

ChatGPT and higher education: How many students really use it?

Since exploding into the popular consciousness in late 2022, Chat GPT has taken the world by storm. The machine-learning chatbot [has over 100 million users](#) and racks up 1.8 billion visitors per month. In the UK, [85% of people are aware of the tool](#). A great feat for a new and complex technology.

While the impact of artificial intelligence tools is being debated, one area it will affect is education. In this article, we look at what Chat GPT is. How can it be used in education? How many students use it? And what are the risks?

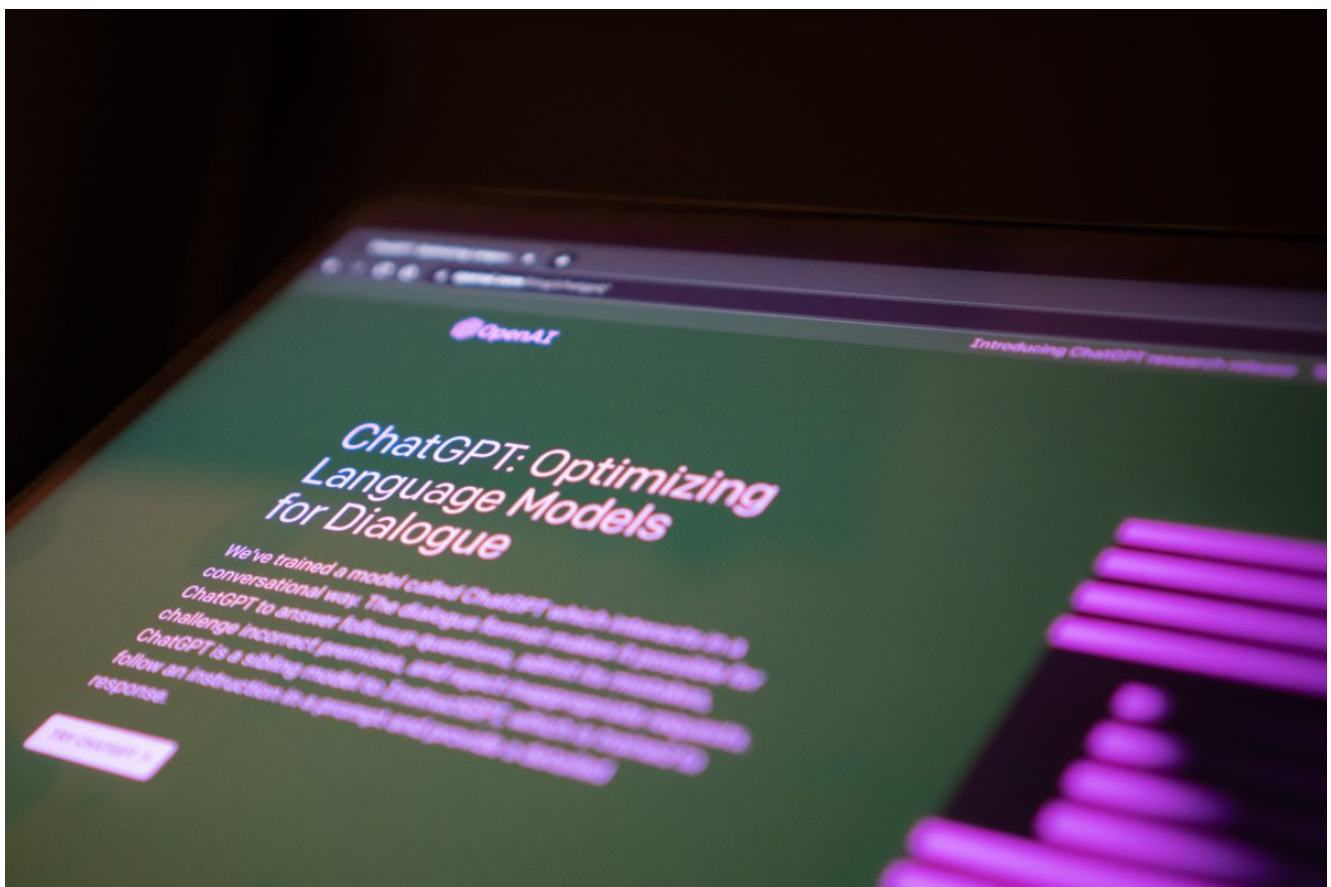


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What is ChatGPT?

Before we understand the impact on education, it's important

to know [what ChatGPT is](#). Put simply, ChatGPT is a chatbot designed to reply in an incredibly humanlike manner.

It's based on machine learning. This is where the algorithm the chatbot is based on has been trained with real-world information and can learn from new information. This training and ability to learn allows it to understand patterns within the text and reply accordingly. This means it can adapt to queries or prompts provided by the user. The result? Text replies that are well-written and, in many cases, accurate.

How many students use ChatGPT?

ChatGPT's ability to generate content has meant it was pretty much immediately used by students. With a quick prompt, learners could generate essays and answers to any conceivable topic. That's in seconds, compared to hours or days for an essay completed traditionally.

While statistics for the whole UK student population aren't available, at Cambridge, [47.3% of students used ChatGPT in April 2023](#). That's a big number, but such en-masse usage could lead to unintended consequences.

What are the risks of using ChatGPT as a student?

There are several dangers related to the use of ChatGPT in universities.

First, while it's a helpful tool, given it is based on 2019 data, it can often serve up incorrect or out-of-date information. It also has the tendency to 'hallucinate.' This is where the algorithm glitches and serves up incorrect or biased information. Lastly, ChatGPT arguably gets rid of the hard part of work. If students don't need to try, will they learn anything over the long term?

As a result, at least [8 out of 24 Russell Group Universities have banned ChatGPT's use](#), including Oxford and Cambridge.

The cat is out of the bag, though, so it's likely universities will need to adapt. Teaching methods will likely need to shift away from essay writing to developing and appraising arguments. Indeed, with AI, students can articulate their ideas more clearly. And isn't that what educators should really be focusing on?

What do you think of ChatGPT? Is it a helpful tool? Let us know your thoughts below.