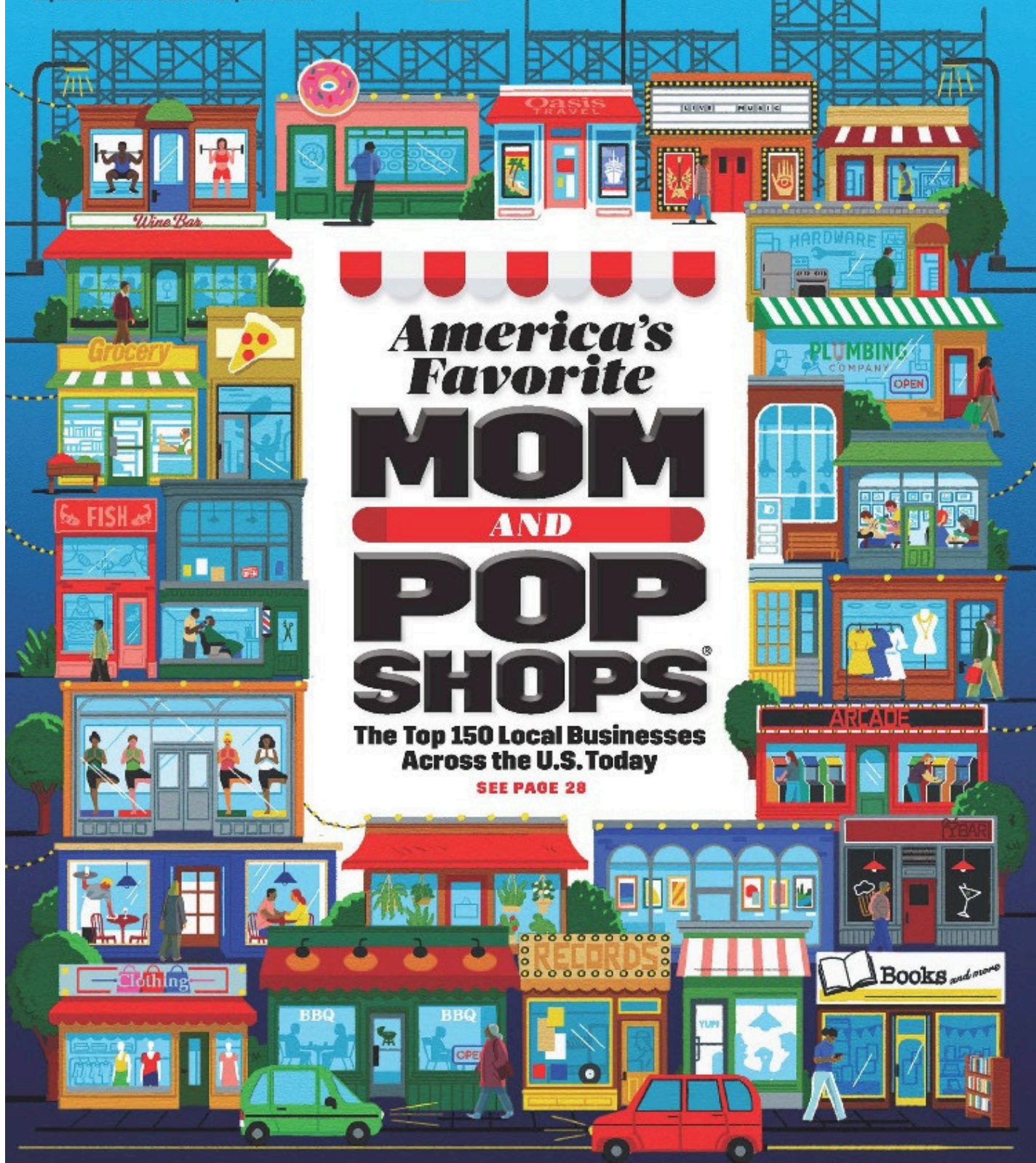


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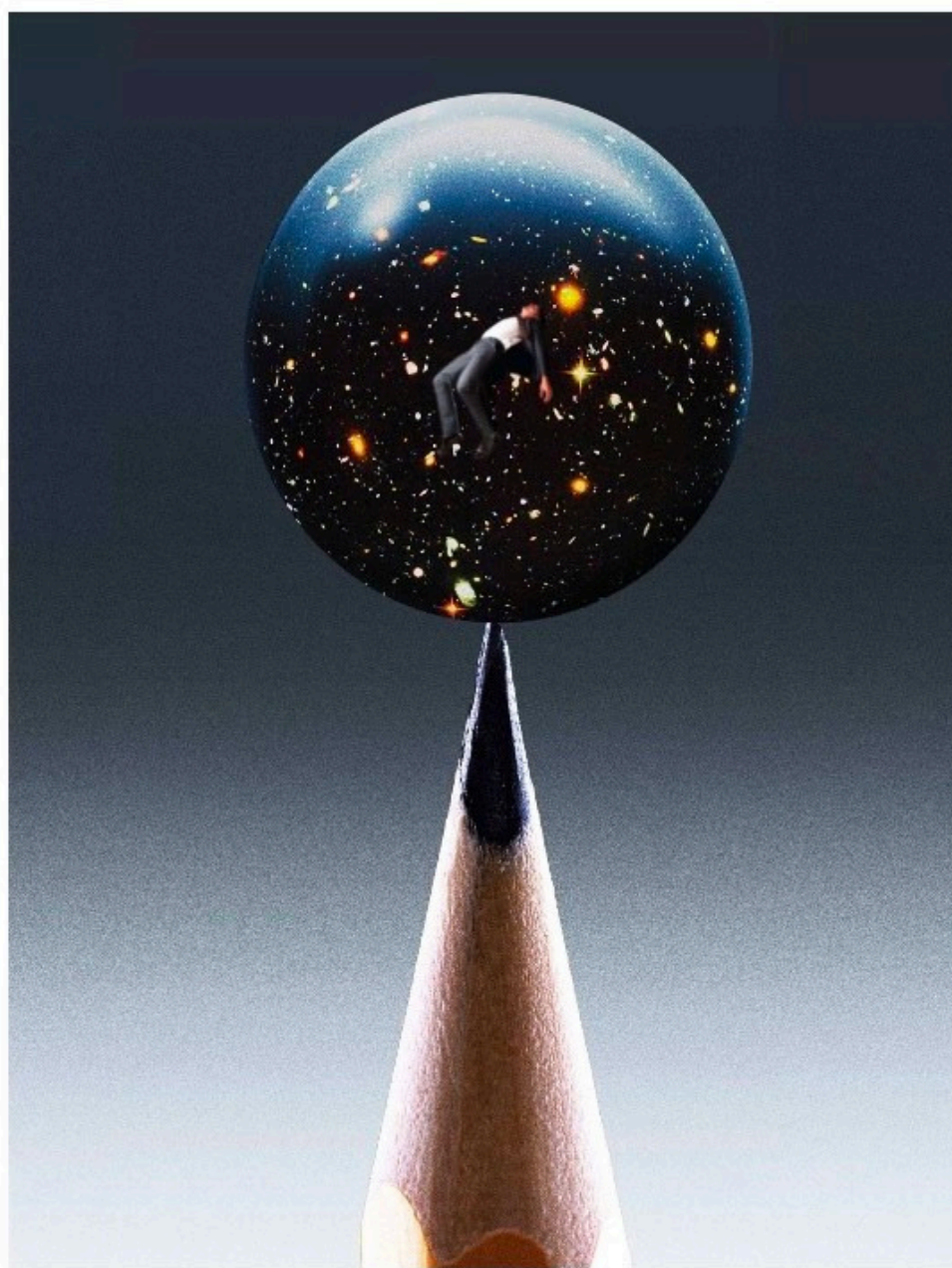
Don't Let AI Do Your Writing for You

There's much to gain by writing things yourself—and much to lose when you outsource it. Here's why entrepreneurs need to be writers. **by ELIZABETH WARDLE**

Every single step of an entrepreneurial journey happens through some form of writing—from early pitches to later marketing campaigns, from contracts to plans. The academic phrase for this is: “Writing mediates your activities.” In other words, writing helps you get things done.

But many people have a vexed relationship with writing. They remember their high school teacher's red pen, the five-paragraph essay, and their anxiety over high-stakes writing tests. They remember memorizing rules that they then didn't get quite right, and hear voices in their heads telling them they are better at math, or asking why they didn't learn to write properly in their English classes. For these people, writing is something they would prefer to avoid.

For anxious writers, a tool like ChatGPT might feel like a godsend. After all, why wouldn't you want to get those writing tasks out of the way without the struggle? If a new tool can do the work for you, why not take advantage? If AI can give you 10 new marketing slogans or draft a contract in 10 seconds, why not let it? You can skip the replay of your high school English teacher's voice in your head, stop worrying about comma splices, and just let the technology take over.



There's no doubt that AI will be—already is—part of our writing lives going forward. But we lose something when we blindly embrace new writing tools, skip the composing process entirely, and run away from our bad experiences with writing.

The first thing we lose by relying too much on AI is one of the major functions of writing: human connection. Do you remember the ad Google ran during the Olympics (“Dear Sydney”) suggesting kids should use AI to write a letter explaining their admiration for Olympians? Sports writer Shehan Jeyarajah wrote: “Their pitch is really, ‘Hey, we can feel and express emotions so your daughter doesn’t have to.’” And there was a strong public outcry against the ad.

What surfaced in that moment was that writing connects people—and this connection is not something we want to outsource to a computer. If we don’t want AI to replace human emotions and relationships, then we need to think carefully about when and why we rely on AI tools.

When you face a writing task large or small, ask yourself two questions: *Who am I writing to? What connects with those audiences and feels meaningful to them?*

Sometimes, what connects us is imperfection. Consider the letter your child might write to their Olympic hero. The misspellings and the awkward language are actually what make the writing meaningful. These illustrate that a breathing and evolving human being is behind the words, and the words are heartfelt. The polished and perfect sentences that AI produces are not what humans would write to another person with whom they have or want to have a connection. And telling AI to “revise to sound

more like an 8-year-old” is just faking human connection.

In addition to human connection, another important function of writing is learning. Writing is not about producing a product—or at least, it is not *just* about producing a product. What happens when you sit down to write a letter to an old friend, a marketing campaign, or a white paper? Do you put your perfectly preformed thoughts down on the page exactly as they are in your mind? Probably not. Instead, the act of trying to turn ideas into written text is an act of learning. As you force yourself to write sentences and sketch out thoughts, you find that your ideas change. Unclear thoughts become clearer, and one idea leads to another. The act of engaging in writing is an act of thinking and learning.

When we rely on AI tools to simply create a written product for us, we are not writing. We are producing a final product that

reminded of variables you had not yet considered and needed to hammer out? As you wrote an email to a friend about your latest venture, did you gain a new perspective on your work?

You lose something when you skip the part of writing that is drafting, thinking, and learning. If you just instruct an AI tool to write the pitch for you or to email your friend an update, you miss the opportunity to learn new things that will make your business better. You sell yourself short.

If you are an anxious writer, you might find that your past feelings and experiences get in the way of writing to learn. This is very common. I teach writing at Miami University, and I invite you to try a few of the methods I share with my students.

First, identify and talk back to the voices in your head that criticize your writing. Your rule-obsessed AP English teacher is not welcome here. Actively

learn, not to write a product for someone else’s consumption.

Third, if you really struggle to get words on a page because you are afraid of making mistakes, change your tools and environment: Use pen and paper and “freewrite” without stopping; turn your monitor off and just type as quickly as you can; storyboard your ideas; talk into your phone’s Notes app and then use that as a first draft.

We write because we need to get things done; writing mediates all the activities we care about. Writing is mediating our activities because—and *when*—it enables meaningful relationships and communication between human beings. Those activities exist in the first place because we imagined them as we used writing to think, learn, and create. We innovate new ideas and paths forward when we engage in the act of thinking through writing.

As you navigate the changing world of AI-powered writing



WHEN WE RELY ON AI TOOLS TO CREATE A WRITTEN PRODUCT, WE ARE NOT WRITING. WE ARE PRODUCING A FINAL PRODUCT THAT MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE MEANING FOR OTHER HUMANS—AND WE SKIP THE PROCESS OF THINKING AND LEARNING.

may or may not have meaning for other humans—and we are skipping the process of thinking and learning.

Make a quick list of the kinds of writing you need to do in order to make your business successful. What happens when you go through the process of writing these texts? For example, as you wrote and practiced your first pitch to a potential partner or funder, did you learn as you drafted? Did one idea lead you to a new one? As you wrote a contract for a new partner, were you

replace her with a voice that encourages you to keep going and make meaning with words.

Second, remind yourself that writing for learning is a private sandbox where you can get anything on the page, and no one but you will see it. Your spelling errors and sentence fragments don’t matter; you are simply writing to see what you discover. If the idea of writing full paragraphs and formal prose increases your heart rate, then write in bullets, fragments, or even dialogue. The goal is to

tools, don’t skip the opportunity to slow down and engage in the composing processes that will help you imagine new ideas, perspectives, and connections.

Elizabeth Wardle is University Distinguished Professor, Roger and Joyce Howe Distinguished Professor of Written Communication, and Director of the Howe Center for Writing Excellence at Miami University of Ohio. Her latest book is Writing Rediscovered: Nine Concepts to Transform Your Relationship With Writing.