

TEACHER'S GUIDE · BUSINESS ENGLISH

Does AI make professionals more productive?

LEVEL
C1 · Advanced

TIME
60 min

SKILLS
Reading · Speaking · Grammar · Vocabulary

Learning objectives

In this lesson, you can:

- analyse a news article about an experimental study
- use hedging language to report research cautiously
- identify the limitations of a study
- discuss responsible use of AI at work

Key vocabulary

productivity · control group · evaluator · inequality · limitation · white-collar · hype · generalise · fact-check · prompt

Materials

- this worksheet
- article: *Study finds ChatGPT boosts worker productivity for some writing tasks* (MIT News)

1 Warm up

SPEAKING

Look at the pictures. What can you see? How are they connected to the topic? Then answer the questions with your teacher.



PICTURE A · an AI chat assistant



PICTURE B · writing and editing a text

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1. Which writing tasks take up most of your working time?
2. Have you used an AI tool to write at work? What was the result?
3. What worries you about using AI for professional writing?

2 Vocabulary preparation

VOCABULARY

Part A: Match the words with the definitions.

white-collar (adj) | hype (n) | control group (n) | limitation (n) | generalise (v) | evaluator (n)

1. _____ exaggerated public excitement about something new
2. _____ the group in an experiment that does not receive the treatment, used for comparison
3. _____ a person who judges the quality of something
4. _____ a weakness or factor that reduces how far results can be trusted or applied
5. _____ connected with office and professional work rather than manual work
6. _____ to apply a result from one situation to many others

Part B: Research verbs. Complete the sentences with the verbs in the box (in the correct form).

find | suggest | measure | assign | replicate | rate

1. The study _____ that ChatGPT reduced completion time.
2. Participants were randomly _____ to two groups.
3. Independent evaluators _____ the quality of each text.
4. The results _____ that less experienced workers benefit most.
5. The researchers _____ time in minutes.
6. Other teams need to _____ the study in real workplaces.

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3 Main input: read and learn

READING · GRAMMAR

In 2023, two MIT researchers tested how ChatGPT affects professional writing. Read the first two paragraphs, then from "To study generative AI's effect..." to the end of the paragraph that begins "The experiment demonstrates...".

ARTICLE

Study finds ChatGPT boosts worker productivity for some writing tasks
MIT News (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) · Zach Winn · 14 July 2023 · selected paragraphs, about 500 words (3 minutes) · free
https://news.mit.edu/2023/study-finds-chatgpt-boosts-worker-productivity-writing-0714

Read the first two paragraphs. Answer: By how much did ChatGPT reduce the time to complete tasks? By how much did quality increase?

Language focus: hedging: reporting research cautiously

Careful writers avoid overstating results. Compare the strong and hedged versions.

Strong claim	Hedged version	Hedging device
AI makes workers more productive.	AI may make some workers more productive.	modal verbs: may, might, could
The gains are real.	The gains appear to be real in this context.	appear / seem to; limiting phrases
AI reduces inequality.	The data suggest that AI tends to reduce inequality between workers.	suggest, indicate, tend to
Real-world gains are smaller.	Real-world gains are likely to be somewhat smaller.	likely / unlikely to; somewhat, relatively

Practice: Rewrite the strong claims using the hedging device in brackets.

1. ChatGPT improves the quality of all professional writing. (may / some) → _____
2. Weaker writers benefit most. (The data suggest) → _____
3. The time savings will be the same in real offices. (unlikely to) → _____
4. Workers who try ChatGPT keep using it. (tend to) → _____
5. Generative AI will change white-collar work. (is likely to) → _____

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4 Reading comprehension and analysis

READING

Part A: Read again. Are the statements true (T) or false (F)? Circle.

1. The participants were college-educated professionals from six occupations. T / F
2. All participants used ChatGPT for both tasks. T / F
3. The ChatGPT group finished the second task 11 minutes faster than the control group. T / F
4. Evaluators rated the quality of ChatGPT users' work 18% higher. T / F
5. Workers who scored lower on the first task benefited least from ChatGPT. T / F
6. Two weeks later, workers exposed to ChatGPT were twice as likely to use it in their real jobs. T / F

Part B: Choose the best answer.

1. Which of these was one of the tasks in the study?
   (a) A financial audit. (b) A software program. (c) A cover letter for a grant application.
2. Why might the real-world speed gains be smaller than in the experiment?
   (a) Companies don't allow ChatGPT. (b) Workers have to fact-check and write prompts.
   (c) Real tasks are always shorter.
3. What effect did ChatGPT have on inequality between workers?
   (a) It reduced it. (b) It increased it. (c) It had no effect.
4. Where was the research paper published?
   (a) Nature. (b) MIT Technology Review. (c) Science.

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Part C: Analyse and evaluate.

1. Identify one limitation of the study and explain how it could affect the conclusions.

2. If AI helps weaker writers most, what could this mean for hiring, training and pay?

3. Under what conditions would you allow your team to use AI for client-facing writing?

5 Speaking practice and discussion

SPEAKING

Part A: Choose TWO cue cards. Talk about each card with your teacher for 1–2 minutes.

Cue card 1: AI at my company

- Current policy
- Tools used
- Concerns

Cue card 2: Quality vs speed

- When speed matters
- When quality matters
- Trade-offs

Cue card 3: Skills and inequality

- Junior staff
- Senior staff
- Training

Cue card 4: Trust and accuracy

- Fact-checking
- Responsibility
- Errors

Cue card 5: Research and hype

- Reading studies critically
- Headlines
- Evidence

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Part B: Answer the questions with your teacher. Give reasons and examples.

1. Which parts of your job could AI realistically speed up, and which should remain fully human?
2. Who should be responsible when AI-assisted writing contains an error?
3. If AI narrows the gap between strong and weak performers, how should companies reward expertise?
4. How can professionals avoid being misled by hype about new technologies?
5. Should companies require employees to disclose when they have used AI? Why? / Why not?

6 Lesson takeaway and wrap-up

REVIEW

Complete the sentences. Then tell your teacher.

1. Three hedging expressions I'll use: _____
2. The finding I find most significant: _____
3. The study suggests that _____ ; however, _____
4. My rule for using AI at work: _____

Takeaway: In a controlled experiment, ChatGPT cut writing time by about 40% and raised quality by 18%, helping weaker writers most — but real-world gains are likely to be smaller. Read research critically: look at the tasks, the sample and the limitations.

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+ Optional extension / homework

WRITING

Write a critical summary (200–250 words) of the study for your company's leadership team. Report the findings, evaluate two limitations and make a cautious recommendation. Use at least five hedging devices.

Alternative activity:

Draft a one-page "AI writing policy" for your team (what is allowed, what must be checked, who is responsible) and present it to your teacher in the next class.

References

Winn, Z. (2023, July 14). *Study finds ChatGPT boosts worker productivity for some writing tasks*. MIT News. https://news.mit.edu/2023/study-finds-chatgpt-boosts-worker-productivity-writing-0714

Original materials: vocabulary, language examples and exercises were written for NATeacher for C1 learners.

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Teacher's guide

Learning objectives. By the end of the lesson, the student can: analyse the design, findings and limitations of an experimental study reported in the media; report research cautiously with hedging; evaluate implications for the workplace; discuss responsible AI use.
Total time: approx. 60 minutes — Warm up 6 · Vocabulary 7 · Main input 10 · Comprehension 14 · Speaking 18 · Wrap-up 5. The extension is optional homework.

▶. Main input: about the resource

Resource: *Study finds ChatGPT boosts worker productivity for some writing tasks*, MIT News (Zach Winn, 14 July 2023). Free; no login. https://news.mit.edu/2023/study-finds-chatgpt-boosts-worker-productivity-writing-0714

What to read: paragraphs 1–2, then from "To study generative AI's effect..." to the end of the paragraph beginning "The experiment demonstrates..." (about 500 words, 3 minutes). The rest of the article is optional extension reading.

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Key information: Researchers Shakked Noy and Whitney Zhang (MIT economics PhD students); paper in Science. 453 college-educated workers (marketers, grant writers, consultants, data analysts, HR professionals and managers) did two 20–30-minute writing tasks related to their jobs (e.g. cover letters for grant applications, sensitive emails about restructuring, cost-benefit analyses). Half used ChatGPT for the second task. Time fell by 40% (11 minutes faster than the control group) and quality, judged by evaluators, rose 18%. Workers who scored lower on the first task benefited most, so inequality between workers decreased. Limitations: tasks lacked company-specific context, gave explicit instructions and outputs weren't fact-checked; real-world gains may be smaller because workers must fact-check and write prompts. Workers exposed to ChatGPT were twice as likely to use it at work two weeks later.

1. Warm up

6 mins.

Show the pictures. Ask the questions and encourage nuanced opinions (benefits and risks).

Possible answers: "The pictures show AI-assisted writing and a professional checking a document — speed versus quality control."
Support: give sentence starters: *In my experience..., The main risk is...* **Challenge:** ask "Is 'productivity' the right way to measure the value of writing?"

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2. Vocabulary preparation

7 mins.

The student completes Part A and Part B alone. Check together, say the words aloud and ask the student to repeat the difficult ones.

Part A

1. hype
2. control group
3. evaluator
4. limitation
5. white-collar
6. generalise

Part B

1. found 2. assigned 3. rated 4. suggest 5. measured 6. replicate

British and American English: American *college-educated* (British *university-educated*); British *generalise, organisation*, American *generalize, organization*. *Data* can be plural (formal, academic) or uncountable (general use) — both are accepted.

3. Main input and language focus

10 mins.

Open the article on screen. The student reads paragraphs 1–2 for the gist questions, then the methodology and limitations section. **Answers:** time fell by 40 percent; quality rose by 18 percent.

Present the language focus in 1–2 minutes: elicit the rule from the examples, then move to the practice.

Practice

1. ChatGPT may improve the quality of some professional writing.
2. The data suggest that weaker writers benefit most.
3. The time savings are unlikely to be the same in real offices.
4. Workers who try ChatGPT tend to keep using it.
5. Generative AI is likely to change white-collar work.

Common mistakes: over-hedging (“it might possibly perhaps suggest”); “The data suggests” is common in American and informal English, while “the data suggest” (plural) is traditional in academic British English — both are accepted; “is likely to changing” → “is likely to **change**”.

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4. Reading comprehension and analysis

14 mins.

The student reads again and works alone. Check together and ask the student to distinguish findings from interpretations.

Part A

1. T (453 workers) 2. F (half used it for the second task) 3. T 4. T 5. F (they benefited most) 6. T

Part B

1. c 2. b 3. a 4. c

Part C

1. e.g. the tasks gave explicit instructions and didn't require company-specific context or fact-checking, so real-world gains may be smaller. 2–3. Open answers; reward hedging and balanced reasoning.

Accept: well-supported interpretations; paraphrases with accurate numbers. **Support:** give a simple diagram of the experiment (task 1 → random groups → task 2) before Part A. **Challenge:** the student designs a better follow-up study that addresses one limitation.

5. Speaking practice and discussion

18 mins (cue cards 6 · questions 12).

The student chooses two cards and speaks for 1–2 minutes on each. Then ask the five questions one by one. Let the student finish, then ask follow-up questions: "How strong is that evidence?", "What would a sceptic say?", "Would that apply in your company?"

Model answer (Q2): "Ultimately, the professional who signs off the document should be accountable. AI may draft the text, but it is unlikely to understand the client relationship or the legal implications."
Evaluate: hedging used appropriately; critical analysis of evidence; precise vocabulary (control group, limitation, generalise); coherent extended argument.
Correction: note mistakes while the student speaks and correct 2–3 of them at the end, so you don't interrupt fluency.

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6. Lesson takeaway and wrap-up

5 mins.

The student completes the sentences and says them aloud. Ask: "How would you explain this study to a colleague who only read the headline?"

Possible answers: "may, the data suggest, is likely to"; "Weaker writers appeared to benefit most."; "The study suggests that AI speeds up writing; however, it tested simple, explicit tasks."

+. Optional extension / homework

Check: 200–250 words; accurate reporting of findings; balanced evaluation of limitations; varied hedging without over-hedging; formal register and cohesion.

✓. Did the student reach the objectives?

- Can the student explain the design and main findings of the study?
- Does the student hedge claims appropriately without over-hedging?
- Can the student identify and evaluate limitations?
- Can the student propose a responsible AI policy with reasons?

✓. Resource verification log

Resource	Institution / URL	Type · length	Checks (21 Oct 2026)	Result
Study finds ChatGPT boosts worker productivity for some writing tasks	MIT News (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) https://news.mit.edu/2023/study-finds-chatgpt-boosts-worker-productivity-writing-0714	Article · selected paragraphs, about 500 words (3 min)	Page loads; content matches the exercises; free, no login; suitable for C1; university news, not a language school	**Approved**

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References

Winn, Z. (2023, July 14). *Study finds ChatGPT boosts worker productivity for some writing tasks*. MIT News. https://news.mit.edu/2023/study-finds-chatgpt-boosts-worker-productivity-writing-0714

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