THE LEARN-IT-ALL EDUCATOR

A Guidebook for Training Brains, Not Replacing Them

CHAPTER 1 FACULTY WORKSHEET

Cognitive Triage: Managing Educator Workload in the Age of AI

PURPOSE

Each activity presents a core concept from Chapter 1, then directs you to apply it
to your own course, discipline, or students. You will leave with a personalized
Cognitive Triage Action Plan grounded in the chapter's frameworks.

Name   **Institution / Discipline**

_____   _____

Course / Program   **Date**

_____   _____

How to Use This Worksheet

This worksheet accompanies Chapter 1 of *The Learn-It-All Educator* (Machajewski, 2026). It is designed for use in workshops, learning communities, or self-guided professional development. You do not need to complete every activity, choose the ones most relevant to your current context.

SECTION A	Opening Exercises (Activities 1–3): Establish your baseline and examine your assumptions including any skepticism about AI.
SECTION B	The FLUFF Phase (Activity 4): Identify administrative tasks to delegate strategically.
SECTION C	The SPARK Phase (Activities 5–9): Protect and strengthen high-impact human work.
SECTION D	Closing Exercises (Activities 10–12): Draft a policy, stress-test it with students, and finalize your action plan.

Each activity follows a consistent structure:

📍 CONCEPT	A brief definition of the idea from the guidebook.
▶️ DIRECTED TASK	A specific action tied to your course, discipline, or students.
✏️ RESPONSE AREA	Space to write - use pencil, pen, or type directly in this document.

A   SECTION A: OPENING EXERCISES
Establish your baseline and examine your assumptions

1   Harvesting vs. Seeding *Framework: Two Types of Academic Work*

CONCEPT

Not all academic tasks are created equal. Harvesting tasks are transactional duties with capped payoffs, speed and automation are appropriate because extra effort yields no additional value. Seeding tasks are growth-oriented investments with uncapped payoffs, struggle and effort produce lasting cognitive development. Confusing these two types is the root cause of educator burnout and student atrophy.

DIRECTED TASK

Audit your current weekly schedule. In the table below, identify 3 transactional "Harvesting" tasks suitable for automation and 3 growth-oriented "Seeding" tasks that require your full cognitive focus.

HARVESTING Tasks (transactional, capped payoff)	SEEDING Tasks (growth-oriented, uncapped payoff)

Reflection: What pattern do you notice about where you spend most of your time?

2   The Skeptic's Case *For Faculty Who Question AI Delegation*

CONCEPT

Before delegating anything to AI, faculty deserve to examine their strongest objections. This is not about capitulation, it is about principled reasoning. A blanket refusal and an uncritical embrace are equally poor responses to a complex pedagogical challenge. The FLUFF/SPARK lens helps clarify which objections hold and which dissolve under scrutiny.

DIRECTED TASK

Write the three strongest arguments AGAINST delegating any task in your course to AI: pedagogical, ethical, or professional. Then evaluate each argument: Does it apply equally to all tasks, or only to some? Which arguments hold under the FLUFF/SPARK lens? Which collapse?

Argument Against AI Delegation	Holds for SPARK tasks?	Holds for FLUFF tasks?

What did this exercise reveal about the nature of your concerns?

3   The Time Ledger *Empirical Baseline: Your Own Data*

CONCEPT

Frameworks are more convincing when grounded in personal evidence. Before accepting or rejecting

the Cognitive Triage framework, measure it against your actual workweek. How much of your time currently flows into FLUFF vs. SPARK? The numbers often surprise even skeptics in both directions.

DIRECTED TASK

Over the next week, track your professional time in two columns using the log below. At the end of the week, estimate the percentage of time in each category. Then answer the reflection question.

Day	FLUFF Time (tasks with capped payoff)	SPARK Time (high-impact, uncapped work)

Estimated split: ___% FLUFF / ___% SPARK
If you recovered 20% more time for SPARK, what would you do with it? Be specific.

B SECTION B: THE FLUFF PHASE
Delegating strategically for efficiency without surrendering cognitive value

4 Filtering with AI and the Verification Boundary *FLUFF Framework: F (Filtering)*

CONCEPT

Filtering: scanning literature, extracting themes from evaluations, finding patterns in large datasets is one of the most powerful applications of AI as a FLUFF tool. But there is a strict boundary: Filtering is delegatable; Verification is not. Because AI is a probability engine (not a truth engine), it can hallucinate citations, invent statistics, and present fabrications with complete confidence. Accepting AI filtering without manual verification creates the conditions for "zombie submissions."

DIRECTED TASK

Part 1: Construct an AI prompt to filter a long disciplinary text, course evaluation, or literature set.
Part 2: Describe the specific manual verification steps you will perform on the filtered output.

PROMPT TEMPLATE

```
Act as a research assistant. I am going to provide you with [TEXT/DATA SOURCE].
Your task is to identify [SPECIFIC THEMES / PATTERNS / CLAIMS] from this content.
Do not invent information not present in the source. Flag any gaps in the data.

Source: _____
Looking for: _____
```

My Verification Plan (what I will manually check before trusting this output):

Discipline-specific risk: Where would unverified AI filtering cause professional harm to a student?

C SECTION C: THE SPARK PHASE
Protecting and strengthening high-impact human work

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5 Pushing Into Unit 2: The Persuasive Stance *SPARK Framework: P (Persuasive)*

CONCEPT

AI excels at Unit 1, consensus-based facts, balanced overviews, hedged summaries. Unit 2 is where AI fails: the complex applications, the nuanced debates, the persuasive stance that requires commitment. Uncapped payoffs require moving students from "what does the literature say" (Unit 1) to "what do you actually argue and why?" (Unit 2). Persuasion requires the courage to stake a claim.

DIRECTED TASK

Identify a Unit 1 (consensus-based) topic in your current syllabus. Then redesign it to force students into Unit 2 territory where they must argue a specific, defensible, persuasive stance, not a summary.

Current Unit 1 Topic / Assignment	Redesigned Unit 2 Version (Persuasive Stance Required)

What makes the Unit 2 version harder to complete with AI alone? What human judgment does it require?

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6 The Professional Voice: What Is Lost When Students Outsource It?
SPARK Framework: A (Authentic)

CONCEPT

AI harvests the average, statistically likely content that is, by definition, generic. Authenticity is a seeding activity: nurturing a student's unique professional voice rather than accepting AI-generated prose. There is no ceiling on the value of authentic voice in professional practice. But there is a real cost when students graduate having outsourced it. The question is not "what grade did they earn", it is "what professional capability did they develop?"

DIRECTED TASK

Identify a specific scenario in your discipline where a student's career trajectory would be jeopardized if they had outsourced their professional voice to AI throughout their education. Be concrete: what role, what situation, what failure mode? What exactly is lost in that transaction?

Discipline / Role:

The scenario (when would the gap become visible?):

What is irreplaceable about the human voice in this context?

7 | AI as Sparring Partner: The Coach Model *SPARK Framework: R (Rigorous)*

CONCEPT

Rigor is not about making tasks harder for the sake of difficulty, it is the productive struggle that generates neural growth. A good coach does not do the work for you; they push you to attempt one more rep than you thought possible. AI can serve this role: not as a ghostwriter, but as a hostile reviewer that challenges assumptions, identifies logical gaps, and demands evidence.

The assignment is not "write a paper", it is "defend your argument against relentless challenge."

DIRECTED TASK

Design an assignment prompt where AI acts as a "sparring partner" adding friction to student thinking, not removing it. Use the prompt template below as a starting point, then adapt for your discipline.

PROMPT TEMPLATE
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Act as a [SPECIFIC ROLE, e.g., Skeptical Peer Reviewer / Hostile Examiner /
Industry Expert].
I will provide my [THESIS / DRAFT / ARGUMENT].
Your mission: [TASK, e.g., identify 3 logical gaps — do not rewrite my work].
Challenge every claim I make. Ask follow-up questions. Do not accept vague answers.
Increase difficulty at each level:
   Level 1: Basic questions a classmate might ask
   Level 2: Questions a faculty member would ask
   Level 3: Questions a skeptical industry professional would ask
```

My Sparring Partner Prompt (adapted for my discipline / course):

What evidence of learning would I look for in the student's submission?

8   The Non-Obvious Trend: What AI Would Miss   *SPARK Framework: K (Keen-Insight)*

CONCEPT

Keen-insight is the ultimate uncapped payoff: sensing patterns and opportunities that sit outside the available data. AI predicts the probable; humans sense the non-obvious. AI is trained on the past, it cannot see what has not yet reached statistical significance. Michael Crow's insight that non-traditional students needed scaled online access transformed ASU while the data said it would fail. That kind of prescient, risky, original thinking is precisely what AI cannot replicate.

DIRECTED TASK

Identify one emerging trend, paradigm shift, or non-obvious development in your field that an AI (trained on historical data) would likely miss or interpret incorrectly. Then describe how you would teach students to develop the instinct to sense these shifts before they become obvious.

The non-obvious trend or shift I see in my field:

Why would AI likely miss this (what data would it over-weight or under-weight)?

How would I teach students to develop this kind of forward-sensing instinct?

9 The Cost of Outsourcing: Making the Case to Students *Cognitive Atrophy & the Brain-Training Justification*

CONCEPT

MIT researchers found that students who relied heavily on AI for essay writing showed significantly weaker neural connectivity after just four months and performed measurably worse on subsequent cognitive tests (Kosmyna et al., 2025). Cognitive atrophy is real: the brain loses strength when it stops being exercised. Faculty who understand this must be able to explain it to students in ways that are compelling, not punitive. The goal is not to ban AI, it is to help students understand what they are trading away.

DIRECTED TASK

Select one SPARK task in your course that students frequently shortcut. Draft a "brain-training justification", a short explanation you would give students, in your own voice, for why outsourcing this specific work to AI harms their own development. Make it honest, direct, and discipline-grounded.

The SPARK task I am protecting:

My brain-training justification for students (draft it here this could go directly into your syllabus):

10 The Cross-Disciplinary FLUFF Map *Workshop Activity: Where Do Disciplines Diverge?*

CONCEPT

What counts as FLUFF in one discipline may be SPARK in another. A writing professor may consider feedback templates a FLUFF task (delegate); the same template is a SPARK task for a communications professor teaching professional voice. These disciplinary differences are not arbitrary, they reveal the implicit assumptions each field makes about what constitutes cognitive labor.

DIRECTED TASK

Pair with a colleague from a different discipline. Each of you independently completes your FLUFF/SPARK map in the table below. Then compare: Where do your maps diverge most sharply? What does the divergence reveal about discipline-specific cognitive labor? What would you never delegate that your colleague happily would?

Task / Activity	Your Classification (FLUFF or SPARK)	Colleague's Classification	What the Difference Reveals

What assumption about cognitive labor does your discipline make that others might not share?

| D | **SECTION D: CLOSING EXERCISES**
Draft a policy, test it with students, and build your action plan |

| 11 | **Drafting the Cognitive Triage Policy** *From Framework to Formal Syllabus Language* |

CONCEPT

A Cognitive Triage policy is a formal framework that explicitly differentiates between allowed "Harvesting" (efficiency tasks appropriate for AI delegation) and required "Seeding" (cognitive work reserved for human effort). A good policy is not punitive it is explanatory. It gives students the reasoning behind the boundaries, not just the rules. Inspired by Gawande's surgical checklist: your policy is the "pedagogical safety checklist" that protects student competence.

DIRECTED TASK

Draft a formal syllabus statement that clearly defines (1) which FLUFF tasks are acceptable for AI delegation in your course, (2) which SPARK tasks are reserved for human effort, and (3) the rationale for each. Write as if a student with no prior exposure to this framework will read it.

AI is PERMITTED for the following tasks in this course (FLUFF delegation):

AI is NOT a substitute for human effort on the following tasks (SPARK protection):

Why these boundaries exist (your brain-training rationale in student-facing language):

12   The Student Reality Check *Testing Your Policy Before It Meets the Classroom*

CONCEPT

Policies written without student input often fail on contact with the actual classroom. A policy that seems clear to a faculty member may read as arbitrary, confusing, or unfair to a student. Closing this gap before the semester begins, rather than after a dispute, produces better outcomes for everyone. The goal is not to soften the policy, but to make it genuinely comprehensible and actionable.

DIRECTED TASK

Share your draft policy from Activity 11 with two students, ideally one who uses AI frequently and one who is skeptical of it. Ask: What confused you? What felt unfair? What made sense? Document their reactions below. Then note what you would revise and why.

Student	What Confused Them	What Felt Unfair	What Made Sense

Revisions I would make to the policy based on this feedback:

What did student responses reveal about assumptions I had not examined?

13 The Credibility Stress Test *Can You Trust This Output Professionally?*

CONCEPT

Every AI output carries a silent question: "Is this trustworthy enough to put my name on?" The difference between AI enthusiasts and AI professionals is not enthusiasm, it is verification discipline. Running AI output through the SPARK Rigor lens makes the question explicit: What assumptions did the AI make? What would a skeptical colleague say? What would need to change before you would present this to a dean, a journal editor, or a credentialing board?

DIRECTED TASK

Select one AI-generated output you might actually use: a rubric, feedback template, course description, or literature summary. Run it through the SPARK Rigor lens. Document your findings and estimate the time required for verification vs. the time saved by generation.

Rigor Checkpoint	What the AI Got Right	What Needed Correction

Time to generate with AI: _____ Time to verify: _____ Net time saved: _____ Was the output professionally trustworthy before verification? What changed after?

14 My Cognitive Triage Action Plan *Personalized Commitments for This Week*

CONCEPT

Inspired by Gawande's surgical safety checklist: this action plan is your "pedagogical safety checklist." It ensures your expertise is protected, not replaced. Like the checklist that reduced surgical mortality by 47%, the goal is not complexity, it is reliable application of what you already know. Commit to three specific actions this week. Not aspirational: specific, named, and schedulable.

DIRECTED TASK

Complete all three commitment statements below. Then use the notes section to capture any remaining questions, concerns, or ideas you want to explore further.

1 FLUFF to Delegate

The specific task I will delegate to AI this week:

2 SPARK to Protect

The high-impact activity I will reinvest my reclaimed cognitive energy into:

3 Student Policy Statement

The one sentence I will add to my syllabus to explain why Cognitive Triage matters for my students:

Notes, Questions, and Ideas for Further Exploration:

> *"The learn-it-all does better than the know-it-all."*
>
> Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft

NOTES: