October 1, 2026

Telling Stories and Navigating Careers in the Era of AI

Presented by **Elaine Ly**

For **JRNL 3700: Data Storytelling**

1. Resources and Reflections for Careers
2. Heuristics and Best Practices for Using AI
3. Now You Try
4. Sharing and Summaries

Hi, I'm Elaine!

Now

2nd-year Ph.D. student in the Human, AI Technology, and Society (HATS) Lab, advised by Prof. Chenyan Jia.

I study

AI alignment: making sure AI agents reflect human values. Interdisciplinary approaches to inform AI policy and governance.

Recently

Collaborated with the Knight-Georgetown Institute on a white paper about how AI has impacted journalism and content creation on the web.

My path so far

Working in Defense

Two Six Technologies, MIT Lincoln Laboratory, Los Alamos National Laboratory

Working in Public Policy

GW China Affairs Forum; Atlantic Council 9/12 Cyber Strategy; Export-Import Bank, Foundation for Defense of Democracies; Knight-Georgetown Institute

Working in Academia

Bridging my technical and political understanding to advocate for change in the world.

Lessons from a highly interdisciplinary life

1. Working on related fields will inevitably improve your “theory of everything”

A coherent mental framework that ties your mode of operation together.

Whether that’s journalism, data science, or after-school activities, **all of these skills will help you progress in a comprehensive manner as a person.**

2. You’re allowed to change over time, and most importantly, fail

Understand that change isn’t always deviating from your original goalpost. **Sometimes it actually indicates self-growth and that the goalpost has changed.**

Changing fields, labs, or plans isn’t “losing” so much as another data point to understanding what you actually enjoy and were meant to do.

3. Careers are also built off who you know (and how you present yourself)

Technical know-how is just as important as forming a strong network of people who have not only resources but a good backbone for collaboration.

Learn how to speak publicly, develop self-confidence, and create “mental” branding via narratives. **It’s okay to keep reaching out to ask for help.**

4. When there aren’t opportunities, create them

Don’t wait around for opportunities to come find you. Because you are pioneering in a field that may not have much pre-existing infrastructure, **you sometimes may need to be the founder of opportunities**.

While daunting, this can be deeply exciting because you have the ability to transform the field you’re in.

Have these points manifested in your journey so far?

Resources, communities, pathways

1. Seriously, use all your student perks. Now.

Someone online created a comprehensive list of all the perks you can get with your student .edu email domain, so that you don't have to. While from 2024-2025, it's still relatively up to date:
Student Developer Tools & AI Discounts 2024-2025

We have Claude at Northeastern University. How many people have used it?

Google Gemini for Students 1 Year Offer and ChatGPT for students - 4 months free are running timed promotions for students to get a free long-term trial of Pro versions.

2. Take a look at some of the resources out there for upskilling.

We're not going to cover every single way you can tackle data visualization and journalism in this one lecture.

Google News Initiative
Data Journalism Tools - Public Media Alliance

3. Internships and fellowships

There are plenty of internships and fellowships will bring researchers, journalists, and policy people together in the same room. **APPLY, APPLY!**

Take advantage of career coaching, and resume and interview prep: Experiential Education and Career Development
Call for Applications: 2027 Tech Policy Press Fellowship Program (Good program, but closed)
Dow Jones News Fund Fellowship (still open until Nov.!)

4. Graduate school, but it's not the only way

Many universities host interdisciplinary training fellowships, like NSF PEAR traineeship, which are intentionally meant to fund your graduate program while you study interdisciplinary topics.

That being said, don't think it's the only way to success. Point #3 matters more if you don't plan to go back to school.

Thinking about AI…

“

A **heuristic** is a practical rule of thumb or approach used to solve problems quickly when a perfect solution isn’t available.

From the Greek word heuriskein, meaning “to find” or “to discover.” The term gained prominence in education, psychology, and computer science to describe learning through exploration and experience.

There is no one-size-fits-all advice for how you choose to integrate AI into your life.

But if there's one thing you should take away...

AI | SEPTEMBER 18, 2026

The Harvard AI Debate Heats Up

The University has pushed the adoption of AI into teaching and operations, but faculty resistance is growing louder.

by Schuyler Velasco

Schools are starting to teach AI literacy. For many, that means helping kids see chatbots' flaws

After initially trying to ban AI use, a growing number of U.S. public schools are trying a new strategy: encouraging classroom experimentation.

Be responsible. Take accountability. There's been a lot of backlash over using AI tools recklessly.

But don't let these stories make you abstain from using these tools altogether when they have the ability to **boost** your *creativity*, *learning*, and *progress*.



The unintended consequences of large language models as a labor-augmenting technology in science

Eamon Duede[1,2], Kevin Gross[3], M.J. Crockett[1,2], and Carl T. Bergstrom[4,5]

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[4]University of Washington
[5]Santa Fe Institute

arXiv:2607.17397v1 [physics.soc-ph] 19 Jul 2026

Abstract

As a labor-augmenting technology, large language models (LLMs) have the potential to accelerate scientific activity across the research pipeline. But even if LLMs perform on par with human experts at selected tasks, their use will bring unintended consequences as they alter the balance of frictions and inducements that steer the allocation of research effort across projects. Here we develop a simple mathematical model to illustrate. In fields where LLMs are useful primarily as tools for discovering promising projects, researchers will become more selective about what they publish; where they facilitate the process of publishing existing data, researchers will become less selective. By allowing scientists to work more quickly, LLMs raise the opportunity cost of researcher time, creating incentives to refine papers less thoroughly before moving on. Enticing as it is to imagine that, by saving us time on mundane tasks, LLMs will provide us with more time to think deeply and develop projects completely, our results temper such hopes.

1 Introduction

Researchers are highly polarized about whether and how large language models (LLMs) can and should impact the practice of science [BAR+25]. Some argue that LLMs already serve as valuable research tools. Unlike other novel technologies that accelerate only one aspect of a workflow, they claim, LLMs are poised to transform the entire research pipeline, from hypothesis generation [SYH25, ZLS+24] and experiment design [BMKG23, GS]+24], to processing, synthesizing and analyzing data [MSA+23]; from performing literature reviews [WGY+24, AHS+26], to writing up results [LZW+25, LLL+24, Si26]. Others point out that current LLMs have significant limitations that may be insurmountable: they have been shown

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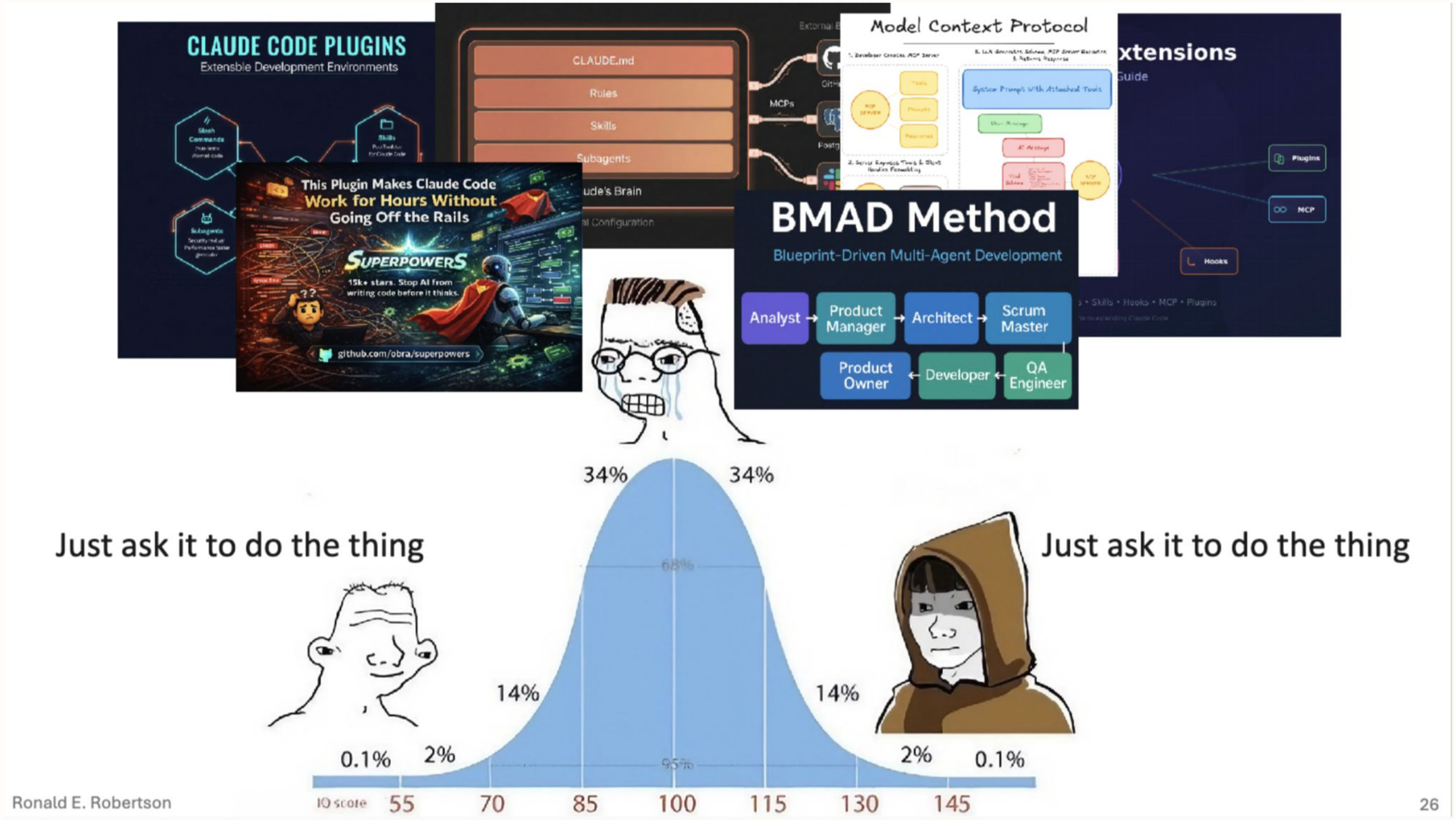
arXiv preprint (2607.17397), 2026

arxiv.org/abs/2607.17397

> *"It is enticing to suppose that... LLMs will enable us to reclaim our time and use the surplus to think more deeply... Unfortunately, our model reveals a flaw in this logic. As a labor-augmenting technology, LLMs* ***increase the opportunity cost of our time****, impelling us to do more, less well – rather than the same amount, better."*
>
> Duede, Gross, Crockett & Bergstrom, *The unintended consequences of large language models as a labor-augmenting technology in science*, 2026.

In an era where we are enticed to outsource our minds to AI, slow down. Be methodical. Find what works for you.

So what are the new best practices as of fall 2026?



AI agents have generally gotten skilled enough to adapt to user requests without excessive technical finagling.

Just ask it to do the thing. (But double check after.)

Claude AI Tools: When to Use What

Claude Website

Best for iterating on ideas, drafting content, and getting feedback through rapid back-and-forth conversations.

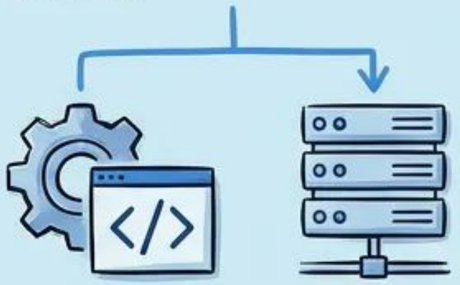


Conversation Partner

Always in the loop

Claude Code

Ideal for autonomous execution, building software, and managing complex systems directly from your terminal.



Autonomous Execution

Terminal barrier

Claude Cowork

Perfect for organizing files, synthesizing research, and creating finished deliverables with a user-friendly interface.



Accessible Interface

High usage quota

aimaker.substack.com

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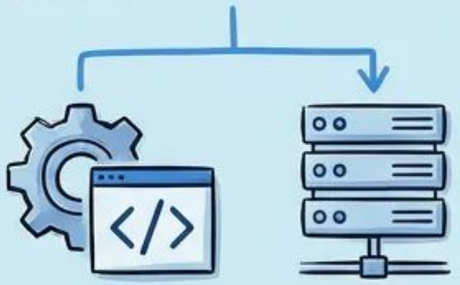


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Where they succeed

- Cleaning and reshaping messy data
- Writing chart and analysis code
- Brainstorming angles you haven’t considered
- Explaining unfamiliar methods or jargon
- Drafting headlines, captions, and starter templates

Where they fail

- Hallucinating or confidently stating trends, caveats, or conclusions that aren’t supported by the data
- Not paying attention to fine details
- Lack of context leading to false assumptions
- “One-shot” or “few-shot” prompting on complex tasks, especially ones that require your own understanding as well

AI as a source

You can’t rely on a chatbot as a single source. Verify all purported facts.

AI as a colleague

Use it as a conversational bouncing board. Write as much context as possible, as though you were explaining your task to someone who had no idea about what you were doing.

AI as an assistant

Don’t make it write your first drafts from scratch, especially when it may require more nuanced and complex synthesis or thinking.

Same dataset, different prompts, drastically different outcomes

Bad

"Make a chart of this data."

The AI has to guess:

- what question you're asking
- who the chart is for
- which rows to keep or drop

You get a generic chart, and its choices stay hidden.

Good

"I'm a journalism student writing about movie budgets. Does horror earn more per dollar than other genres? Make a bar chart of the median worldwide gross per $1 of budget, by genre. Then list every row you removed or changed, and why."

Who you are sets the context

The question gives the chart a purpose

Exactly what to make chart type and measure

Ask it to show its work so you can check its choices

Applying best practices *into practice*!

Form groups of 1 or 2 people.

*Ideally, choose someone you don't know (**from another school** if possible)!*

1 for people who like working individually.
2 for people who like working with others.

The person with less hands-on LLM experience should be the "driver" – someone who focuses on the immediate tactical implementation and controls the keyboard – and the second person should be the "navigator", acting as the person who thinks more about the larger questions and directions.

Predefined

Choose a dataset from the following lists and tell a story with it using the LLM.

If you choose more complicated datasets, there are various moderating variables that affect all data. As such, focus on your visualization skills and consider nuances that might underlie relationships.

Official repo for the #tidytuesday project · GitHub

Simple (archived) datasets from 2018:
https://github.com/dataeducation/tidytuesday/tree/master/data

Open-ended

Think of an open question you have that can be answered by data. Have the LLM act as a source, collaborator, and assistant to answer that question.

Be as creative with your visualizations as possible!

This may involve asking Claude to write code for you, if applicable.

You can also get data from the internet using Google sheets!
Google Sheets: Scraping data from the internet

People who are learning for the first time will move more slowly than people who are skilled. It's okay whether you finish just one graph or multiple visualizations!

Let’s share our findings!

In addition to sharing your visualizations, talk about:

- What questions you were asking as you set out to visualize,
- What was your work process like with the LLM, and if it worked for you,
- What you found to be surprising vs. not surprising,
- What challenged you, if applicable,
- How the LLM decided to frame your data, and whether or not you agreed with it

Audience: share your thoughts (or kind feedback) with the presenters!

Let’s discuss ethics

Pair up for several minutes to discuss a question here that’s interesting to you, or something else you’ve been thinking about regarding the intersection of LLMs and journalism.

These questions are what data journalists are actively dealing with in the field; one person’s “right answer” may be another person’s “wrong answer”.

Is it necessary for a newsroom to disclose AI use to readers? Why or why not?

When does it become inappropriate to use AI for something (i.e., data viz, writing, etc.)? Why?

Is it ethical to publish figures or writing you couldn’t have done without AI? Why?

What did you take away as a highlight or challenge from using LLMs today?

Ask Me Anything!

Thank you!

Use AI to move faster, but use your judgement to get it right.

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