

BUSINESS // CHRIS TOMLINSON

# Tomlinson: I'm not worried about Google's chatbot taking my job, and you shouldn't be, either



Chris Tomlinson, Columnist  
April 3, 2023



1 of 7  
Houston-based writing coach Stan Lemmons, author of "The Secret to Writing: 10 Secrets to Effective Communication through Writing," poses as his alter-ego. Lemmons provides writing instruction to everyone from middle schoolers to corporate executives and says writers have nothing to fear from artificial intelligence.

Handout [Show More](#)

Artificial intelligence programs such as ChatGPT have triggered some anxiety among us who string words together for a living. So I asked Bard, [Google's new chatbot](#), "What is the best way to become a great writer?"

The 170-word answer boiled down to five points: Read often, write every day, get feedback, edit your work and never give up.

Hmmm, pretty trite advice.

Houston-based writing coach Stan Lemmons says there are 10 steps. His new book, "[The Secret of Writing](#)," is a clever and concise system to improving your writing, applicable for everyone from middle schoolers to corporate executives. So, I asked him about AI, writing and communication.

"If you look at a chatbot, it's a tool that generates text from the internet and other books and journals and so on. This artificial intelligence and modeling are able to use predictive language to put out this content," he told me. "It's another way of generating texts. But it's an output that has to be questioned, examined and ultimately edited and fact-checked."

The text lacks originality, and for all the editing, you might as well write it yourself. AI can write a decent book report but cannot generate an inspiring presentation to convince employees to take a company in a new direction.

But neither can most executives. CEOs famously talk about a lack of engineering talent but equally complain about their lieutenants' poor writing skills. Effective writing requires more than basic literacy.

"There are different aspects of communication, and through the 10-step process, I touch on the different questions in terms of understanding your audiences, understanding the requirements and your timeline and all these different factors," Lemmons said. "Then we move to the process of generating and editing text."

Flip through the business pages, and you'll find plenty of communication breakdowns. A CEO's comment can send share prices plunging. An executive's poorly-worded memo offends coworkers. Or a smart-aleck remark leads to expensive litigation.

"If it's coming from a senior executive, what they say becomes even more important; it's magnified in terms of its potential impact," Lemmons said. "And then the tone, the way it's written, it can really impact the culture or shape a situation in a way that may not be so positive for that organization."

AI is a parrot, repeating what it finds on the internet, and it will reproduce human errors. But AI can also speed up your writing with predictive text, where the bot anticipates your next word. I admit, though, when that happens, I worry that my writing is predictable and boring. That's terrible for a columnist.

I subscribe to an AI-powered copyediting program called Grammarly to check my punctuation and word use. I confess the program has broken me of many bad habits and improved my productivity. But the program does not catch all my mistakes, as careful readers often remind me.

"As sophisticated as a chatbot and other artificial intelligence tools might become, you can't replace the human mind and the creative sophistication and unlimited mental capacity that comes from a person that can be shaped through writing," Lemmons argued.

Yet anxiety around AI is only growing. The United Kingdom last week invited comments for new AI regulations "[to create the right environment to harness the benefits of AI and remain at the forefront of technological developments](#)."

A thousand AI researchers, led by AI investor Elon Musk and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, [called for a six-month pause in AI development](#).

"Should we let machines flood our information channels with propaganda and untruth? Should we automate away all the jobs, including the fulfilling ones? Should we develop nonhuman minds that might eventually outnumber, outsmart, obsolete and replace us?" their letter asks.

These are good questions, even if they anticipate a technology that does not exist. Some of the signatories invented today's technology when most believed what they imagined was only science fiction. We should heed their advice on this revolutionary new technology, especially as social media erodes our sense of reality.

Encouragingly, history shows technology has never eliminated work or obviated creativity. Despite increased productivity, most people still work long hours to house and feed themselves. Our capitalist system always manages to keep us in wage slavery.

I'd love to train a chatbot to mimic my style so that I only have to choose a topic and it does the research and writing. But as Lemmons explained, there is much more to communication than stringing together words, it's about thinking things through.

*Chris Tomlinson, named 2021 columnist of the year by the Texas Managing Editors, writes commentary about money, politics and life in Texas. Sign up for his "Tomlinson's Take" newsletter at [HoustonChronicle.com/TomlinsonNewsletter](#) or [Expressnews.com/TomlinsonNewsletter](#). [twitter.com/cltomlinson](#) [ctomlinson@hearstcorp.com](mailto:ctomlinson@hearstcorp.com)*

### Sign up for Tomlinson's Take

Get Chris Tomlinson's takes on money, politics and life in Texas delivered to your inbox.

Email

[SIGN UP](#)

By signing up, you agree to our Terms of use and acknowledge that your information will be used as described in our Privacy Policy.

Written By **Chris Tomlinson** Reach Chris on [f](#) [t](#) [in](#)

Chris Tomlinson has written commentary about money, politics and life in Texas for Hearst Newspapers since 2014. In 2021, the Texas Association of Managing Editors awarded him columnist of the year, and the Headlines Foundation named him Texas's Star Opinion Writer. He's authored two New York Times Bestsellers, "Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth" and "Tomlinson Hill: The Remarkable Story of Two Families Who Share the Tomlinson Name - One White, One Black." Before joining the Houston Chronicle, he spent 20 years with The Associated Press reporting on politics, economics, conflicts and natural disasters from more than 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

[VIEW COMMENTS](#)