

Graduate Student AI Use Decision Tree

This guide based on guidance from The Ontario Council on Graduate Studies, York University, The University of Toronto, Western University, Trent University, the University of Guelph, Queen's University, the University of Victoria, and with assistance from Gemini 2.5-Pro and Claude Sonnet 4 Reasoning AI models.

Start Here

Supervisor Consultation

Q1: Have you discussed the intended use of a specific AI tool for this specific task with your supervisor and received their explicit approval?

YES: Go to Question 2

NO: STOP. Do not use the AI tool. The first and most critical step is to have an open conversation with your supervisory team.

Policy check

Q2: Have you checked whether the university and department / faculty policies explicitly permit the use of AI for this type of task? (e.g., coursework, research, data analysis, thesis writing).

YES: Go to Question 3

NO/DON'T KNOW: STOP. Do not use the AI tool. The first step is to have an open conversation with your supervisory team about your planned AI use and also consult senate bylaws and policies.

Task specific check: Is this an appropriate use of AI

Q3: Which of the following activities best describe what you plan to do with the AI tool(s)

STOP: Generally inappropriate

- Generating substantive sections of text, such as your literature review, analysis, or conclusion and submitting them as your own
- Generating core ideas, arguments, or hypotheses without your own intellectual contribution
- Submitting AI-generated work as your own for publication
- Using AI when explicitly prohibited
- In a core skill assessment without disclosure
- Submitting sensitive research, private, or personal data to a public AI tool
- Submitting copyright materials to public AI tools
- Using AI for deception
- Any use that violates academic integrity / student code of conduct or other university policies

Proceed with caution: Use with high level of caution, care, and verification **Go to Question 4**

- Recording and transcribing interviews with consent
- Writing a grant or REB application
- Core argument development/ refinement
- Using AI as a search engine
- Paraphrasing
- Debugging or optimising code
- Translation assistance
- Critical evaluation of sources
- Methodology design
- Data analysis and interpretation with verification
- Conducting peer review
- Generating synthetic data
- Coding or thematic analysis of qualitative data

Data Security & Privacy Check

Q4: Will you be inputting any of the following into the AI tool:

- Unpublished research data, concepts, or results?
- Confidential or sensitive data from human participants?
- Copyrighted or licensed material?
- Personal information?

NO: The information is public or your own general ideas. **Go to Question 5**

YES: STOP. Do not use public AI tools. Inputting such information can breach confidentiality agreements, violate privacy laws, and compromise your intellectual property, as the data may be stored and used by the AI provider. Check if the university provides/ recommends a secure, licensed AI tool for this purpose that guarantees privacy. If not, you cannot use an AI tool for this task.

Generally acceptable (with disclosure) Go to Question 4

- Brainstorming ideas or refining research questions
- Summarizing literature or identifying themes as a starting point for exploration
- Improving the clarity of your writing / seeking feedback
- Checking grammar and style
- Generating code for data analysis or simulations
- Formatting and reference management
- Preparing for comprehensive exams or thesis defence

Accountability & Verification Check

Q5: After using the AI tool, will you critically evaluate, fact-check, and verify every piece of the output for accuracy, bias, and completeness?

YES: You commit to treating the AI output as a starting point, not a final product. You will independently verify all facts, citations, and arguments. **Go to Question 6.**

NO: STOP. Do not use the AI tool. You are solely responsible for the integrity and accuracy of

If you have navigated the decision tree to this point, you have confirmed that your intended use of AI is:

- **Approved by your supervisor.**
- **Permitted by the University / department.**
- **Appropriate for the task.**
- **Secure and protects your data.**
- **Subject to your verification and accountability.**
- **Will be transparently documented.**

You may proceed with using the AI tool for the specified task. Remember to keep a detailed record of which tool(s) you use, how you use them (including prompts), and for what purpose. This documentation is crucial for transparency and academic integrity.

Transparency Check

Q6: Are you prepared to document and cite the use of the AI tool in your work according to established academic standards (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago etc.) and any specific guidelines from your supervisor, publisher, or discipline?

YES: You are ready to use the AI tool(s) responsibly.

NO: STOP. Undisclosed use of AI may be considered a breach of academic integrity.