

Generative AI is a digital technology that creates and alters content from existing data. AI is a rapidly changing tool that can help or hinder learning. Understanding how to use AI tools ethically and effectively is part of developing college-level digital literacy, and this process may vary by discipline. This resource, developed in conjunction with writing tutors and faculty from a range of academic backgrounds, provides general considerations about learning, policy, and practices related to AI and academic assignments. However, learners should always tailor their work to their audience and assignment guidelines.

## Determine the Learning Purpose

When considering whether to use AI on an assignment, make sure the use of AI will not cause you to bypass learning important concepts or skills.

- **Skills & Knowledge**—What skills and knowledge could you develop by completing the assignment without AI? Will AI enhance or inhibit your critical thinking and creativity?
- **Assignment Context**—Why is your instructor requiring this assignment? What is it building on?
- **Personal Learning Goals**—What do you hope to gain as you engage in the learning process? Do you have enough knowledge or experience to check or confirm AI-generated output?

## Consider the Larger Picture or Learning Process

Learning typically requires time, engagement, and effort, so be mindful of how AI may impact these aspects of your learning processes or educational experiences.

- **Time**—Do not assume that AI use will always save time. If AI allows you to move forward quickly without learning an essential concept or skill, when will you engage in that learning?
- **Learning Processes**—Your learning process is unique to you. It is important to understand how you learn to avoid skipping steps in your personal learning process.
- **Proficiency**—Mastering a skill or increasing in knowledge and proficiency takes practice and problem solving. To level up, use AI to engage with your learning, not distance you from it.
- **Limitations**—AI is not good for all tasks. AI is a tool that should be used for learning only when it is the right tool for the job.
- **AI Literacy**—Using AI effectively requires its own learning process. Devoting time and effort to develop the skillset needed to use AI may or may not overlap with course assignments and goals.

## Check Relevant AI Policies

When beginning an assignment, check policies related to both AI use and academic integrity. Note that AI policies are specific to different contexts and may conflict with each other.

- **Assignment Policy**—Check assignment guidelines to know how you may or may not use AI tools.
- **Course Policy**—Be familiar with general course guidelines for AI use.
- **Department Policy**—Know that AI policy may vary by department or program.
- **University Policy**—Understand how university AI policies guide policy and practice across campus.
- **Platform Policy**—Be aware of and comply with individual AI platform policies.
- **Disciplinary Conventions**—Learn the expectations for AI use within your academic discipline.

## Determine the Degree of AI Use

Not all uses of AI tools are the same. Understand the degree of use you are or will engage in.

- **AI-Assisted**—AI is used to brainstorm or plan, but AI content is not included in the assignment.
- **AI-Guided**—AI is used to refine original content, including guiding revising and editing processes.
- **AI-Collaborative**—AI is used frequently to prompt or expand ideas. The learner’s original argument, voice, and direction are still prominent.
- **AI-Expanded**—AI is used to develop more extensive notes or full paragraphs based on a prompt, assignment, or outline provided by a learner.
- **AI-Generated**—AI is used to generate full paragraphs, sections, or papers with little or no revisions by the learner. Without clear permission or requirement by an instructor, this level of use may be seen as academic dishonesty or plagiarism.

## Check the AI Output

AI is a tool that cannot think or understand, so you will need to check accuracy and determine the value and effectiveness of content created by AI. You must be able to analyze, evaluate, and revise AI output since you are responsible for the assignments you submit.

- **Accuracy**—AI is not always accurate and can fabricate information (hallucinations).
- **Bias**—AI is often biased because it is trained on large samples of online data containing bias.
- **Tone**—AI output may have a tone of expertise and still be inaccurate.
- **Revision**—Rather than accepting AI output, continue refining and prompting AI for best results.

## Cite or Acknowledge AI Use

Acknowledging AI use through transparency and documentation is essential when using AI.

- **Disciplinary norms**—Different disciplines (e.g., business, history, math, etc.) will have different norms for acknowledging AI use. In addition to adhering to policy, adhere to disciplinary norms.
- **Citation styles**—Use the citation style appropriate for your assignment, course, or discipline when you cite content created with or by AI.
- **Acknowledgement**—Note or acknowledge AI use even if you are not using AI-generated content word-for-word.

## Continue Learning Best Practices for AI Use

Learning how to use AI ethically and effectively is an ongoing process. These guidelines, along with practice and experience, present a good starting point for the ongoing development of best practices for AI use.

- **Understanding Purpose**—Your output is only as good as your prompt. Developing a strong understanding of content and purpose is necessary for effective prompt engineering.
- **Disciplinary Evolution**—AI will continue to evolve, so stay current on how AI is used in your field.
- **Ethics**—Be aware of the big picture and how AI use impacts labor, privacy, the environment, etc.
- **Digital Divides**—Not everyone has the same access to AI tools. Avoid assumptions about other people’s experience with or understanding of AI.
- **Critical Thinking**—Continuing to think critically about AI and learning as you complete assignments and make use of AI as a tool in other aspects of your learning and work.