



## WICDS policy on the use of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) is an emerging technology that has profoundly shifted the academic landscape. There is no question that AI platforms are now part of our research strategies. Many scholars use these tools in productive and thoughtful ways, improving the quality and rigour of their work. For instance, AI can help to collate literature on a topic that may otherwise be overlooked and can assist neurodivergent scholars with structure and clarity. However, AI is also open to significant abuse, with inexperienced or unscrupulous academics using it in ways that must be considered unethical. This policy is designed not to insist that AI usage is banned, but rather to guide you in avoiding unethical behaviour and academic misconduct that can impact your career at WicDS.

**Writing and editing:** AI should never be used to write assignments, communications or research. Even when based on original ideas, it is not appropriate to feed these into an AI and ask it to generate an essay or email. All written work must be produced by the author. When using AI as an editing tool, students are advised to be extremely cautious in ensuring that the AI simply checks spelling and grammar errors, which they then inspect and decide on, rather than rewriting their original work into a different form. AI-generated and -edited writing is extremely generic and makes it impossible to evaluate students' skills and knowledge. This use of AI also prevents the development of communicative skills and individual authorial voices and creates a dependence over time whereby students feel unable to write for themselves.

**Plagiarism:** The use of AI to generate written work and submit it as one's own is considered plagiarism, as the student is claiming to have undertaken writing that they personally did not do. This is a very serious form of academic misconduct and will result in assignments, dissertations or theses receiving a failing mark, which may lead to a fail in the degree overall.

**Disclosure:** When using AI during research, students must include an AI disclosure statement that clearly acknowledges how and why AI was used. Proper acknowledgment of AI-assisted work demonstrates integrity and respect for academic rules and ethics.

**Exams and assessments:** Students must not use AI to complete examinations or tests. Using AI during exams, whether online or in person, gives an unfair advantage and violates examination rules. Any AI assistance during these assessments is classified as cheating. The use of AI in examinations can also lead to decreased critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

**References:** AI is not academically reliable because it tends to generate false or fabricated information. AI may invent books, authors, journal articles or page numbers that do not exist. This is considered a falsification of sources that damages the credibility of academic work.



Student submissions that contain ‘hallucinated’ references will receive an automatic fail. When AI is used to support referencing, all citations must be carefully checked by the author.

**Data:** Students must not use AI to fabricate survey results, statistics, experiments or interview responses. Research data must be real and verifiable. Fabricated data is considered research fraud and is one of the most serious academic offences.

**Learning outcomes:** Students must not use AI to bypass learning outcomes. Recent research has confirmed that using AI summaries instead of reading required textbooks, articles or case studies prevents deep understanding and retention of academic material. WiCDS expects students to engage directly with academic sources rather than relying solely on AI-generated summaries.

**Tasks and assignments:** AI must not be used in answering discussion forums and participation tasks. Online discussion posts, peer responses and participation marks are meant to reflect a student’s understanding and engagement. Using AI-generated responses forestalls genuine interaction and is also prohibited. Students must not use AI to produce group work unless specifically requested to do so, and/or agreed with the entire group. Group assignments assess teamwork, communication and shared responsibility. Using AI undermines the purpose of collaborative learning.

**Data collection ethics:** AI must not be used to complete ethical training tasks and modules. AI must not be used to develop research questions in instances where interviews, focus groups or surveys are being employed. These fields require reflexivity, personal judgement, responsibility and accountability, which cannot be offered by AI.

Please visit <https://www.wits.ac.za/ai-policies/> to access the broader Wits AI Framework.

*While we acknowledge that this technology is new and mistakes may be made, WiCDS students found to be systematically using AI in unethical or prohibited ways may face a variety of consequences, including:*

- *Written work receiving a failing mark*
- *Supervisors refusing to approve submissions of proposals or final research*
- *Withdrawal of support for NRF funding*
- *Ineligibility for WiCDS-supported funding opportunities*
- *Exclusion from higher degrees within the Centre*
- *Referrals to the School of Social Sciences Plagiarism Committee*
- *Formal exclusion from the Centre*