

For students

Guidelines for using GenAI tools in Learning and Assessment

This document was developed by the Stellenbosch University Faculty of Science Working Group on GenAI in Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

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Further guidance

This document gives you background and basic guidelines. For further guidance please use these resources:

- Talk to your lecturers.
- Talk to the librarian responsible for your programme. Find their contact details here: <https://libguides.sun.ac.za/>
- Library guide on plagiarism: <https://libguides.sun.ac.za/c.php?g=742962&p=5316900>
- Library guide on AI: <https://libguides.sun.ac.za/AI>

1. Introduction

The rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is reshaping the landscape of higher education. Within science, where analytical thinking, problem-solving, experimentation, and innovation are central to learning, these technologies present both extraordinary opportunities and significant challenges in terms of ethical use, academic integrity, and pedagogical value [1].

Stellenbosch University (SU) published in 2024 a Position Statement on the Ethical Use of Artificial (AI) Intelligence in Research and Teaching-Learning-Assessment [2]. The Position Statement is aligned with SU's Plagiarism Policy [3] and puts forward a set of principles for staff and students regarding the use of AI in research and teaching & learning activities, underlining the importance of academic integrity.

This document provides a summary of the AI Position Statement along with practical examples illustrating good vs bad use of GenAI tools, such as ChatGPT and Copilot. The list of examples given in Sec. 6 is meant to guide the use of GenAI tools for generating text, code, summaries, or using AI for brainstorming or planning academic tasks.



2. Background

- GenAI tools cannot and should not be prohibited. As students in STEM, you should learn to use these tools responsibly and critically.
- Ethical use of GenAI tools should not be penalised. These tools are not bad when used responsibly and ethically. What can and should be penalised is non-ethical and non-disclosed use of GenAI tools or the excessive and non-critical use of these tools in a given assessment.
- Considerations about what constitutes permissible use of GenAI tools and what action to take when non-permissible use is suspected rest ultimately on SU's Plagiarism Policy and the principles set out in that document.
- Different environments and lecturers may have different views about the extent to which GenAI can or should be used. It is your responsibility to find out what constitutes permissible use of GenAI tools in each of your courses.

3. Definition of terms

From SU's Plagiarism Policy [3]:

Plagiarism: The use of the ideas or material of others without acknowledgement, or the re-use of one's own previously evaluated or published material without acknowledgement (self-plagiarism).

Self-plagiarism: The re-use of one's own previously evaluated or published material without acknowledgement or indication thereof.

From SU's Position Statement [2]:

AI tools: Refers to software, libraries, packages or apps based on AI systems that deploy specific applications of some of these systems.

Example: ChatGPT is an GenAI tool based on large language models designed to generate text.

GenAI systems: Systems capable of generating text, images, videos, and other output by extrapolating from their training data.

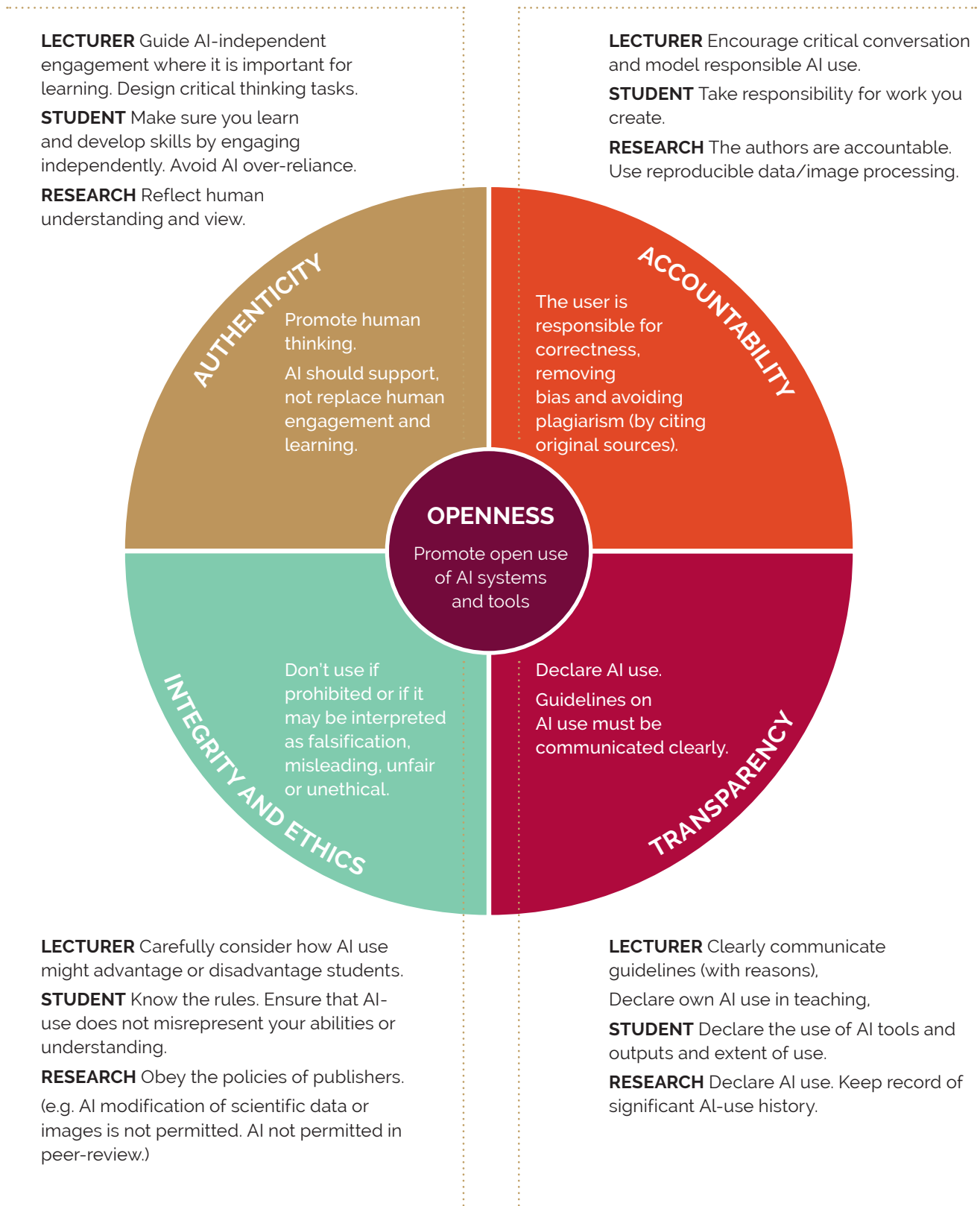
Example: Applications built on such systems include ChatGPT, Copilot, and Midjourney.

AI-giarism: AI-enabled plagiarism.

4. Basic guidelines

SU's Position Statement on the use of AI [2], as related to assessments, is based on a few basic principles, illustrated in Fig. 1:

FIG. 1



1. Openness: Promote openness in the use of GenAI systems and tools in research processes, teaching, assessments, and sharing of data, code and methodologies to facilitate reproducibility, collaboration and scrutiny.

2. Transparency: The use of GenAI tools should be declared as much as possible.

- **Students:** Clearly and honestly declare the use of GenAI tools, their outputs, as well as the extent of their use. This can be added at the end of an assessment as a section 'Declaration on the use of AI tools'.
- **Research/postgraduates:** Declare GenAI use in all output. If AI-use has substantially contributed to the research (e.g. in brainstorming, methodology or analysis) detailed records of the prompt history should be downloaded and saved as research data.

3. Authenticity: Promote human-centered research, critical thinking, and verification of AI-generated outputs or content. The use of GenAI should support human learning and engagement, not replace it.

- **Students:** Make sure GenAI use does not replace or limit your learning and engagement with academic tasks. Avoid over-reliance on GenAI tools that will limit your preparedness for situations where you cannot use it (e.g. exams).
- **Research/postgraduates:** Make sure GenAI use does not limit the depth of your engagement and understanding in research. Ensure that your work reflects your own understanding, view, style and voice.

4. Accountability: Human authors remain fully accountable for what they create; they are responsible for correctness, for avoiding bias, and for avoiding plagiarism by citing original sources. GenAI cannot be credited as author.

- **Students:** Use GenAI tools ethically and responsibly by:
 - » declaring GenAI use,
 - » checking all facts against reliable resources, citing original sources where necessary,
 - » evaluating all GenAI output critically for correctness and relevance,
 - » checking for bias or preconceptions and mitigating those.

Following the SU Plagiarism Policy, students must be able to provide evidence, if challenged, of their own understanding and of the process or methodology followed to reach an answer.

- **Research/Postgraduates:** Take full responsibility for your work. Cite original and relevant sources (that you have read). Ensure that the processing of data and evidential images is done by reproducible and explainable processes (which means GenAI tools cannot be used for this purpose).

5. Integrity and ethical use:

Do not use GenAI tools if

- » they are prohibited or break professional boundaries or academic integrity.
- » their output may be interpreted as falsification, may mislead or disadvantage people, or may be unethical in any way.
- » they require uploading sensitive material, confidential information or protected intellectual property.
- **Students:** Know and obey institutional rules and prohibition of GenAI use in particular situations. Remain cautious of misusing AI-generated output, which may result in misrepresenting your own abilities.
- **Research/Postgraduates:** Know and obey the policies of publishers. For example GenAI generation or modification of scientific data or evidential images is usually not permitted, as processing of scientific data must be reproducible and explainable. GenAI use is usually not permitted when peer-reviewing unpublished papers.

5. When to declare

From SU's Position Statement on the use of AI [2]:

The default position is to declare GenAI tools when they are used. That said, it is acknowledged that declaring the use of some forms of AI tools is not always essential. In this respect, the Position Statement defines two categories:

WEAK USE:

Use of Natural Language Processing (NLP)-based AI tools to assist in writing or correcting text or computer code. The tools can be generative, but they are not used to generate a substantial part of the relevant work or computer code. One example is Grammarly which assists a person in improving text that is already written. Another is Copilot which assists a person in writing and improving computer code. AI tools falling in this category do not necessarily need to be declared, although declaration is recommended.

EXAMPLES:

Use GenAI to **assist** your work.

- Use ChatGPT to correct/improve your writing.
- Use ChatGPT/Copilot to correct or generate bits of code.
- Need not be declared if not extensive
- Declaration of use is suggested.

vs.

STRONG USE:

Use of GenAI tools to create novel content such as text, images, music, or computer code, where users have little to no input. One example is the use of ChatGPT to generate large pieces of text, summaries of works or reviews. The use of AI tools falling in this category should be fully disclosed, including the purpose for which it was used.

EXAMPLES:

Use GenAI to **create/generate** content.

- Use GenAI to generate text, images, sound bits, code.
- User/student has little to no input in the generated content.
- Must be declared.
- Counts as plagiarism/AI-giarism if not declared.
- Even if declared, can be considered bad academic practice if used extensively.



The distinction between weak and strong use is not clear-cut. When in doubt, treat the use as a strong use to be declared. See the examples in the next section.

A declaration of AI use does not absolve students from the responsibility of ensuring the accuracy and validity of the work produced.

Example of AI declaration

Portions of this essay/report/assignment were generated with AI assistance from [ChatGPT/Copilot/DeepSeek/list tools here]. This/these tool/s was/were used for [list parts of the work where AI was used and explain how it was used]. All AI-generated content has been fact-checked and revised. The final submission reflects my own understanding.

6. Examples of usage

6.1. Scenarios related to text generation

	Scenario	Plagiarism or AI-giarism?	Why?
1	A student asks ChatGPT to write an essay or report and submits it unchanged or with limited changes.	Yes	AI-generated content is not original work. There is a lack of transparency (the use of GenAI is not disclosed) and accountability (the work submitted is not the student's own).
2	A student asks ChatGPT to write parts of an essay or report, reworks these parts on their own, and submits the essay and report with a declaration at the end stating that AI was used in the development of the work.	No	AI-generated content was used but in the context of work authored by the student. If challenged, the student must be able to explain which part of the essay or report is original and which part was inspired or influenced by AI-generated content.
3	A student asks ChatGPT to summarise a journal article and submits the summary as their own.	Yes	This is still copying an AI-generated interpretation without citing it. The work submitted is not the student's own work.
4	A student uses ChatGPT for grammar and language suggestions.	No	This is a weak use of GenAI that need not be declared, although students should feel free to declare it.
5	A student generates ideas with the help of GenAI for an essay or report, and then writes the essay themselves, citing proper sources.	No	Using GenAI for planning and brainstorming is allowed. It is good practice to declare that use at the end of the work submitted.



Important: The amount of changes that need to be made to AI-generated content in order for that content to qualify as being original depends on the nature of the work and the changes made. This should be considered in the context of SU's Plagiarism Policy. It is not an issue related specifically to the use of GenAI.

6.2. Scenarios related to code generation and programming

	Scenario	Plagiarism or AI-giarism?	Why?
1	A student copies AI-generated code into their project without attribution.	Yes	Just like text, code requires proper citation. AI-generated code is not original work. There is a lack of transparency (the use of GenAI is not disclosed) and accountability (the work submitted is not the student's own).
2	A student uses ChatGPT or Copilot as part of a coding environment to develop a piece of code or program, prompting the AI for help and suggestions on specific parts of the code.	No	This is similar to the Scenario 2 above for text: here code is generated using GenAI and then incorporated into a larger code developed by the student. The use of GenAI should be declared in the submission. If challenged, the student must be able to explain which part of the code or program is original and which part was inspired or influenced by AI-generated content.
3	A student uses ChatGPT or Copilot to debug a program.	No	This is a weak use of GenAI similar to a grammar tool. The use of GenAI can be declared, but this is not absolutely necessary.
4	A student uses ChatGPT or Copilot to obtain the first version of a program that is then refined with or without further help from the GenAI tool used.	No	This is similar to planning or brainstorming. The use of GenAI here is permitted as long as the final code submitted has been reworked enough from the original AI-generated code and that the use of GenAI is declared.

SUMMARY

- GenAI can help but misusing it leads to plagiarism or AI-giarism. The line between permissible use and AI-giarism is not exact - it is determined ultimately by being responsible and accountable for the work submitted, following SU's Plagiarism Policy.
- GenAI content must be declared. Be as open and specific as possible - the more open the better. Use the example of GenAI declaration provided in Section 5.
- AI should assist learning, not replace it.
- Always check AI-generated content, facts, and references.

8. Sources

References

1. Prof Hafizah Chenia, 2025, Community of Practice document
2. [SU's Position Statement](#) Ethical use of Artificial Intelligence in Research and Teaching-Learning-Assessment 2024
3. [SU Policy on Plagiarism 2016](#)
4. [Interim SU guidelines on allowable AI use and academic integrity 2023](#)
5. Prof Francois Smit, 2025, Presentation on plagiarism and the use of AI tools.

Repositories of useful resources

[Library guide on Plagiarism](#)

[Library guide on Academic Integrity and AI](#)

