that workslop is already here, even if no one has measured it in schools yet.



## Common Classroom Examples of AI Workslop

When I think about AI workslop in teaching, certain scenes come to mind right away. A student hands in a piece of writing that looks polished at first glance, yet something feels off. The

structure is too even, the tone sounds borrowed, or the phrasing carries that familiar AI echo. As you read further, the ideas begin slipping away from the actual prompt. Whole paragraphs circle back on themselves and in certain cases featured examples appear that have nothing to do with the texts you taught in class. And suddenly you're no longer assessing the assignment, you're trying to figure out what the student actually understands beneath the AI gloss.

Here are some examples of workslop that you may recognize from your own classroom or team work.:

- Assignments where the writing looks too uniform, too polished, or packed with phrases no student in that class has ever used
- Essays that follow a rigid five-paragraph AI template, complete with generic topic sentences and vague “research-sounding” claims that don’t connect to the unit
- Responses that cite made-up quotes, invented sources, or references that don’t appear anywhere in the assigned reading
- Presentation slides full of sweeping generalizations, incorrect facts, or definitions lifted straight from AI without any link to classroom discussion

- “Reflections” that sound fluent but reveal no personal insight, no detail from the activity, and no real connection to what happened in class
- Journal entries that reuse the exact same sentence structures across multiple submissions, with only the topic swapped in
- Group project sections where one student’s contribution reads entirely different from their previous work and doesn’t align with the group’s shared plan.

The thing about AI workslop is that it rarely hides for long. Once you’ve spent enough time with these tools yourself, the patterns become familiar. You start catching the odd phrasing, the recycled structures, the confident statements that go nowhere. This is why, in every training I run with teachers, I encourage an exploratory mindset. Use AI, play with it, and push it. The more you experiment with it in your own work, the quicker you’ll recognize its quirks when they appear in your students’ assignments. Familiarity becomes a form of protection, not only against sloppy AI use but also against the confusion it creates in assessment and feedback.

## **The Hidden Costs of AI Workslop for Teachers**

Niederhoffer and her colleagues talk about some of the costs that AI workslop creates in workplaces, but in teaching these costs expand even further. Our work depends on clarity, timing, and trust, and when (bad) AI-generated shortcuts enter the mix, the ripple effects can reach every corner of the classroom. What looks like a small flaw in a draft ends up reshaping the whole day for the person who has to fix it.

Some of the hidden costs teachers may feel include:

- More time spent rewriting or correcting AI-generated lessons before they can be used
- Re-teaching concepts because students received inaccurate or poorly structured explanations
- Confusion in team planning when shared materials don't match learning goals or classroom realities
- Emotional exhaustion from constantly cleaning up shortcuts someone else took with AI

**And the impact isn't only practical; it affects relationships and teamwork:**

- Loss of trust between colleagues who rely on one another for accurate materials

- A quiet perception that a teammate is less prepared or less competent than they actually are
- Planning sessions that get derailed by AI-generated drafts no one can use as a starting point
- Tension around who is responsible for “fixing” the work and carrying the extra cognitive load



## **Causes of AI Workslop in Schools**

When I think about the possible reasons why AI workslop shows up in classrooms, I usually split them into two broad areas. Some come from outside the classroom, from the pressures and expectations that shape how teachers end up

using AI. Others come from inside our own practice, from the habits, assumptions, and skill gaps we carry into our work. Both sets of factors matter, and both can shift with the right guidance and support.

## **External Causes**

As I said, these are forces that come from outside the classroom and push teachers toward shortcuts or rushed AI use:

- Pressure from schools or districts to “use AI more,” often without explaining when AI actually helps (Delanoy, 2025)
- Lack of clear, district-level guidelines and AI use policies that define quality, accuracy, and appropriateness in AI-assisted work (Langreo, 2025)
- Limited time for planning, which makes quick AI outputs tempting even when they’re not reliable
- Tools approved or promoted without subject-matter review, leading to mismatches with standards or grade levels

## Internal Causes

These are factors rooted in teachers' own knowledge, confidence, and workflow:

- Weak AI literacy that leaves teachers unsure how to evaluate, refine, or question AI-generated output
- Limited prompting skills, where vague prompts produce vague drafts that require heavy editing
- Overtrust in AI's confident tone, especially when the content “looks right” on the surface
- Reliance on first drafts instead of using AI as a partner to build on existing ideas
- Lack of awareness of AI hallucinations, especially in subjects that require precise detail or discipline-specific accuracy



## How Teachers Can Avoid Workslop

The good news is that workslop isn't inevitable. With a few intentional habits, we can keep AI from creating more work than it saves. And as I stated in the introduction, the goal isn't to avoid AI but simply to use it in more efficient and creative. I think a lot of this comes down to slowing down, checking the details, and bringing our professional judgment back into the process.

Here are a few practical steps that help:

- Always verify AI output against your curriculum, standards, and your students' actual level
- Start with your own ideas before prompting, so AI builds on your thinking instead of replacing it
- Ask AI to explain its reasoning or cite where certain details come from
- Use AI for early drafts or brainstorming, not for final versions of lessons or assessments
- Develop shared team norms for AI-assisted work so collaboration stays clear and consistent
- Strengthen your AI literacy so you can spot hallucinations, inaccuracies, and generic content. I wrote a whole book on this, [Teaching with AI](#):

Practical Strategies to Integrate AI in the Classroom

- Lean on your critical thinking skills: question the output, check assumptions, and compare multiple versions
- Fact-check AI explanations, especially in subjects where precision matters
- Require students to show their process (e.g., drafts, notes, reasoning, etc.) not just polished AI-shaped final answers.



## Resources to Build Your AI Literacy

I know that in the midst of all the excitement around AI, many teachers are still unsure where to look for real guidance. The internet is full of documents that promise clarity, but once you start reading, you realise many of them fall into the same workslop we talked about earlier. They sound helpful on the surface yet offer little that can guide actual classroom decisions.

In my book *[Teaching with AI](#)*, I included a chapter called *AI and Teacher Professional Development*, where I pulled together the resources that genuinely helped me cut through the noise. These are reports, frameworks, and guides produced by organisations that have been in this space long enough to offer substance. They have become my reference points whenever I want to help teachers map out their own AI learning.

I arranged these resources into the categories below so you can move through them in whatever way fits your needs. I'm sharing them here so you can keep them handy as you build your own AI literacy and make decisions that fit your classroom, your students, and your context.

## Foundational AI Frameworks

Start here for comprehensive overviews of AI in education:

1. *AI and Education: Guidance for Policy-makers*, UNESCO (2021). <https://doi.org/10.54675/PCSP7350>
2. *AI and the Future of Education: Disruptions, Dilemmas and Directions*, by UNESCO (2025). <https://doi.org/10.54675/KECK1261>
3. *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning: Insights and Recommendations*, by U.S. Department of Education (2023). <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/ai-report/ai-report.pdf>
4. *A Guide to AI in Schools: Perspectives for the Perplexed (MIT)*, by Smith et al. (2025). <https://tsl.mit.edu/ai-guidebook/>
5. *Guidance for generative AI in education and research*, by UNESCO (2023). <https://doi.org/10.54675/EWZM9535>

## Competency and Literacy Frameworks

AI Literacy frameworks for students and teachers:

1. *AI Competency Framework for Teachers*, by UNESCO (2024). <https://doi.org/10.54675/ZJTE2084>
2. *AI Competency Framework for Students*, by UNESCO (2024). <https://doi.org/10.54675/JKJB9835>
3. *Empowering Learners for the Age of AI: An AI Literacy Framework*, by OECD (2025).  
<https://ailiteracyframework.org>
4. *AI Literacy: A Framework to Understand, Evaluate, and Use Emerging Technology*, by Digital Promise (2024).  
<https://doi.org/10.51388/20.500.12265/218>
5. *AI Learning Priorities for All K-12 Students*, by CSTA & AI4K12 (2025). <https://csteachers.org/ai-priorities>.
6. *DEC AI Literacy Framework: AI Literacy for All*, by Digital Education Council (2025).  
<https://www.digitaleducationcouncil.com/post/digital-education-council-ai-literacy-framework>

## Implementation and Readiness Guides

Practical resources for schools ready to adopt AI:

1. *AI Readiness Framework*, by aiEDU (2025).  
<https://aiedu.org/ai-readiness-framework>
2. *AI Guidance for Schools Toolkit*, by TeachAI.  
<https://www.teachai.org/toolkit>
3. *K-12 Generative AI Readiness Checklist*, by Council of the Great City Schools et al. (2023).  
<https://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/417/K-12%20Generative%20AI%20Readiness%20Checklist%20October%202023%20v1.1%202.pdf>
4. *AI Toolkit for School Districts*, by Common Sense Media.  
<https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/featured-content/files/csm-ai-risk-assessment-ai-teacher-assistants-final.pdf>
5. *Empowering Education Leaders: A Toolkit for Safe, Ethical, and Equitable AI Integration*, by U.S. Department of Education (2024).  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED661924.pdf>

## Ethics, Equity, and Safety Guidance

Critical considerations for responsible AI use:

1. *Ethical Guidelines on the Use of AI and Data in Teaching and Learning*, by European Commission (2022).  
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/153756>
2. *Responsible AI and Tech Justice: A Guide for K-12 Education*, by Kapor Foundation (2024).  
<https://kaporfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Responsible-AI-Guide-Kapor-Foundation.pdf>
3. *AI Risk Assessment: AI Teacher Assistants*, by Common Sense Media (2025).  
<https://www.common sense media.org/ai-ratings/ai-risk-assessments>
4. *Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law* (Council of Europe), by Leslie, D. et al. (2021). <https://edoc.coe.int/en/artificial-intelligence/10206-artificial-intelligence-human-rights-democracy-and-the-rule-of-law-a-primer.html#>

## Specialized and Sector-Specific Guidance

Targeted resources for specific contexts:

1. *Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research*, by UNESCO (2023).  
<https://doi.org/10.54675/EWZM9535>
2. *A Call to Action for Closing the Digital Access, Design, and Use Divides*, by U.S. Department of Education (2024).  
<https://portal.ct.gov/das/-/media/das/ctedtech/publications/2025/2025-used-oet-archive/netp24.pdf>
3. *AI in Education: A Microsoft Special Report*, by Microsoft (2025). <https://cdn-dynmedia-1.microsoft.com/is/content/microsoftcorp/microsoft/bade/documents/products-and-services/en-us/education/2025-Microsoft-AI-in-Education-Report.pdf>

## State and Regional Guidance

Location-specific implementation guides:

1. *Human-Centered AI Guidance for K-12 Public Schools*, by Washington OSPI (2024).

<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2024-06/comprehensive-ai-guidance.pdf>

2. *Generative AI in K-12 Education: Guidance for Arizona Schools*, by Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy (2025). [https://legacy.nau.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/222/2024/11/1106\\_1560229\\_AZ-GenAI-Guidance-v24.03\\_ADA-Final-1.pdf](https://legacy.nau.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/222/2024/11/1106_1560229_AZ-GenAI-Guidance-v24.03_ADA-Final-1.pdf)
3. *State AI Guidance for K12 Schools* (compilation of 26 states' guidance), by AI for Education. <https://www.aiforeducation.io/ai-resources/state-ai-guidance>

## **Conclusion**

AI workslop, as I like to think of it, is a kind of collateral damage of AI use. No one sets out to create it. It isn't intentional, and it isn't malicious. It's what happens when speed replaces judgment, when polished surfaces hide weak thinking, and when we trust AI's confidence more than our own expertise. The result is something that quietly drains time, energy, and focus. Over weeks and months, it can erode professional trust, complicate collaboration, and make teaching feel heavier than it needs to be.

We don't eliminate workslop by avoiding AI. We avoid it by using AI more thoughtfully. Strong AI literacy, clearer team norms, slow careful reviewing, and a commitment to our own judgment are the things that keep AI outputs from becoming someone else's problem. As I always say, embrace AI, use it aggressively, but keep your hands on the wheel. The quality of the work still depends on you.

## References

- Delanoy, N. (2025, November 10). We asked teachers about their experiences with AI in the classroom: Here's what they said. *The Conversation*.  
<https://theconversation.com/we-asked-teachers-about-their-experiences-with-ai-in-the-classroom-heres-what-they-said-265241>
- Langreo, L. (2025, January 30). Schools' AI Policies Are Still Not Clear to Teachers and Students. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/schools-ai-policies-are-still-not-clear-to-teachers-and-students/2025/01>
- Niederhoffer, K., Rosen Kellerman, G., Lee, A., Liebscher, A., Rapuano, K., & Hancock, J. T. (2025, September 22). *AI-Generated "Workslop" Is Destroying Productivity*. *Harvard Business Review*.  
<https://hbr.org/2025/09/ai-generated-workslop-is-destroying-productivity?>