Guidelines for the Ethical Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Research

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Contents

Document Information

Version & Updates

This document is continuously evolving to reflect developments in GenAI technology and research applications. Content is current as of **January 2026**. Please check for updates as AI capabilities and best practices continue to advance rapidly.

Disclosure of AI Use in the Preparation of this Document and Related Documents:

This guidance document and the associated guide to best practice and templates (see 'Further Reading') were developed with assistance from multiple versions of the AI models: Claude (Anthropic) and GPT (OpenAI). These models were used to:

- generate example outputs for demonstration purposes
- create synthetic datasets for demonstration purposes
- assist with content organisation and proofreading
- produce sample imagery

All AI-generated examples have been reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness within the academic research context.

Application

This document applies to any staff members or postgraduate research students conducting research at AUT.

Introduction

> *"At AUT, we believe AI should serve people, not the other way around. That's why we've built our AI strategy on clear principles that put ethics, equity and human connection at the centre of everything we do. Our approach to AI isn't about replacing what makes education meaningful – it's about enhancing it."*
>
> - Auckland University of Technology, AUT's AI approach and principles, 2024

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has rapidly evolved from experimental technology to a transformative tool reshaping how research is conducted across disciplines. From accelerating literature reviews and data analysis to supporting creative ideation and manuscript preparation, GenAI offers unprecedented opportunities to enhance research productivity and explore new methodological approaches. However, this technological advancement also brings significant responsibilities and risks that researchers must carefully navigate.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide AUT researchers with practical direction on the ethical and effective use of GenAI tools. Our aim is to give you the confidence to explore and utilise GenAI's full potential within your discipline while maintaining awareness of the risks and understanding of how to mitigate them appropriately. These guidelines will help you harness GenAI's capabilities while preserving the integrity, originality, and rigour that define excellent research practice.

Consistent with AUT's AI Futures principle of *Kanohi ki te Kanohi* (face-to-face connection), we affirm that while AI tools can significantly enhance research processes, they must never replace the essential human judgement, critical thinking, and direct engagement that underpin good research practice. The irreplaceable value of face-to-face collaboration, peer validation, and human insight remains central to our research culture and academic integrity.

Related Procedures and Documents

All GenAI use at AUT must operate within our established ethical and regulatory framework:

- **Our AI Future** - the AUT Vice-Chancellor's 'AI Taskforce' report which sets direction for the overall use of AI at AUT
- **AUT Code of Conduct for Research** - ensuring all research maintains the highest standards of integrity and ethics
- **AUT Research Data Management Policy** - protecting sensitive information and maintaining appropriate data security protocols
- **AUT Ethics Committee Guidelines and Procedures**
- **AUT Postgraduate Handbook** - for postgraduate research processes and regulations
- **Moanaroa Pacific Research Guidelines** – for guidance on Pacific data sovereignty and using AI in alignment with Pacific values

By operating within this framework, researchers can confidently integrate GenAI tools into their work while maintaining AUT's commitment to responsible innovation, cultural values, and research excellence.

These guidelines are designed to evolve alongside the rapidly changing GenAI landscape. We encourage feedback and suggestions to ensure these guidelines remain practical and relevant for our research community.

Managing the Risks of GenAI Use in Research

GenAI tools offer powerful capabilities for research but require careful consideration of risks and responsible implementation. This section outlines fundamental principles that apply across all research contexts, regardless of your specific use case or discipline. Understanding these core guidelines will help you navigate the balance between leveraging AI's benefits while maintaining research integrity, protecting participant data, and meeting academic standards.

Key Risk Areas

Participant data exposure: Uploading interview transcripts, survey responses, or other participant data to AI tools may inadvertently share sensitive information with commercial entities, potentially breaching confidentiality agreements and ethical approval conditions

Inaccurate or misleading outputs: AI tools may generate inaccurate, misleading, or fictional outputs. They can 'hallucinate' information or sources which don't exist in reality; and research using AI tools can perpetuate these inaccuracies. Similarly, synthetic data generated by AI tools can be useful, but may also be inaccurate or biased.

Perpetuating biases: Because AI models are built on data and algorithms that can be biased, AI outputs themselves may include overt or covert biases. Using biased outputs may risk amplifying harms and perpetuating inequalities.

Cultural risks: AI tools often reflect Western values and can perpetuate cultural biases. In many cases it may not be appropriate to use AI tools for cultural matters where human beings are the kaitiaki (guardians) of knowledge. Uploading cultural data[1] to AI tools may also violate cultural principles or protocols (including, for instance, data sovereignty). Additionally, AI outputs may be culturally homogenising where nuances in local cultural narratives, dialects, and traditions are not well represented in AI models.

Premature research disclosure: Sharing preliminary findings, novel methodologies, or unpublished data with AI systems could expose your work before publication, potentially compromising intellectual property or competitive advantage

Copyright and intellectual property violations: Inputting copyrighted materials or other proprietary information into AI tools may infringe the rights of the copyright holder or intellectual property owner. Even using AI tools on open-access third-party materials may inadvertently infringe copyright.

[1] For descriptions of what may qualify as Māori, Pacific, or Indigenous data, please refer to AUT's Research Data Management Policy.

Institutional information leakage: University-specific data, proprietary research methods, or confidential collaborations could be retained and potentially accessed by AI providers

Export controls risk - Sharing sensitive information with an open-sourced AI tool may breach export controls legislation. It is illegal to export controlled technologies from New Zealand without an export permit. Export means sending anything outside New Zealand, including transmission by any means. Controlled technologies are information needed to develop, produce, or use goods listed on the NZ Sensitive Goods List, including technical data, information and assistance.

Risk Mitigation Strategies

Do not rely on GenAI for final output: GenAI outputs can be used as starting points, to brainstorm or draft material that requires human review, fact-checking and refinement. Final research conclusions, analyses, and published work must reflect your expertise and verification, not GenAI recommendations.

Anonymise data: Protect participants' anonymity when using AI tools, in alignment with your ethical approval. This can include removing identifying information such as participant names, contact details, institutional identifiers, and any combination of variables that could identify individuals.

Respect intellectual property: Do not upload copyrighted works (such as published papers, textbooks, creative works, proprietary code, designs) or other sensitive information (such as confidential information, cultural intellectual property, or export-controlled technical information) into AI tools, where such an action could violate intellectual property rights.

Check institutional policies and assessments: Follow AUT's other relevant guidelines (see "Related Procedures and Documents" above) and check the AUT IT department's "AI Tools Register" for trust assessments of specific tools.

Read Terms of Service: Understand how different AI providers handle your data. Some retain and use uploaded content for training, while others offer more secure alternatives.

Give preference to AUT-provided tools: Free versions of AI tools often don't allow for adequate data security and privacy. Paid versions can allow greater data protections, if configured carefully. AUT versions of AI tools (such as AUTGPT), or 'local' versions that work offline, are typically preferable from a security and privacy perspective. See the AUT AI Tools Register (under 'Further Reading') for guidance on specific tools.

Consult with advisors and/or stakeholders: Seeking advice from advisors within (for example) cultural or community groups can help to identify ways of using AI tools that respect and centre the values of the research stakeholders.

1. Researcher Responsibility and Authorship

You remain fully accountable for all outputs. GenAI is a tool – responsibility and authorship stay with the researcher. Treat GenAI as you would a research assistant, not a substitute for human scholarly judgment. All outputs require your domain expertise, critical evaluation and verification. Any violations or errors, including factual errors, copyright infringement, plagiarism, cultural violations, or bias caused by GenAI output, are your responsibility. Acknowledge GenAI usage in the same way you would acknowledge a research assistant's contribution.

2. Data Sensitivity and Ethics Compliance

Protect participant privacy and institutional data. Always ensure that uploading data into GenAI tools complies with your ethics approval and AUT's Research Data Management guidance. Take great care when choosing AI tools for handling sensitive research data – refer to the AUT ICT team's assessments of the trustworthiness of individual tools from a data security perspective (available from the Tuia AI Hub). Never upload confidential participant information, cultural data, unpublished findings, proprietary institutional data, or sensitive or export controlled information without proper authorisation and appropriate safeguards.

3. Transparency

Disclose GenAI use where it materially impacts your research. Material impact includes any AI assistance that influences your literature review, research methodology, data collection or analysis, interpretation of results, conclusions or could affect the reproducibility of your work. Provide sufficient detail about your AI usage to enable reproducibility of your results. This includes documenting which tools you used, how you used them, and what role they played in your research process. Transparency serves multiple purposes: it maintains research integrity, enables proper evaluation by peers, and ensures compliance with evolving academic standards. The academic community is still developing consensus on AI disclosure standards, but **current best practice strongly favours over-disclosure rather than under-disclosure**. What might seem trivial today could become a significant methodological consideration tomorrow.

4. Publisher, Funder, and Examination Policy Compliance

Check and follow specific policies beyond AUT's guidelines. Many funders, publishers, and conferences have introduced requirements that may be different to AUT's internal stance. Researchers must check and follow the specific AI disclosure policies of their target journal, funder, or conference. If you're acting as a peer reviewer or thesis examiner, adhere to confidentiality obligations—do not upload others' manuscripts or thesis content into GenAI tools unless expressly permitted.

5. Respect for Data Sovereignty

Data sovereignty refers to the concept that data is subject to the laws and governance structures of the nation or people from whom it originates. For Indigenous and Pacific peoples, data sovereignty extends beyond legal frameworks to encompass cultural protocols, spiritual relationships with knowledge, and the right to control how information, language, and cultural knowledge are collected, stored, used, and shared.

Data sovereignty is fundamentally about **power, control, and self-determination**. It recognises that data about people and cultures is not neutral - it carries cultural significance, spiritual meaning, and has the potential to either empower or harm communities depending on how it is used. In the context of GenAI, data sovereignty becomes critically important because these systems often incorporate cultural knowledge without consent, proper context, or community oversight.

Māori Data Sovereignty

Mātauranga Māori are recognised as tāonga. Uploading Māori data to commercial GenAI services can conflict with Māori data sovereignty principles because the data are copied, retained, and may be reused for model training without proper consultation or consent from Māori communities. AUT's Research Data Management Policy requires that Māori data be managed in alignment Te Mana Raraunga Principles of Māori Data Sovereignty and the CARE Principles for the Governance of Indigenous Data.

Pacific Data Sovereignty

GenAI tools pose significant risks to Pacific data sovereignty by potentially accessing, copying and utilizing Pacific knowledge, languages and cultural data without community knowledge or consent. This violates the Pacific relational value of vā. Indigenous Data must be managed in alignment with the CARE Principles for the Governance of Indigenous Data.

Indigenous Data Considerations for All Researchers

If indigenous data is entered into public GenAI systems, there can be little control of where it ends up, creating risk of inadvertently exposing or commodifying data without consent. Be aware that data can be considered sensitive by different people, cultures, and communities. To ensure good data practices the following actions are recommended before entering indigenous data into GenAI systems:

- Consult with cultural advisors
- Ask 'how should this data be treated?'
- Ask 'have my participants consented to this use of their data?'
- Consider whether your use of AI may put data sovereignty at risk

Need guidance? AUT's Library Research Services team can guide you in the responsible use of GenAI, including thinking through considerations of Māori and Pacific Indigenous data and knowledge sovereignty.

Copyright and IP queries can also be referred to copyright@aut.ac.nz or ventures@aut.ac.nz.

Further Reading

AUT AI Guidance and Documents

- **Our AI Future** - the AUT Vice-Chancellor's 'AI Taskforce' report which sets direction for the overall use of AI at AUT.
- **Using Generative Artificial Intelligence in your Research: A Guide to Best Practice** – an educational guide on how to use GenAI effectively and responsibly, including use cases and examples for a variety of research applications.
- **Templates for using Artificial Intelligence in your Research** - templates and sample text to help researchers track, check, self-assess, and disclose their use of AI.
- **AI Tools Guidance** – helps you understand how to safely use a variety of AI tools in your research, drawing on trust level guidelines in the AI Tools Register.
- **AI Data Guidance** – includes examples of what types of data that might be considered sensitive or highly sensitive, and what types of AI tools are suitable for each level of data sensitivity under the AI Tools Register.

All of the above documents are available from the AI Hubs for staff and postgraduate research students at the below links:

AI Hub for Postgraduate Research Students

AI Hub for AUT Staff

Royal Society | Te Apārangi Guidelines

Aotearoa researchers are encouraged to refer to the **Guidelines for the Best-Practice Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Research in Aotearoa New Zealand** from the Royal Society | Te Apārangi – a national guide for upholding national research excellence standards and practices in the context of GenAI.