

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Attribution and Citations for Open Educational Resources (OER) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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1. How should AI-generated content be cited?

Authors can follow leading experts in the field of publishing on their policies for the use of generative artificial intelligence and style guidelines for citing AI, including:

- a. American Psychological Association (APA Style)
 - I. [APA policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in scholarly materials](#) states “When a generative artificial intelligence (AI) model is used in the drafting of a manuscript for an APA publication, the use of AI must be disclosed in the manuscript and cited” (American Psychological Association, 2025a).
 - II. [APA Style Blog: How to cite Chat GPT](#) is helpful for its examples to support quoting or reproducing text created by any generative-AI.
- b. Modern Language Association (MLA Style)
 - I. Review [How do I cite generative AI in MLA style? \(Updated and Revised\)](#) for references and examples on how to cite gen-AI by paraphrasing or quoting text, citing creative visual or textual works, and secondary sources. The MLA also emphasizes the value of acknowledging AI use in more detail than the required citation. (Modern Language Association, 2025a)
- c. Chicago Style
 - I. The information pertaining to Chicago Style differs from APA and MLA, and recommendations on the [Chicago Style website](#) rely on the 2017 edition of CMOS. See [Columbia College Chicago Citation Guide \(18th Edition\): AI-Generated Content Lib Guide](#) for additional information.
 - II. “ChatGPT stands in as “author” of the content, and OpenAI (the company that developed ChatGPT) is the publisher or sponsor, followed by the date the text was generated. After that, the URL tells us where the ChatGPT tool may be found, but because readers can’t necessarily get to the cited content (see below), that URL isn’t an essential element of the citation...If you’ve edited the AI-generated text, you should say so in the text or at the end of the note (e.g., “edited for style and content”)” (The Chicago Manual of Style Online, 2024).
 - i. Example: “Text generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, March 7, 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/chat>.” (The Chicago Manual of Style Online, 2024).

Additionally, authors should disclose to their audience how AI was used in their writing process, whether it was to code, generate content or analysis, research elements, or conduct another

type of system output. “Authors need to be transparent, providing the necessary information for readers to understand how generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used during the research and manuscript drafting process. Disclose the use in the most relevant place in the manuscript, most likely the Introduction or Method sections” (American Psychological Association, 2025b).

An example can be seen in the “Acknowledgements” in section “[16.1: Template Phrases for Reflecting on AI Feedback](#)” of the open educational resource (OER) titled *How Arguments Work - A Guide to Writing and Analyzing Texts in College* (Mills, 2025a):

- d. **Acknowledgments:** The above template phrases followed by asterisks (*) were adapted from ChatGPT output responding to a "Template phrases for reflecting on AI feedback prompt," *ChatGPT*, 25 Sep. version, *OpenAI*, 8 Oct. 2023, <https://chat.openai.com/share/9c526e9b-b654-4c24-abb3-01a173026a63>. The remaining original phrases and the organizational structure are by Anna Mills and are shared under a [CC BY 4.0 license](#).

See the [Guidance on what to disclose and where in manuscripts or coursework table](#) on the *APA Journals policy on Generative AI: Additional Guidance* webpage for more information.

2. Should an author cite AI-generated content that would be “common knowledge” for an expert?

This would be dependent on how the author is using the AI-generated content and the end goal. For example, if the author is using AI to rephrase something, disclosing the use of AI would be a best practice to demonstrate the ways in which AI was used throughout the work. Refer to [FAQ #1](#) for more details on how to cite AI-generated content.

It is important however, to maintain a purview of human oversight and digital literacy for when AI may not be the necessary tool to complete the task. Allowing AI to complete routine work and automate less essential elements allows for authors to thrive in the creative elements - where humans excel.

3. How should AI-generated images be cited, and are users required to provide attribution when there is no entity to credit?

The U.S. Copyright Office (2025) makes clear that AI-generated content is not eligible for copyright protection. If a work includes AI-generated material, applicants must disclose the AI’s role and explain their own human contributions, since only the portions created by a human author are eligible for protection. Copyright in the United States is defined by human authorship, which has been upheld by the Constitution, the Copyright Act, and numerous court proceedings (Adapted from quotes pulled from pages 2, 3, and 7 of the U.S. Copyright Office, 2025 relating to content generated by AI, and supreme court cases relating to human-authorship that were then summarized by Perplexity, 2023 and paraphrased).

Harvard University's [AI Marketing Guidelines](#) states "to ensure the authenticity of the content we produce, it is important to be transparent about the use of AI. AI-generated images (e.g. illustrations, data visualizations) must be identified as such by placing the following tag in the lower right corner of the image: "Created using AI." Images that are modified, edited, or enhanced (e.g. sharpened, color-corrected) do not require a tag. Content that was primarily developed by AI requires attribution. Content that was inspired by, guided by, or edited with AI does not require attribution" (Harvard, 2025).

They also provide the following example: **Image Attribution:** When citing AI-generated images in online content, include attribution directly below the image or in the image caption: (Image generated using Dall-E).

Modern Language Association's (MLA) [How do I cite generative AI in MLA style?](#) describes the following way to incorporate AI-generated images into your work: "If you are incorporating an AI-generated image in your work, you will likely need to create a caption for it following the guidelines in section 1.7 of the *MLA Handbook*. Use a description of the prompt, followed by the AI tool, version, and date created:



Fig. 1. "Pointillist painting of a sheep in a sunny field of blue flowers" prompt, *DALL-E*, version 2, OpenAI, 8 Mar. 2023, labs.openai.com/."

4. What should be done when AI provides citations that are off-base, incorrect, or fabricated?

There are various steps the user could take. Verifying that the AI is not 'hallucinating' or fabricating a source could include checking the citation information through other reputable academic databases and search engines, or employing the chatbot to include reference links for the information it provides and checking whether these links really lead to the source mentioned. Either way, authors are responsible for verifying not only the citations but the information presented within their final work, which includes any material gathered through the use of AI.

If the AI tool provided real, authenticated links, it would be in the best interest of the user to thoroughly review the original source and verify the accuracy of the AI-generated content to the original content to make sure they match up. Many times, while gen-AI will use an accurate

source, it may still falsify information that comes from that source. Other times, the AI-generated content has derived both authentic source links as well as accurate information from that source. If this is the case, it may still be in the users best interest to reference the original source for your writing needs, while disclosing the process of using AI would still be necessary.

If the AI-generated content provides a source that cannot be found, or a link that cannot be verified, the likelihood is that it is not real. Remember that AI does not fully grasp context, intent, or credibility so human judgment remains essential. From this point, it may be necessary to adjust your AI usage and/or tool for better results. For example, as mentioned previously, adjusting the prompts to include reference links and checking them or creating more clear and structured prompts that guide the AI toward more focused and accurate information.

Utilize an AI that is created to reference sources. Examples include: [Google Gemini](#), [Perplexity.ai](#), [Scite Assistant](#), [Semantic Scholar](#), and others. All AI can only produce responses from the information they are trained on, so while all gen-AI are prone to “hallucinate” made-up responses instead of not providing an answer, there are certain gen-AI tools that are less prone to hallucinate because they have a Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG) application, sometimes along with a Vector Search, a special type of embedded large language model (LLM) that is used to take the prompt language and use the words to source the information most relevant and reliable (Databricks, 2024).

5. How can one ensure that AI-generated output does not mirror copyrighted sources too closely, or inadvertently plagiarize?

That will depend on the output, the type of AI being used, as well as the prompt engineering of the user. Some may use AI-generated content as a starting-point of evidence gathering. For example, using AI to curate research with the goal in mind to review the information, confirm validity and move through the remainder of the writing process with a human-centered approach. Others may use AI to support their brainstorming process and outlining, leaving the “human-work” to provide nuance and creative examples.

Anna Mills and Maha Bali document cases of AI mirroring sources too closely in [Don't trust AI to cite its sources](#), a chapter in the open educational resource (OER) [AI and College Writing: An Orientation](#) (Mills, 2025b). The chapter notably demonstrates a case where Google’s “AI Overview” plagiarized one of Maha Bali and co-author Maria Zamora’s works without mentioning them as authors. This example and the other cautions provided in Mills (2025b) OER demonstrate the importance of keeping track of AI output that references, ideas, data, or quotes to track down and review the phrasing, intent, and context of the information in its original form. This process of accountability and verification of information, as expressed in [FAQ #4](#), should include checking the licenses of those sources for the user's needs.

6. If you copy text from an AI directly, do you own the copyright, and can you apply a Creative Commons (CC) license to it?

The U.S. Copyright Office (2025) clarifies that AI-generated outputs are not joint works between the user and the AI system, since copyright requires a person to contribute original, copyrightable expression. Simply providing prompts—even detailed ones—does not meet this threshold, because prompts function as ideas or instructions rather than expressive authorship, and users lack meaningful control over the AI's decision-making.

However, the U.S. Copyright Office (2025) acknowledges that in the future, if technology enables users to exert greater control over expressive elements of outputs, such contributions could potentially qualify as human authorship (Adapted from quotes pulled from pages 24-25 of the U.S. Copyright Office, 2025 that related to humans editing, adapting, and modifying AI-generated content which were then summarized by Perplexity, 2023).

7. Does the use of AI-generated content in an Open Educational Resource (OER) prevent the whole work from being licensed under Creative Commons (CC) or OER? What statement or strategy should be adopted regarding attribution and licensing in such cases?

The Creative Commons (CC) blog post, titled [Understanding CC Licenses and Generative AI](#) by Kat Walsh in 2023 confirms that the CC license an author selects applies to the human elements of the final product, while the integrated elements of AI-generated content may not be copyrightable independently. They add, “We encourage the use of CC0 for those works that do not involve a significant degree of human creativity, to clarify the intellectual property status of the work and to ensure the public domain grows and thrives” (Walsh, 2023).

This is also confirmed by the U.S. Copyright Office, as they explain that “A human may...’modify material originally generated by AI technology to such a degree that the modifications meet the standard for copyright protection” (U.S. Copyright Office, 2025). This is more complex than it seems, however, as the standard for copyright protection is fairly complex, and courts have made case-by-case exceptions where humans can demonstrate the AI-generated material is arranged or modified “in a sufficiently creative way that ‘the resulting work as a whole constitutes an original work of authorship” (U.S. Copyright Office, 2025).

If an author is adapting an open educational resource (OER), they can maintain the original work's licensing. If there is AI included in the original OER, it would be in the best interest of the author to include the attribution of the AI as the original authors have it. If there is no attribution of AI in the original OER, but it is known (or suspected) that there is AI-generated content within the OER, it is in the author's best interest to add a statement to that effect.

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