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Geoffre Sherman
Indiana University Indianapolis, gnsherma@iu.edu

David Pierce
Indiana University Indianapolis, dpierce3@iu.edu

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A Practical Guide for Teaching with Generative AI in Sport Management

Geoffre Sherman

David Pierce

Indiana University

Please send correspondence to Geoffre Sherman, gnsherma@iu.edu

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is reshaping how sport management educators design assignments, evaluate student work, and develop professional competencies. This article presents a practical pedagogical framework that integrates GenAI tools within the Design Council's Double Diamond process—Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver—to scaffold student thinking across project-based courses. Rather than positioning GenAI as a replacement for student reasoning, the model treats it as a collaborator in roles such as a research assistant, clarifier, creative teammate, and editor. Fluency in prompt engineering is developed progressively through structured exercises that emphasize verification, iteration, and critical evaluation of model outputs. Two complementary assessments—the Prompt and Decisions Portfolio and the Interactive Oral—ensure that authorship, reasoning, and adaptability remain central to evaluation. Aligned with guidance from UNESCO, the U.S. Department of Education, and the NIST AI Risk Management Framework, this approach equips sport management students to engage GenAI ethically, transparently, and with sustained human judgment.

Keywords: AI, ethics, pedagogy, leadership, design thinking

Instructors who design real-world scenarios for assignments, case studies, or even capstone projects place students into scenarios where they collect and synthesize information in a critical thinking process to develop ideas and solutions. Over the past three years, concerns have been raised about the impact of Generative AI (GenAI) on the integrity of the work submitted by students. We believe GenAI is not a replacement for that work. However, when used well, it speeds up the mundane, multiplies plausible perspectives through simulation, and makes the invisible parts of thinking (assumptions, tradeoffs, and checks) visible enough to coach. The challenge for instructors is to design those benefits while protecting learning, equity, and integrity. It is important to prioritize pedagogy first, and AI second. This can be done by setting clear goals and deciding where an AI assistant lightens the cognitive load without taking over reasoning, where it can act as a sparring partner in preparing for class, and where it should step aside.

This piece translates that stance into a sport specific teaching model, anchored in the Design Council's Double Diamond process (Discover, Define, Develop, Deliver) and paired with assessments that grade process as well as product (Design Council, n.d.). The approach respects guidance that urges human centered, transparent use of AI (UNESCO, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023) and aligns classroom habits with contemporary risk frameworks (NIST, 2023; OWASP Foundation, 2023/2025). Access to capable models tends to raise output quality and speed, with the largest gains often accruing to novices - exactly the population in many undergraduate sport programs (Noy & Zhang, 2023; Brynjolfsson et al., 2025).

The Double Diamond Process

The Double Diamond process includes four phases. The **Discover** phase requires research and listening. When students are asked to collect their own interviews and observational data, GenAI can help create interview questions and summarize lengthy interviews. When students are asked to conduct secondary research, GenAI is a *research assistant* students can treat with scrutiny after the model drafts a landscape brief of claims with sources to verify. Students then do the verification by checking the claims against other sources. The point is to *amplify* students' reach while teaching verification as a habit, not to outsource judgment (UNESCO, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Ask students to conduct secondary research before entering the interview and observation phase of the analysis. Once they have become the "subject matter expert" in the area (i.e., sport fan experience) by reading primary and secondary sources, they then can create a summary of the article based on (1) their notes from their reading and (2) a specific prompt that includes their reading notes to provide in a summary form, which, many times, ends up leading them to additional sources to aid them in deeply versing themselves in the topic in which we are working. As students shift from the research into the subject matter, discovery continues into synthesizing interview and observation data to define the problem spaces that may exist.

Define shifts to understanding the information that has been collected and then framing the problem that needs to be solved or the opportunity that needs to be pursued. When students have collected their own data in the form of observation and interviews, students can write prompts against their

own dataset by asking the AI platform to only consider data from the project. AI can help students synthesize the data by generating personas, identifying themes across interviews, creating empathy or stakeholder maps, or creating any other analytical tool that is relevant to the course being taught. Students demonstrate their understanding of course material through writing a prompt for the GenAI platform that asks it to analyze the data from the project from the perspective of the analytical tool taught in the class. Finally, the define phase ends with the refinement of a "How might we....?" question.

With this phase, GenAI's role is *clarifier*: it rewrites the problem at multiple scopes (too broad, too narrow, just right). The student's job is to select the scope of the question and ensure that it can be supported with evidence from the project. Begin with a basic prompt then ask students to iterate by adding perspective (*"You're a fan experience consultant"*), incorporating direct quotes from transcripts, and layering in frameworks (e.g., *"include fan touchpoints of the fan journey including security, entry, and waiting"*). By refining the "How Might We" question with evidence from their journey maps, students target their thinking into the specific space they are working within.

Next, brainstorming or ideation occurs in the **Develop** phase. The goal of this phase is to generate as many ideas as possible without constraints or limitations. Here, GenAI can act as a teammate that can help generate a list of options that stretch the students' thinking or act as a coach that can push the basic idea to be even more creative by looking at the idea from a fresh perspective. The sport management literature has already demonstrated this kind of human centered design in capstones; pairing it with GenAI simply gives students faster iteration cycles (Pierce, Davies, & Kryder, 2019). Students begin with independent ideation, capturing surface-level ideas on paper. Then they engage GenAI as a teammate, using strategic prompt engineering to deepen their thinking. Below is a sample prompt from our senior fan experience capstone:

> *"You are an expert creative thinker channeling [Insert Innovator] known for solving challenges through [Insert what makes their thinking style unique — e.g., empathy and narrative-based advocacy, iterative engineering, disruptive innovation, generalist problem-solving, etc.]*
>
> *You have [Data Type/Files] on [Specific User Group]. These interviews have been transcribed and themed into the following core problem:*
>
> *[Insert Problem Statement]*
>
> *Your design challenge is summarized as a "How Might We" question:*
>
> *[Insert How Might We Question]*
>
> *Using [Innovator Name]'s approach to creativity, generate 8 divergent, boundary-pushing solution ideas. For each idea, provide the following:*
>
> *1. Solution Name or Concept Title*
>
> *2. Short Description of the Idea*
>
> *3. How this idea reflects [Innovator]'s unique mindset or approach*

4. Which specific pain point(s) from the interviews this solution addresses

Be sure that the ideas vary in format (e.g., mindset shift, product, service, experience, policy, campaign, or system design). The solutions should be ambitious, user-centered, and inspire new ways of thinking about the problem. Remember, the team we are working with is the Indiana Pacers, an NBA team-based Indianapolis, IN. The arena is Gainbridge Fieldhouse.

Finally, the **Deliver** phase culminates in presentation materials or artifacts that speak to industry such as an investor pitch deck, a sponsorship proposal, an event ops manual, a community partnership MOU, or a recruitment campaign. GenAI, in this phase, is *editor* (terminology, headings, checklists) and *examiner* (viva style questions tied to the rubric). Students develop pitch presentations with a narrative arc, minimal text, and compelling imagery. GenAI supports iterative image creation. Prompt examples with explanations are provided next. The first prompt is intentionally simple, allowing students to critique and revise initial versions.

Prompt Examples

Prompt 1

Create a clear, high-resolution illustration of one main object on a plain background. Center the object in the image. Use a [color] background that contrasts with the object. The style should be that of a realistic photo. Do not add any extra objects, text, or decorations. The final image should look clean and minimal, suitable as a centerpiece photo for a presentation slide.

For the student, learning to write prompts is like learning to write a clear sentence before writing a paragraph. The prompt is upgraded from create an image with these variables to create this specific image in this style with this look on this background and nothing else. After seeing initial results, students refine their prompts by adding layout, mood, and purpose. This shifts them from requesting images to thinking like designers.

Prompt 2

Create a wide, landscape-oriented illustration for a presentation slide. In the [location on image], leave a clear, empty area with a soft gradient so I can add a title later. At the [location on image], show [2–3 key elements [specific to the project topic]. The style should be a realistic image that has elements of the idea using a specific color palette or logos. Do not include any text in the image. Make sure the scene clearly communicates the [project idea] using only visuals.

When initial images aren't sufficient, students layer in real references and editing instructions, preserving lighting and perspective while adding new elements.

Prompt 3

Using the uploaded image as the background, keep all existing elements in the photo, but add new objects that [focus on the project and elements students want to include]. Match the lighting and perspective of the original image so the new object looks naturally integrated. The new ob-

ject should be clearly visible but not cover important parts of the original picture. Do not change the colors, contrast, or composition of the background, only add the specified object. Do not add any text.

When needed, students compose detailed scenes. They should think like art directors.

Prompt 4

Create a detailed, high-resolution illustration showing [overall concept, e.g., "how data moves through a computer network"]. Include these clearly visible elements:

[Element 1, e.g., "A central server tower in the middle"]

[Element 2, e.g., "Several laptops around it, each with small glowing screens"]

[Element 3, e.g., "Thin lines or cables connecting the laptops to the server"]

[Element 4, e.g., "Small icons above the cables representing data packets, like tiny envelopes or cubes"]

The background should be [background style, e.g., "a dark gradient with subtle geometric shapes"] so the main elements stand out.

Use a [color palette, e.g., "blue and purple neon"] and keep the style [style, e.g., "clean, slightly futuristic, vector illustration"].

*Leave a **blank area** in the bottom third of the image with minimal detail so I can place text there later.*

Follow the list exactly and do not add extra types of objects beyond what is described.

Collectively, these exercises show how AI accelerates drafting, freeing instructors to focus on reasoning and deeper critique. Universal Design for Learning principles ensure students without AI access have equivalent, rigorous alternatives.

What AI Changes

Used deliberately, GenAI accelerates learning by speeding low-stakes drafting and enabling more formative feedback while instructors focus on reasoning. Research confirms this particularly benefits novices, which is exactly what sport management education needs: faster iteration toward stronger reasoning (Noy & Zhang, 2023; Brynjolfsson et al., 2025). It also changes the tempo of learning. Students move more quickly through low stakes drafting and receive more formative critiques while instructors spend less time editing and more time interrogating assumptions and evidence. Evidence from randomized and field studies supports the basic pattern. Careful scaffolds, novice writers and early career professionals benefit most from assistance, narrowing performance gaps while raising overall quality and speed (Noy & Zhang, 2023; Brynjolfsson et al., 2025). Because facts, policies, and people matter in sport, we also require verification. Students learn to treat model outputs as drafts to test, cross

reference, and revise. This is not just good pedagogy; it is also consistent with current public guidance on AI in education, which emphasizes human agency, transparency, and accuracy (UNESCO, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Prompt Engineering Fundamentals

Students benefit from GenAI tools when they learn how to ask. There are several steps that build fluency in prompting without overwhelming the rest of the tasks that need to be completed during the semester. First, prompt literacy is a compact grammar that includes role, task, context, constraints, output format, evaluation criteria, plus the habit of delimiting inputs and requesting structured outputs (e.g., a table of claims/sources/confidence). A 20-minute exercise is enough to show why vagueness produces generic answers, and specificity yields relevant results. Require students to include at least two checks in their instructions ("cite governing body policy if making a claim about signage" or "flag ADA accessibility issues in venue layouts"), aligning with human centered AI guidance (UNESCO, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Second, templates provide reusable, sport specific patterns ("critique this sponsor deck with our rubric," "draft a risk scan for a multivenue tournament," "prepare a community partner interview outline") and show how one or two short exemplars steer outputs. Third, students iterate and evaluate. Students move from try and see to a rhythm of prompt → output → evaluate → revise, where the evaluation step is itself a mini prompt that checks accuracy (e.g., NCAA or league policy), coverage (stakeholders addressed), and clarity. This prevents the common pattern of uncritical copy paste and builds a transferable habit of testing model outputs before use (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Prompt Transition Examples

We asked our students to use the most basic prompt when analyzing and synthesizing the interview data. The ensuing examples include basic, intermediate, and advanced prompts.

Basic Prompt

The following is a basic prompt example: *"Provide the themes and insights that appear from the attached interview transcript and/or observation notes."* After seeing the response, students can then ask to run a new prompt that seeks to pull deeper insights and themes appearing in the transcript by advancing the prompt. For instance, add context to the prompt and examine the response provided.

Intermediate Prompt

The intermediate prompt builds on the basic prompt: *"Analyze this NBA fan experience interview transcript and identify 4-5 key themes, but focus specifically on the fan journey touchpoints:*

- *Pre-arrival experience (ticket purchase, planning, expectations)*
- *Arrival and entry experience (parking, security, wayfinding)*
- *In-arena experience (concessions, seating, entertainment, game atmosphere)*

- *Post-game experience (exit process, lasting impressions, likelihood to return)*

This prompt provides deeper, more emotionally nuanced insights. However, students can take it even further and provide a more advanced prompt.

Advanced Prompt

For the more advanced prompt, students could position themselves as an NBA fan experience consultant and request analysis of the transcript content through very specific lenses such as an emotional journey lens, operational touchpoints lens, and a loyalty and retention lens. The prompt for each respective lens might look like:

- *EMOTIONAL JOURNEY LENS: What themes reveal the emotional highs and lows of the fan experience? Look for moments of excitement, frustration, surprise, or disappointment throughout their journey from pre-game to post-game.*
- *OPERATIONAL TOUCHPOINT LENS: What insights emerge about specific operational elements (parking, concessions, seating, technology, staff interactions, facilities)? Identify pain points and moments of excellence.*
- *LOYALTY & RETENTION LENS: What themes suggest factors that drive fan loyalty, repeat attendance, or likelihood to recommend? Look for emotional connections, value perceptions, and memorable moments.*

For each lens, identify 2-3 themes with supporting evidence. Then, synthesize across all three lenses to propose 2-3 high-impact fan experience improvements this NBA team should prioritize. Explain your reasoning, expected impact on fan satisfaction, and potential implementation challenges.

Assessment

Assessment should reward the qualities sport managers need to carry into industry: the ability to scope problems, compare options, and verify facts. Two assessments make those qualities visible. The Prompt & Decisions Portfolio (PDP) collects evidence of judgment. Students include the key prompts and outputs (trimmed to essentials), annotate the human edits, and keep a verification log: which claims did we check, how, and what changed? They add a short ledger of accept/reject decisions with rationales tied to the rubric. The PDP keeps the focus on process rather than mere polish and offers instructors a fairer window into authorship, which is important given both the low accuracy of now discontinued tools and their documented bias against nonnative writers (OpenAI, 2023; Liang et al., 2023). The portfolio is a light, practical enactment of the documentation emphasized in the NIST AI Risk Management Framework and a reminder of basic safety from the OWASP Top10 for LLM applications (NIST, 2023; OWASP Foundation, 2023/2025).

Second, a brief interactive oral (IO) completes the picture. In a 10–12-minute conversation, the assessor plays a stakeholder like a city safety officer, sponsor rep, or community partner and introduces evolving constraints. Students respond with evidence, explain tradeoffs, and adapt. Roleplaying a stakeholder can test whether students can adapt under moving constraints. Universities have produced excellent practitioner guides on designing and running IOs, and these resources explicitly situate IOs as secure assessments in an AI saturated

environment (University of Melbourne CSHE, 2025; Jisc, 2024).

Rubrics then follow naturally. They can be focused on problem framing and criteria; quality of AI use (clarity of prompts, iteration with evaluation, appropriate role selection, verification); reasoning and evidence (assumptions, alternatives, tradeoffs); ethics and risk (privacy, bias, prompt injection awareness); and communication (audience fit; clarity under questioning). The rubric headings themselves point to coaching conversations; they are not merely tally sheets (NIST, 2023; OWASP Foundation, 2023/2025).

Conclusion

This article demonstrates how students can learn to scope problems, compare options, interrogate outputs, disclose methods, and explain choices to stakeholders. The Double Diamond provides rhythm; the PDP makes reasoning visible; interactive orals ensure authorship and adaptability remain central. They learn to use intelligent tools in ways that strengthen and never supplant human judgment.

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