

## Introduction:

AI based services like Grammarly claim to offer quick fixes to overwhelmed students through aggressive, insecurity pedaling advertising; these advertisements spoonfeed to students the belief that they don't have enough time to dedicate the same revision to their papers that may happen in a University Writing Center or during peer review.

What could be a creative, educational, or workplace tool for brainstorming and sound boarding has now become an infantilizing, anxiety inducing product-- meaning students will continue to return to these tools to solve problems that they are told are too much for them to handle.

## Approach:

Grammarly's advertising has exploded across my dashboards and feeds since 2020, but specifically during 2023, when I couldn't go without being bombarded by a Grammarly ad on YouTube. As a student and writer myself, nothing is more frustrating than see the actors in these commercials stress out over the state of their office, or how perfect their essay reads— especially in the early hours while actively procrastinating another project.

For my research, I examined and close read several Grammarly ads from their YouTube Channel; I did this so I could identify trends/patterns and learn how Grammarly was advertising to students.

# How does Grammarly advertise to working students? What methods, language, and themes/motifs are used when advertising?

# “You Don't Have Enough Time!”



## How AI Writing Tools Market Themselves to Working Students

Written By – Ruby Burch  
Advised by – Professor Bri Taormina-Barrientos



Scan for References

## Limitations:

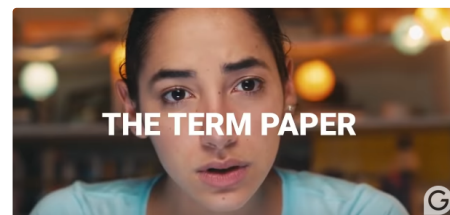
One of the major limitations with this research is that I only looked into Grammarly's advertising. Grammarly's app and services are pretty exclusive to proofreading and grammar related concerns. I would, in future research, like to look into the AI programs that are built to support creative writers like SudoWrite, or a program that's still ever-growing like ChatGPT.

An added variable to this is race and perceived fluency. Most of Grammarly's ads feature students of color, and in several of them, the students are concerned about their English proficiency. Grammarly offers to solve this by running student writing through their "Fluency Assistance" tool. I wasn't able to play with this tool, but I'm concerned that the focus of this tool is ensuring that students write white, or write using Standard White American English rather than using their own voices.

## Findings:



Scan to View these Ads and Read Additional Findings



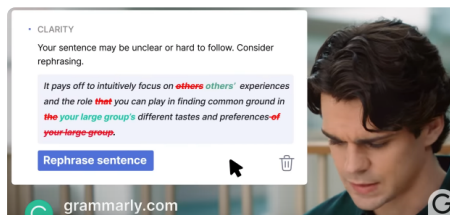
In this ad, by using Grammarly to make sentence level word changes, and highlight the areas of plagiarism, the subject secures an A on her essay. The subject is a young, female student of color who appears very stressed by her essay, and is seen cramming to get it done

Trend: By making sentence level fixes, the student gets an A on their paper.



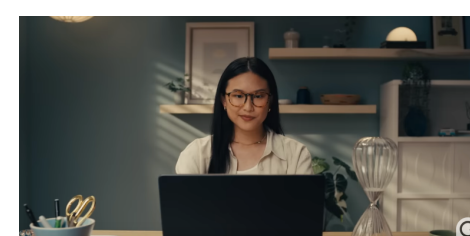
In this ad, a black woman who appears to work in an advertising field uses Grammarly's AI tool to generate a summary of something she's written, then shorten it, and then she copy pastes it into her word processor. When she gets a message from the CEO asking if the project is done, she uses Grammarly to generate a confident sounding confirmation and receives a thumbs up in return.

Trend: By using the AI tool exclusively to write, the worker gets praise from her boss.



This ad features a white, male student who uses grammarly's suggestions to edit his sociology paper. He uses the rephrasing tool without reading how the before and after sounds-- perhaps to maintain the fast pace Grammarly promises

Trend: Grammarly is dependable enough to let it make the changes for you, and move the editing process along.



In this ad, another female student of color is distressed because she has a biology paper and has no idea where to start. She uses Grammarly's AI tool to generate essay topic ideas, generate a research plan, then to generate citations that acknowledge AI use.

Trend: By using the AI tool list out ideas for a concept, the student feels less overwhelmed when it comes to picking an essay topic.

## Discussion:

For many of these videos, the students are relying on Grammarly to completely rewrite their essays. Without much consideration, they let Grammarly override their work and replace it with what the program prefers. This results in students losing their individual voice, and in some cases even losing their argument. Reliance on these programs results in a positive feedback loop of students being told by a racist institution that they cannot write to its standards, falling back on tools like Grammarly that write white, then proving to Grammarly and the institution that they will sacrifice their own voice for the institution's comfort. Grammarly markets largely to female students of color, and the tone of these videos is that when their writing does not conform to the standards of a white institution, that it must change in order to earn respect from the institution.

I am especially curious about the way that AI tools like these could be used to support writers, or be used as accessibility tools. Something that came up in my discussions and research on this was how similar discussions around AI and Grammarly are to conversations about Wikipedia, or early internet resources for research. The fear and hysteria around these tools is largely related to how new they are. These tools have yet to be regulated

In the fourth video, rather than using Grammarly to change their essay or words, but is instead using it to list out potential starting places. Grammarly and other AI tools are based in data organization; they work as excellent resources for students to gauge starting points, to analyze data, or make reason of long lists of concepts. In this instance, Grammarly is working in the student's favor in that it supports the student's needs while still leaving space for the student to write her own essay.