

# AI Bytes

## Making Sense of Artificial Intelligence in Literacy and Basic Skills Education

A Contact North | Contact Nord and Literacy Link South Central publication

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Welcome to *AI Bytes*, your digital digest for the latest in artificial intelligence (AI) information for literacy and basic skills (LBS).

Whether you're designing inclusive lesson plans, leading professional development or reimagining e-learning, *AI Bytes* is your trusted source for practical, AI-driven insights. In this seventh edition, we're revisiting key tools and assistants — but this time, through the lens of growth. Over the past year, many platforms have undergone significant upgrades, becoming truly **multimodal** to support interaction through text, voice and images.

This issue highlights what's new and what's improved. Let's take a closer look at how these innovations might support your work and learning.

Stay tuned for additional updates, insightful tutorials and much more as we navigate the exciting landscape of artificial intelligence together! 🤖

## Inside *AI Bytes*

This bulletin is the seventh in a series of 11 scheduled for distribution between 2024 and 2026. We specifically designed it to provide valuable insights and resources for educators in adult education, with an emphasis on literacy and basic skills (LBS) programs.

In this edition, we offer:

- An AI Escape
- AI Literacy and Critical Inquiry
- AI Then and Now

## Meet the *AI Bytes* team



**Carolina Cohoon** is an EdTech Consultant at Literacy Link South Central. Her professional background encompasses education and rehabilitation, with a passion for inclusion and accessibility. Carolina is

dedicated to designing learning experiences that celebrate and embrace diversity. Her interest in AI is fueled by her enthusiasm for innovation, knowledge sharing, enhancing accessibility, and improving the learning experience through personalized learning adaptations that AI can offer within the framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Carolina is certified in ChatGPT through the Blockchain Council and has recently completed Ivey School of Business

training in Accelerating Leadership through AI, demonstrating her dedication to advancing inclusive, technology-enhanced education that drives meaningful transformation in learning.



**Jeremy Marks** works for Literacy Link South Central as a project manager and edtech researcher. He recently completed the Teacher/Trainer of Adults program at Conestoga College. Jeremy has taught learners in public and

secondary schools, colleges and universities, as well as at the LBS level in Canada and the US, since 2002. His fascination with AI comes from a longstanding passion for educational theory and cognitive philosophy.

\* This bulletin is edited by Contact North | Contact Nord.

## An AI Escape

Do you love **escape rooms**? Step into **Algorithm Archives**, a hidden vault within a museum where lost AI prototypes and crucial data are locked as chips behind genuine works of art. Built with LBS practitioners in mind, this immersive AI theme escape room invites you to test and expand your AI knowledge.

You and your team of digital archaeologists find yourselves trapped after accidentally triggering a dormant AI security protocol. To escape, you must solve a series of challenges that test your understanding of artificial intelligence—its history, regulations, and capabilities. Each room reveals a new puzzle, intricately themed around AI.

Ready to put your knowledge to the test? Find it [here!](#)



# AI Literacy and Critical Inquiry

Imagine AI as a roadmap guiding our learners toward better job opportunities and greater critical thinking. No longer is AI an abstract concept reserved only for tech experts or large businesses — it's a part of everyday life. From the smart suggestions in our email apps to the intuitive search results on Google, AI is everywhere. Today, Google doesn't just list links; it provides tailored summaries and supporting resources. However, the convenience of this immediate access carries a risk: It can inadvertently lead learners to depend on quick answers that might not be accurate.

For many learners, AI is already a handy tool. They use it to write résumés, translate content and summarize text. This means AI isn't just a piece of technology — it's woven into their lives. Our challenge as educators is to help them use these tools wisely and responsibly.

In today's world, being AI literate is a must-have skill. It goes beyond knowing how to operate a tool; it's about understanding how to think with AI. With the right guidance, learners can learn to ask smart, probing questions, critically evaluate the information generated and spot any biases hidden in the outputs. They'll begin to understand that although AI can produce polished, instant responses, these answers aren't a substitute for genuine comprehension or research.

Yes, AI has its challenges. Relying solely on its convenience can lead to shallow thinking. But when we teach our learners to harness AI as a creative collaborator and as a critical thinking companion, it can enhance and deepen their learning. When they know how AI works, what it can do and what its limitations are, they're better prepared to use it purposefully. It can open new worlds of research, break down language barriers and allow access to global ideas that might otherwise remain out of reach.

As educators, we also benefit from integrating AI into our teaching strategies. Think about those times you needed to instantly modify a level 3 OALCF task or create more engaging learning tasks: AI can be a powerful assistant! However, without deliberate instruction in AI literacy, both educators and learners risk transitioning from active participants to passive consumers, diminishing their critical thinking skills.



## The Passive Consumer

Without clear guidance, we (learners & instructors) face real challenges:

- The **achievement gap** might widen into an **automation gap**
- Learners may use AI tools they don't fully understand
- Learners may fear AI and be left behind
- The **digital divide** can deepen into an **ethical divide**

Without proper training, we make it possible for AI to reinforce the inequities already present in our society. Suppose we do not help learners develop critical thinking skills when using AI. In that case, they might end up being led by the technology rather than using it for personal betterment and professional improvement. As literacy education leaders, we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to champion a transparent, equitable approach to AI education.





## Responsible AI Literacy in Practice

What does responsible AI literacy look like in practice? It includes:

- **AI citations:** Learners can cite AI just like any other reference, explaining how it augmented their thinking and work.
- **Deep inquiry:** Instead of focusing only on the final answer, learners are taught to ask follow-up questions, critique responses and explore the subject matter more deeply.
- **Ethical engagement and discernment:** We encourage them to read the terms of service for AI tools and ask: “Where is my information going?” and “How reliable is this source?”

By embedding AI literacy into our tasks, we can create a future in which AI amplifies the learner’s thinking, enhancing their critical skills rather than replacing them.

Let’s lead the way to ensure our learners aren’t left behind in this era of rapid digital transformation. We need to empower them to navigate and contribute to a world increasingly shaped by technology.

## AI Then and Now

**ChatGPT** has rocketed from what many perceived as a text-focused assistant just a year ago when it offered its GPT-4 to Plus subscribers. Although it already had promising multimodal features, including voice and custom GPT, those experiences were still emerging and hadn’t yet become widespread or seamless.

**Fast forward to today** and the launch of GPT-4o (“mini”). GPT-4o mini offers unified text, audio and image processing into a single, lightning-fast model. Voice chats now feel natural and interactive. ChatGPT has blossomed into a comprehensive creative and research partner, offering deep web analysis, advanced image generation and intelligent document insights. It is also natively available on iPhones. Voice support and shortcuts via the Action button make it feel like an ever-present digital assistant in your pocket.

### Pricing:

- **Free plan** access to GPT-4o mini and reasoning. Limited access to file uploads, data analysis, image generation and voice mode.
- **Plus plan** \$20 USD per month with limited access to Sora video generation. Access to research preview of GPT4.5. Extended limits on messaging, file uploads, data analysis and image generation.
- **Pro plan** \$200 USD per month with unlimited access to GPT-4o and Reasoning. Extended access to Sora and Deep Research.

More here: <https://openai.com/chatgpt/pricing/>



A year ago, **Microsoft Copilot** was still finding its footing, quietly embedding itself in apps like Word and Outlook to help summarize emails, draft content and streamline everyday tasks.

**Today**, Copilot has evolved into a full-fledged **ecosystem**. We're seeing specialized role-based copilots, powerful AI-driven meeting recaps in Teams and even deeper integration across Microsoft 365. Now powered by **GPT-4 Turbo** and Bing Search, Copilot is significantly more **context-aware** and has become a vital, enterprise-grade assistant for organizations aiming to boost productivity at scale.

For learners with a **Personal or Family Microsoft 365 account**, Copilot offers substantial support. In Word, they can now draft, outline and refine essays and reports directly within the document. They can also craft stunning presentations in PowerPoint. Copilot further helps them organize notes, summarize readings and build custom study guides in OneNote. In Outlook, Copilot also helps the user quickly understand and manage emails by summarizing long threads, improving the tone of messages, extracting specific information (like dates or names) and suggesting action items to track what needs to be done. With **Microsoft Designer** at their fingertips, learners can also design eye-catching custom visuals for websites and entrepreneurial ventures, or build a portfolio to increase their employment prospects and make their projects truly stand out.

### Pricing:

**Free version:** This version does not offer deep, in-app integration within the desktop versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint or Outlook. It's more of a chat interface that can pull information from and help create content for those services. With this free version of Copilot, you can bypass a ChatGPT Plus subscription. It gives you free, unlimited access to OpenAI's powerful o1 reasoning model and voice feature.

### Copilot is now included in Microsoft 365 Personal and Family.

- Personal: CAD \$11.50/month
- Family: CAD \$14.50/month (one to six people)

Existing Microsoft 365 Personal and Family subscribers in most markets will automatically get access to Copilot in their apps once they update to the latest version.

### Copilot Pro. CAD \$27.00 user/month.

Copilot Pro is designed for users who demand more intensive AI capabilities. The core reasons to upgrade to Copilot Pro include extensive usage limits, significantly more AI credits than the standard offering and the ability to ensure that power users rarely hit the caps key. Copilot Pro also grants preferred access to the latest AI models like GPT-4 and GPT-4 Turbo — even during peak hours, which translates to faster and often more accurate responses. It also includes substantially more “boost” for faster image generation in Microsoft Designer, offering early access to experimental AI features. This makes it an ideal choice for users who want the most advanced and unrestricted AI experience within their Microsoft ecosystem.

More info [here](#).

**Google Gemini**, known a year ago as Bard, started as a text-based conversational tool built on the PaLM 2 model. Although promising, it was still catching up in areas like multimodal capabilities and real-time Google integration.

**Today**, Gemini has undergone a bold rebrand and reinvention. It now features powerful tools like [Veo](#) for video generation, sophisticated image interpretation and native integration across Google Workspace. Infused with **DeepMind's cutting-edge models** and experimental features like *Deep Think*, Gemini now stands as a robust, imaginative assistant for content creators, researchers and professionals alike. With **Gemini now replacing Google Assistant on many Android devices**, it offers real-time voice conversations, screen sharing and camera input to make it a genuine hands-on mobile experience.

**Pricing:**

**Free:** Access to Gemini Pro for basic chat, text, voice and image input.

**Google One AI Premium – \$19.99 USD/month:** Includes Gemini Advanced (Gemini 1.5 Pro), Veo video generation, Workspace tools (Docs, Gmail, etc.) and 2TB Drive storage.

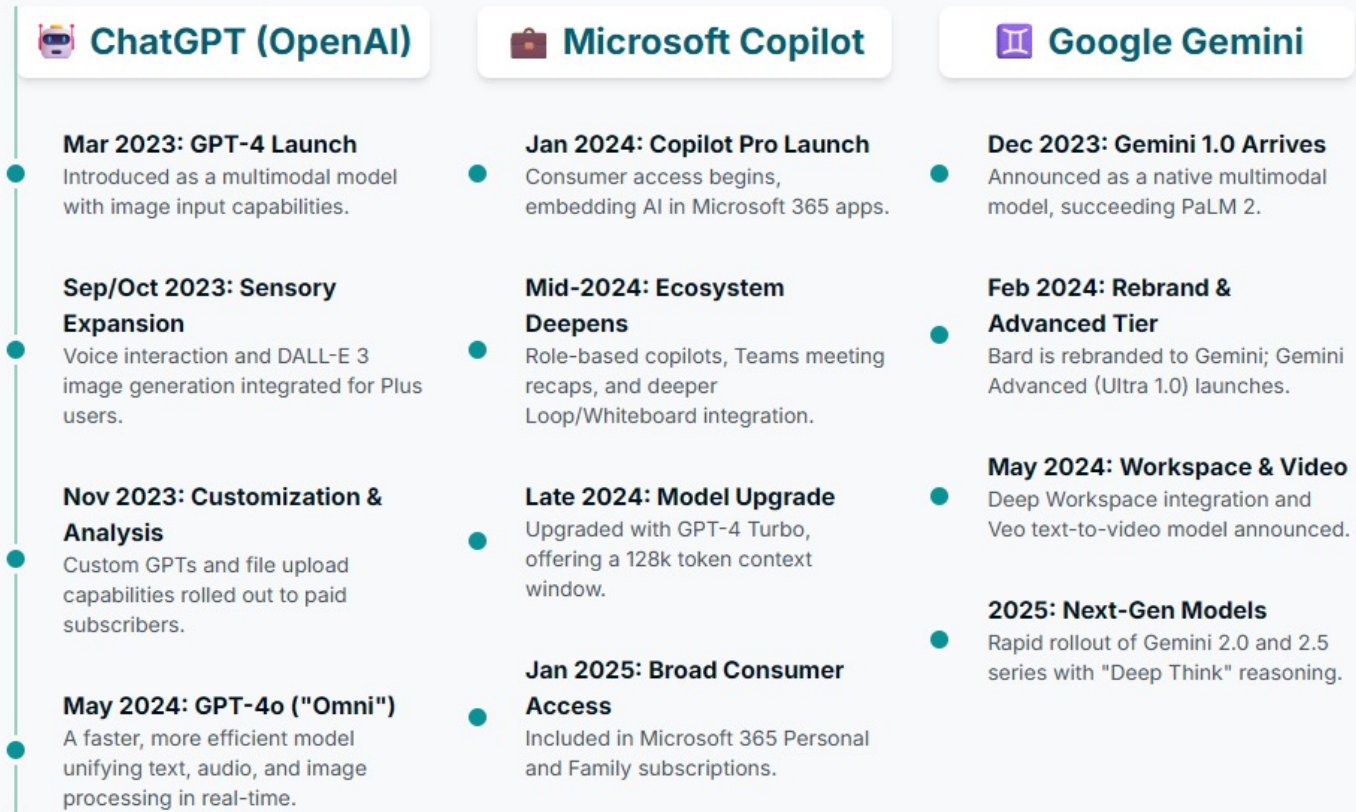
**Gemini for Workspace:**

- Business: \$20 USD/user/month
- Enterprise: \$30 USD/user/month includes Gemini Advanced and deeper AI features in Workspace apps.

For more info regarding what Gemini can do, follow this link: [Google AI Pro and Ultra – get access to Gemini 2.5 Pro and more](#)

*This image created with Gemini Deep Research and Canvas, then refined by a human, depicts the evolution of ChatGPT (OpenAI), Microsoft Copilot, and Google Gemini. It charts their key milestones from March 2023 to 2025, highlighting major developments such as enhanced AI capabilities, expanded integrations, and advanced multimodal features.*

AI Model Evolution Timeline Comparison





# Empowering Learners in the AI Age (and What's Next!)

The evolution of AI literacy compels us to ask: **What truly defines an empowered person in the age of intelligent machines?** For us in LBS, **finding the answers to this question is a compelling challenge.** Our journey continues, shifting from simply deciphering text to decoding the digital currents that shape perception, from fostering critical thought to cultivating the courage to interrogate algorithmic intent. We are doing so much more than teaching skills. We strive to ensure our learners emerge not as passive recipients of the future but as conscious, discerning, and purposeful creators of it. This is the enduring, vital purpose that grounds and propels us forward.

In our next issue, we will dive deep into the transformative potential of **AI Agents**, the autonomous programs designed to perform tasks and make decisions under your direct guidance. But that's not all. We will also unveil LBS-friendly **AI Toolkits**, specifically highlighting practical tools and resources you can leverage now to enrich lessons and personalize learning.

Prepare to discover how these advancements aren't just futuristic concepts but powerful aids waiting to enhance your teaching.



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[All Copilot users now get free unlimited access to its two best features - how to use them | ZDNET](#)

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