National Literacy Trust

Change your story

Children and young people's use of generative AI to support literacy in 2024

Irene Picton & Christina Clark

June 2024

National Literacy Trust

Change your story

Introduction

Recent developments in technology have accelerated the influence of artificial intelligence (AI)[1] on our lives. The potential impact of generative AI[2] is of particular interest to those working in the creative industries and in education (see, e.g., Department for Education, 2023). The ability of generative-AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude to both 'write' (generate new texts) and 'read' (e.g. summarise texts) in a human-like manner means they are set to play an increasingly important role in the literacy lives of children, young people and adults.

We are interested in exploring how such platforms might influence, and potentially redefine, what it means to be literate in the digital age. As generative-AI tools become more pervasive and their capabilities expand and improve, it is essential to develop an evidence base for how this will create new challenges and opportunities for the literacy skills needed to participate in democracy, the economy and society itself.

Based on data from more than 50,000 children and young people taking part in our Annual Literacy Survey, and with a focus on more than 15,000 young people aged 13 to 18, this report explores young people's attitudes, behaviour and confidence around using generative AI to support literacy and learning[3]. Primarily, findings show that awareness and use of these tools by children and young people has increased rapidly in the last year, with 3 in 4 young people aged 13 to 18 saying they'd used them in 2024. The survey also provides evidence that many young people are using generative AI to support literacy. For example, 2 in 5 young people aged 13 to 18 agreed that it had helped them with writing generally, and 1 in 5 said that they had used it to write stories.

However, while most young people said that they added their own thoughts to anything AI told them, 1 in 5 admitted to just copying AI outputs, and a similar

---

[1] *"The theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence."* (Oxford Reference Dictionary, n.d.).

[2] Generative AI can *"create new content based on large volumes of data that models have been trained on, including audio, text, images and video"* (DfE, 2023).

[3] See Picton., I & Clark, C. (2024) *Teachers' use of generative AI to support literacy*, London: National Literacy Trust

percentage said they didn't check responses from AI in case they might be wrong. This suggests greater support is needed to ensure this group of young people have the information and skills they need to interact creatively and critically with generative-AI tools and outputs.

While unsupervised use of generative AI is not recommended for under 13s[4], we have also included some brief findings from children aged 8 to 13 in this report for information. Insights from this younger age group suggest a similar percentage of those aged 8 to 13 are using generative AI as their older counterparts, and for broadly similar reasons. However, while slightly fewer children in this age group said they used it for homework compared with those aged 13 to 18, more said that it helped them with ideas and to learn new things, and slightly more said they used it write stories and poems or to have a chat. Critical attitudes (such as adding your own thoughts or just copying AI outputs, and checking responses are accurate) were broadly similar to those seen in older age groups, suggesting early support around interacting effectively with these tools might be beneficial.

Findings from this research will inform an ongoing programme of research into the influence of generative AI on literacy in the digital age, as well as supporting the development of practical training, programmes and resources for schools. We hope they will also make a useful contribution to a growing body of research exploring how best to help children and young people develop the skills they need to access the potential benefits of generative AI for literacy and learning.

Method

About the Annual Literacy Survey

The National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey, run annually since 2010, includes questions about reading, writing, speaking and listening, as well as about children and young people's access to literacy resources at home and in school. On occasion, the survey has also been conducted with schools that have also provided reading-attainment data, allowing us to explore associations between reading engagement and skills. However, the main foci of the survey are the affective and behavioural aspects of literacy, including enjoyment, attitudes, behaviour, confidence and motivation.

[4] See, e.g., https://help.openai.com/en/articles/8313401-is-chatgpt-safe-for-all-ages

Three surveys were available in 2024: one for children aged 5 to 8, one for children and young people aged 8 to 16, and one for young people aged 16 and older. Taking place from January to the middle of March every year, schools are recruited from autumn onwards through our networks, newsletters and social media followers, and through partner organisations such as World Book Day and Renaissance. Participating schools receive their own school-specific report, which means that they can compare their responses with national data once we publish the national reports.

Every year, we include themed questions to allow us to explore associations between literacy and other topics (such as environmental awareness, financial literacy or mental wellbeing). Following the launch of ChatGPT3 in November 2022, questions about awareness and use of generative AI were included in the 2023 survey, with further questions on attitudes and behaviours around AI added in 2024. Only surveys for children and young people aged between 8 and 18 included questions relating to generative AI.

The 2023 and 2024 Annual Literacy Survey samples

In 2023, 64,066 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from schools in the UK participated in the online survey. This increased to 66,008 in 2024. Further demographic information for the overall 2024 sample is given below:

66,008

children and young people aged 8 to 18 from the UK.

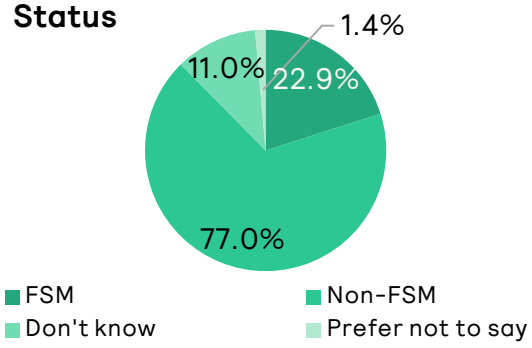
Age of respondents

22.5%	8 to 11 years
45.9%	11 to 14 years
27.6%	14 to 16 years
4.0%	16 to 18 years

Gender

48.9%	boy
47.1%	girl
2.9%	would rather not say
0.5%	describe themselves another way

Free School Meal (FSM) Status



National Literacy Trust
Change your story

This report explores young people's attitudes, behaviour and confidence around using generative AI to support literacy and learning. 42,263 children and young people aged 8 to 18 answered questions about generative AI in our Annual Literacy Survey in 2023[5], increasing to 53,169[6] in 2024. The main findings focus on data from young people aged 13 to 18, from whom we received more than 15,000[7] responses. Findings for younger children (aged 8 to 13) are included later in the report.

Key findings

Overall awareness and use of generative AI in 2023 and 2024 in young people aged 13 to 18

- While 1 in 5 (20.0%) young people aged 13 to 18 said they had heard of ChatGPT in early 2023, by early 2024, almost all (92.2%) said they had heard of generative AI tools and platforms. Of those who had heard of generative AI, the percentage who said they had used it doubled between 2023 and 2024, increasing from 2 in 5 (37.1%) to 3 in 4 (77.1%).

> The percentage of young people aged 13 to 18 who had used generative AI has doubled over the last year, increasing from almost 2 in 5 in 2023 (37.1%) to 3 in 4 (77.1%) in 2024

- More boys than girls said they had used generative AI in 2023 (40.3% vs. 23.6%) but this gap narrowed in 2024, with similar percentages of boys and girls saying they had used it (78.3% vs 76.4%).
- In 2023, slightly more young people aged 16 to 18 used generative AI compared with those aged 13 to 16 (45.3% vs 36.7%). However, in 2024, slightly more of those aged 13 to 16 than those aged 16 to 18 said they had used it (77.9% vs 72.2%).

[5] In 2023, 42,263 children and young people aged 8 to 18 answered questions about generative AI, increasing to 53,169 in 2024.
[6] Of children and young people who answered questions about generative AI in 2024, 70.2% (n = 37,339) were aged 8 to 13; 26.1% (n = 13,894) were aged 13 to 16 and 3.6% (n = 1,936) were aged 16 to 18.
[7] 15,830: 13 to 16 (n = 13,894) and 16 to 18 (n = 1,936)

- In 2023, 34.8% of those aged 13 to 18 who received free school meals (FSMs) and 37.7% of those who did not receive FSMs had used generative AI. This gap narrowed in 2024, with those who did and did not receive FSMs equally likely to say they had used it (77.7% vs 77.3% respectively).

Motivation for using generative AI in young people aged 13 to 18

- Entertainment, curiosity, homework and inspiration were the most-cited purposes for using generative AI. However, more than 2 in 5 (44.4%) regular users aged 13 to 18 said they'd used generative AI to have a chat, while almost 1 in 5 (18.5%) said they had used it to write stories, 1 in 8 (12.8%) to write poems or lyrics, and 1 in 11 (9.0%) to write non-fiction.

Almost 1 in 5 (18.5%) young people aged 13 to 18 said they used generative AI to write stories

  - More young people who said they enjoyed writing and wrote daily said they had used generative AI for writing stories compared with those who didn't. However, 1 in 7 (14.5%) young people aged 13 to 16 who did not enjoy writing also said they had used it for this purpose, suggesting these tools may have encouraged at least some less-keen writers to experiment with this activity.

13- to 18-year-olds' attitudes to using generative AI in 2024

- Around half of young people aged 13 to 18 agreed that that generative AI helped them with ideas (56.6%), to understand things (52.2%) or to learn new things (50.8%). In addition, 2 in 5 (39.6%) said it helped them with writing, and 1 in 4 (23.2%) felt it helped them with reading.

2 in 5 (39.6%) young people aged 13 to 18 felt generative AI helped them with writing, and almost 1 in 4 (23.2%) with reading

13- to 18-year-olds' self-reported skills and behaviours when using generative AI

- Almost 1 in 2 (47.4%) 13- to-18-year-olds agreed that, when they used AI, they usually added their own thoughts into anything it told them. By

contrast, 1 in 5 (20.9%) said that, when they used generative AI for homework, they usually just copied what it told them.

- Fewer young people aged 16 to 18 said they just copied AI outputs compared with those aged 13 to 16 (12.2% vs 22.7%). This suggests that older teens are either less likely to copy AI outputs directly, or to admit to doing so.

1 in 5 (20.9%) young people aged 13 to 18 said they usually just copied what generative AI told them

- Similarly, while 2 in 5 (39.9%) young people aged 13 to 18 said they checked outputs from generative AI as they might be wrong, 1 in 5 (20.6%) did not, suggesting greater support may be needed to ensure this group of young people have the information and skills they need to critically evaluate AI responses.

Use of generative AI in young people aged 8 to 13

Some generative-AI platforms provide guidance that they should not be used unsupervised by children under 13. However, brief findings from children aged 8 to 13 are included to provide insight into this younger age group's use of these tools.

- In 2024, 3 in 4 (75.3%) children aged 8 to 13 said they had used generative AI. As with older age groups, entertainment and curiosity were the most-cited purposes for those aged 8 to 13. However, more children in this age group used it for a chat than older age groups (58.9%), and fewer for homework (40.7% vs 59.1% of those aged 13 to 18). Otherwise, a similar percentage of those aged 8 to 13 said they used it to write stories, poems or lyrics, and non-fiction as young people aged 13 to 18.
- Compared with older age groups, slightly more children in this younger age group agreed that generative AI helped them with ideas (63.2% vs 56.6% of those aged 13 to 18), to learn new things (56.7% vs 50.8% of those aged 13 to 18) and with reading (28.7% vs. 23.2%).
- However, there were almost no differences between children aged 8 to 13 and those aged 13 to 18 in relation to adding their own thoughts into AI outputs, copying what generative AI told them or checking things AI told them as it could be wrong.

These findings provide some initial insight into how the use of and engagement

with generative AI has changed over the last year, and how this is associated with age, gender, receipt of free school meals and broader literacy engagement.

Over the last year, there has been a dramatic increase in children and young people's awareness and use of generative AI. Our findings also suggest that most have a broadly positive attitude towards using this new tool for entertainment, learning, inspiration and literacy. It may also have potential benefits for at least some of the least keen and confident writers.

However, 1 in 5 children and young people taking part in the survey admitted that they often just copied what they found on generative AI for homework, and that they didn't check AI outputs. This suggests greater support is needed to help this group of children and young people interact more creatively and critically with generative AI.

Children and young people's use of generative AI in 2024

Overall awareness and use of generative AI in young people aged 13 to 18

We first asked children and young people about their awareness and use of generative AI platforms in early 2023, shortly after the launch of ChatGPT3 in November 2022. 42,263 children and young people aged 8 to 18[8] answered a question about awareness of ChatGPT (the main generative-AI platform at this point). In 2024, 53,169 children and young people aged 8 to 18 answered a question about whether they had heard of generative-AI platforms (such as, for example, ChatGPT, Snapchat My AI or Bing Chat)[9].

[8] In 2023, 46.9% (n = 30,077) of the sample were boys and 48.5% (n = 31,076) girls, 2.3% (n = 1,485) didn't want to specify their gender and 2.2% (n = 1,428) described themselves another way. 15.8% (n = 10,127) were aged 8 to 11; 66.4% (n = 42,523) were aged 11 to 14; 15.1% (n = 9,667) were aged 14 to 16 and 2.7% (n = 1,749) were aged 16 to 18. 16.3% (n = 10,418) told us they received free school meals (FSMs), 72.0% (n = 46,116) did not, 1.6% (n = 1,046) didn't want to say and 10.1% (n = 6,486) didn't know.

[9] Within this subsample, 70.2% (n = 37,339) children were aged 8 to 13; 26.1% (n = 13,894) young people were aged 13 to 16 and 3.6% (n = 1,936) were aged 16 to 18.

Some generative-AI platforms provide guidance suggesting that they should not be used unsupervised by children under 13[10]. While we included younger children in our survey for information, findings will focus initially on young people aged 13 to 18[11] who may be presumed to be using generative AI independently. Findings for younger children (those aged 8 to 13) are included later in this report (see p18).

Awareness of generative AI increased significantly over the year since we last asked this question, with almost all (92.2%) young people aged 13 to 18 saying they had heard of it in early 2024, compared with just 1 in 5 (20.0%) in 2023. In addition, of those who said they had heard of these generative-AI platforms, the percentage of those aged 13 to 18 who said they had used them doubled between 2023 and 2024, increasing from 2 in 5 (37.1%) to 3 in 4 (77.1%).

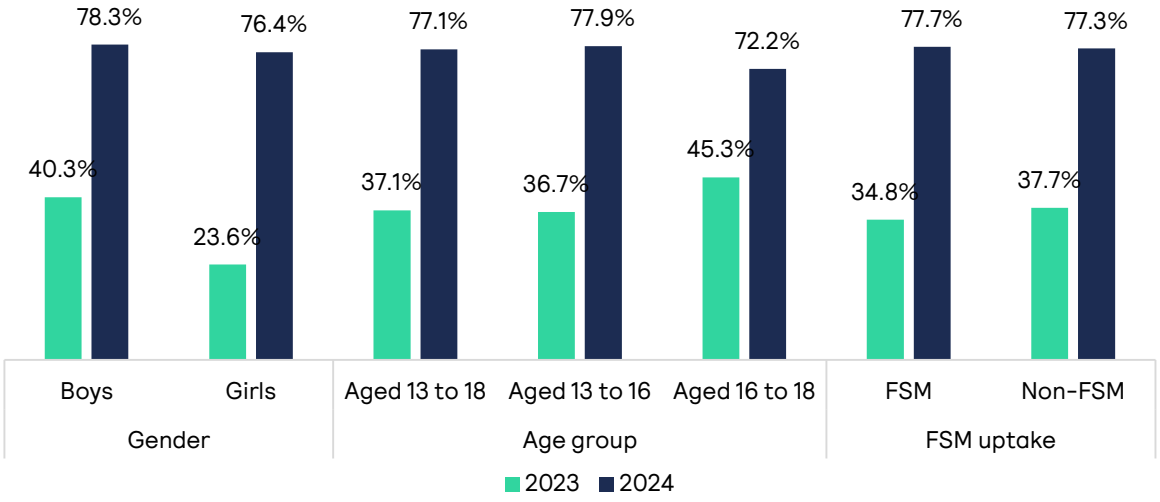
More boys than girls said they had used generative AI in 2023 (40.3% vs. 23.6%), and earlier surveys have also found that boys aged 7 to 17 were more likely to report using ChatGPT than girls of the same age (34% vs 14%, Ofcom, 2023). However, in our 2024 sample, our survey found that the gender gap in using generative AI had narrowed, with similar percentages of boys and girls aged 13 to 18 saying they had used it (78.3% vs 76.4%, see Figure 1).

Reports based on UK data have shown that anything from 67% to 79% of secondary-school-aged students are using AI tools (see, e.g., Ofcom, 2023; RM, 2023). In 2023, slightly more young people aged 16 to 18 said they had used generative AI compared with those aged 13 to 16 (45.3% vs 36.7%). However, in 2024, slightly more of those aged 13 to 16 than aged 16 to 18 said they had used it (77.9% vs 72.2%).

Research has found associations between household income and children's awareness and use of generative AI (Bissoondath, 2024; Ofcom, 2024). However, despite concerns about the digital divide, our survey found that the same percentage of young people who did and did not receive free school meals (FSMs) reported using generative AI in 2024 (77.7% vs 77.3% respectively).

[10] See, e.g., https://help.openai.com/en/articles/8313401-is-chatgpt-safe-for-all-ages (note: children and young people were not asked if they used generative AI tools alone or with adult supervision).
[11] n = 15,830 (13 to 16: n = 13,894, 16 to 18: n = 1,936).

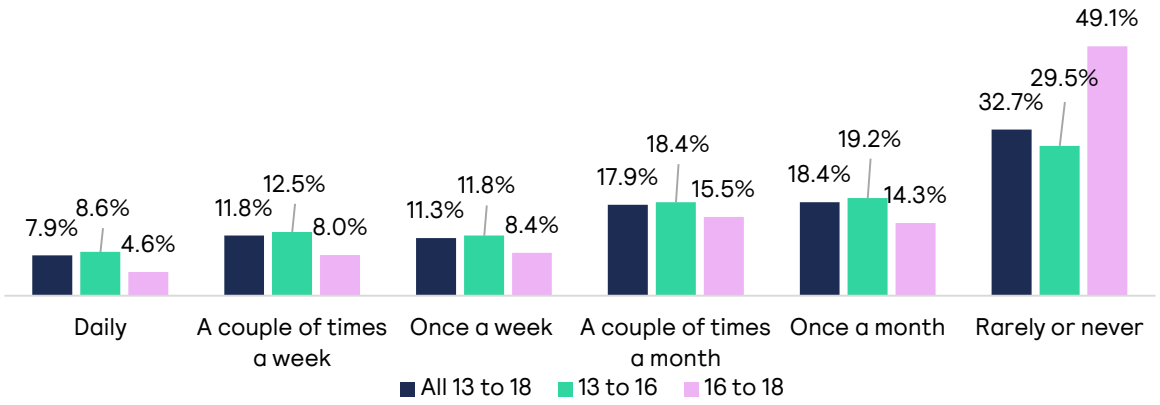
Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 13 to 18 who had used generative AI in 2023 and 2024 by gender, age and free-school-meal uptake



Frequency of use of generative AI in 2024

While the overall percentage of young people aged 13 to 18 saying they had used generative AI in 2024 was high, few reported using it with much frequency. When asked how often they used generative AI, 1 in 3 (32.7%) young people aged 13 to 18 reported using it 'rarely or never', suggesting they may simply have tried it out at some point (see Figure 2). This was particularly the case for 16- to 18-year-olds, 1 in 2 (49.1%) of whom said they used it 'rarely or never'. Otherwise, almost 1 in 5 (17.9%) of those aged 13 to 18 reported using it a couple of times a month, and 1 in 8 (11.8%) a couple of times a week, while just 1 in 13 (7.9%) used generative AI daily.

Figure 2: Frequency of use of generative AI for children and young people aged 13 to 18 in 2024



A note on children and young people's motivations for using generative AI in 2023

In early 2023, as Chat GPT was relatively new, we invited children and young people to share free text comments about what they had used it for. A thematic analysis of these comments found that most of those who had used it at that point had done so for help with homework, for fun, to ask questions, for chess, to write stories, for ideas and inspiration, or to write code.

Children and young people's comments indicated a broad range of attitudes to using ChatGPT for homework, with one young person saying they had used it: "So I don't have to do anything." However, others said they had used it to provide everything from initial inspiration to final proofreading (e.g. one comment said, "Checking essays and things I write for errors. I don't use it to generate writing for me, as I do this better.")

However, most comments about using ChatGPT to support writing appeared to relate to creative, rather than routine, aspects of writing. Many children said they had used it for crafting stories, scripts or songs, often together with family members. A typical comment in this area related to using it "... to come up with more ideas for songs for the pantomime that my grandmother is directing".

I don't use it [generative AI] to write for me, as I can do this better

13- to 18-year-olds' motivations for using generative AI in 2024

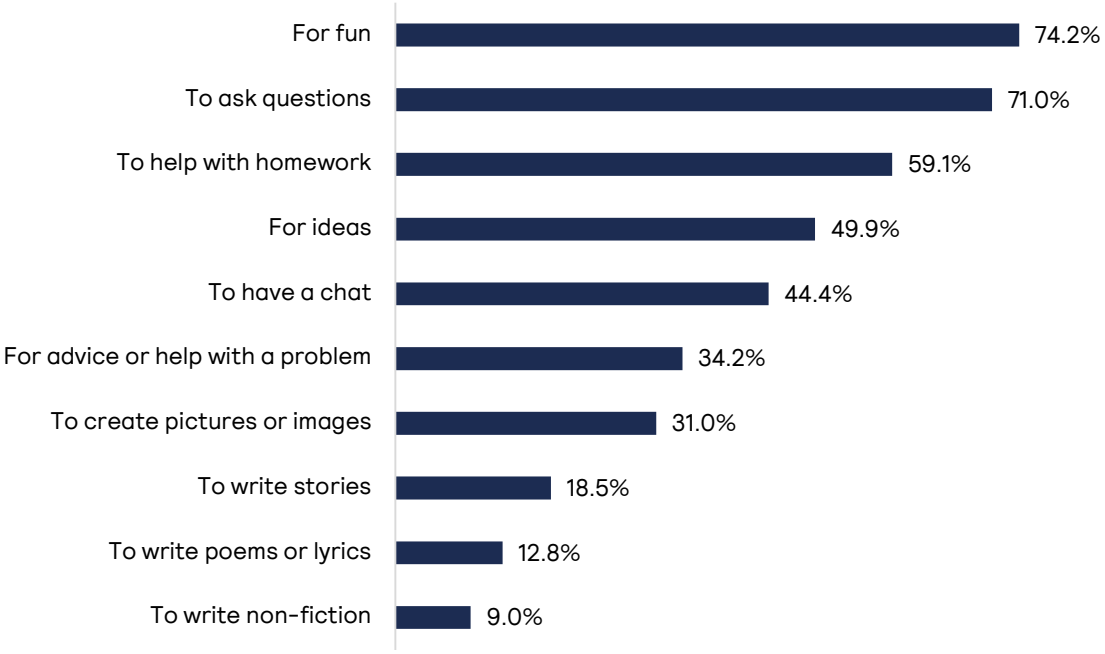
In 2024, we invited young people aged 13 to 18 who told us that they used generative AI at least once a month to select their main reasons for doing so. Suggested reasons were based on a list informed by findings from the previous year and wider research.

As shown in Figure 3, entertainment and curiosity were the most-cited reasons for using generative AI in this age group in 2024, with 3 in 4 (74.2%) young people aged 13 to 18 saying they used it for fun and 7 in 10 (71.0%) to ask questions. Homework and inspiration were the next most popular reasons, with 3 in 5 (59.1%)

regular users saying they used generative AI for homework and 1 in 2 (49.9%) for ideas. Using generative AI for conversation was the fifth most popular reason, with more than 2 in 5 (44.4%) young people saying they had used it to have a chat.

Media and research reports suggest there has been a growth in young people using AI chatbots to discuss problems (see, e.g., Tidy, 2024; VoiceBox, 2023) and, in our survey, 1 in 3 (34.2%) regular users of generative AI said they used it for advice or help with a problem. Looking at young people's use of generative AI in relation to writing, almost 1 in 5 (18.5%) of those who used it regularly said they did so to write stories, almost 1 in 8 (12.8%) to write poems or lyrics, and 1 in 11 (9.0%) to write non-fiction.

Figure 3: Motivations for using generative AI in children and young people aged 13 to 18 in 2024



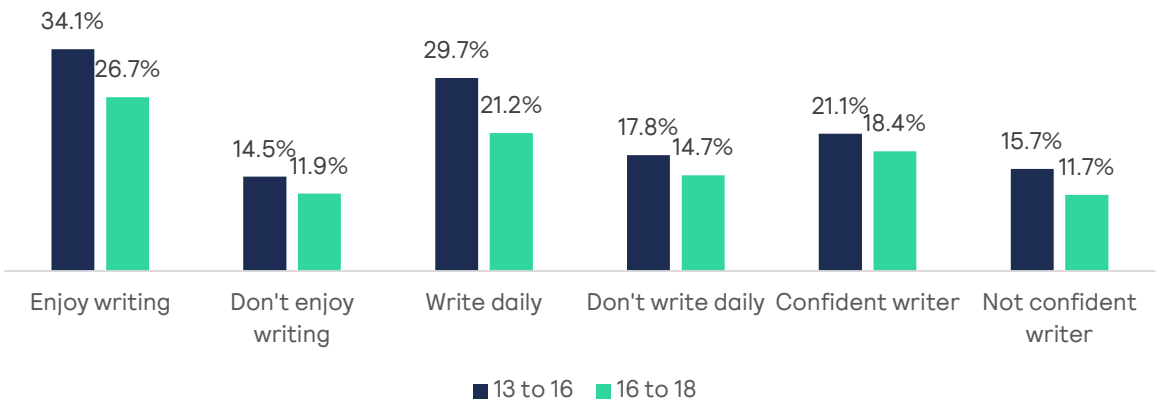
Almost 1 in 5 (18.5%) young people aged 13 to 18 said they used generative AI to write stories

As writing stories represented the most popular use of generative AI on the list in terms of directly supporting literacy, we were interested to explore any differences in the wider reading and writing attitudes of young people who used generative AI for this purpose. At present, studies in this area are relatively limited, although some research with older students has explored the benefits, drawbacks and helpful practices around using generative AI to support creative writing (see, e.g., Cummings et al., 2024).

In our own sample across those aged 13 to 16 and 16 to 18, more of those who said they enjoyed writing said they used AI for this purpose compared with those who didn't enjoy writing (see Figure 4). In addition, more of the most-frequent writers (those who wrote daily) said they used AI to write stories compared with less-frequent writers. However, only slightly more of those who rated themselves as good writers said they used AI to write stories than those who were not confident writers.

This indicates that more young people who already enjoyed writing and wrote daily chose to use generative AI to write stories, perhaps reflecting their existing interest in writing and in trying out different tools to support it. However, it is also worth noting that more than 1 in 10 young people who said they did not enjoy writing and wrote infrequently or felt less confident about writing said they used generative AI to write stories. For example, 1 in 7 (14.5%) young people aged 13 to 16 who did not enjoy writing said they had used it for this purpose, suggesting that these tools might encourage at least some young people who otherwise don't enjoy writing to experiment with this activity.

Figure 4: Using generative AI to write stories by writing enjoyment, frequency and confidence in children and young people aged 13 to 18



13- to 18-year-olds' attitudes to using generative AI in 2024
13- to 18-year-olds' self-reported skills and behaviours when using generative AI in 2024

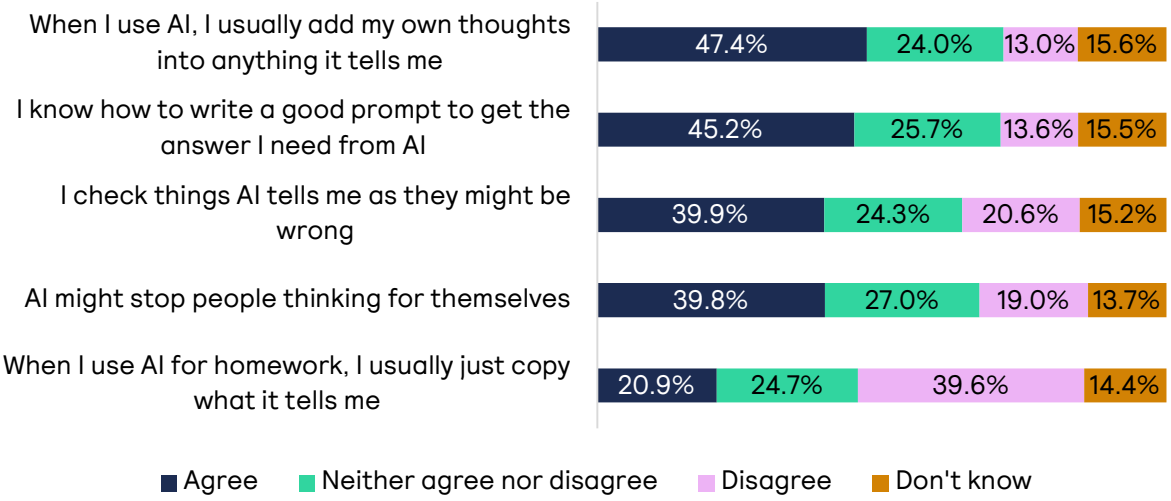
We were also interested to learn about young people's sense of their own skills and behaviours when using generative AI. When presented with a series of statements in this area, almost 1 in 2 (47.4%) young people aged 13 to 18 agreed that, when they used AI, they usually added their own thoughts into anything it told them, while 13.0% disagreed with this statement (see Figure 6).

By contrast, 1 in 5 (20.9%) said that, when they used generative AI for homework, they usually just copied what it told them, although it is worth noting that twice as many young people (39.6%, or 2 in 5) disagreed with this. This suggests that most of their interactions with generative AI tend to include some element of co-creation, although these statements do not allow us to know how much. At the same time, 2 in 5 (39.8%) young people agreed that generative AI might stop people thinking for themselves, although this statement also had the highest percentage of children saying that they neither agreed nor disagreed (27.0%), perhaps as this technology is too new for them to have formed an opinion on this.

1 in 5 (20.9%) children and young people said they usually just copied what generative AI told

Young people aged 13 to 18 also appeared to feel quite confident in their skills around obtaining the answers they needed when using generative AI, with just under 1 in 2 (45.2%) agreeing that they knew how to write a good question or prompt to get the answers they needed. Similarly, 2 in 5 (39.9%) said they checked outputs from generative AI as they might be wrong. However, 1 in 5 (20.6%) disagreed with this statement, suggesting greater support may be needed to ensure this group of young people have the information and skills they need to critically evaluate AI responses.

Figure 6: Young people aged 13 to 18's self-reported skills and behaviours when using generative AI in 2024



As shown in Table 2, there were few differences by gender, but more boys than girls were confident about writing a good prompt (49.8% vs 40.4%, a difference of 9.4pp). Equally, differences by age group were slight, apart from copying from generative AI. Far fewer young people from the older age group (aged 16 to 18) agreed that when they used it, they usually just copied what it told them, with just 1 in 8 (12.2%) saying this compared with more than 1 in 5 (22.7%) 13- to 16-year-olds. This suggests that older young people are either less likely to copy AI outputs or to admit to doing so. The older age group were also less confident with prompts (40.5% felt confident, compared with 46.1% of those aged 13 to 16) and slightly more concerned about the implications of generative AI for independent thought, with 44.2% worried about this compared with 39.0% of those aged 13 to 16.

Fewer differences were seen by free-school-meal status, although marginally more of those who did not receive FSMs said they usually added their own thoughts to AI outputs (48.3% vs 45.0%) and felt they knew how to write a good prompt (46.1% vs 43.1%).

National Literacy Trust
Change your story

Table 2: Percentage agreement with generative AI self-reported skills and behaviour statements by gender, age group and FSM uptake in children and young people aged 13 to 18

A brief look at 8- to 13-year-olds' use of generative AI in 2024

As noted, some generative-AI platforms provide guidance suggesting that they should not be used unsupervised by children under 13[13]. While children and young people were not asked if they had used generative AI alone or with an adult (this question will be included in future surveys), findings from children aged 8 to 13 have been included in this report to provide some insight into their use of these tools in 2024.

In 2024, 3 in 4 (75.3%) children aged 8 to 13[14] said they had used generative AI. Overall, patterns of use were similar to older age groups, with most (21.3% or 1 in 5) reporting using it 'rarely or never', suggesting they had likely just tried it out. However, 1 in 7 (14.8%) said they used it daily, 1 in 6 (17.2%) said they used it a couple of times a week and 1 in 5 (18.1%) a couple of times a month.

8- to 13-year-olds' motivations for using generative AI in 2024

Children aged 8 to 13 who told us they had used generative AI at least once a month were invited to share their reasons for doing so. As with older age groups, entertainment and curiosity were the most-cited purposes for those aged 8 to 13, with 3 in 4 (77.9%) saying they used it for fun and 7 in 10 (68.6%) to ask questions. However, more children in this age group said they had used it for a chat than older age groups (58.9% vs 44.4% of those aged 13 to 18), and, likely reflecting increased homework at secondary school, fewer of those aged 8 to 13 reported using generative AI for homework (40.7% vs 59.1% of those aged 13 to 18).

More 8 to 13s than 13 to 18s said they used generative AI for a chat (58.9% vs 44.4%)

[13] See, e.g., https://help.openai.com/en/articles/8313401-is-chatgpt-safe-for-all-ages
[14] n = 37,339

A similar percentage of those aged 8 to 13 as 13 to 18 said they used generative AI for ideas (51.1% vs 49.9%) and for advice or help with a problem (32.2% vs 34.2%). A marginally higher percentage of those aged 8 to 13 reported using generative AI to write stories (22.1% vs 18.5%), poems or lyrics (16.3% vs 12.8%) and non-fiction (12.0% vs 9.0%) compared with 13- to 18-year-olds.

8- to 13-year-olds' attitudes to using generative AI in 2024

Children aged 8 to 13 were also invited to agree or disagree with various statements relating to attitudes to using generative AI in relation to creativity, learning and literacy. Compared with older age groups, more children in this younger age group agreed that generative AI helped them with ideas (63.2% vs 56.6% of those aged 13 to 18), to learn new things (56.7% vs 50.8% of those aged 13 to 18) and with reading (28.7% vs. 23.2%). However, similar numbers agreed it helped them to understand things (55.7% vs 52.2%) and helped them with writing (41.5% vs 39.6%).

More children aged 8 to 13 than 13 to 18 felt generative AI helped them with ideas (55.8% vs 46.5%) and to learn new things (56.3% vs 48.9%)

8- to 13-year-olds' self-reported skills and behaviours when using generative AI

Finally, when presented with statements exploring self-reported skills and behaviours when using generative AI, an almost identical percentage of those aged 8 to 13 as 13 to 18 said they usually added their own thoughts into anything it told them (48.4% vs 47.4%). In addition, 22.8% said that, when they used generative AI for homework, they usually just copied what it told them, compared with 20.9% of those aged 13 to 18. The difference in the percentage of those aged 8 to 13 and 13 to 18 who said they checked things AI told them – in case they were wrong – was slight (43.7% vs. 39.9%), and a similar percentage did not check (21.4% vs 20.6% of older age groups). Finally, the percentage who felt able to write a good prompt was also similar (44.6% vs 45.2%), although marginally fewer of those aged 8 to 13 felt AI might stop people thinking for themselves (35.5% vs 39.9% of older age groups).

National Literacy Trust
Change your story

Summary and discussion

As with any new development in technology, speculation about the impact of generative-AI tools, including how they might reshape the literacy landscape, varies considerably. For example, some academics have considered whether the affordances of generative AI may mean that reading and writing skills might eventually become obsolete (Hamilton et al., 2023). Others have emphasised the urgent need to support children and young people to develop the critical evaluation and co-creation skills needed to work effectively with AI outputs (McKnight, 2021). Our findings also suggest that this should be a priority for educators and policymakers.

> Literacy increasingly means and includes interacting with and critically evaluating AI
>
> (McKnight, 2021)

The speed of recent developments in generative AI has also re-invigorated research into what it means to be literate in a digital world. It is essential that research in this field foregrounds the voices and experiences of children and young people, listening to how they engage with AI currently, the opportunities they have to learn about positive interactions with AI and, most importantly, their hopes for the digital future (see, e.g., UNICEF, 2018).

Findings from our first surveys on this topic provide initial insight into how young people's use of, and engagement with, generative AI has changed over the last year, and how this is associated with demographics and wider literacy attitudes and engagement. While awareness and use of generative AI has risen dramatically, many young people appear to be using it quite infrequently at this point. Our survey also found few differences in use in relation to age, gender and socio-economic background in 2024, suggesting these factors had less influence on young people in our sample than on those seen in some other recent surveys, where children from lower-income backgrounds reported lower awareness and use of generative-AI tools (see, e.g., Bissoondath, 2024; Ofcom, 2024).

The potential for generative AI to widen or narrow the gap in attainment between more and less financially advantaged students is widely debated. Opportunities for personalised learning via AI tutors may have a positive impact on widening

access to this kind of support (Gates, 2023; Luckin & Cucurkova, 2019), but there is also a risk of deepening and reinforcing inequalities, particularly for marginalised or disadvantaged students (see, e.g., Felix & Webb, 2024). This will be an important area of focus for our own ongoing research in this area.

Other prominent concerns about generative AI include the facilitation of plagiarism, lack of engagement with learning and confabulation or hallucination. Around 1 in 5 young people in our survey admitted that, when they used generative AI for homework, they usually just copied what it told them, and a similar proportion said they didn't check AI outputs as they might be wrong. While it is also important to acknowledge that more than 2 in 5 young people asserted that, when they used generative AI, they added their own thoughts into anything it told them, it is clear that many young people are not employing critical practices when interacting with generative AI.

At the same time, developments in generative AI emphasise an increasingly urgent need to support young people's broader awareness of the ecosystem within which such platforms exist, as well as the potential biases and other issues with the data they are trained on. Learning to work effectively with AI tools and responses is part of developing good AI-literacy skills, which have been defined as *"understanding, using, evaluating and [considering] ethical issues"* in relation to AI (Ng et al., 2021; see also Kim, 2024). A 2023 policy paper on generative AI in education has further asserted the value of foundational knowledge in ensuring students develop the skills they need to use generative AI effectively (Department for Education [DfE], 2023).

Together with a companion report based on findings from a survey of more than 500 teachers in schools across the UK[15], reflections based on children and young people's experiences with, and perspectives on, AI and literacy will provide a foundation for our future research in this area. This will explore perceptions of the literacy skills most needed to make a positive contribution to the world of work, economy and society, and how generative AI might reconfigure the purpose and practice of reading, writing, speaking and listening in the digital age. Future surveys will also offer an opportunity to track changes in these areas as generative AI, and its influence on literacy, continues to evolve.

[15] Picton & Clark (2024), *Teachers' use of generative AI to support literacy in 2024*, London: National Literacy Trust

National Literacy Trust

Change your story

About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories.

Visit www.literacytrust.org.uk to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

Copyright

National Literacy Trust

Change your story