

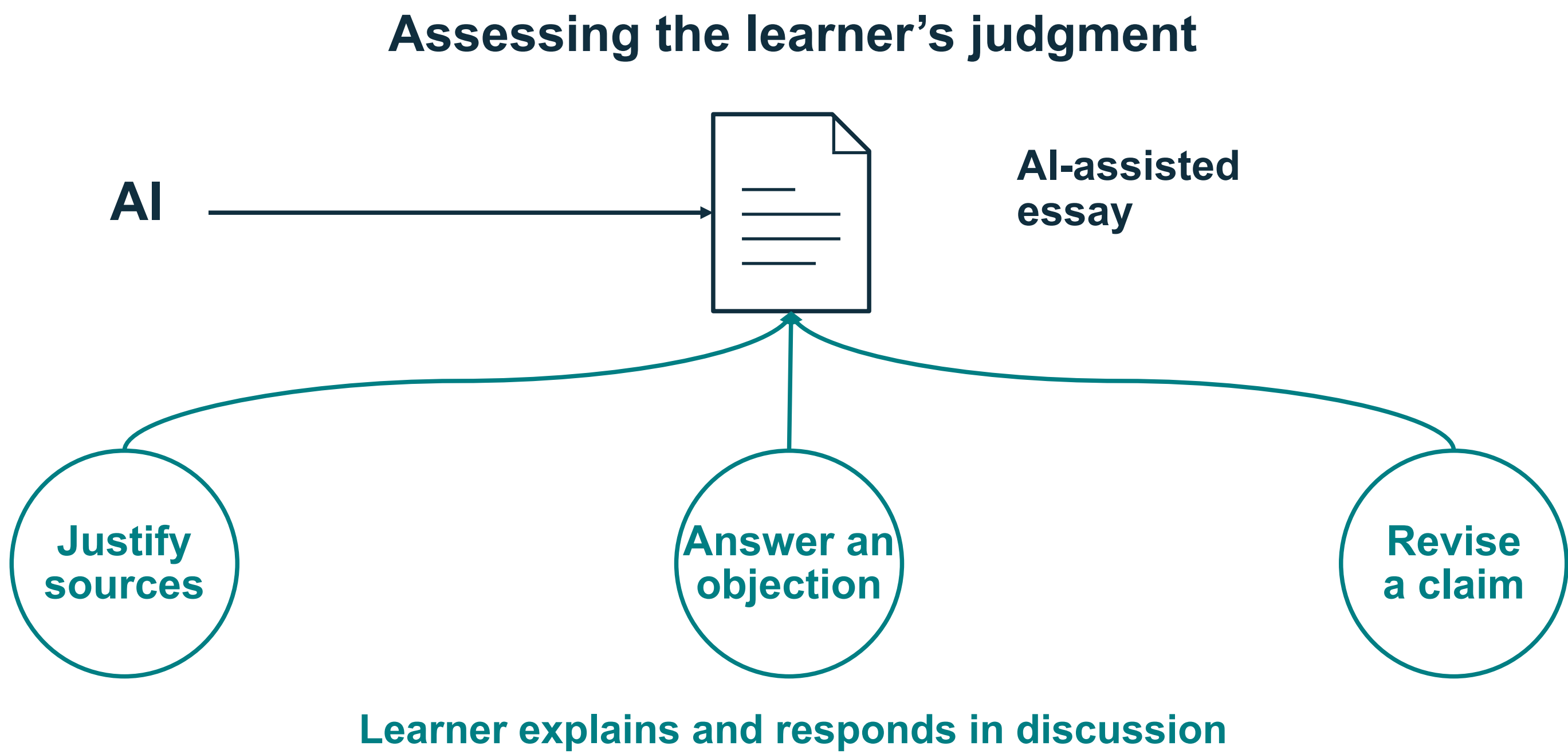
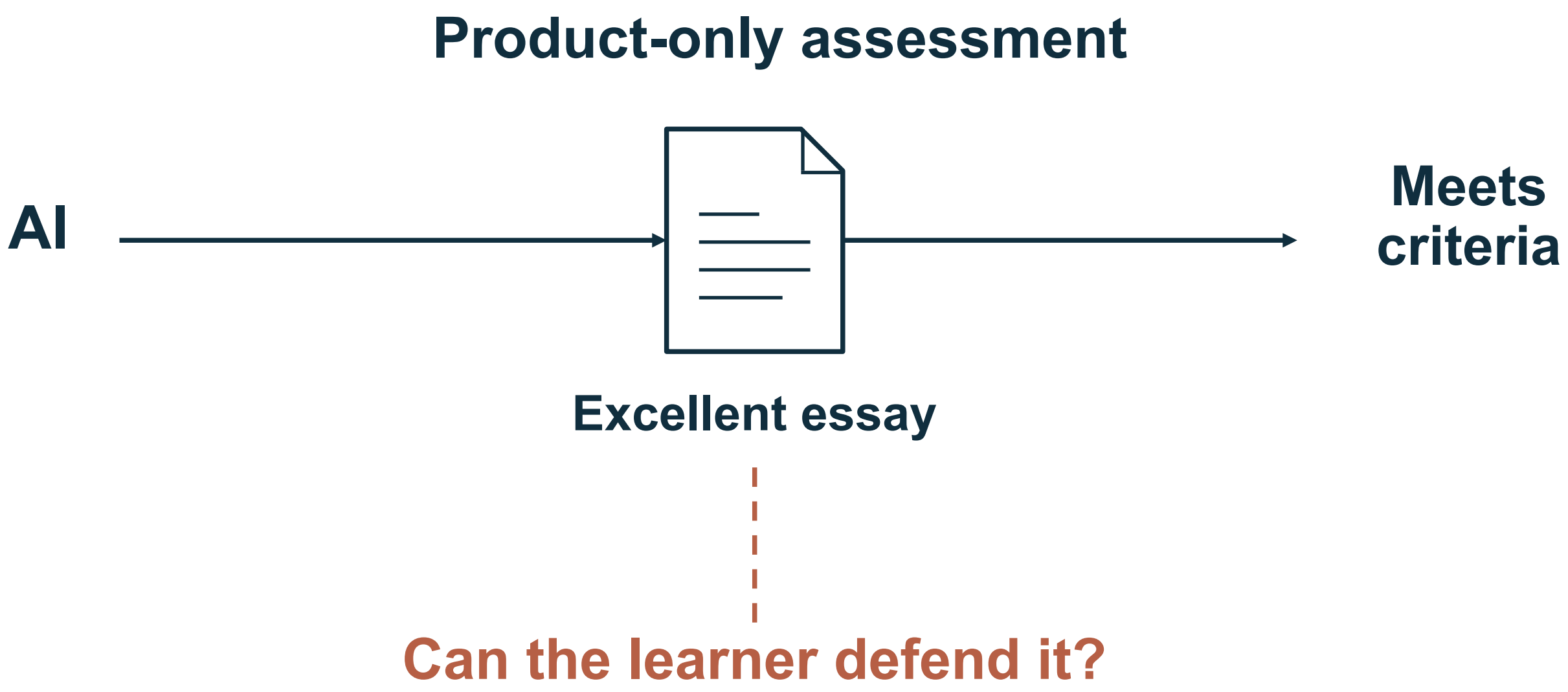


When AI Does the Work, What Is Learning For?

Post-Instrumental Learning and the Risk of Capacity Dissolution

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Even when AI produces excellent work, institutions must preserve people’s ability to explain, challenge, and take responsibility for it.



01 A perfect-AI stress test

Imagine a student who submits an excellent essay but cannot explain why its central claim follows from the evidence. The essay meets the standard; the student’s understanding remains uncertain.

Assume AI completes a specified task flawlessly. This thought experiment is not a forecast. Even then, performance alone cannot decide which goals are legitimate, whose interests count, or who is responsible.

GRANTED: flawless task execution
STILL OPEN: purposes and responsibility

02 Capacity dissolution

A deeper loss: the practices that sustain human judgment disappear, even while excellent work remains.

Task obsolescence: the task becomes unnecessary.
Skill obsolescence: a technique narrows or moves to specialists.
Formative loss: opportunities to learn judgment disappear.

If institutions replace practice with AI outputs, people may lose the judgment needed to question those outputs.

03 Five capacities for accountable delegation

We propose post-instrumental learning: learning to set goals, judge reasons, and take responsibility when AI does the task. Five capacities guide this proposal.

	CAPACITY / FUNCTION	INSTITUTIONAL QUESTION
1	END-SETTING Keep goals open to question and revision before and during AI use.	Who can question what the AI is asked to achieve?
2	REASON-GIVING Connect the claims people adopt to reasons others can examine.	Can someone explain and defend why the result is justified?
3	CONTESTABILITY Give affected people a recognized right and a practical route to challenge decisions.	Can objections lead to review and a change in the decision?
4	REFUSAL / REVISION Make opting out, correction, and redesign genuinely available.	Can people refuse or change AI use without hidden penalties?
5	PARTICIPATION Sustain shared activities where people learn to judge and question the work.	Who still has opportunities to learn by taking part?

These capacities overlap. They are a normative proposal, not a tested scale or checklist. Institutions must support them; no individual needs to master everything.

04 Assessment after AI

For an AI-assisted research essay, the target is students’ ability to judge and defend sources—not to catch AI errors. Instructors need evidence of this judgment before awarding credit.

ILLUSTRATIVE ASSESSMENT PLAN

TARGET	Judge a source’s authority, relevance, and limitations.
EVIDENCE	Ask students to justify sources, compare a claim with its primary source, and answer a new objection.
REVIEW IF	Essay quality improves, but students cannot defend sources or revise arguments when evidence changes.
RESPONSE	Restore guided source evaluation. Review whether the task and marking criteria assess students’ judgment.

05 Keep opportunities to learn

Institutions should review who learns to direct and question AI, and who receives only finished work. Better outputs alone do not show better learning.

Instructors provide accessible practice; institutions support it and offer routes to challenge decisions. AI tutoring and translation can help learners participate.