



USG Student Guide to Generative AI Literacy

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About This Guide

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools can help students brainstorm ideas, explore unfamiliar topics, explain concepts, practice skills, and improve their writing. However, using these tools effectively requires more than knowing how to enter a prompt. Students also need to understand what GenAI can and cannot do, evaluate its responses, and make informed decisions about when and how to use it.

This guide is designed to help you develop **GenAI literacy**—a foundational understanding of how GenAI tools work, their capabilities and limitations, and how to use them effectively, ethically, and responsibly in your learning.

Understanding Policies and Expectations

This guide **does not represent** an official University System of Georgia (USG) policy and **does not replace** the policies of your college or university, your instructor's expectations, or the requirements of individual assignments. Rules for GenAI use can differ across institutions, courses, instructors, and assignments. Always confirm what is permitted before using GenAI for academic work. Ultimately, you are responsible for the work you submit, including any content developed with GenAI.

Goals

This guide aims to help you:

1. **Identify** appropriate ways to use GenAI for academic work while following institutional policies, instructor expectations, and assignment requirements.
2. **Select and use** GenAI tools to support learning activities such as brainstorming, research, writing, studying, and explaining concepts.
3. **Apply** prompting techniques to guide GenAI toward relevant, useful responses that address your goals.
4. **Evaluate** AI-generated content for accuracy, reliability, bias, missing information, and fabricated claims or sources.
5. **Use** GenAI responsibly while maintaining academic integrity, acknowledging AI assistance when required, and taking responsibility for submitted work.
6. **Use** GenAI to support curiosity, critical thinking, reflection, and independent learning rather than simply accepting its responses or allowing it to replace your own thinking.

Topic: What Is GenAI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as recognizing patterns, understanding language, solving problems, making predictions, or supporting decisions. AI has been in development for decades, but recent advances in generative AI have made powerful AI tools widely accessible.

AI Technologies

AI encompasses a range of technologies, and the terms used to describe them are related but not interchangeable. The diagram below illustrates how some of these concepts fit together. The focus of this guide is on generative AI, particularly LLM-powered chatbots and their effective, responsible use in learning.

Generative AI

Generative AI (GenAI) refers to AI systems that can create new content in response to a prompt or other input. Depending on the system, that content may include text, images, audio, video, or computer code.

GenAI tools can help students brainstorm ideas, explore unfamiliar concepts, summarize information, practice skills, and receive feedback. However, their usefulness depends on how they are used. AI-generated content can be inaccurate, incomplete, biased, or misleading. A response that sounds confident and authoritative is not necessarily correct.

Large Language Models (LLMs)

Many conversational GenAI tools are powered by **large language models (LLMs)**. These models are trained on large collections of data to recognize patterns in language and generate text in response to prompts and conversational context.

LLMs can explain complex ideas, help organize information, generate examples, and assist with writing. However, they do not guarantee factual accuracy or understanding simply because their responses sound convincing. They can produce fabricated information, misrepresent sources, or overlook important context.

Students should treat AI-generated responses as material to evaluate, not as unquestionable authority. Verify important claims against reliable sources, consult course materials, and apply your own judgment.

GenAI Chatbots

A **chatbot** is an application that allows users to interact with a computer system through conversation, usually by typing or speaking. GenAI chatbots use generative AI to produce responses to users' questions, instructions, and other inputs.

Examples include ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, and Claude. These tools can support learning by helping students explore questions, compare explanations, work through problems, and practice communicating ideas.

A chatbot primarily operates through an interaction with the user: the user provides a prompt, the system generates a response, and the user decides what to do with it. Some chatbots also have access to web searches, files, or other tools, so the distinction is not simply whether a system can use external information.

AI Agents and Agentic AI

AI agents go beyond generating responses: they can take actions to accomplish goals. An AI agent uses AI to plan steps, access tools, and carry out tasks with some degree of independence. Depending on its permissions, it might search websites, retrieve files, run code, or interact with other software.

Agentic AI refers more broadly to AI systems designed to plan and act toward goals, sometimes coordinating multiple agents to complete tasks.

When AI Goes Wrong!

GenAI chatbots can produce inaccurate or fabricated information, known as *hallucinations*, and encourage *cognitive surrender* when users accept AI-generated responses without critical evaluation.

AI agents go beyond generating responses: they can use tools and take actions to accomplish goals. Depending on their permissions, they may introduce risks such as unintended actions, unauthorized access, or misuse of tools.

Agentic AI refers more broadly to AI systems designed to plan and act toward goals, sometimes coordinating multiple agents. As these systems become more autonomous, ensuring appropriate safeguards and human oversight becomes increasingly important.

Activity: Get to Know GenAI

This activity introduces you to a GenAI chatbot. You will create a story, change it through follow-up instructions, and observe how the chatbot responds. You will also explore how to communicate your goals clearly and examine what the chatbot can—and cannot—tell you about how it generates responses.



Objectives

After completing this activity, you will be able to:

1. Interact with GenAI to create and refine content.
2. Give clear, purposeful instructions to direct GenAI's responses.
3. Understand how to communicate effectively with GenAI tools.

Instructions: Create a Story

In this activity, you'll use a GenAI chatbot to create a short story and then revise it through a series of prompts. You'll experiment with how instructions affect the story's length, details, genre, tone, intended audience, and writing style. **Keep working in the same conversation, building on the existing story at each step rather than starting over.** This will help you explore how to communicate your goals clearly and guide the chatbot's responses.

1. **Open a GenAI tool:** Open a web-based tool such as [ChatGPT](#), [Google Gemini](#), or [Microsoft Copilot](#) in another browser window.
2. **Instruct the AI:** Submit an instruction to the AI explaining what you would like it to produce. For example, *"Write a short story about a lost dog."*
3. **Adjust the length:** Submit a follow-up prompt to change the story's length. For example, *"Limit the story to 300 words."*

4. **Change a detail:** Submit a follow-up prompt to change a character's name or another detail. For example, *"Change the dog's name to Bruno throughout the story."*
5. **Change the genre:** Ask the chatbot to transform the story into a different genre. For example, *"Rewrite the story as a science-fiction drama set on a distant planet."*
6. **Adjust the tone:** Ask the chatbot to change the story's tone or add a new element. For example, *"Make the story funnier and add a talking cat."*
7. **Change the audience:** Ask the chatbot to adapt the story for a different audience. For example, *"Rewrite the story for children ages 8–12"* or *"Rewrite it for adult readers."*
8. **Experiment with writing style:** Give the chatbot a creative challenge. For example, *"Rewrite the story as a Shakespearean play"* or *"Rewrite it as a playful rhyming poem with whimsical wordplay."*
9. **Evaluate and refine:** Review the latest version. Does it reflect your instructions? Submit additional prompts to refine the story until you are satisfied with the result. Notice which instructions produce the changes you intended and which may need clarification.

Condensed Prompt

You don't need to submit each instruction separately. You can also combine as many individual requirements into a single, detailed prompt to guide the chatbot toward the result you want.

Prompt: *Write a short story about a lost dog. Limit the story to 300 words and name the dog Bruno. Set the story on a distant planet and turn it into a science-fiction drama. Make the story funny by including a talking cat. Write it for children ages 8–12 as a Shakespearean play, using dialogue, humor, and imaginative language. After writing the story, review it to ensure you have followed all the instructions.*

Topic: Prompt Engineering

In the previous activity, you used a series of prompts to guide GenAI in writing a story. You changed the instructions to influence the tone, length, audience, and style of the response. This process is called **prompt engineering**: writing clear, specific instructions to help a GenAI chatbot produce more useful and relevant responses. You do not need to be a technical expert to write effective prompts. The key is to communicate what you want, provide relevant context, and explain how you would like the response presented.

Role, Context, Task, and Format (RCTF)

One approach to writing effective prompts is the **RCTF framework**: Role, Context, Task, and Format. These four elements help you organize your instructions and communicate your expectations. You do not need to include all four elements in every prompt. Use the framework when you need more control over a response or when your initial results are not meeting your needs.

RCTF Formula

- **Role:** Specify a perspective or area of expertise for the chatbot to adopt.
- **Context:** Provide background information, including your audience, purpose, or relevant circumstances.
- **Task:** Explain what you want the chatbot to do.
- **Format:** Specify how you want the response organized or presented.

RCTF Example and Breakdown

Prompt: *"You are a biology tutor. I am a first-year college student studying cell biology. Explain the difference between mitosis and meiosis, using everyday language and examples. Present the explanation in a comparison table and include three questions to test my understanding."*

Can you identify the four elements of RCTF?

- **Role:** *"You are a biology tutor."*
- **Context:** *"I am a first-year college student studying cell biology."*
- **Task:** *"Explain the difference between mitosis and meiosis, using everyday language and examples."*
- **Format:** *"Present the explanation in a comparison table and include three questions to test my understanding."*

Notice how each element helps guide the chatbot. The role establishes a teaching perspective, the context identifies the student's level, the task defines what to explain, and the format specifies how to organize the response.

Review the Chatbot's Response

Below is an example of a response ChatGPT might generate from the RCTF prompt.

<i>Chatbot response to the prompt</i>		
Feature	Mitosis	Meiosis
Purpose	Growth and tissue repair	Production of reproductive cells
Number of cell divisions	One	Two
Number of resulting cells	Two	Four
Genetic information	Generally identical to the original cell	Genetically different from one another
Chromosome number	Maintained	Halved

Remember

Effective prompting is an iterative process. If a chatbot's response is too complicated, too general, or missing important information, refine your prompt and try again.

Topic: From Prompts to Conversations

When you first use GenAI, you might approach it like a search engine: ask a question, get an answer, and move on. But conversational AI offers another possibility. You can ask follow-up questions, request clarification, explore alternative perspectives, and challenge an answer.

These interactions can help you understand difficult concepts and examine ideas from different angles. However, a longer conversation does not necessarily mean deeper learning. The value comes from how you engage with the responses: questioning claims, evaluating evidence, and connecting new information to what you already know.

Example: From Prompt to Conversation

Suppose you are studying the French Revolution and ask a GenAI chatbot to explain the root causes.

GenAI Response: *The French Revolution happened because many people in France were unhappy with how things were going. The king had too much power, and the government was spending more money than it had. Most people were poor, while a small group had special rights and didn't have to pay as many taxes. At the same time, new ideas were spreading about fairness and freedom. All of this created tension, and eventually, people decided to fight for change.*

Expand the Conversation

Follow-up prompts can help you examine an answer, explore related questions, and identify what you still need to learn. For example, you could:

Clarify or organize information:

- *“Can you organize the causes into political, economic, and social categories?”*
- *“Can you explain the relationship between France's financial crisis and public dissatisfaction?”*

Explore different perspectives:

- *“Which causes are debated most by historians?”*
- *“What are some different historical interpretations of the causes of the French Revolution?”*
- *“What would a historian who disagrees with this explanation argue?”*

Request examples or deeper explanations:

- *“Can you give me a specific historical example that illustrates one of these causes?”*
- *“Why was the unequal tax system so controversial?”*

- “What important details might be missing from this explanation?”

Investigate the evidence:

- “Which claims in your response should I verify?”
- “What reliable historical sources could I consult to check these claims?”
- “What evidence supports or challenges this explanation?”

Ask the chatbot to help you improve the conversation itself:

- “Which claims in your response should I verify?”
- “Can you suggest reliable sources that support or challenge this explanation?”

Remember: The goal is not simply to have a longer conversation, but to use the conversation to develop your own understanding.

Cognitive Surrender: When You Stop Questioning

One risk of using GenAI is *cognitive surrender*: accepting an AI-generated response without critically evaluating its accuracy, reasoning, or assumptions. For example, you might accept the chatbot's explanation of the French Revolution because it sounds convincing. You might even use it in an assignment without consulting your course materials or checking its claims. In doing so, you give up an opportunity to exercise your own judgment.

To avoid cognitive surrender:

- Question the response rather than automatically accepting it.
- Verify important claims using reliable sources and course materials.
- Look for missing information, assumptions, and alternative interpretations.
- Decide for yourself whether the explanation is convincing and well supported.

Remember: The chatbot can help you explore a topic, but you remain responsible for evaluating the information and deciding what to believe.

Summary

Prompting is just the beginning. Conversing with GenAI can help you explore ideas, clarify confusion, and develop your understanding—but only when you remain actively involved in the learning process. Use AI to support your thinking, not replace it.

Topic: Accuracy and Best Practices

GenAI chatbots can help you brainstorm, study, organize ideas, and explore unfamiliar topics. However, their responses are not always accurate, complete, or unbiased. A response can sound convincing without being supported by reliable evidence. Using GenAI responsibly means evaluating its responses rather than automatically accepting them. The following sections describe four important concerns and offer practical strategies for addressing them.

Accuracy and Hallucinations

GenAI chatbots can generate information that sounds plausible but is inaccurate or entirely fabricated. These errors are commonly called hallucinations. A chatbot might invent a statistic, misrepresent a research finding, or provide a source that does not exist. Even when individual statements are accurate, a response may omit important context or oversimplify a complex issue.

Example: A student asks whether remote work is more productive than working in an office. The chatbot claims that remote work always increases productivity. The student includes this claim in a paper without checking the research, which reveals a more complicated picture.

Best Practices

- Verify claims using credible sources including course materials and scholarly research.
- Check statistics, dates, quotations, and references against their original sources.
- Look for missing context, competing evidence, or unsupported conclusions.
- Treat chatbot responses as a starting point for investigation, not as authoritative evidence.

Bias and Perspective

GenAI responses can reflect biases, stereotypes, and gaps in the data used to develop AI models. Responses may also reflect limitations in the information available to the chatbot or in how a question is framed.

Example: A student asks a chatbot to identify influential leaders in technological innovation. The response emphasizes men from Western countries while overlooking significant contributions from women and people in other parts of the world.

Best Practices

- Consider who is represented and whose contributions or perspectives may be missing.
- Seek multiple perspectives when exploring historical, cultural, or social issues.
- Question assumptions and generalizations in AI-generated responses.
- Ask follow-up questions such as, "Whose perspective is missing?" or "What assumptions does this explanation make?"

Academic Integrity and Responsibility

Academic integrity means being honest and responsible in your academic work. It includes following assignment instructions, acknowledging sources, and demonstrating your own learning.

Using GenAI is not automatically academic misconduct. What is permitted depends on your instructor's expectations, assignment requirements, and institutional policies. Problems arise when students misrepresent AI-generated work as their own, fail to disclose AI use when required, or submit work they cannot explain or defend.

Example: A student asks a chatbot to write several sections of a research paper and makes only minor edits. The student submits the paper without the acknowledgment required by the instructor and cannot explain the reasoning behind several of its claims.

Best Practices

- Follow your instructor's guidelines for using GenAI in each assignment.
- Use chatbots to support your thinking and learning rather than replace them.
- Disclose or acknowledge AI use when required by your instructor or institution.
- Verify AI-generated information and sources before incorporating them into your work.
- Check applicable copyright and usage requirements before submitting AI-generated work.
- Make sure you understand and can explain the work you submit.

Privacy and Data Protection

When you interact with a GenAI chatbot, the information you provide may be collected, retained, or used in ways that depend on the provider, product, account type, and privacy settings. Do not assume that information entered into a chatbot is automatically private or confidential.

Example: A student uploads survey responses containing participants' names and email addresses to a chatbot for analysis. If the student lacks authorization to share this information, the upload could expose personal data and violate privacy requirements.

Best Practices

- Do not enter sensitive personal information, passwords, financial details, or confidential academic or research data unless you have explicit authorization and understand the applicable protections.
- Remove identifying information from documents and datasets before sharing them when appropriate.
- Review the tool's privacy settings and data-handling policies.
- Follow your institution's requirements for protecting personal, research, and confidential information.
- When in doubt, consult your instructor or institution before uploading data.

Topic: From Predictable to Excellent Results

GenAI can help you brainstorm, organize ideas, explain concepts, and improve your writing. But using GenAI does not automatically make your work original or your work excellent.

A chatbot can produce a fluent, well-organized response that appears thoughtful and complete. Yet the response may rely on familiar explanations, predictable ideas, and conventional approaches. It may answer the question without challenging assumptions, making unexpected connections, or offering an original perspective.

The difference between competent work and exceptional work often comes from what you contribute: your knowledge, curiosity, critical thinking, creativity, and willingness to explore ideas beyond the obvious.

AI Responses Can Be Predictable

Large language models (LLMs) which power many GenAI chatbots learn patterns from large amounts of data. When responding to a prompt, they generate text by predicting likely sequences of words based on those patterns and the context of the conversation.

This process allows chatbots to produce useful explanations, summarize complex information, and combine ideas in interesting ways. However, when asked a broad question, a chatbot may default to familiar explanations and widely represented perspectives rather than offer a distinctive or unexpected approach.

Consider what happens when many students use the same chatbot to answer the same assignment question. Their responses may share similar arguments, examples, organizational structures, and vocabulary. Even if the writing is polished, the results can become repetitive and lack individual perspective.

Your Thinking Makes the Difference

Your knowledge of a subject helps you recognize when an AI response is too general, overlooks an important detail, or misses an opportunity to explore a more interesting question.

This is where **domain knowledge** matters. The more you understand a topic, the better equipped you are to evaluate AI-generated ideas, recognize limitations, and identify possibilities the chatbot has not explored. Instead of accepting the first response, use the chatbot as a starting point for your own thinking.

For example, suppose you ask a chatbot to explain the causes of the French Revolution. The response may provide a conventional summary of economic inequality, political conflict, social divisions, and Enlightenment ideas. That may be a useful starting point, but **you** can take the inquiry further:

- **Challenge assumptions:** *"Does this explanation give too much weight to economic causes? What other interpretations deserve consideration?"*
- **Explore unexpected connections:** *"How might developments in communication, political culture, or public opinion have influenced the revolution?"*
- **Examine competing perspectives:** *"How do historians disagree about the relative importance of these causes?"*
- **Develop your own argument:** *"Based on these competing explanations, what questions could I investigate to develop a distinctive argument of my own?"*

These prompts do more than request additional information. They encourage you to question familiar explanations, investigate alternatives, and identify ideas worth exploring.

The First Shall not be the Last!

When using GenAI, resist the temptation to accept a response simply because it sounds polished or complete.

- **Question the obvious.** What assumptions does the response make? What might it have overlooked?
- **Explore alternatives.** Ask for competing explanations, unfamiliar perspectives, or approaches that challenge conventional thinking.
- **Make connections.** Consider how ideas from different sources, disciplines, or experiences might relate.
- **Apply your judgment.** Evaluate which ideas are useful, which need further investigation, and which you disagree with.
- **Develop your own perspective.** Use what you learn to construct arguments, interpretations, and solutions that reflect your own reasoning.

Caution! Asking a chatbot for something "more creative" or "more original" does not guarantee a genuinely original result. You must still judge the quality of the ideas and determine what, if anything, they contribute to your work.

Topic: Advanced Prompt Engineering

Once you understand the basics of prompt engineering and the RCTF framework, you can try additional techniques to guide GenAI responses more deliberately. These approaches can be useful for complex assignments, research, writing, coding, and analysis.

Advanced prompting can help you:

- Break complex tasks into manageable steps.
- Guide responses toward a particular format, style, or level of detail.
- Explore ideas through successive questions.
- Provide examples of the kind of response you want.
- Examine a topic from different perspectives.

Remember: A detailed prompt does not guarantee a correct or insightful response. You still need to evaluate the results and apply your own judgment.

Choose the Right Technique

Different techniques address different needs. You can use one technique or combine several, depending on your task.

<i>Choose the Right Prompting Technique</i>	
If you want to:	Try:
Break a complex task into manageable steps	Prompt chaining
Show the chatbot examples of the response you want	Few-shot prompting
Specify requirements such as length, audience, or format	Using specific constraints
Guide the response toward a particular role or perspective	Custom roles or personas
Combine several requirements in one prompt	Layered instructions

Prompt Chaining

Prompt chaining means breaking a complex task into a series of connected prompts. Each response provides a starting point for the next step, allowing you to develop an idea or complete a task progressively. This technique is useful when a single prompt would require too many steps or when you want to examine a topic before deciding how to approach it.

Example: You're preparing an essay on cultural rituals and symbolic meaning:

1. Summarize the source article below in three key points.
2. Explain how those ideas relate to rites of passage in different cultures.

3. Suggest two possible arguments I could investigate, noting what evidence would be needed to support each.
4. Help me evaluate which argument is most promising based on the sources I provide.

Each prompt builds on the previous response, helping you move from understanding the source material to developing your own argument.

Few-Shot Prompting

Few-shot prompting means providing a chatbot with a small number of examples before asking it to complete a similar task. The examples help communicate the format, style, or approach you want. This technique is useful when you need a response to follow a particular structure or when you want feedback that reflects a demonstrated analytical approach.

Example: You are studying how to analyze literary passages.

Prompt: *"I've provided two examples of literary analysis below. Examine how they use quotations, explain literary devices, and connect evidence to interpretation. Use the same approach to analyze the new poem, but develop an interpretation based on the poem itself rather than copying the examples."*

The examples give the chatbot a clearer sense of your expectations than general instructions alone.

Adding Specific Constraints

You can guide a chatbot's response by specifying requirements such as length, audience, tone, organization, or content. This approach is sometimes called zero-shot prompting because you provide instructions without supplying examples of the desired response. It is useful for tasks such as summarizing articles, creating outlines, explaining difficult concepts, or organizing information.

Example: You are struggling to understand an article containing unfamiliar terminology.

Prompt: *"Summarize the article below in approximately 150 words. Use plain language familiar to students at my grade level. Organize the summary into three short paragraphs and state the article's central argument in the first paragraph. Distinguish the author's conclusions from any limitations or qualifications discussed in the article."*

Specific constraints help the chatbot understand what you need and how the response should be organized.

Custom Roles or Personas

You can ask GenAI to respond from a particular role or perspective, such as a tutor, writing coach, historian, or debate coach. This can help direct the response toward a particular purpose, level of detail, or style.

Example: You want feedback on your academic writing.

Prompt: *“Act as an academic writing coach. Review the paragraph below and suggest ways to improve its clarity, organization, and use of evidence. Explain the reasons for each suggestion and identify one strength in the paragraph.”*

Assigning a role can help focus the response, but it does not give the chatbot genuine professional expertise or guarantee that its advice is correct.

Layered Instructions

A prompt can combine several instructions to guide a response more precisely. Building on the RCTF framework, you can add requirements about tone, evidence, limitations, or the kinds of feedback you want. This approach is useful when you have a clear goal and need the chatbot to address several requirements at once.

Example: You are preparing for a college-level debate about renewable energy policy and want to strengthen your argument.

Prompt: *“Act as a debate coach. Review the argument below for a college-level debate about renewable energy policy. Identify assumptions, evaluate the strength of the evidence, and point out potential counterarguments. Organize your feedback under three headings: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Questions to Consider. Do not rewrite the argument; help me identify where I need to strengthen my reasoning.”*

By combining a role, task, context, and specific requirements, you can guide the chatbot toward feedback that supports your own thinking rather than simply asking it to produce a finished response.

Topic: Self-Study Techniques

GenAI can support independent learning by helping you plan your studies, practice what you have learned, reflect on your understanding, and explore challenging concepts. With your instructor's approval, you can use GenAI to supplement course materials and strengthen your study habits. The key is to use GenAI to support your learning, not replace the effort required to learn. Here are five ways to put it to work.

Study Planning

Create a personalized study schedule and get suggestions for managing your time and priorities.

Example: A student with a busy work schedule asks GenAI to create a weekly study plan using their course calendar, upcoming deadlines, and available study time. The chatbot suggests when to review readings, complete assignments, practice problems, and take breaks. The student reviews the plan and adjusts it to fit their actual workload and priorities.

Why this works: A realistic study plan helps you organize your time, break large tasks into manageable steps, and establish consistent study habits. GenAI can help you develop a starting plan, but you must decide whether the schedule is practical and adjust it as your circumstances change.

Self-Assessment

Test your understanding of course material and identify topics that need further review.

Example: A student preparing for an exam provides their lecture notes to GenAI and asks it to create a practice quiz. After answering the questions without looking at their notes, the student reviews the explanations, checks any uncertain answers against course materials, and revisits concepts they have not yet mastered.

Why this works: Retrieving information from memory helps strengthen learning and reveals gaps in your understanding. Practice questions can help you identify what you know and what you need to review. However, AI-generated questions and answers can contain errors, so verify explanations against reliable course materials.

Reflection

Explain what you have learned in your own words, then use GenAI to help identify misunderstandings or gaps.

Example: After reading an assigned chapter, a student writes a summary of its main concepts without copying directly from the text. They ask GenAI to identify any important concepts they may have misunderstood or overlooked. The student compares the feedback with the chapter and revises their understanding as needed.

Why this works: Reflection helps you monitor your own learning, recognize misconceptions, and identify areas that need more attention. This process involves metacognition—thinking about your own thinking and evaluating how well you understand a subject. Writing your initial explanation before consulting GenAI helps you assess your own understanding rather than simply accepting the chatbot's account.

Reasoning and Logic

Examine your arguments by asking GenAI to challenge your reasoning, identify unsupported claims, and suggest counterarguments.

Example: A student preparing for a class debate shares their position on a topic and asks GenAI to act as a critical discussion partner. The chatbot identifies assumptions, questions the evidence, and suggests opposing viewpoints. The student evaluates these challenges and strengthens the argument where necessary.

Why this works: Examining different perspectives encourages you to question assumptions, evaluate evidence, and consider alternative explanations. GenAI can help you identify weaknesses you might have overlooked, but its critiques are not always correct or relevant. Evaluate each suggestion and use your own judgment to determine whether your argument needs revision.

Concept Mapping

Organize complex information into visual representations, such as concept maps, mind maps, outlines, or diagrams.

Example: A student studying a complex biological process asks GenAI to identify the major concepts and explain how they relate. The student uses this information to create a concept map showing the relationships among the concepts. They then compare the map with their course materials, correct any errors, and use it to explain the process in their own words.

Why this works: Concept mapping makes relationships among ideas more visible. It can help you organize information, recognize connections, and identify gaps in your understanding. Creating or revising the map yourself is an important part of the learning process; simply viewing an AI-generated diagram may not reveal whether you understand the relationships it depicts.

Topic: Accountability

Using GenAI in your studies comes with responsibilities. Your college or university, your instructors, and individual assignments may have different requirements for when and how you can use these tools. Some instructors encourage GenAI use for learning activities, while others restrict or prohibit it for particular assignments. Before using GenAI, make sure you understand the rules for your course and assignment. You are responsible for following those rules and for the work you submit.

Institutional Policies

Your college or university may have policies or guidance addressing GenAI use, academic integrity, and student conduct. These requirements may appear in the student handbook, academic honesty policy, code of conduct, or a dedicated AI-use policy.

What you should do: Find out where your institution publishes its guidance and review the relevant policies. They establish expectations that may apply across your courses, including requirements for responsible use, acknowledgment of AI assistance, and prohibited forms of academic misconduct. If you cannot find clear guidance, ask your instructor or consult the appropriate institutional office.

Instructor Expectations

Instructors may establish different expectations for GenAI use, depending on their courses, learning objectives, and teaching approaches. For example, one instructor might encourage you to use GenAI to brainstorm ideas or receive feedback on a draft. Another might prohibit its use on an assignment designed to assess your independent writing or problem-solving skills.

What you should do. Read your syllabus and course guidelines carefully. If you are unsure whether a particular use is permitted, ask your instructor before proceeding. Do not assume that permission in one course applies to another.

Assignment Requirements

Even when GenAI use is permitted in a course, individual assignments may have additional restrictions or requirements. An assignment might allow you to use GenAI for brainstorming but prohibit using it to write the submission. Another might permit AI-generated text but require you to acknowledge that assistance or explain how you used the tool. Some assignments may prohibit GenAI use entirely.

What you should do: Read the instructions for each assignment and follow its specific requirements. When an instruction is unclear, seek clarification rather than assuming a particular use is acceptable.

Academic Integrity

Using GenAI does not remove your responsibility for the work you submit. You are accountable for its accuracy, quality, and compliance with academic integrity requirements, regardless of whether you created it independently or used AI assistance.

What you should do:

- **Verify information.** Check factual claims, statistics, quotations, and references against reliable sources.
- **Acknowledge assistance.** Disclose or cite GenAI use when required by your instructor or institution, following their specified guidelines.
- **Demonstrate your learning.** Understand the ideas, reasoning, and conclusions in your work. You should be able to explain and defend your own contributions.
- **Evaluate the content.** Question unsupported claims, recognize potential bias, and correct errors rather than accepting AI-generated responses at face value.
- **Follow applicable rules.** Respect assignment instructions, institutional policies, and relevant requirements for sources and information use.

Handout: Accountability Checklist

Use this checklist to review your use of GenAI before submitting an assignment. It can help you confirm that your use of GenAI follows applicable policies, protects information, and supports your learning.

Policies and Expectations

- ☐ I have reviewed my institution's policies and guidance on academic integrity and GenAI.
- ☐ I have checked my instructor's expectations for GenAI use in this course.
- ☐ I have read the assignment instructions and confirmed which uses of GenAI are permitted.
- ☐ I have asked my instructor for clarification if I am unsure whether a particular use is allowed.

Privacy and Data Protection

- ☐ I have not entered confidential, sensitive, or personal information into a GenAI tool without appropriate authorization and an understanding of how that information may be handled.
- ☐ I have followed applicable institutional requirements for protecting personal, academic, and research information.

Accuracy and Critical Thinking

- ☐ I have checked important facts, statistics, quotations, and references against reliable sources.
- ☐ I have verified that cited sources exist and support the claims attributed to them.
- ☐ I have evaluated AI-generated responses for errors, unsupported claims, bias, and missing perspectives.
- ☐ I have questioned assumptions and used my own judgment rather than automatically accepting the chatbot's responses.
- ☐ I have revised or discarded AI-generated content that was inaccurate, misleading, irrelevant, or inconsistent with my goals.

Academic Integrity and Responsibility

- ☐ I have checked important facts, statistics, quotations, and references against reliable sources.
- ☐ I have verified that cited sources exist and support the claims attributed to them.
- ☐ I have evaluated AI-generated responses for errors, unsupported claims, bias, and missing perspectives.
- ☐ I have questioned assumptions and used my own judgment rather than automatically accepting the chatbot's responses.
- ☐ I have revised or discarded AI-generated content that was inaccurate, misleading, irrelevant, or inconsistent with my goals.

Resource: GenAI Tools and Support

The following websites provide access to widely used GenAI chatbots. Features and access requirements vary by product, account type, and subscription.

- [ChatGPT](#) — OpenAI's conversational AI assistant.
- [Claude](#) — Anthropic's conversational AI assistant.
- [Google Gemini](#) — Google's AI assistant.
- [Microsoft Copilot](#) — Microsoft's AI assistant.
- [Meta AI](#) — Meta's AI assistant.
- [Perplexity](#) — An AI-powered search and answer tool that provides sources for many responses.

Learn to Use GenAI

Official help centers provide product-specific instructions, explanations of features, troubleshooting guidance, and information about settings.

- [OpenAI Help Center](#) — Guides and support for ChatGPT.
- [Anthropic Help Center](#) — Guides and support for Claude.
- [Google Gemini Help](#) — Instructions and support for Gemini.
- [Microsoft Copilot Help and Learning](#) — Product guidance and learning resources for Microsoft Copilot.
- [Perplexity Help Center](#) — Guides and support for Perplexity.

Improve Your Prompting Skills

Effective prompting involves more than writing detailed instructions. It requires defining your goal, providing relevant context, evaluating responses, and refining your approach when necessary.

- [Learn Prompting](#) — Educational materials on prompting techniques, AI capabilities, and limitations.
- [OpenAI Prompt Engineering Guide](#) — A more technical guide to writing and refining prompts, with examples that can help you understand how instructions influence AI responses.

Explore AI Research and Developments

These resources provide information about AI research, capabilities, limitations, safety, and emerging developments. They offer useful perspectives, but research published by an AI company reflects that organization's work and perspective.

- [OpenAI Research](#) — Research and publications on AI capabilities, applications, and safety.
- [Anthropic Research](#) — Research on AI systems, model behavior, and safety.

- [Google DeepMind](#) — Research on AI systems, scientific applications, and emerging technologies.

Acknowledgements and License

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GenAI as a Development Partner

This guide was developed in collaboration with ChatGPT. At every stage, human oversight and authorship guided the final product. ChatGPT provided ideas and suggestions, but all decisions about content, structure, tone, and accuracy were made by the guide's developers.

Support and Contributions from ChatGPT

- **Outlining:** Suggested section structures, learning objectives, and activity flow.
- **Brainstorming:** Contributed examples, prompts, and ideas to help frame key themes.
- **Refining:** Offered feedback on tone, clarity, and structure to strengthen communication.
- **Editing:** Helped revise and rephrase content while preserving the author's original intent.
- **Formatting:** Recommended student-friendly formats like checklists, scenarios, and step-by-step instructions.

Updates, Versions, and Formats

The student guide is updated periodically. The latest version can be downloaded from the [USG OTLE website](#).

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