



Why Classical Education Matters More in the Age of AI

A student can now produce a respectable five-paragraph essay in seconds. Artificial intelligence can summarize a novel, solve an equation, explain the causes of the Civil War, suggest an argument, correct grammar, and imitate almost any style of writing. As these tools become more capable, parents and educators face an obvious question: What should education look like when a machine can perform many of the tasks we once asked students to perform? For classical Christian education, the answer begins with another question: What is education for?

If education is primarily the transfer of information, artificial intelligence presents a serious challenge. Machines are becoming remarkably good at retrieving and organizing information. If the purpose of school is simply to produce correct answers, AI can often get there faster than the student. But classical education has never understood knowledge that way.

The purpose of education is not merely to fill a student's mind with facts. It is to form a particular kind of person: someone capable of recognizing truth, reasoning carefully, speaking clearly, exercising sound judgment, and using his abilities wisely. That task may become more important in the age of AI, not less.

Information Is Not Wisdom

We live in an age of unprecedented access to information. AI accelerates that trend. A student can ask a computer almost any question and receive an immediate response. But having access to an answer is not the same thing as understanding it.

A student who has learned history can recognize when an account of the past is simplistic or false. A student trained in logic can recognize a bad argument even when it is presented confidently. A student steeped in good literature develops an ear for language that cannot be

replaced by clicking "rewrite." A student who has memorized Scripture, poetry, historical dates, and the rules of grammar possesses knowledge rather than merely knowing where to retrieve it.

This distinction matters because we cannot judge information from a position of ignorance. Before students can evaluate what a machine tells them, they must know something themselves. AI therefore does not eliminate the need for knowledge. It makes real knowledge more valuable.

Students Must Learn to Think Before They Outsource Thinking

Consider the difference between a calculator and mathematical knowledge. A calculator is useful precisely because the person using it understands what numbers mean and knows which operation to perform. Give the same calculator to someone who understands nothing about mathematics, and the tool cannot supply the missing judgment. AI presents the same problem on a much larger scale. It can propose an argument, but the student must determine whether the argument is sound. It can write a paragraph, but the student must know whether the paragraph says anything worth saying. It can summarize a book, but a summary is no substitute for wrestling with the themes and content of the book itself.

This is one reason classical education emphasizes grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Students first acquire knowledge. They then learn to reason about that knowledge. Finally, they learn to express what they know with clarity and persuasion. Those skills become the means by which students can use new technology without surrendering their own minds to it.

Education Forms Habits, Not Just Outputs

There is an even deeper concern. Imagine two students who turn in equally good essays. One spent several days reading, thinking, outlining, writing, and revising. The other entered a prompt into an AI program and submitted what appeared on the screen. The final products may look similar, but the students are not.

One practiced attention. He struggled to understand difficult ideas. He learned to organize his thoughts. He discovered weaknesses in his argument. He searched for the right words. He experienced the frustration that accompanies difficult work and the satisfaction that follows perseverance. The other produced an output.

This is why shortcuts in education can be so destructive. The process of writing the essay is doing something to the student. Classical Christian education takes that process seriously because education is concerned with formation. Habits of attention, patience, honesty,

diligence, and intellectual courage are formed through repeated practice. No machine can undergo that formation for a child.

AI Is a Tool, Not a Teacher

None of this requires Christians to fear artificial intelligence or reject technological progress. Christians have always used tools. Books themselves are technologies. So are printing presses, calculators, and computers. Used rightly, AI can become another useful tool. The question is whether the student commands the tool, or the tool commands the student.

A mature student may someday use AI to organize information, test an argument, automate tedious work, or increase his productivity. There may be enormous benefits to learning how to use these technologies well. But mastery requires something prior to the technology itself. It requires discipline to use a shortcut when appropriate and refuse it when the shortcut would rob us of something worth learning. These are educational questions, but they are also questions of character.

Preparing Students for a World We Cannot Predict

We cannot know exactly what artificial intelligence will look like when today's elementary students enter adulthood. The technology will change, and particular software programs will come and go. Entire professions may change along with them. That uncertainty is another reason to give children an education rooted in permanent things.

Students need to know how to read carefully, think logically, distinguish truth from falsehood, communicate clearly, work diligently, and exercise wisdom. Above all, Christian students must understand that knowledge and ability are gifts that should be ordered toward the glory of God and the good of their neighbor.