

Quick Kit: Choosing AI Tools for Teaching (Basics)

“How do I know if this tool is a good fit?”

You are looking to launch your exploration of using AI for yourself or guiding students in how to evaluate the utility/suitability of a tool for a given job, but you don't know where to start. Below, you will find a beginner's guide for general-purpose tool assessment. Discipline-specific applications will require a more rigorous approach than what we suggest here.

1. **Define your purpose!** What are you really trying to accomplish with the tool?

Think about a task you perform regularly in your teaching, research, or creative work that involves creating or curating content. **Define what a successful outcome looks like.** The more specific you are, the better.

Examples (collaboratively generated with Chat GPT!)

- Are you drafting a report or lesson overview? Success might mean a concise, accurate summary in your voice.
- Are you generating an image or logo? Maybe success is a professional, accessible design ready for publication or web use.
- Are you preparing a voiceover or script? Success could mean clear, natural tone and alignment with your intended message.

Translate this activity to the classroom: Instruct students on how to frame goals and identify what defines a good response/product before they open the tool. Cultivate metacognition whenever possible.

2. **Explore the Landscape of Tools!** What tools exist that you have access to, and what do you need to know before diving in?

Select one or two tools that might help you achieve your goal. Before you test them, you might want to:

- Visit each tool's site and read about its features.
- Look for short demo videos or educator reviews online.
- Check if it requires personal data or an institutional login.
- Understand how your data and products might be used or secured.

Translate this activity to the classroom: This process is a part of digital literacy practices. If guiding your students through this process, highlight *how* they can investigate tool credibility, privacy, and alignment with course objectives.

3. **Experiment Thoughtfully!** Try out the tool in a structured/semi-structured manner and observe the outcome.

Use your task as the test case (especially as *you* are the expert in the room and know what a good outcome looks like). As you prompt and evaluate outputs, take short notes on tool features like:

- How well the tool understands your directions and what changes or information you need to add to improve performance.
- The quality, creativity, or accuracy of the output.
- How much human input and judgement is still needed to reach a satisfactory result.

Translate this activity to the classroom: Have students keep a reflective journal to make notes on their observations and interactions with tools they test. Highlight that collecting data and recording observations is a critical process that translates well to the world beyond the classroom!

4. **Reflect and Decide!** Is this tool a good collaborator?

Compare your notes to your original goals and criteria for a good outcome. Answer the following questions for yourself:

- Did this tool help me reach my goal effectively?
- How much oversight or refinement was required?
- Would I trust this tool enough to recommend it to students or colleagues?
- What ethical or accessibility concerns might arise in using it in class or research?

Translate this activity to the classroom: Share your evaluation process with students and encourage them to follow through the same steps. After step 3, assign students a summary evaluative statement on utility, effective use and limitations/cautions/caveats. Emphasize that they are cultivating discernment, data collection, observation, and evaluation which are critical life and scholarly skills.