

Open Letter



Worship God with Your Mind

Karina Dunn, Vanguard College Library Director¹

Here at Vanguard College, we are concerned with your growth, learning, and development. Companies that promise to “make education easy” are not. When they build AI tools that can write your assignments for you, they aren’t concerned with whether the content generated is true, noble, or trustworthy. They aren’t concerned with whether you actually learned the content, and they certainly aren’t concerned with whether that content shaped you into a better ministry leader than you were before the tools generated the content on your behalf.

Your instructors, on the other hand, are concerned with these things. They work hard to create assignments that extend the learning beyond the classroom, that apply the content to your life experience, and that give opportunities for growth and development inside your heart and mind.

Dear student, I can picture you now: it’s pushing 11PM on a Wednesday. You’ve spent the evening serving in ministry and are full of joy and exhaustion, but now the assignment deadline is looming, and you’ve got three more due by the end of the week. Tomorrow’s another full day and your brain feels like static. The cursor blinks mockingly in your blank document. Then you remember, ChatGPT could probably write this whole thing in seconds. In the moment, that temptation makes perfect sense. Of course, AI can produce coherent paragraphs while you’re struggling to even produce coherent thoughts. It probably feels more like survival than cheating, promising yourself that you’ll learn the material *later*, if only you can get through tonight. But you are a beloved image-bearer, capable of far more than you think (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Ps 139:14).

Fast and easy does not mean good or best. Educational research shows that active engagement with learning material builds lasting understanding far greater than passive consumption of information. You must transform the information into knowledge in your own mind. Shortcuts to your learning bypass the very struggle that actually creates those new neural pathways. When you offload your cognitive processing to AI tools, you’re practicing delegation rather than comprehension. It will cause you to struggle in future courses that build on foundational skills you were supposed to have practiced. It will cause you to struggle in job interviews where you need to explain concepts you never truly understood. It will cause you to struggle in crisis situations where you need to apply knowledge you only pretended to learn. Imagine sitting in front of the credentialing committee, being asked about the exact ideas in your ‘A’ paper and realizing you don’t even remember writing it.

¹ Karina has been a professional librarian since 2019 and is passionate about the information literacy of our next generation of pastors and leaders. Her love for students is only surpassed by her love for her family. She married her Bible College sweetheart and has two children. She has seen the hand of God at work in her own career formation and loves how librarianship brings together her passion for higher education with her passion to serve in ministry. To God be the glory in all our pursuits of knowledge.



Dunn, Open Letter: Worship God with your Mind

This is why we at Vanguard College have created guidelines that seem stricter than what might be available in the professional or publishing world. Undergraduate academic work is valuable far beyond what you produce. It is valuable because of *what it produces in you* as a student. This means submitting yourself to the process of learning. Writing the assignments yourself and disclosing when you get help.

We are not afraid of AI tools; we just want to use them wisely. Like any other tool in the hands of a disciple, we want to be confident that you are using it to serve our mission in ways that honor God's Word, support your spiritual formation, and prepare you for authentic ministry. Prioritize the learning outcomes for each assignment, for each course, for each semester, and for your entire degree. God's good plans for you include growth. Growth demands effort. Discipleship includes discipline (cf. Proverbs 12).

So, this is my challenge to you, dear student, as you consider ChatGPT's offer to draft your paper in the midnight hour a week after it was originally due. Don't say yes. If you're already in the habit of using AI generative tools (Copilot, Gemini, Claude, among others), be very intentional about your prompts. The tool will be eager to please and offer far more than you should allow it to do on your behalf. Include specific boundaries in your initial requests (see Appendix A for examples). When in doubt, ask yourself the following questions from Philippians 4:8. Is your use of AI:

- True - Honest in presentation and attribution?
- Honorable - Reflecting integrity in your academic work?
- Just - Fair to others and respecting proper attribution, moral and ethical?
- Pure - Maintaining appropriate boundaries?
- Lovely - Enhancing rather than diminishing your personal learning?
- Commendable - Respectable when it becomes known to others?
- Excellent - Promoting quality, not just convenience?
- Praiseworthy - Ultimately honoring to God?

And if it isn't, consider handing in your rough draft instead. May integrity and righteousness protect you (Psalm 25:21). Remember, I am here to help.

Blessings from your Librarian,

Karina

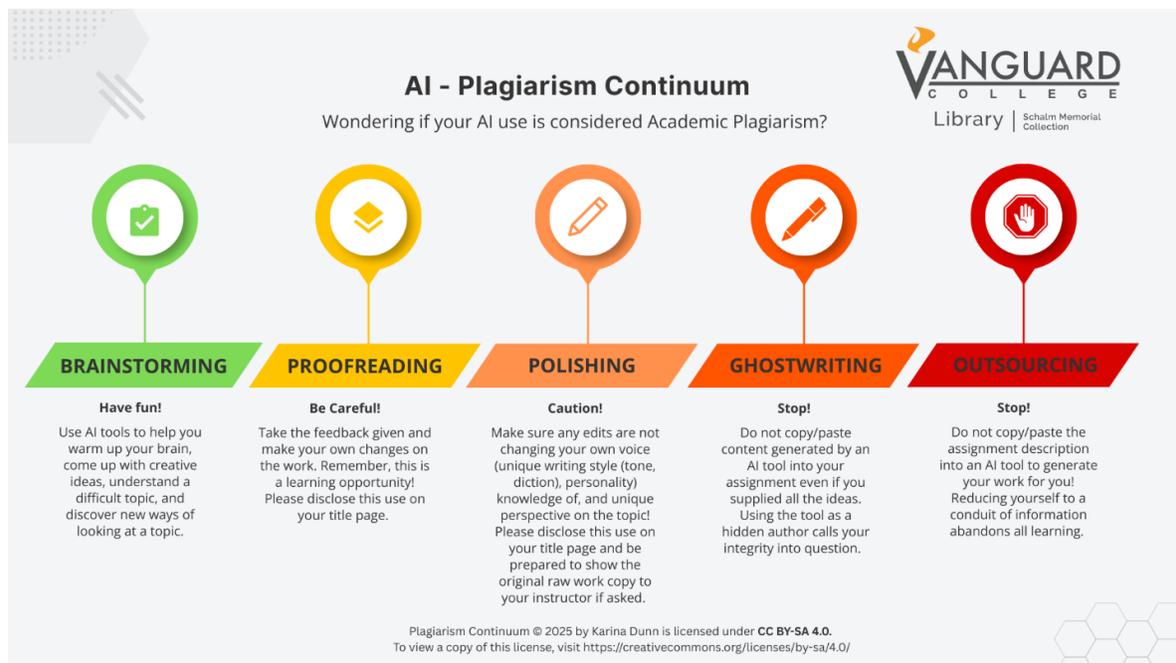


Figure 1. Vanguard College's new AI-Plagiarism Continuum developed by Karina Dunn in January 2026 in response to student confusion regarding our guidelines.

APPENDIX A: Sample Prompts

A useful prompt for AI chat tool that doesn't shortcut your learning: Please proofread the following text. I want feedback only, not edits or rewrites. Check for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and clarity issues. For each issue, quote the relevant part and explain what's wrong, but do not provide a corrected sentence or alternative wording. If something needs rewriting to be fixed, just tell me that it does—don't show how.

Another useful prompt for AI chat tool that doesn't shortcut your learning: Please explain the following college level assignment description to me like I am in junior high (or middle school). Ask me questions to help ensure my understanding. Do not generate any portion of the requirements or offer to do my assignment during the explanation and conversation.

APPENDIX B: Example of Phil. 4:8 rubric on a real-world scenario

As an example, I prompted Claude.AI to:

imagine a scenario in which a preaching minister uses AI to craft a devotional reflection about Philippians 4:8 and then evaluate the situation according to the Philippians 4:8 rubric devised above.

The response that was generated is included below, verbatim. As you read, consider: What do you think of this scenario? Consider how comfortable you might be with hearing an AI-generated sermon from your pastor or leader. Do you agree with the AI tool's assessment?

Scenario: The AI-Generated Sermon

Let's consider a realistic scenario: A minister at a local church needs to prepare a devotional reflection on—ironically—Philippians 4:8 itself. Pressed for time, the minister engages in extensive dialogue with an AI assistant, providing the passage and some basic direction. After refining through several prompts, the AI produces a well-crafted devotional. The minister delivers this message nearly verbatim on Sunday, adding only a few references to the congregation's recent struggles with anxiety and some local context. The congregation finds the message compelling. Let's evaluate this situation using the very criteria from Philippians 4:8.

Evaluation Through Philippians 4:8

Is it TRUE?

The content itself may be biblically accurate and theologically sound. The AI can access information about Philippians 4:8 and produce orthodox interpretation. However, there's a deeper truth issue: presenting someone else's work as if it emerged from your own study and prayer is not truthful. The congregation assumes the message represents the minister's personal engagement with Scripture.

Is it HONORABLE?

Honor involves integrity and appropriateness in our actions. While the minister did engage with the content through dialogue with the AI, bypassing personal study and reflection while presenting the message as one's own lacks the honor that ministry requires. Honor would involve either substantial personal contribution or transparency about the process.

Is it JUST?

Justice includes giving proper credit and attribution. The minister has presented AI-generated content without acknowledgment, which raises questions of intellectual and spiritual integrity. Just practice would involve either significant personal transformation of the material or disclosure about the assistance received.

Is it PURE?

Purity in ministry involves authenticity and integrity of process. When a congregation receives a message, they're not just receiving content but witnessing a personal embodiment of engagement with God's Word. The lack of transparent process compromises this purity of relationship between minister, message, and congregation.

Is it LOVELY?

While the content itself might be aesthetically and spiritually appealing, the overall practice lacks the beauty of authentic ministry. Truly lovely ministry practice involves the beauty of personal wrestling with text and context—a beauty that's diminished when the formative process is outsourced.

Is it COMMENDABLE?

Would this practice be commendable if known? Would theological educators, church leaders, or congregation members commend this approach if fully aware of it? Likely not. Commendable practice would involve either substantial personal transformation of the AI content or transparency about its use.

Is it EXCELLENT?

Excellence in ministry involves both content quality and process integrity. While the content might be excellent, the process falls short of the excellence expected in faithful proclamation. True excellence involves the minister's own spiritual and intellectual engagement with the text.

Is it PRAISEWORTHY?

Would knowledge of this practice bring praise to God and the minister? Or would it potentially undermine trust and raise questions about authenticity? Praiseworthy proclamation emerges from personal encounter with God through Scripture, not primarily from technological assistance.

Guidelines Application

According to Vanguard College AI guidelines, this scenario would fall under 'Uses Requiring Disclosure' at minimum, possibly even 'Prohibited Uses' depending on the extent of verbatim delivery. Our guidelines would recommend:

1. The minister should substantially transform AI-generated content through personal reflection
2. The process should include personal study of Scripture before AI assistance
3. The minister should disclose to the congregation that AI was used as a brainstorming tool
4. The final message should reflect the minister's unique voice and pastoral relationship

This ensures the practice aligns with Vanguard College's values of Scripture's supremacy, disciplined spiritual formation, and authentic ministry preparation.