

Checklist for Academic Writing with Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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This checklist is designed to help you ensure your scholarly work is original, accurately informed, and properly credited. Remember, AI tools are meant to enhance your work, not replace your critical thinking or intellectual engagement. As such, there is no better way to approach academic writing, than to be guided by the basic principles of “good research”.

When you aim to stay within the realm of good research practice when writing, negative aspects (plagiarism, unethical use of AI, etc.) tend to become secondary concerns, as they are almost automatically avoided. There are many arguments out there on what good research entails, but if we had to break it down into its most simple form for academic writing, it would be three things: Originality, Accuracy, and Credit.

In terms of *originality*, we are talking about the product that you are delivering; in this case, your writing. To know whether or not you have produced something original, you would have to acquire a good idea of what is already out there. As such, your work has to be informed by existing information. However, with so much information out there being incomplete, inaccurate, or just plain false, you will need to develop a way to evaluate the *accuracy* of any information you use to inform your work. The moment you use this accurate, existing information to strengthen your own, you will have to give any and all such sources *credit*.

To be able to produce writing that succeeds in all three of these aspects, it is imperative that you develop a basic process with which to approach your research. Essentially, research aimed at producing such writing, has to do with how we engage with information. More specifically, it has to do with how we *find* information through various tools and sources, then how we *process* that information we have found, with the intent to *produce* our own information in writing (Weideman, 2003:41).

Given all of the above concepts, it makes no sense to approach academic writing at the end, as we would not be able to evaluate the information we have produced, without first finding the sources to inform it. Yet, many of us tend to use AI tools for only this last step. The issue with this is that you have no way of knowing whether your product (writing) is original, accurate, or credited accurately, because you did not find and process the information used to produce it yourself. Therefore, it now becomes important for you to incorporate certain checks to assist you with ensuring that the writing you produce aims to maintain good research practice, even with AI assistance. These checks can be broken down into the following two main categories: i) *the academic research process* and ii) *the core qualities of good research*. From these two categories, we should also be able to develop more iii) *general guidelines for responsible AI use*.

1. The Academic Research Process

Before, during, and after using AI in your research, consider the following (adapted from Weideman, 2003:41):

1.1. Finding Information (searching, reading, and evaluating sources)

- Have I actively searched for relevant and credible sources, prioritising academic libraries (physical and online) and academic search engines (e.g., National e-publications, EBSCO-Host, Google Scholar)?
- Have I critically evaluated the relevance, credibility, and potential bias of *every* source I found, including those discovered with AI-powered tools?
- Am I aware that general internet searches (e.g., normal Google, Wikipedia, social media opinions) are often considered "danger zones" for academic information due to their potential lack of credibility?
- Have I used established criteria, such as the CRAAP Test, to rigorously evaluate online information for relevance, authority, currency, and purpose?

Finding information with AI tools

- When using AI-powered search tools (e.g., Elicit, Semantic Scholar) for broad or deep sourcing, have I ensured that I do not blindly trust their outputs?
- Have I always double-checked facts and sources independently against credible original materials?

1.2. Processing Information (analysing, planning, synthesising and integrating sources)

- Have I genuinely analysed and synthesised the knowledge I've found to make sense of it and structure *my thoughts* logically?
- Have I developed a clear argument or thesis statement based on *my understanding*?
- Have I moved beyond simply reproducing material from sources to critiquing and synthesising multiple opinions?
- Do I understand that the critical thinking and intellectual work of integrating information remains mine, even with AI assistance?

Processing information with AI integration

- If using AI tools (e.g., *ChatGPT*, *NotebookLM*, *Voyant*) to summarise, rephrase, or organise large volumes of information, have I ensured these tools assist, rather than replace, my intellectual work?
- Have I reviewed, verified, and personalised all AI outputs to ensure they align with my argument and understanding?

1.3. Producing Information (writing/presenting ideas and information)

- Is my work written in a systematic, logical, and balanced manner, presenting a case backed by properly selected material?
- Does my writing follow the specific academic structure of an introduction (including a clear thesis or objectives), logically developed body paragraphs, and a conclusion?

Utilising AI for writing

- When AI assists in drafting text, checking grammar (e.g., *Grammarly*, *Quillbot*), or formatting citations (e.g., *Zotero*), have I thoroughly reviewed, verified, and personalised these outputs?
- Do I remember that the ultimate responsibility for the clarity, logic, and originality of the final product rests with me?

2. Core Qualities of Good Research

These qualities are fundamental to academic integrity and apply regardless of AI tool use:

2.1. Originality – your contribution

- Does my work present my own insights and synthesis, ensuring it is distinct from existing ideas?
- Have I ensured that my academic writing remains my own work and reflects my unique voice?
- Am I striving to contribute new perspectives to the existing body of knowledge in my field?
- Have I incorporated source material by synthesising others' ideas in a unique way, rather than simply deferring to “authoritative voices”?

AI Awareness

- Am I aware that over-reliance on AI can hinder the development of my own critical thinking and lead to a lack of genuine intellectual engagement, directly preventing originality and increasing the risk of plagiarism and “brain drain”?
- Do I understand that if I am unable to establish whether my work is original or not, I cannot put my own name to it, as I have not fully engaged with the information.

2.2. Accuracy (fact verification)

- Are all facts and information presented in my work correct and verifiable?
- Are all my claims evidence-based and logical, supported by reliable evidence from reliable sources?

AI Awareness

- Do I ensure that I *never* blindly trust AI outputs, and do I always double-check sources and facts independently, understanding that AI models can generate incorrect or misleading information?
- Have I reviewed and verified every AI-generated output for correctness and cross-referenced it with reliable sources?

2.3. Proper Crediting (academic integrity)

Acknowledging Sources

- Have all sources I have consulted and used been cited precisely and accurately within my text and in a comprehensive reference list?
- Am I familiar with and consistently adhering to the prescribed referencing style (e.g., Harvard, MLA, APA)?
- Do I clearly indicate how I am using the material derived from sources, such as whether I agree with it, support it, or am simply showing a range of opinions?

Plagiarism Prevention

- Do I understand that failure to acknowledge sources constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious academic misconduct and intellectual theft?
- Am I aware that many instances of plagiarism are unintentional, often due to a lack of understanding or skill in referencing conventions, and that support is available to develop these skills?

AI-Generated Content

- Have I credited all external sources, including any information that has been shaped or generated by AI tools?
- If AI generates text that I incorporate, have I treated it as an external source that needs to be acknowledged according to university guidelines, or did I go and check where it gets its information from so I can *credit the actual source*?

3. General Guidelines for Responsible AI Use

Beyond the specific steps, these overarching principles are crucial:

- **Do not blindly trust AI outputs:** Always double-check sources and facts against credible materials.
- **Use AI as a support tool, not as a shortcut:** AI should assist your critical thinking, not replace it.
- **Credit all sources:** Properly cite external sources, including any information that has been shaped or influenced by AI tools, treating it as an external source according to university guidelines. AI is not an author, and cannot be cited; go and find the actual sources of information provided by AI.
- **Take ownership:** Remember, you are ultimately responsible for the integrity and quality of your own academic work.

References

Weideman, A. 2003. Justifying course and task design in language teaching. *Acta Academica*, 35(3):26-48.



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