

Artificial Intelligence in Theses – Guidance

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki

This guidance will be updated and is effective from August 1, 2026.

Introduction

This guidance has been created to support supervisors and students writing theses in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki in how to use tools of generative artificial intelligence responsibly and transparently. The use of generative artificial intelligence tools is becoming more common and expanding in professional work and research. Applications that utilize large language models can assist in searching for sources, creating various structures and summaries, planning, and finalizing text.

A thesis is a scientific work that aims to train students in conducting social science research. Through the thesis, the student demonstrates their competence in their own field of study, its methods of knowledge acquisition and justification, as well as research ethics and scientific writing practices (cf. the learning objectives of thesis courses). Writing a thesis is a process. The thesis is supervised. Supervision means, for example, that the supervisor is aware of the stages of the process, knows the foundations and materials of the work, and provides the student with feedback that guides the work. However, the thesis writer is always ultimately responsible for the result. Thus, tools of generative artificial intelligence can never be the author.

The attached guidelines are based on the university's policy on the use of artificial intelligence in generative artificial intelligence (references to AI in research and AI in teaching). A key factor in the reliability of research is transparency. When using tools for generative artificial intelligence, the methods of AI application must be reported at an adequate level. In the review of the reliability of theses, the key methods and tools for using generative artificial intelligence will be described. The main principle is that when using AI, good scientific practice is followed, with special attention paid to research ethics, data protection, and copyright.

"When generative AI is used significantly in research, the name of the tool, the version used, the date of use, the method of use, as well as the phase and purpose of using the tool must be reported. This promotes the reproducibility of the research and allows others to assess the reliability of the results. It also fosters the sharing of good practices within the research community." (AI in Research, UH)

"If you use a language model as an aid in producing the work to be submitted, report on the use of the language model in a way determined by the course instructor, adhering to good scientific practice. This also applies to theses." (AI in Teaching, UH)

Recommendations for Supervision

In supervision, it is essential that the supervisor is aware of the phase of the thesis process, the foundations of the research, knows the material, and understands how the material has been generated. In seminars and other supervision situations, the student discusses the process and also the use of AI. Data protection notices should be prepared so that the

supervisor has access to the original material, including personal data. Discussion about AI usage methods is also good to include in the normal introductory instructions for seminars as well as in seminar sessions.

AI is seen as one of the tools for conducting a thesis from an assessment perspective. Assessment follows the instructions of the assessment matrix. Transparently reported and permitted use of AI does not affect the evaluation of the thesis. Conversely, use against the guidelines contributes to the evaluation and may lead to cases of academic misconduct.

Permitted Uses

Ideation and Delimitation

- Clarifying the research problem and brainstorming sub-questions.
- Mapping relevant theories related to the topic.

Planning Search Strategies

- Keyword alternatives, synonyms.

Transcription and Translation

- Transcribing using tools recommended by HY. Note! Handling of data must always comply with data protection notices and research permissions.
- Translating foreign language materials.

Drafting Visualizations

- Ideas and drafts for diagrams and figures that the student will finalize and to which the thesis author has rights.

Support for Using Analytical Methods

- Clarifying the basic principles of the methods for oneself, creating analysis code, compiling tables. Note! The actual analysis, scientific interpretation, and conclusions are the student's own work.

Structure and Writing Support

- Suggestions for the structure of the thesis (draft of the table of contents).
- Light support for language refinement in one's own text: clarity, fluency, grammar suggestions.
- Note! The student writes, edits, and approves the final text and checks the accuracy of translations, considering copyright.

Project Management

- Coaching on scheduling the work plan and setting intermediate goals.

Prohibited Uses

Manipulating Data

- Manipulating or altering research data in a way that jeopardizes the authenticity of the data.

Inventing References and Content

- Using non-existent sources or accepting references and sources without checking the original publication (comparable to relying on second-hand sources). Sources must always be verified.

Producing Text

- Writing the research report with AI in such a way that it replaces the student's own writing and academic contribution.

Analysis

- Actual analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as making conclusions.

Data Protection and Security

- Inputting personal data, identifiers, or confidential/sensitive research material into unprotected or unapproved services.
- Transcribing or analyzing using tools that do not meet HY's data protection requirements.

Maturity Test

- The use of language models for preparing the maturity test is prohibited.

Use Against Guidelines or Concealed Use

- Using AI in a manner that contradicts the supervisor's instructions or concealing its use is considered fraud and will be dealt with according to HY's regulations.

Copyright and Ethics

- Ensure rights to the materials and images you use. Properly cite sources. Images or texts suggested by AI do not exempt you from source references or permissions.
- Avoid misleading image manipulation.
- Be aware that unprotected AI services may use the material you input into their services in the future.

Reporting and Documentation in the Thesis

- Keep a log or journal of AI usage as part of the thesis process:
 - Record key usage methods and notes about your learning process regarding AI use.
 - Keep the journal available for the supervisor; it can be used to support seminar presentations.
- Report use of AI in thesis abstract. The report should at a minimum, include:
 - The tools used and their purpose.
 - How you verified the accuracy (fact-checking, verification of references).
 - How you used AI to support the use of methods.
 - How you limited AI use and what impact it had on the final outcome of the work.
- Also, consider the ethical aspects of AI use as part of research ethics reflection.

References

Using generative AI in research. <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/research/research-integrity/ai-research>

Using AI to support learning. <https://studies.helsinki.fi/instructions/node/3968>