

Ghost in the Machine: Using AI Ethically in College Work

Quick Guide for Responsible AI Use in College

What Does 'Ghost in the Machine' Mean?

- Used metaphorically for the idea of consciousness inside machines or AI systems.
- AI tools can feel like a 'ghost' helping us, but these tools lack true understanding or intention.

What AI Tools Can and Can't Do

- AI tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly generate or refine text based on patterns, not comprehension.
- These tools can help us brainstorm, summarize, or check grammar, but they don't *know* or *understand* us like a person would.
- Their outputs may be incorrect, generic, or lack context.
- AI reflects its training environment, which is powerful for information synthesis, but prone to inaccuracy, generic phrasing, and privileging majority-culture voices.
- It works best when *you* guide it with critical questions, add context, and cross-check sources.

Responsible Use vs. Cheating

✓ OK to do:

- Using AI to brainstorm ideas, outline arguments, or get feedback on grammar and clarity before writing your own paper
- Using AI to summarize or explain topics
- Asking AI to explain difficult concepts in simpler terms, generate practice questions, or summarize lecture notes to reinforce learning
- Using AI to help locate scholarly sources, create draft bibliographies, or summarize research papers (then verifying accuracy yourself)

✗ Not OK:

- Submitting AI-generated work as your own
- Using AI to bypass learning or assignments
- Using AI to complete take-home exams, quizzes, or problem sets that are meant to assess your individual understanding
- Fabricating or copying AI-invented references or relying solely on AI “facts” without fact-checking in academic work.

Quick Tips for Ethical AI Use

- Always check your instructor's AI policy
- Use AI to support your thinking, not replace it
- Slow down! Revise and personalize AI content before submitting
- Be transparent and cite AI use when necessary (MLA/APA now offer guidelines)

Final Thought

AI can assist you, but your voice, reasoning, and integrity matter most. Use AI with curiosity, not dependency. Stay in charge of your own learning.

6-Step Framework for Evaluating AI Use and Output

Consider Your Values

Ask: Does this use reflect your personal and professional values, such as originality, transparency, and sustainability, while still remaining open to innovation and experimentation?

Tip: Before using AI for a task, pause and run it through your values “filter.”

Does this use respect originality?

Am I being transparent with collaborators?

Is the output sustainable?

Is using AI for this task hurting anyone?

Considering these questions can help align your choices with your principles and prevent you from defaulting to convenience over values.

Check Accuracy

Ask: Does this align with verified sources (textbook, peer-reviewed article, trusted database)?

Tip: Always cross-check at least one key claim against a reliable source.

Look for Context

Ask: Is the answer too generic? Does it address the specific question, or just give a surface-level overview?

Tip: Push for more depth. For example, prompt AI to 'Give examples from non-Western contexts.'

Spot Bias

Ask: Whose voices are missing? Does this reflect only the majority culture, Western norms, or privileged perspectives?

Tip: Compare with alternative viewpoints and look for perspectives from underrepresented groups.

Evaluate Usefulness

Ask: Does this actually help me learn, or am I just copying text?

Tip: Reframe the output in your own words. If you can't, it means you don't fully understand it yet.

Use Human Judgment

Ask: What's my interpretation? How does this connect to my knowledge or lived experience?

Tip: Treat AI like a study partner, not an authority. You are the thinker; AI is just a tool.

Don't just accept what AI gives you. Interrogate it.

Use it to spark ideas, then layer in your own analysis, context, and critical thinking.