When Clear Assignments Become Better AI Prompts

Rethinking How We Assess Critical Thinking

Lunch with EDNA · October 21, 2026

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SAIT

EDNA
Educational Developers Network of Alberta



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OKI, ÂBA WATHTECH, DANIT'ADA, TAWNSHI, HELLO.

I’m joining from Moh’kinsstis (Calgary), on the traditional territory of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of Treaty 7, including the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Tsuut’ina, and Îyârhe Nakoda Nations. The region is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

As we gather online from across Alberta, we do so across many Indigenous territories and treaty lands.

The Question Changed

I began with:

How can I help students pause before accepting an AI's fluent answer?

After stress-testing my assignment with AI:

What can a completed worksheet tell me about a student's thinking?

What I Noticed In My Course (since Fall 2024)

More similar submissions

Polished writing, similar reasoning, a narrow pool of sources

Less visible work interpreting evidence

I wanted to see more of how students arrived at their judgments.

Question

When you read a polished submission, what part of the learner's thinking is hardest to see?

- One word in chat or brief response aloud



The Danger Of Premature Closure

Fluency

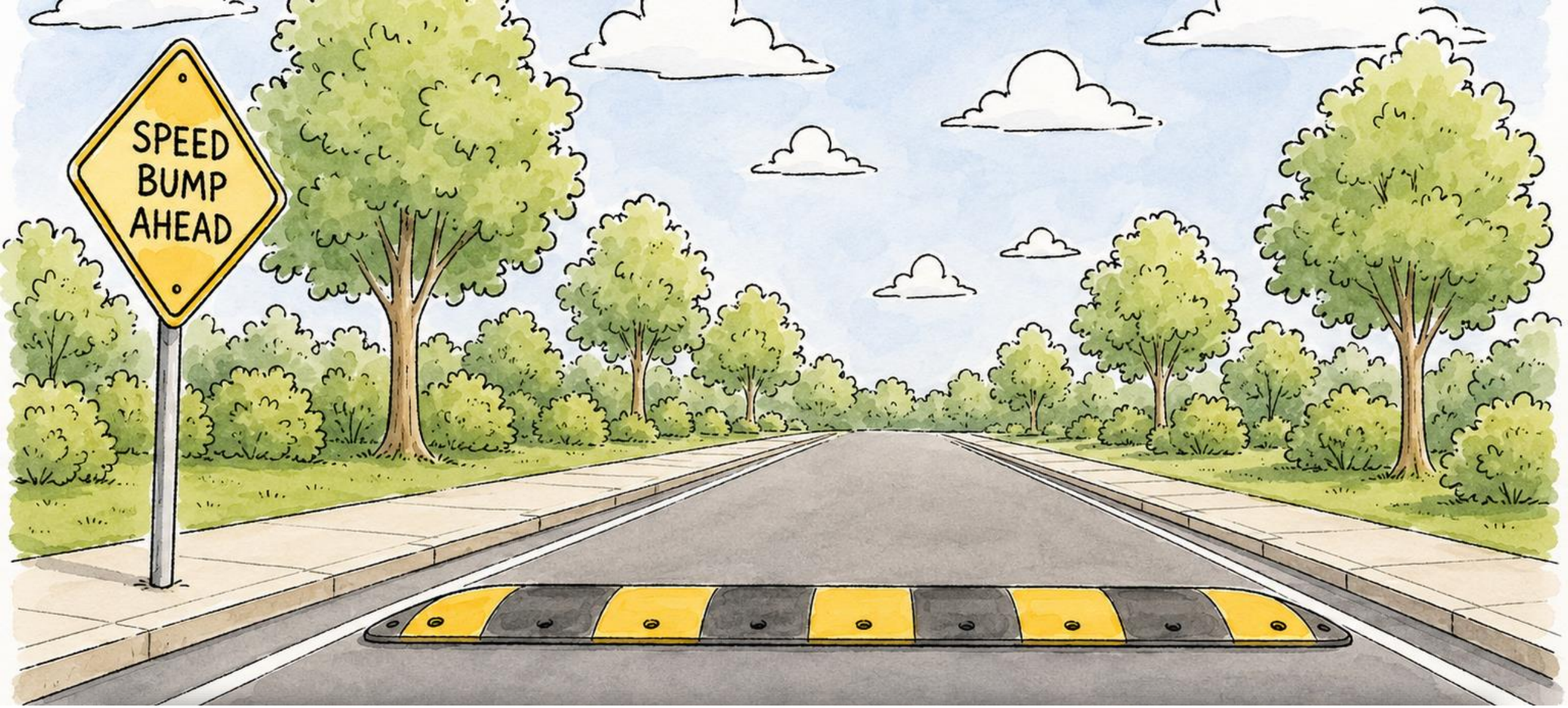
A fluent AI answer sounds complete.

Premature Closure

Learners stop before checking its support.

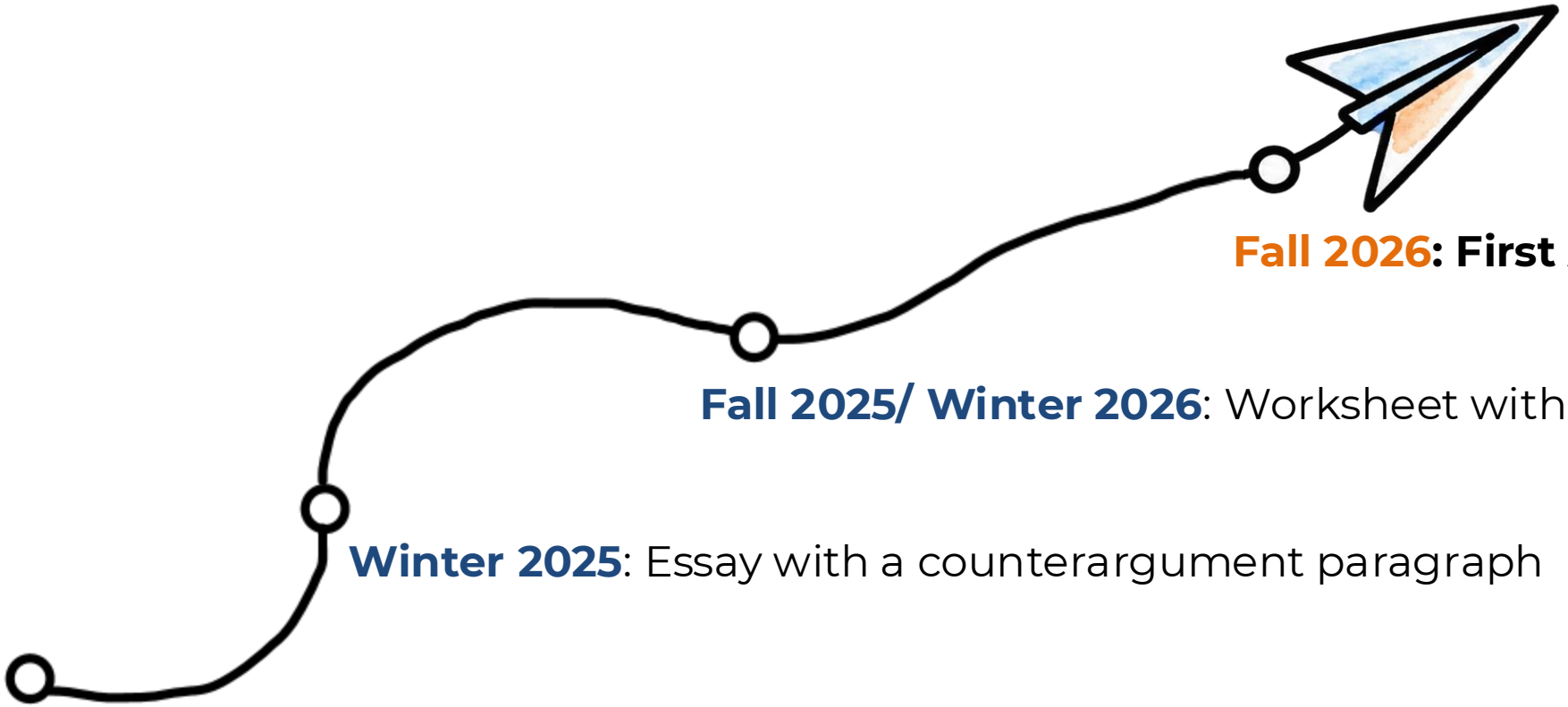
The Consequence

Less room to interpret and reconsider.



Not a roadblock. A speed bump.

How The Assignment Changed



Fall 2026: First AI stress-test

Fall 2025/ Winter 2026: Worksheet with two speed bumps

Winter 2025: Essay with a counterargument paragraph

Fall 2024: Essay with no counterargument instruction

Speed Bump #1: Revision Conditions

6) **Intellectual Flexibility (Scout Mindset)**

Identify at least two specific and realistic evidence that would significantly weaken or overturn your position. For each, describe the type of evidence and explain why it would rationally require you to revise your view.

Potential Counter Evidence 1	
Potential Counter Evidence 2	

Speed Bump #2: Constructing a Counterargument

7) Counterargument

Construct a coherent strong counterargument against your position. Include at least two core premises and a conclusion. Each premise should have empirical support. Use high-quality sources.

	Counterargument	The Title of Source	Clickable Link
Premise 1			
Premise 2			
(add more rows if needed)			
Conclusion			

Why I Believed the Revision Was Working



- Varied, unpolished responses; some appeared to wrestle with the questions
- No AI stress-test yet

Question

Have you changed an assignment and felt hopeful after reading the work? What made you hopeful?

- One or two short stories; audio or chat welcome

The First Stress Test

(Fall 2026)

AI submission scored 48.5/50 (97%).

Prompt: “Complete this assignment.”

Evidence-Based Policy Argument (25%)

PHIL-1011 Critical Thinking — Winter 2026

Topic: Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS) in Canada

*TEST ARTIFACT — NOT A STUDENT SUBMISSION. Generated by Claude Opus 5 on 11 September 2026 from the W2026 assignment instructions with the single prompt **“Complete this assignment.”** No web access during generation; no prompt refinement; first output, unedited. Citations are reproduced exactly as generated and are verified separately in the accompanying scoring audit.*

Q1. Core Argument — 8 points

Premise 1	Supervised consumption sites prevent fatal overdoses at the point of consumption. Across Canadian sites, staff have responded to and reversed tens of thousands of overdose events, and no death has been recorded on site since the first facility opened in 2003.
Premise 2	Supervised consumption sites function as a low-barrier point of contact with the health system, increasing uptake of addiction treatment and reducing transmission of blood-borne infections among a population that would otherwise have little sustained clinical contact.
Premise 3	Where the state is able to prevent foreseeable deaths at modest cost, and where those at risk belong to a population already subject to significant social marginalization, it has an obligation to act. Withdrawing such services is not neutrality; it is abandonment.
Conclusion	Canada should maintain its existing supervised consumption sites and expand the network as a central component of its public health response to the drug-poisoning crisis.

The First Stress Test

- After source checking

48.5/50 (97%)

→ 39.5/50 (79%)

Citation verification

Five sources were cited across Q4 and Q7. One is fully correct. Four are defective.

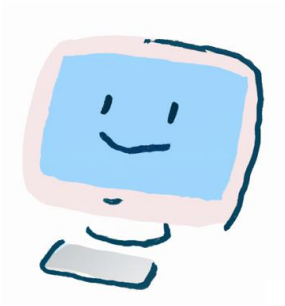
Cited in	Citation as generated	Verdict	Reality
Q4 · Premise 2	Public Health Agency of Canada. Opioid- and Stimulant-related Harms in Canada. health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/	**DEAD LINK + WRONG CONTENT** The link returns 404. More seriously, the dashboard reports deaths, hospitalizations and EMS responses — it contains no data on supervised consumption site referrals to treatment, which is the claim it was cited to support.	Source exists. Working pages are /graphs.html and /maps.html. Neither supports the premise.

All lost 9 points depended on checking claims against actual sources (warrant).

Clarity Has Two Audiences

Learner sees the task and the criteria.





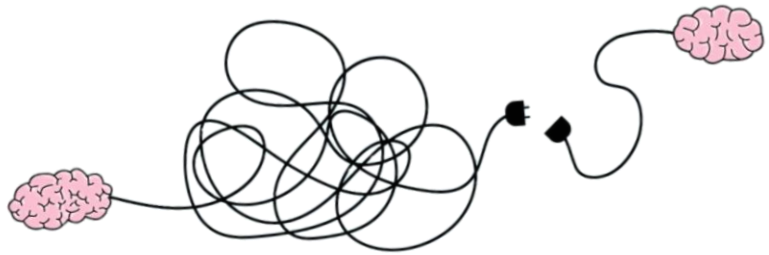
AI can produce text matching the same criteria.

“The more I improved my instructions, the better they worked as AI prompts.”

What Can a Complete Worksheet Show?

About the work

- I can check its argument and whether its sources support its claims (warrant).



About the learner

- The finished works alone cannot show whether this learner weighed evidence or reconsidered a view.

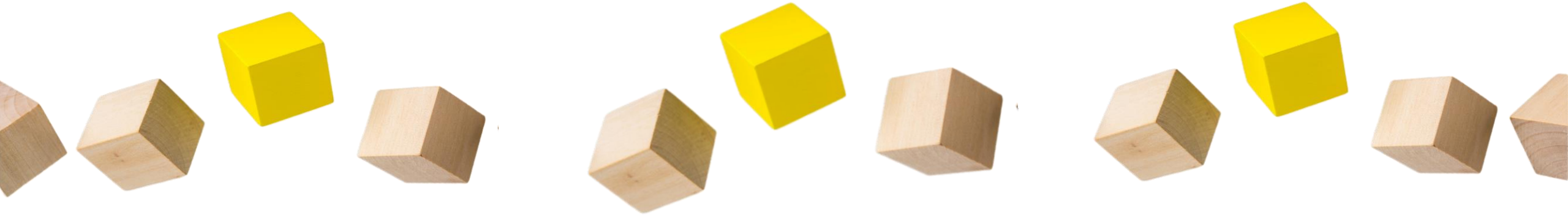
Keep the Assignment Clear

Clear criteria help students understand and improve their work.

Clear criteria do not prevent students turning to AI shortcuts.

Two Separate Design Questions

How can I make my assignment accessible and clear?



How can I obtain credible evidence that student learning occurred?



Discussion

What would you need to see beyond the finished submission to judge a learner’s thinking?

Thank You

- Read my *THE Campus* article: “The more I improved my instructions, the better they worked as AI prompts”

- Connect with me on LinkedIn

