

The AI writing and editing checklist

A workflow template for anyone using AI to write under their own name. Seven tells to watch out for, five steps to build into practice. None of the tells are wrong in isolation. All are suspicious in combination.

Writers

Run this over your own drafts after using AI for research or structure. Strip the tells before the piece goes out under your name.

Communication team leaders

Build this into agency and in-house workflow. A shared edit standard protects voice and credibility across the team.

The principle

AI generated text cannot be reliably caught by detection software. Density and context give it away, and only a human reader who knows what the prose is supposed to sound like can spot it. Editing, not prompt engineering, is the skill that matters.

AI workflow

A workflow for using AI without losing your voice. Six steps to build into agency and in-house practice.

- ☐ Start with governance. Set out the rules of the road for the team. What are the go and no-go areas?
- ☐ AI for research, synthesis and reviewing material.
- ☐ Write content yourself, in your own voice.
- ☐ If you do use AI to draft, edit hard for the seven tells above.
- ☐ Read the piece aloud. AI writing loses its rhythm when spoken. Yours should not.
- ☐ Ask a colleague to read a paragraph cold. If they ask whether you used AI, keep editing.

Seven AI tells

Watch for these in any draft that has been through a model. None is wrong in isolation. In combination they give it away.

- 1 The em dash
 - . Count them. More than two or three per page is a signal. Swapping for an en dash or hyphen changes the character but doesn't fix the rhythm or density.
- 2 Contrastive negation
 - . Hunt for "not X, it is Y" constructions. "This is not a technical problem. It is a governance problem." Rewrite every one as a positive statement.
- 3 The rule of three
 - . Groups of three ideas in paragraph after paragraph. Break the cadence. Use two. Use four. Let the prose vary.
- 4 Formulaic transitions
 - . Moreover. Furthermore. In conclusion. Delete on sight. The sentence that follows usually carries the meaning without them.

- 5 Telltale vocabulary
 - . Delve. Underscore. Navigate. Tapestry. Realm. Pivotal. Landscape. The model's favoured register. Rewrite in your own words.
- 6 Summary paragraph
 - . If the draft ends by restating what it just said, cut the closing paragraph. Trust the reader to have followed the argument.
- 7 Flawless grammar
 - . Sentences all the same length. All properly balanced. Break the rhythm. Put friction back in. Let some sentences be ugly.

Stephen Waddington is founder of Wadds Inc., a professional advisory consultancy for communications agencies and in-house teams, and a PhD researcher at Leeds Business School. His book *AI for Public Relations: A How-To Guide for Implementation and Management*, co-edited with Ben Verinder, is set to be published by Kogan Page in May 2026.