

Debate!

Should computers grade student essays?

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Humans can grade about 30 essays per hour. Computers can grade thousands of essays in seconds. But humans are better at scoring, right?

Not so, says Mark Shermis, dean of the College of Education at the University of Akron, in Ohio. He used computer programs to grade more than 16,000 middle school and high school essays that had already been graded by humans. He found there wasn't much difference in the scores.

Shermis acknowledges, however, that the grading software has its limitations. "It can't recognize a good argument," he explained. "But it can tell you that you've mistaken there for their, and tell you that you've made some mechanical errors."

Les Perelman argues that the grading software will teach bad writing. He was the director of writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for 26 years. While testing one grading system, he wrote a bogus essay that received the highest score. How did he trick the computer? Just throw out all the rules for good writing that you've ever learned, he says.

"Almost half of the score is based on length," he told TFK. "The more words you write the better. Never use a simple word when you can use a big word. Never say many, say myriad or plethora."

► ***What do you think? Should computers be used to grade student essays? Motivate your answer!***