

St. Some Times

From the Life and Times of Gregory Lemoine, International Teacher since 2001.

AI





The A.I. Challenge

Personally, I haven't been to involved with Artificial Intelligence. It's just that everyone at work is asking me about it. Time for me to start "tinkering" with A.I.

A week before Thanksgiving, I bought five or six books about ChatGPT. I wanted to know more so I didn't sound so inept every time my boss asked me how important it is and whether we should be teaching about it. AI is the buzz on everyone's lips at school, a topic no one knows anything about. A

conversation that always comes up when I talk "tech" with teachers.

As our three day weekend came closer, I came up with a new challenge for myself: write my second book over the weekend and publish it. I shelled out \$20 for the latest version of ChatGPT4 (with DallE). If you don't know about it, ChatGPT 3.5 has been out for several months. ChatGPT has been out for a year and made all the headlines. It is just one, albeit the most famous of the AI generator platforms (apps). "Generative" means word based or discussion AI. Basically, you have an ongoing

conversation with the bot and it spits out information in crazy cool formats.

Ask for a poem. Ask for a paragraph, list, lines of code, a song. It will certainly do that. But remember - "garbage in, fancy garbage out". Lipstick on a pig, or ask for a pig and get a herd of goats.

Dall-E is the art (visual) form of ChatGPT. The latest version (4) is a new model. For \$20/month, you get time on ChatGPT and it includes generating prompts for Dall-E. Pretty cool.

Dall-E

I went onto google to ask how they came up with the name for Dall-E, the Artificial Intelligence Visual Art generation platform. Google confirmed my suspicion of a "hats-off" to Salvatore Dali:

Google: The software's name is a portmanteau of the names of animated robot Pixar character WALL-E and the Spanish surrealist artist Salvador Dalí.

What a cool reference to the word portmanteau. I couldn't define that word right off the bat, so here is a clear definition for you (and me) from **dictionary.com**:

noun, plural

port-man-teaus, port-man-teaux [pawrt-man-tohz, -toh; pawrt-man-tohz, -toh,].

Chiefly British. a case or bag to carry clothing in while traveling, especially a leather trunk or suitcase that opens into two halves.

Linguistics.

Also called **port-man-teau word**. A word that combines the form and meaning of two or more other words; a blend.

Note: all of the images in this newsletter volume are designed by Dall-E and my prompts. The cover was especially fun. I found out, while trying to make the cover, Dall-E is not efficient at images with text. I had to do all of the words in another program after achieving my cover goal. It took me about 10 prompts before the lighting, dessert, and robot were favorable.

Wet Chicken Rides On

While playing with Dall-E, the weather turned. Then I got a new bike.

Yes, I'm really stretching it here, but wow. The generative AI is truly fascinating stuff. I've been using the bajeeesus out of my \$20 subscription. I need images for a lot of my job and a menagerie (this newsletter is like a power play on Scrabble isn't it?) —a menagerie of personal projects. School slideshows, presentations, adverts, websites, this!

So here is the magic of the wet chicken images...(below and back cover). There was a thunderstorm that started early on a Thursday. School was canceled last minute before lunch. The staff stayed, but the kids went home.

Here on the desert island I call "home", when it rains there is no place for water to go. It usually only rains once or twice

a year and later. We just experienced a week of overcast, wet, drizzly days. I still have a habit of hanging my bike helmet by the strap on the right handlebar, the throttle. Oops!

I started up my old "the Scooter" after 3 tries on the ignition. Dumped the water from my helmet. Drove home in a brief deluge (bad timing). On the way home, I drove through a massive puddle because the little rice burner 2-door made it through in front of me. From times in Cambodia, I knew most scooters can get through about 30 seconds of submerged muffler chaos before they die. Success. Thank you Dall-E for successfully creating my wet chicken on a scooter prompt.

one of my first prompts: create an image of a tiny chicken on a motorbike. going through a puddle. dark smooth lighting. soft pastel colors. 3d blender render. physically based rendering. horizontal image.





What is it Like using ChatGpt-4?

It's difficult to really picture it correctly unless you have tried it. Here's a glimpse.

Go on. Try it. Google ChatGPT. The early versions are free, just not connected to Dall-E. Try out prompt engineering. It's all about asking the right question.

My project was a three day mission. I started at 6:00am in my usual spot at Starbucks. Earbuds screaming music. Tea. Croissants. Ready.

I had to start a conversation with my AI. Everything was "built" like a scaffolding. The AI had to be led

into the situation I wanted to create: a book about international teaching to be read by local USA teachers (possibly working in public schools). I actually pasted two chapters of my first book into the AI to start my conversation. I prompted AI to analyze my writing style.

Then I instructed AI to do some research based on the top "experts" in the field of international education. If it was looking towards a base of experts, I could prompt AI to even generate an outline for the book. Ughh. That took some tweaking. The right outline was key to the later prompt flow. I already

had my title, so within ten tries, I finally had an outline to work with. By 10am, I was ready to go deeper. Sitting in the only Starbucks on the island ensured me frequent breaks. Bathroom. More coffee. Friends stopping by my "spot" to talk with me. (like a scene from the Godfather).

Prompting AI is not like, "hey, AI, write a book for me!" or "write a 20,000 word professional term paper. Nope. That wouldn't happen yet. Especially since you can only squeak a max of 500 words. Instead, break it into a lot of successive, scaffolded prompts.

Prompt. Rinse. Repeat.

The First Response is rarely good enough. But practice...

makes perfect. It takes a lot of practice and grit. Don't give up. This is an art form. You have to know what you want before you go down this road. I was on a mission.

I started with three sections of my first chapter. Then I whittled it down to two sections with a summary and lead-in to the next chapter.

Meticulous. Knowing I'd do a thorough edit tomorrow. But tragedy struck after four chapters! ChatGpt-4 is beta. Even though I had paid my fee, so many people are using it that there is some cap, ceiling, limit. I was given a message mid-response of Chapter 4 section 1:

"Give other people time. You cannot use ChatGPT-4 for a while. Try back

in three or four hours. Thank you." What the SNAP!

Hmm. I switched over to 3.5. The earlier version actually spit out responses a lot faster. I guess it doesn't produce the same quality. Read the book and let me know.

Suffice it to say, I finished the prompting the first day. The second day was editing word for word. I spent a lot of time on editing.

Day 3, as I melted into the chair, I formatted the book to publish.

result of my first prompt: create a cinematic image of a tired writer sitting at a table in a coffee shop. He is talking to an excited woman. She is telling the tired writer a wild story, with her arms flailing in the air. there are empty coffee cups piled on the table between them. In the background is the scene of an empty starbucks coffee shop. cinematic, matrix filter, photorealistic, 8k, cinematic



Formatting Woes

I spent way too much money on my first book. Why? I had to pay for editing, cover design, ISBN numbers, and formatting for both the ebook version and the paperback version.

After the first two days, day three was fun at first. I had emailed another indie author to see if I could get a template for MS word. Yes, so far, all my promos and edits were in word. Close to 20 thousand words.

I wasn't sure exactly how precise I had to be with the manuscript. I'd read up on the Kindle process, but there were still questions I had and could not answer.

You see, publishing to Amazon is free. But you are definitely on your own for the process. (if you don't want to pay)

Amazon even has an app that will allow you to submit a word manuscript one time, enabling you to produce the paperback AND the ebook from one source.

So I pasted the first five chapters of my manuscript, the raw MS Word file, into the author's template. I should have tried just one chapter. Dumbass! It looked terrible in the Kindle app. Scratch that. Shit.

I took a break and drank a few more coffees. Talked to some wayward friends. Then started over. Direct from manuscript into the Kindle Create app. This worked out well.

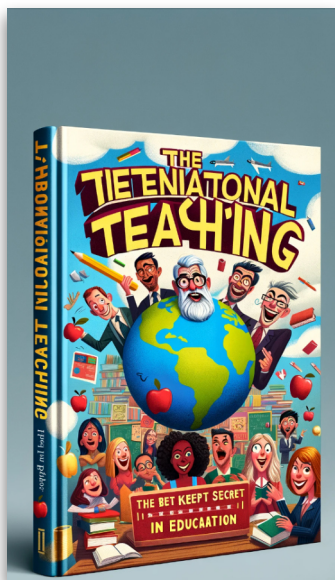
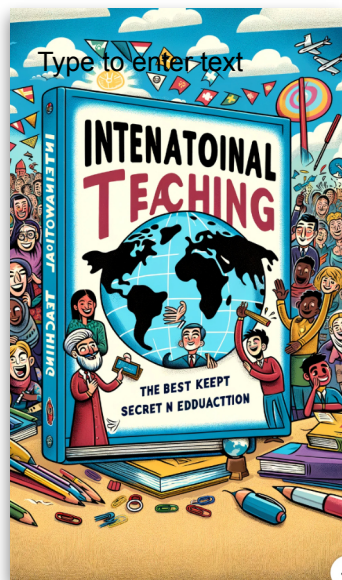
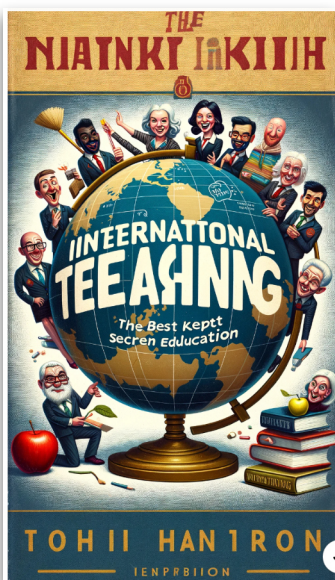
Once I had it completely into the template, I went back and could preview it on multiple devices or as a paperback. Pretty damn cool.

Since my cover was ready, I was published on Amazon by 10pm. "Finito". Done. "Khalas"

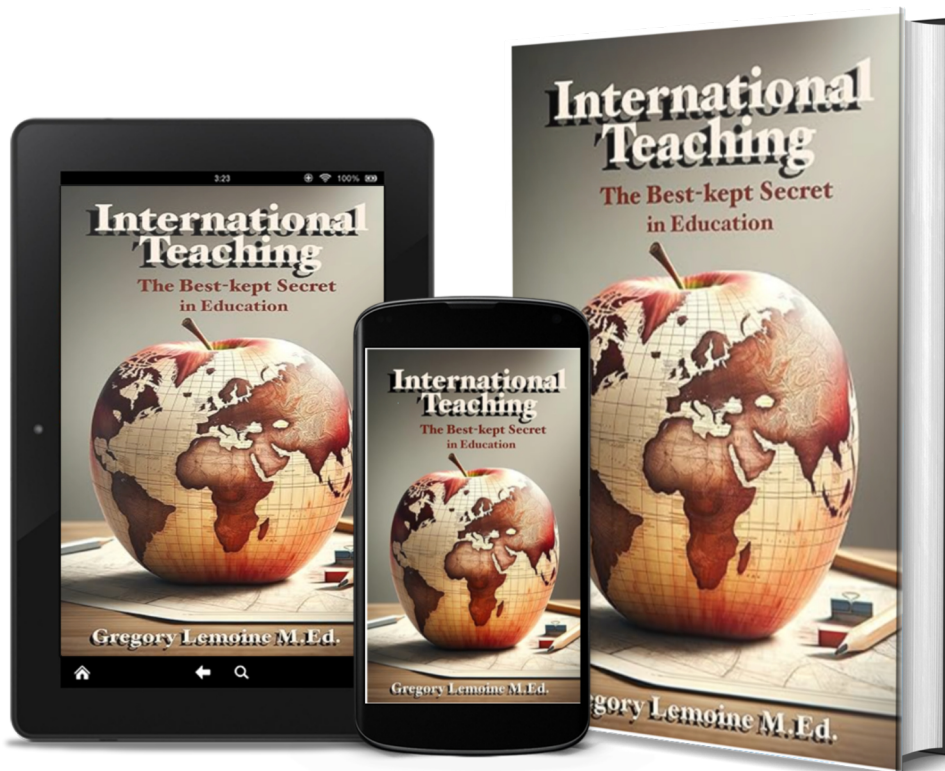
Now, the book race. Can book 2 outrace book 1? Book #1 - \$4,000 Book #2 - only \$20 initial cost. We'll see who wins on profit.

Prompting Cover Designs

Dall-E is an amazing tool. Each generated response took about 2 minutes, depending on the prompts. I started with the idea of the word SECRET. As in "keeping a secret." That didn't really work out. The idea of an atlas, passport, traveling, or a clipart of school all seemed very un-interesting. Some had already been taken. But the idea of an apple (symbol for teacher/education) and the world (symbolizing international) seemed natural. Below are a few I refused.



None of them was the "right fit" (get it?) for my second book. Here is the final prompt that produced the final cover above: "create an image 1,600 x 2,560 pixels. superimpose an atlas of the world over an apple for the foreground center. the background is the galaxy." It was too busy, complicated. I felt it would take away from the titles. So, my final prompt - based on the penultimate, was: "regenerate without the background". Done. I had reached "prompt fatigue".



The Final Cover Design

What do you think? Should I have spent money on a designer again? According to google search: The cost of a professionally illustrated book cover can range from \$500–\$1,500. A fully illustrated book can cost between \$2,000–\$10,000, depending on the complexity of the artwork.

I invested in \$20 for a month of ChatGPT-4 with Dall-E included. Once I had the cover design, I plopped it into a photo app called Affinity Photo to add the text. The title took me about two hours if you include the research I did about fonts on successful book covers.

The image above, showing all three cover formats, to represent paper and eBook versions, was created by uploading my initial cover image into an online tool called **DIY Book Design**. They are amazing and Free!

So, I ask you again. Should I pay for a professional to create my book cover? No way.

Whew. What a journey it was. But it wasn't over.

Remember I said I was finished by 10pm? I would have been finished by 6pm if not for both the ID debacle (pg.11) and the fact that I wanted to publish both a digital and a paperback version of my book.

The eBook cover is only one side. A paperback has a front, back, and spine. The front and back were easy in the KDP Create App.

I had hit major fatigue. I couldn't believe it. 9pm. I clicked on upload. The paperback cover wouldn't go. Given the step by step instructions, how could it go wrong. Kindle App. Kindle Cover? Ughh.

The spine! The damn spine text was not accepted. I got it to accept. But it's crap. There is a little more to do. I'm a perfectionist.

The BEST part of Kindle Direct Publishing? I can make edits on the cover or on the inside content at no cost!



One Year Scooter

It was one year ago. I bought the scooter (Chinese knock-off model) and gave my not dead - "almost dead" Suzuki to Rushdi. It's all spelled out in Issue V262.

Now, after a year, I have re-validated the old saying: "YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR".

Don't judge me. At the time, I was also looking at leaving the island to teach in a different country. The new scooter would have been a mere 6mth investment. So quick to judge?

Check it out. To the right is the final product of my meticulous record keeping. Each time I went to the island fuel station, I would take a picture of the odometer and wait for Ahmed to finish the 2-second top-up. With a 150cc engine and a 4L tank, it's amazing I didn't run out of fuel at some point. Look at 6-10-23! That was truly running on fumes, rolling into the station.

Let me summarize the reasons I bought a new Suzuki and the Scooter is now gathering desert sand dust - as a backup:

1. I don't trust the scooter anymore
2. The kickstarter doesn't even move. Not the best alternative if the electric starter fails.
3. The electric starter fails 1/3 of the time.
4. The seat is already cracking in the desert weather. The Suzuki lasted 4 years before I replaced the seat cover.
5. The handlebars rattle (a lot)
6. The speedometer is OFF by 15k/hr. If I'm going 60, I'm actually going 45. Constant mental math is draining.
7. I had to refuel every week. My old Suzuki was once every three weeks.
8. Parts just "fall off" once in a. While.
9. I don't trust it.

1	Date	KM	Diff	SARS	Liters	SAR/Liter	Notes (Col C - double click on above DIFF to fill in the new value automatically)
2	2022-11-17	0	0	--	--	2.33	First day of Ownership. 5,500 SARS brand new plus delivery outside of gate
3	2022-11-25	79	79	7.76	3.33	2.33	
4	2022-12-06	163	84	7.71	3.31	2.33	
5	2022-12-15	248	85	7.55	3.24	2.33	Later left for Maldives
6	2023-01-07	303	55	4.82	2.07	2.33	
7	2023-01-14	352	49	4.73	2.03	2.33	Price is stable at 2.33SAR/L = US\$2.35/Gal
8	2023-01-21	433	81	7.46	3.2	2.33	
9	2023-02-02	523	90	8.9	3.82	2.33	
10	2023-02-22	645	122			2.33	
11	2023-03-03	713	68	5.43	2.33	2.33	
12	2023-03-10	769	56	4.57	1.96	2.33	
13	2023-03-18	818	49	4.73	2.03	2.33	Oil Added First Time
14	2023-03-25	886	68	5.43	2.33	2.33	
15	2023-04-07	1008	122			2.33	
16	2023-04-15	1076	68			2.33	
17	2023-04-21	1124	48	4.52	1.94	2.33	Tried to get air today. Nope. The air hoses have been broken for months. Both of them.
18	2023-04-28	1209	85			2.33	
19	2023-05-12	1292	83	7.02	3.22	2.33	
20	2023-05-23	1367	75	7.55	3.24	2.33	
21	2023-05-27	1417	50	4.24	1.82	2.33	
22	2023-06-03	1496	79	7.7	3.53	2.33	Air at
23	2023-06-10	1590	94	8.81	3.78	2.33	
24	2023-06-17	1667	77	7.55	3.24	2.33	
25	2023-06-20	1719	52	5.12	2.35	2.33	
26	2023-07-13	1797	130	8.09	3.47	2.33	
27	7/21/2023	1874	77	7.04	3.02	2.33	Horn doesn't work anymore.
28	8/4/2023	1951	77	8.04	3.45	2.33	
29	8/11/2023	2031	80	7.15	3.07	2.33	Rushdi changed oil and adjusted the back break. "Fixed" horn by pressing it 1,000x. lol
30	8/24/2023	2103	72	7.11	3.26	2.33	
31	9/1/2023	2165	62	5.78	2.65	2.33	
32	9/9/2023	2229	64	6.97	2.99	2.33	
33	9/16/2023	2282	53	4.96	2.13	2.33	
34	9/24/2023	2344	62	6.41	2.75	2.33	
35	10/3/2023	2409	65	7.01	3.01	2.33	Problem with Starter. Wouldn't start. Tried to kickstart, but kickstarter is crap - can't steeo on it to get it working - won't rotate at all. Kickstart pedal is tiny.
36	10/10/2023	2454	45	4.85	2.08	2.33	
37	10/18/2023	2535	81	7.92	3.4	2.33	
38	10/27/2023	2599	64	7.04	3.02	2.33	Air Hoses working again at station. Woot woot.
39	11/4/2023	2645	46	6.08	2.61	2.33	Started saving 8,000 SAR for a new Suzuki. This bike sucks.
40	11/14/2023	2709	64	7.01	3.01	2.33	
41	11/24/2023	2781	72	8.34	3.58	2.33	Topped the air in the tires.
42	11/29/2023	2873	92	8.06	3.46	2.33	

3.4 Saudi Arabian Riyals (SAR) = \$1.00
So, I paid \$1,618 for "The Scooter"

Yes, the island has one of the cheapest fuel prices in the world. Go figure!
Price: \$2.59/gal





The Suzuki Challenge

Even something simple, overseas, can be a challenge!

The way I live here is basically cashless. Sometimes, that creates a debacle. Case in point: buying a car or motorbike. A car? That's a story for Matt or Stacey to share.

Last month, I decided to buy a dependable moped. It's a basic necessity, a moped. It's my transportation to and from work. Everywhere on camp. I depend on my moped. The scooter is crap.

Cash? I only dump 4K into my account each month. So I had to

basically wait for another paycheck. Even in this world, I can't just - or maybe refuse to - login and transfer a small amount of cash from my USA account.

So Rushdi, my "scooter guy", yes "I've got a guy for that", comes over at 10pm. Mind you, I am usually asleep by 8pm on a school night. I hand him the stack of cash. He asks me "Why you no like Chinese?"

Rushdi is Awesome. He is a Saudi that drives a 20 year old Mercedes and works in a Car dealership. (Yeah, he's not one of those "rich" Saudis.) He's in a subgroup, based on his

religious beliefs. I won't get into it. You can google it.

Anywho, I explain "you get what you pay for". Considering, the dealer buys a generic scooter from China and puts his own emblem on it - a sticker, seriously, a sticker MCW. Anyway, I go through the list. He decides not to even mention the Chinese models to clients any more.

He left after a good half hour talk. He would be working Thursday night (tomorrow) so I just needed to send the driver my location and be at home for the security to verify I was at my apartment. So easy? **

** Hindi

(Suzuki challenge continued...)

At 5 o'clock on Thursday, I was sitting at my apartment. The week of school was done. Weekend time. In theory, I was waiting for security to call and verify a delivery was coming onto the island with a new bike. By calling my apartment, it would mean I live here and it would match my badge number.

The call never came. Instead, the driver called my apartment landline. So strange. He's only the third person to have ever called my landline in 7.5 years. Why didn't he call my cell, text me, or get me on Whatsapp - where I had dropped a pin for him. Why? Why?

He spoke exactly 4 words of English. I speak 0 words of Hindi or Tagalog. Imagine how that conversation went. 1 hour Damam gate. It took me ten minutes. He kept talking Hindi, 4 words of English, and a Tagalog accented super fast version of Arabic. I couldn't just hang up. Why piss off a guy who's delivering something I really need.

Rushdi was busy selling cars. I called Kent. Kent and Karla drove me off the island to the information entrance parking lot.

I helped the guy unload the bike. He and another Indian friend kept smiling like they had just slept with my wife. I kept asking FUEL? PETROL? Was there fuel to get home? The petrol station is closed at 6Pm. It all worked out. I'll learn Hindi some other day.

Lost ID. Lost Mind. Hell.

I haven't lost my Corp ID in Six Years!

It costs about \$500 to replace your corporate security ID. I also know from inside sources of the IT department, all of the new cards still have non-working chips in them. All the more reason not to LOSE my F#@(#)\$@ corporate ID card.

"How did you lose it?", you say. Well, it has to do with my new book, legos and a new plastic ID holder.

The third straight day at Starbucks. Nine hours into my formatting stage. I get the call from Amazon. "You no at school? I deliver apartment? Amazon driver." I reply that I'll be there in three minutes. Literally. It takes three minutes to get home from the coffee shop. I pack up in an excited daze. My Lego Rollercoaster 2022 arrived! I need a change of scenery anyway. Boom. Out the door.

On the way home, I'm thinking to myself: how does he know where I live? I didn't drop a pin. School is the address I have on Amazon. Crazy.

Did I mention I drive a scooter? Did I mention I had replaced my old, plastic ID holder on my necklace with a new

snappable kind? Did I mention I am a latchkey kid. ID, moped keys, house key, class keys, skeleton school key: all on my neck, unless I am scooting around camp. Then the keys and ID are dangling on the ignition. It is important to have a sturdy ID card holder. So I had replaced the worn plastic holder, before it broke!

I get home in just under three minutes. I recognize the driver because he is the only delivery guy to ever show up in an actual Amazon truck. Usually it is some nondescript van, car, or motorbike. (you never know here).

I park "The Scooter" in my gated area. I take the keys out of the ignition and see my new ID card holder open, unsnapped, dangling without my ID. Holy Shit!

The driver asks "next time leave inside by door?" I take the box from him and nod. Shove the huge box into my front door. Get on "the scooter" and exit the parking lot before the Amazon dude has a chance to get back into his actual Amazon van.

I drove back and forth to Starbucks for two hours on different routes. Did it come off this morning's route or just then on the way home? No good.

Two days later. Max, an Indian guy, calls. I meet him in front of the Pharmacy by Starbucks. He hands me my ID!



