## Example:

### Elvis Presley - If I Can Dream ('68 Comeback Special)What insights can we learn from Elvis' "If I can Dream" performance on the '68 Comeback Special?

#### My version:

After years in the creative wilderness, making dumb, uninspiring movies under the watchful eye of manager, Svengali and uber-dad Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis exploded back onto the scene of Rock ‘n Roll with his ’68 Special. The show was intended by Parker to showcase Elvis singing family friendly Christmas carols. But the production was subverted by Elvis and director Steve Binder. This performance condenses the outpouring of Elvis’ repressed emotion having spent the preceding 10 years clicking his heels making commercial fayre his heart wasn’t in.

Fade up from black. Soft brass in the background. And then, there’s Elvis: white suit, red cravat, jet-black slicked back hair in front of a huge red-neon lit sign reading simply, ‘Elvis’. He looks like a cross between an innocent young schoolkid on his way to Sunday School and James Dean. The comeback is very much on.

Then the singing starts. What singing! “There must be lights burning brighter somewhere”. Sombre, no paraphernalia. Just deeply soulful, pleading, almost begging. Elvis is addressing a troubled country in 1968. Only 5 years since JFK had been assassinated, 13 years into US involvement in the Vietnam War and most pertinent to this recording, a matter of weeks after the killing of Martin Luther King. Here’s Elvis at once expressing solidarity with MLK, showing a new, more mature side and telling America it might be hard, but things can get better.

2nd line. The soul deepens, but the singing is still restrained, edging on something indefinable but not stepping there yet.

3rd line. Get ready. He’s building now. “If I can dream of a better land,”

4th line. Now he let’s rip, “Where all my brothers walk hand-in-hand.” Reference to Luther-King is evident. Vocally, he’s hinting at a loss of control, raspy and on the edge.

5th line. He’s back to restrained again, “Can’t my dream come true”.

Occasionally, Elvis stretches out his hand, like he’s aching to connect, trying to pull the audience in. Is this The King of Rock and Roll searching for approval from his people? Through the 2nd verse, there’s a sense of vulnerability as he glances at the audience. There’s something vaguely humble about the way he seems to be checking they’re still there.

Then comes the bridge. There’s nothing humble about that. “We’re lost in a cloud with too much rain.” Go Elvis. Give it some! This is where he finds the qualities that make him great. The visceral rasp that can’t be copied, can barely be described. His eyes are closed now. The dancing hinting for once at geeky, slightly over-rhythmic as performance takes second stage to Elvis finding that inner-Elvis.

Then, after the last line of the bridge, he casts his gaze again at the audience, partly in recovery now, he seems to be saying, “Here I am. That’s what I’ve got”. But he’s back on an equilibrium now, into the last verse. Ready to build again for the finale. “Please let my dream come true right now.” And there he is on the fade out. Deep into the music. Man and musicality in one place and time.

Surely this performance demands consideration. Here’s Elvis, with all the baggage of stardom, all the weight of being a performer after years in the doldrums back centre stage, asking, begging to have his talent recognised.

Later the performance element would finally consume him in Las Vegas. But here, as he escapes the confines of ‘Elvisness’ surely we have a definitive victory of content over form.

“Thank you. Good night.”

#### Chat GPT Version:

##### Prompt: What insights can we learn from Elvis' "If I can Dream" performance on the '68 Comeback Special

Elvis Presley's performance of "If I Can Dream" on the '68 Comeback Special is widely regarded as one of the most powerful and iconic moments in his career. The song was written specifically for the special by Walter Earl Brown, and Elvis performed it as the grand finale of the show, which aired on December 3, 1968. Here are some insights we can glean from this memorable performance:

Emotional Resonance: Elvis' rendition of "If I Can Dream" is emotionally charged and reflects the social and political climate of the time. The special aired in the aftermath of the tumultuous 1960s, marked by civil rights struggles, political unrest, and the assassination of prominent figures. The lyrics convey a message of hope, unity, and a dream for a better world.

Connection with the Audience: The '68 Comeback Special was a pivotal moment for Elvis, marking his return to live performances after years of focusing on movies. The intimate setting and the informal nature of the show allowed him to connect with the audience on a personal level. "If I Can Dream" served as a powerful vehicle for this connection, with Elvis delivering the song with sincerity and passion.

Vocal Mastery: Elvis' vocal performance in "If I Can Dream" showcases his exceptional range, control, and expressiveness. He pours his heart and soul into the song, delivering a performance that resonates with authenticity. The power and conviction in his voice contribute to the emotional impact of the song.

Symbolic Imagery: The lyrics of "If I Can Dream" contain symbolic imagery and references to a dream of peace and understanding. Elvis' performance adds depth to these symbols, with his gestures, facial expressions, and body language contributing to the overall message of hope and unity.

Cultural and Historical Significance: The '68 Comeback Special is often seen as a turning point in Elvis' career, marking a return to his musical roots and a reaffirmation of his status as a live performer. "If I Can Dream" encapsulates this moment and stands as a testament to Elvis' ability to transcend musical genres and connect with a diverse audience.

In summary, Elvis Presley's performance of "If I Can Dream" on the '68 Comeback Special is a powerful and emotionally resonant moment in music history. It reflects the social and political context of the time, showcases Elvis' vocal prowess, and symbolizes a significant chapter in his career.

#### My Version + Chat GPT (significant additions are in italics):

After years in the creative wilderness, making dumb, uninspiring movies under the watchful eye of manager, Svengali and uber-dad Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis exploded back onto the scene of Rock ‘n Roll with his ’68 Special. The show was intended by Parker to showcase Elvis singing family friendly Christmas carols. But the production was subverted by Elvis and director Steve Binder. This performance condenses the outpouring of Elvis’ repressed emotion having spent the preceding 10 years clicking his heels in commercial fayre his heart wasn’t in. Written specifically for the show as a response to Martin Luther King’s assassination and riffing on his most famous speech, the song appeared as the grand finale of the show.

Fade up from black. Soft brass in the background. And then, there’s Elvis: white suit, red cravat, jet-black slicked back hair in front of a huge red-neon lit sign reading simply, ‘Elvis’. He looks like a cross between an innocent young schoolkid on his way to Sunday School and James Dean. The comeback is very much on.

Then the singing starts. What singing! “There must be lights burning brighter somewhere”. Sombre, no paraphernalia. Just deeply soulful, pleading, almost begging. Elvis is addressing a troubled country in 1968. Only 5 years since JFK had been assassinated, 13 years into US involvement in the Vietnam War and most pertinent to this recording, a matter of weeks after the killing of Martin Luther King. Here’s Elvis at once expressing solidarity with MLK, showing a new, more mature side and telling America it might be hard, but things can get better.

2nd line. The soul deepens, but the singing is still restrained, edging on something indefinable but not stepping there yet.

3rd line. Get ready. He’s building now. “If I can dream of a better land,”

4th line. Now he let’s rip, “Where all my brothers walk hand-in-hand.” Reference to Luther-King is evident. Vocally, he’s hinting at a loss of control, raspy and on the edge.

5th line. He’s back to restrained again, “Can’t my dream come true”.

Occasionally, Elvis stretches out his hand, like he’s aching to connect, trying to pull the audience in. Is this The King of Rock and Roll searching for approval from his people? Through the 2nd verse, there’s a sense of vulnerability as he glances at the audience. There’s something vaguely humble about the way he seems to be checking they’re still there.

Then comes the bridge. There’s nothing humble about that. “We’re lost in a cloud with too much rain.” Go Elvis. Give it some! This is where he finds the qualities that make him great. The visceral rasp that can’t be copied, can barely be described. His eyes are closed now. The dancing hinting for once at geeky, slightly over-rhythmic as performance takes second stage to Elvis finding that inner-Elvis.

Then, after the last line of the bridge, he casts his gaze again at the audience, partly in recovery now, he seems to be saying, “Here I am. That’s what I’ve got”. But he’s back on an equilibrium now, into the last verse. Ready to build again for the finale. “Please let my dream come true right now.” And there he is on the fade out. Deep into the music. Man and musicality in one place and time.

Surely this performance demands consideration. Here’s Elvis, with all the baggage of stardom, all the weight of being a performer after years in the doldrums back centre stage, asking, begging to have his talent recognised.

Later the performance element would finally consume him in Las Vegas. But here, as he escapes the confines of ‘Elvisness’ surely we have a definitive victory of content over form. I view this performance as an existential battle between Elvis’ artificial image as honed by his years in Hollywood and a more authentic, emotionally-charged, rootsy Elvis, someone who recognises the power of music to convey a real message. While the trappings of his back-story might be inescapable, he manages to overcome them here to present a sincere and heartfelt cry to the nation. While the advent of Donald Trump in The US might have given ‘authenticity’ dirty connotations, this performance comes from a simpler time, where it’s more aligned with some kind of truth.

“Thank you. Good night.”

## Commentary:

The process of collaborating with AI on this assignment has thrown up some interesting insights on the differences between human-created and AI-generated writing and on the characteristics of my individual approach to writing.

My version of the assignment highlights a number of important characteristics not present in the AI-generated version. First, on a grand-scale, there is the issue of human agency related to choices I made when structuring and carrying out the writing. Evidently, I made the choice of artefact, but additionally, I made decisions related to style, such as mixing short and long sentences for impact and including the repetitive use of the line of lyrics referred to increase impact. Connected to this, I prioritised some information and then chose to partially arrange it chronologically in the order points appeared in the performance to make the writing more easily accessible to a reader not familiar with the artefact.

There are several more significant differences between the two versions, particularly on the inclusion of emotive content and the construction of the text. I feel that my enthusiasm and love of this work comes over more strongly in my writing, although Chat GPT does catch some of this with the phrase “pours his heart and soul into the song, delivering a performance that resonates with authenticity.” Having recognised that, I think the most significant difference is inherent in my attempt to attach a narrative to Elvis’ performance, that of a lost soul finally finding his place again after years in the wilderness. While hinted at by GPT, this is not a major feature of that version.

It is important to consider some of the characteristics of AI-generated writing, some of which may be thought of as negative, some positive and others simply different. The writing seems to attempt a non-personal stance, using, for example, the phrase “widely regarded” to authenticate a point, rather than the more personal approach I took. Then, there are questions of accuracy. In the same sentence, it could be questions that this performance is, indeed, “widely regarded as one of the most powerful and iconic moments in his career.” What about Jailhouse Rock, Love Me Tender or the Las Vegas shows of the 70s?

There are a few notable features of the AI version which should be recognised as possible positives over my version. Most immediately evident are the tight paragraph topics, emphasised by the use of paragraph sub-titles. Then, Chat GPT included several interesting facts which I did not know, for example that the song was written specifically for the 68 Comeback Special, very much with Elvis and his political standpoint at the time in mind. The most useful point raised by Chat GPT was the issue of authenticity, which provoked some insightful thinking on my part on the nature of performance and representation of inner emotion in front of an audience.