University of Basel

Vice President for Education

Guidelines «Citing AI Tools»
How to use AI-tools in university studies

This document provides guidance on the use of generative AI tools in university studies, with a special focus on academic writing. Teaching staff can adapt these guidelines at any time, particularly as required by their discipline and its citing conventions.

The newest version of these guidelines is available on the internet page AI in learning and teaching.

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1. Principles

Background

Recent years have led to the development of “generative AI tools”: computer programs based on artificial intelligence (AI) that produce text, images, videos or code from user input.

The quality of these tools has improved significantly since about 2022, as seen in the examples of OpenAI’s ChatGPT (text generation) and Dall-E (image generation) or Midjourney (image generation).

AI-supported generative technology, such as chatbots or image and multimedia generation programs, are now capable of producing academically relevant output. New tools are constantly being developed and released for increasingly specialized tasks that are central to learning and teaching (e.g. summaries, data analysis, visualizations, etc.).

The results of these tools are often surprisingly good. Nonetheless, these tools also have notable weaknesses: in particular, they frequently make factual errors and freely invent facts, including bibliographical references. They are also often problematic in terms of copyright and data protection.

Is the use of AI-based tools allowed during one’s studies?

As a general rule, the University of Basel does not prohibit the use of AI-based tools. Students should learn how to handle these tools sensibly and responsibly. This involves an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, of academic integrity and legal parameters.

Academic writing skills will continue to be essential: comprehensive subject knowledge, familiarity with academic methods, and writing skills are needed in order to be able to critically evaluate and adapt the output of AI tools.

Under what conditions?

1. AI tools must always be cited, just like other tools and sources. Student papers without complete attribution of sources and tools may be seen as attempted plagiarism or cheating.

2. The products of generative AI tools are not scientifically reliable sources. They should rather be treated as the result of a simple internet search. Even if the source is cited properly, it is still the responsibility of the author(s) to ensure the relevance and accuracy of the AI output.

3. Student assignments and examinations must always be the independent work of the students themselves. For this reason, AI-supported tools may only be used in a supporting role for any work that is submitted for credit. Students must retain a controlling role, in particular when AI-based tools are used to create content outlines and text structures, which represent a significant adoption of ideas. This is precisely where researchers at an early stage of their career must demonstrate their ability to use these tools critically. In an academic context, being able to take full responsibility for one's own written work remains the goal. The same applies to other products submitted for credit, including images, diagrams, bibliographies, etc.

Basic principles of citation

A precise citation is always required when AI-generated elements are incorporated into a paper or other work submitted for credit. Digital tools which do not have a specific generative function, such as software to check spelling or grammar, online dictionaries, library catalogs, etc. do not need to be cited. Lecturers and instructors decide upon the exact form and content of citations.

The Modern Language Association of America has established the following three rules (MLA 2023; the American Psychological Association has similar recommendations, cf. McAdoo 2024). Students should:

1. *"cite a generative AI tool whenever [they] paraphrase, quote, or incorporate into [their] own work any content (whether text, image, data, or other) that was created by it"*

   This refers to the transfer of content elements generated by AI tools, be it in their original state or after modification. Content elements include ideas, arguments, interpretations (including summaries), evaluations, text structures, code and images (including diagrams, visualizations, etc.). In such cases, a reference to the tool should be inserted at or near the corresponding passage by way of a parenthesis, a footnote or endnote, or a caption (cf. table below, points 2, 3 and 5).

2. *"acknowledge all functional uses of the tool (like editing [their] prose or translating words) in a note, your text, or another suitable location"*

   This is about revising content created by the students themselves with the help of AI-based tools: for example, rephrasing, translating, adapting and improving images or optimizing code. In such cases, a general note about the tool and how it was used, mentioned at the beginning or end of the assignment, is usually sufficient (cf. table below, points 1 and 4)

3. *"take care to vet the secondary sources it cites"*

   As indicated above, AI tools often freely invent sources.

2. Citing AI Tools in practice

When writing a paper, what should I pay attention to in order to properly document my use of AI tools?

During the research and writing phase for a student's paper, it is advisable to document the interactions with generative AI in the form of a research notebook/research log, as exemplified in the table below (cf. Sato 2023). Besides, it is good practice to save the conversation (user inputs and AI outputs) outside of the tool itself on one's computer since many tools, even with a personal account, do not save every information – in particular, exact times are often missing. With this kind of documentation, students can make their working process traceable upon request, for example if instructors have doubts about the accuracy and completeness of the references to the AI tools used within a student's work.

	AI-based tool	Type of use	Affected parts of the work	Date	Remarks
1	DeepL Translator	Translation of text passages	Entire paper	01.06.2025-04.06.2025	
2	ChatGPT (OpenAI)	Creation of text suggestions, marked in text and/or footnotes	Chapter 1, p. 3, section 2	02.06.2025	
3	ChatGPT (OpenAI)	I asked ChatGPT about the paper topic and compared its results with my own research	Chapter 2, pp. 5-7, cf. transcript in Appendix II	03.06.2025	
4	ChatGPT (OpenAI)	Rephrasing of the introduction to chapter 3	Chapter 3, p. 12, first paragraph	04.06.2025	
5	Dream (Wombo)	Creation of visualizations	Figure 2, p. 7	04.06.2025	Image 2, p. 7: idea borrowed from Dream, then heavily modified
…	…	…	…		…

Suggestions for correct referencing

A variety of different citation models can currently be found. The rules of the Modern Language Association of America may serve as a helpful model. We will use them here. When citing AI-based tools, the following elements must be included:

- **Title:** for text, image, and multimedia generation tools, the prompt (i.e. user input) serves as the title. For particularly long prompts, cite only the beginning of the prompt.
- **Name and version of the tool**
- **Publisher** (company, organization or person who provided or programmed the tool)
- **Date** of content generation
- **Location** (address / URL of the tool)

Here are some exemplary suggestions for in-text citations:

Examples for in-text citations

Example 1. Verbatim citation of the text

Geology can be defined as the science that “deals with the Earth’s physical structure” (“How to define geology?”, ChatGPT-5, 22.08.2025).

Example 2. Paraphrase of the text

As a geologist, Martina Musterfrau studies the physical structure of the Earth (cf. “How to define geology?”, ChatGPT-5, 22.08.2025).

Example 3. Translation

Samuel Beckett translated Rimbaud’s “Bateau ivre” as “Drunken Boat” (Beckett 1976). It could also be translated as “The Drunken Ship” (DeepL, 23 March 2023).

Example 4. Image

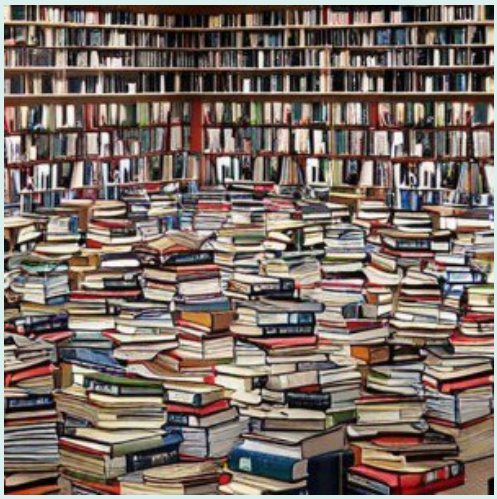

Image 1. “An ocean of books”, image generated by the author with Stable Diffusion, 28.03.2023

Example 5. Text structure

This paper on the Cold War between 1947 and 1989 identifies three particularly important features of this period: 1. the ideological conflict between super-powers, 2. proxy wars in the Third World and finally 3. the arms race, especially in the field of nuclear deterrence (based on an output by Claude Opus 4.1, 22.08.2025).

At the end of their work, students should append a list of tools or aids to transparently disclose their use of AI tools.

Tools and literature

Tools

1. ChatGPT-5, OpenAI: https://chatgpt.com
   Assistance for definitions and language support

2. Claude, version Opus 4.1, Anthropic: https://claude.ai
   Assistance to create the overall text structure

3. Consensus, version June 2025: https://consensus.app/
   Literature research

4. DeepL Write, Deepl SE: https://www.deepl.com/en/write
   Reformulation of text passages

5. DeepL Translate, Deepl SE: https://www.deepl.com/en/translator
   Translation of text passages

6. Stable Diffusion, Stability AI: https://stablediffusionweb.com
   Image generation

Literature

Beckett, Samuel (1976). Drunken Boat. A Translation of Arthur Rimbaud's Poem "Le Bateau ivre." Reading: Whiteknights Press.

References

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- Limburg, Anika, Peter Salden, Margret Mundorf, and Doris Weßels. "Plagiarismus in Zeiten Künstlicher Intelligenz." *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung* 17, no. 3 (October 31, 2022): 91–106. https://doi.org/10.3217/zfhe-17-03/06.
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