Guidance for Doctoral Researchers on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

University of Westminster Graduate School November 2025

The Graduate School provides the guidance below for doctoral researchers on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). It should be read in conjunction with the Guidelines for Using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Academic Research (2025) and the University of Westminster's Policy in Relation to the Safe Use of Generative AI (2024).

This guidance is subject to amendment, revision, or replacement to reflect developments in Generative AI. Doctoral Researchers are required to adhere to the latest published version.

This guidance will help you navigate the opportunities and responsibilities that come with using AI tools in your university studies. By the end of reading this document, you will understand better how to use AI ethically and effectively to enhance your learning while maintaining academic integrity.

1. What is Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)?

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) creates new content through prompts such as text, images, video and code. Examples of GenAI include ChatGPT for text and DALL-E for images. Some GenAI is standalone (e.g. ChatGPT) while some is integrated into software such as Microsoft Office or Google Apps.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools generate new content, analysis, or solutions based on your prompts. In your academic work, you may encounter:

Text Generation

- ChatGPT, Claude, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot
- Writing assistants like Grammarly and QuillBot

Creative Tools

- Image generators (DALL·E, Midjourney, Adobe Firefly)
- Music and audio creation tools
- Video editing with AI features

Research and Analysis

- Translation tools (DeepL, Google Translate, YouDao)
- Data analysis and visualisation tools
- Citation and reference managers with AI features

Technical Applications

- Code generation and debugging tools (GitHub Copilot, CodeWhisperer)
- Mathematical problem solvers
- Design and modelling software with AI capabilities

University of Westminster doctoral researchers can access GenAI, including Adobe suite, Microsoft Copilot and GrammarlyGO. Many other GenAI tools are available publicly. While GenAI tools offer benefits, they also pose risks.

2. Issues and Risks of Using GenAI for the Doctoral Researcher

As a doctoral researcher, you must differentiate between the exploratory use of generative AI to enhance understanding and the use of generative AI for producing content for your doctoral research, including your assessments (i.e. Annual Progress Reviews (APR), Thesis, Viva Voce examination and research outputs). This is essential for maintaining the academic integrity of your research.

Currently, GenAI systems pose limitations relating to trust and accuracy. They may generate false information confidently, so there is a need for the user to verify the content against reliable sources. They also cannot think critically, assess sources or provide nuanced interpretations as a human researcher could.

GenAI systems also pose significant risks around copyright, intellectual property, and plagiarism of your research. As a doctoral researcher, you should not upload any writing to be used for your APRs thesis, or future publications into publicly accessible or commercial generative AI platforms as doing so may result in the system owning that work, reusing the work in training GenAI models and therefore becoming reused by others.

GenAI systems also pose a risk to data protection and confidentiality of your research data. You should not upload any confidential or sensitive information, such as unpublished research, personal details, or data marked as private into publicly accessible or commercial generative AI platforms. Once shared, this data would be treated as public and may be stored, accessed, or reused. Specialist AI tools that protect privacy may exist but will require careful research and permissions from the University.

GenAI systems further present ethical concerns such as inherent biases in training data, which reinforces stereotypes, as well as structural concerns including sustainability, resource demands, unequal access, and lack of accountability for mistakes. Integrating AI into daily life as a researcher demands ongoing scrutiny and caution, alongside ethical and responsible use.

3. Using Generative AI in your Doctoral Studies

The University of Westminster is committed to upholding responsible research practices, and we have policies and procedures in place which outline our commitment to high research integrity and accountability in a positive research environment. This also applies to the use of Generative AI.

While Generative AI (Gen AI) tools can be useful for some aspects of your studies, doctoral research will always require your own original and distinctive input and critical thinking and analysis. Any assessment submitted by a doctoral researcher must be their own work and one of the purposes of the final Viva Voce examination is to confirm that the thesis is genuinely the work of the doctoral researcher.

3.1 Acceptable Uses of Gen AI

There are some possible legitimate uses of GenAI for your doctoral studies. These can include:

- Assisting with grammar and spelling checks.
- Using Generative AI to identify keywords for a search.
- Using translation tools to understand academic texts.
- Practice academic writing with AI feedback
- Study support to help understand complex concepts or advise on study strategies such as time management.
- Specific AI-Assistive software use identified in the Student Support Plan agreed between doctoral researcher, Disability Learning Support and Supervisor

In drafting questions or prompts to GenAI, with some of the acceptable uses above in mind, the university has published a prompt guide for BA and MA students that you may find helpful. You can access the guide via this page.

We recommend that you discuss GenAI with your supervisors to help clarify acceptable approaches for doctoral research and how it relates to your research design. Throughout your doctoral studies, if you are unsure if an intended use of GenAI is appropriate and legitimate for your doctoral studies, you should speak to your supervisor beforehand. You should record details of your discussion and agreement on your Gen AI use for your doctoral research in your supervision meeting notes on the VRE.

Doctoral researchers can also develop their research skills and writing confidence through engagement with the Doctoral Researcher Development Programme (DRDP) and support services such as the Academic Engagement LIbrarians and Learning Development Team

3.2 Unacceptable Uses That Constitute Academic Misconduct

According to the University of Westminster:

"*Academic misconduct is where a student [doctoral researcher] gains, or seeks, attempts or intends to gain, advantage in relation to assessment, either for themself or for another person, by unfair or improper means"*

The University of Westminster distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate uses of GenAI by doctoral researchers. At the University of Westminster, the following is NOT permitted:

- Producing an AI-generated output for your drafts, Annual Progress Reviews (APR), Thesis or Viva Voce and passing it as your own work.
- Submitting a draft or other written output of your work to a GenAI tool and requesting the system to rephrase it in proper English or restructure it.
- To include outputs from GenAI systems (such as ChatGPT) within your doctoral research without disclosure.

Inappropriate use of GenAI (as highlighted above) risks contravening the principles of academic integrity and will be deemed as academic misconduct following the procedures set out in the Student Research Misconduct Regulations.

Even where GenAI outputs are reworded into the doctoral researcher's own words, this would still be considered poor practice. The information may be superficial, incomplete or inaccurate, risking a poor outcome in the Viva Voce (for APR 2 and final examination).

As highlighted in section 2, caution must also be taken in what content and data is submitted into publicly accessible or commercial generative AI platforms as this risks contravening the principles of data protection and research integrity.

University of Westminster provides institutional access to GrammarlyGO and Microsoft CoPilot with commercial data protection (using your University account).

4. How to acknowledge the use of GenAI tools

In cases when GenAI use was deemed necessary by the supervisory team, a declaration should be added to the thesis:

- Name and version of GenAI
- A brief description of how this GenAI was used
- Date(s) the outputs were generated
- Confirmation that this use was approved by your supervisory team

Where it is deemed appropriate to include a GenAI output in your doctoral work, the GenAI technology or software must always be attributed, both at the appropriate point in the text and in the bibliography at the end of the piece of work, using the same referencing style that you have used throughout your thesis.

For greater reproducibility and precision, include the AI model, subscription level and engine, as well as the full date of use. Treat the GenAI as personal correspondence in citations.

Example (Harvard style):
In-text citation: “This content was generated using ChatGPT-4o mini (Plus), accessed 2 May 2025 (OpenAI, 2025).”
Reference list: OpenAI. 2025. ChatGPT-4o mini (Plus) response to [Your Name], 2 May 2025. OpenAI.

For different referencing styles, please check Citethemright.

With any assessment or thesis submission, the doctoral researcher should complete a declaration that they are submitting their own work and have complied with the University's regulation on use of GenAI.

5. In summary

Using GenAI to generate content for your doctoral research without agreement and disclosure is unethical and violates academic and research integrity. **Doing this is academic misconduct.**

As a doctoral researcher, you are developing your expertise and creating an original contribution to knowledge. While GenAI can support certain areas of study, it cannot do the learning for you. It is important that you have ownership over your doctoral research and the knowledge developed. Importantly, your doctoral assessments and research outputs must be your own original work. To do this, give yourself time for critical thinking, problem solving, writing and developing.