Generative AI in Postgraduate Research Degree Guidelines

Purpose and scope

This document sets clear expectations for the responsible, ethical, and transparent use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) by postgraduate researchers (including doctoral and research master's candidates) and supervisors when supporting postgraduate research across all Divisions/Faculty of the University of Waikato. These guidelines aim to protect academic integrity and ethics, research quality and originality, and data security and sovereignty, while supporting innovation in all research methods and practices. They also establish minimum disclosure and record-keeping requirements. These guidelines apply to all research activities and outputs, including theses, research proposals, ethics applications, publications, and presentations. They sit alongside the University's Position Statement and Principles and the Generative AI Data Use Framework.

Position

GenAI may meaningfully enhance research through boosting productivity and supporting the discovery, understanding, and communication of information. It may also reduce language and communication barriers for some postgraduate researchers, including those for whom English is not their first language or who find academic writing challenging. GenAI functionality is increasingly embedded in common digital services and software, including search, email, and writing tools, and you may encounter it without active seeking. For this reason, the University encourages intentional, critical engagement with GenAI rather than passive adoption.

GenAI tools are not infallible: they can produce errors, misinterpret context, and reproduce bias. GenAI should not replace direct engagement with primary sources. Many tools also store or learn from user-provided material, requiring careful consideration of ethical obligations and data governance, including whether you have the right to disclose the information. GenAI must not be used as a substitute for your own critical analysis, interpretation, or reflective thought, though it may support these processes. Appropriate use cases for GenAI may differ between disciplines, knowledge systems or research practices and you should work closely with your supervisors to understand the expectations in your research community and make informed decisions about GenAI use. Ultimately you remain responsible for the originality and accuracy of your work, your argument, and your conclusions, and you must be able to explain and defend any GenAI-assisted content. The University welcomes new technologies that reshape how we think and work, and encourages responsible development of digital and GenAI capability, provided it is guided by human oversight and grounded in academic integrity, ethical practice, and our commitments under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

These guidelines intentionally refer to overarching principles and avoid reference to specific GenAI tools, as technologies are constantly evolving. The University provides access to a range of GenAI tools that can be accessed with your university log-in credentials. Security and privacy protections ensure that information shared or generated within this space remains appropriately safeguarded. You can find the tools endorsed by the University and available to you in the ITS Tech Hub.

Guidelines

1. **Remain accountable for the work you produce**
    - You are accountable for all work you produce, including anything you create, edit, translate, summarise, code, or analyse using GenAI. Apply your own academic judgement to any GenAI output before using it.
    - It is your responsibility to know where the information or data you present in your research outputs come from, that it is appropriately attributed, that it is accurate and that you have assessed the risk of bias or misrepresentation.
    - A GenAI tool cannot be listed as an author or cited as a source. However, use of a GenAI tool may be acknowledged with a citation where it forms part of the research method, for example in data analysis or the creation of AI-generated images.
    - Verify GenAI outputs against the primary sources, paying particular attention to the validity of quotations, references, and data.
    - Any research output must be your own original contribution to knowledge or practice, and all usual academic integrity principles apply to any content produced with the assistance of GenAI
    - You must be able to explain and justify your methods, analysis, observations and conclusions, including any GenAI-assisted steps.
    - You should work with your supervisors to ensure your engagement with GenAI is aligned with disciplinary norms and expectations, noting that in some disciplines the use of GenAI is considered inappropriate or unethical for some aspects of the research process.

2. **Protect people and data as taonga**
    - It is your responsibility to understand the nature of the research data or knowledge you are working with, including who it relates to, who owns it, who has rights to it, and any restrictions on sharing or reuse, so that you can conduct your research in a safe and ethical manner.
    - Identify data or information that is sovereign to Māori or Indigenous peoples or contains identifiable, confidential, or sensitive information about people or organisations.
    - Refer to the Data Use Framework for guidance on handling and protecting different types of data or knowledge when using GenAI. Always refer to your ethics approval documents or contractual agreement for specific guidance that relates to your individual research data. Mātauranga Māori and Māori or Indigenous data must be safeguarded with appropriate governance and permissions, for any purpose.
    - Use GenAI tools within the University's protected digital environment for your research purposes wherever possible, regardless of the information you are working with. Assume that external GenAI tools store, train on, or process data offshore unless confirmed otherwise. If you cannot confirm how your inputs will be stored and processed, you should not upload the information.
    - If there is a tool you would like to use but it is not currently available through the University, then please ask as it may be possible to access this tool. Discuss with your supervisors in the first instance, and then you may contact ITS [see **Key Contacts**] to discuss your requirements.

3. **Develop expertise and innovate responsibly**
    - You are encouraged to explore ways GenAI can support your research and working practices, where this is consistent with these guidelines and the expectations of your discipline.
    - Be proactive in developing your understanding of how GenAI tools work and their academic, ethical, and environmental implications so that you can make informed decisions about their use.
    - You are encouraged to actively engage with professional development opportunities offered by the University and your discipline to build capability in using GenAI effectively (for example, by learning how to write and refine prompts or use advanced functionality such as AI agents).

- Discuss your GenAI training needs with your supervisors, who may also be aware of relevant training and development opportunities within the wider research community.
- Engage with relevant academic literature that uses, evaluates, or critiques GenAI, within and outside of your discipline, to stimulate ideas and to understand emerging practices, perspectives, and concerns that may be relevant to your research.

4. Be transparent in how you engage with GenAI

- You should have an open conversation with your supervisors early in your candidature, and continue this dialogue throughout your enrolment, about the appropriate use of GenAI in your research and thesis writing so they can support and advise you effectively.
- Keep an audit trail of GenAI use where it could affect the integrity, originality, or reproducibility of your work (for example, coding, data analysis, translation, or proof-reading). Records should include details of what you asked the tool to do (for example, prompts or instructions), what the tool produced (outputs you relied on) and what you changed before incorporating into your work.
- Retain an original copy of any draft code, text or analysis before GenAI assistance. Retain the chat history if that functionality is available in the GenAI tool you are using.
- Disclose how and where you have used GenAI in the preparation of your thesis or any other research outputs. You need to state the tool used (including model), what you used it for and to what extent, what inputs you provided, and how you validated the outputs.
- When you submit your thesis, you will need to include a statement about GenAI use (see below).
- Where GenAI use forms a substantive part of your research method, ensure you document it as you would any other method, in your research log and in the relevant part of your thesis (for example, the methodology chapter and/or an appendix), so that your approach is transparent and, where appropriate, reproducible.

5. Proof-read responsibly to retain your authenticity

- Proof-reading of your thesis or a research output is permitted, whether by a human or using GenAI, in accordance with the University's proof-reading guidance
- Proof-reading is *not* editing and changes are limited to spelling, punctuation and grammar corrections or modifications to sentence structure and phrasing that improve clarity. Proof-reading should not alter the meaning of the text, add new material, or restructure your argument.
- For clarity, editing involves substantive changes to the content or structure of your work and is not permitted, whether by a human or using GenAI. This includes adding new material, rewriting paragraphs or sections, changing the emphasis or argument, or otherwise shaping the intellectual content of the work.
- Be mindful of maintaining your disciplinary writing style and tone. GenAI proof-reading tools can alter the tone or "voice" of your writing or shift the balance between precision and descriptive language, so be intentional in your prompts about what you want the tool to do (and not do). This is especially important in disciplines where language forms part of the research contribution or analytical method, and you should discuss appropriate use of GenAI for proof-reading with your supervisors.
- Remember, you can prompt a GenAI tool to make editorial suggestions, but it is your responsibility to decide whether and how to implement these suggestions in your work. Not all GenAI suggestions will be an improvement on what you can write yourself, so use your own judgement and be decisive.
- Retain an original copy of any draft prior to proof-reading. Keep a record of the prompts used and disclose this use (see Guideline 4), providing at least an illustrative prompt example to evidence your workflow. If particular sections of text have been substantively modified with GenAI assistance, indicate this clearly in the relevant output (for example, in a footnote).

6. Be familiar with the GenAI policies of other organisations that affect you

- External organisations connected to your research (for example, research funders, academic publishers, partner and iwi organisations) may have their own policies on GenAI use and it is your responsibility to make sure you meet their requirements as well as those of this University.
- Check the relevant GenAI requirements early and *before* you submit an ethics application; share data or materials with an external party; submit a research output (e.g., abstract, journal article, book chapter or conference paper) or use GenAI within a research collaborator's digital environment or with data provided under a contractual agreement.
- Before you begin preparing a manuscript, identify the publication outlets you are likely to submit to and check their GenAI policies and disclosure requirements. They will likely require that GenAI use is declared in a specific format, which may differ between publishers.
- If external requirements appear inconsistent with those of this University, please discuss with your supervisor before proceeding and, if needed, seek advice from the relevant **Key Contact** below.

Putting these guidelines into practice

You need to consider both the type of data you are working with and how you will interact with the GenAI tool (i.e., what you will ask it to do and how you will use its output). Depending on the data or information you are working with, it may be that the same use of GenAI may not always be appropriate (see Table below). If you are unsure whether a proposed use is acceptable, please seek advice from your supervisor before proceeding. You may also consult with other University services for advice (see **Key Contacts** below).

Thesis submission

When you submit your thesis, you are required to acknowledge whether GenAI was used, and if so, how it was used. This acknowledgement is intended to support transparency and accountability, not to police GenAI use. The acknowledgment should be concise, and placed after the Thesis Acknowledgements page and before the Table of Contents. If GenAI formed a substantive part of your research method (for example, for coding, data processing, or analysis), then you should document this in more detail in the relevant methods section of your thesis.

If you have used GenAI, your acknowledgement must, as minimum, specify:

- the GenAI tool used (including the model, where known)
- the purpose for which it was used
- the inputs provided
- how outputs were checked and validated

If you have not used GenAI in your research or thesis in any capacity, you should state this explicitly to remove any ambiguity.

Examiner guidance (for information)

Your examiners are requested not to use GenAI tools to assess any part of your thesis or to prepare their recommendation, including to check for AI-generated text. This is to protect your original research because the University has no oversight on the security of any GenAI tools used by a third party. Examiners are provided with an Examiner Information Sheet and a link to these guidelines to help them interpret any acknowledged GenAI use within the thesis they are examining in the context of our University position.

The following examples illustrate practical applications of these guidelines but are non-exhaustive.

Generally acceptable under most circumstances

Using GenAI to:

- explore new topics and identify potential sources of information or lines of enquiry, provided these are developed, refined, and evaluated using your academic judgement and awareness of the potential for bias.
- request explanations of concepts, terminology, or methods to support understanding, provided GenAI outputs are not treated as authoritative and are verified against appropriate sources. Remember, GenAI can make mistakes and may misrepresent theoretical concepts.
- proof-read non-sensitive written language, with changes limited to spelling and grammar corrections or modifications to sentence structure and phrasing that improve clarity without altering meaning.
- apply formatting conventions to text, where the intellectual content remains your own.
- draft or refine non-academic materials related to research activities (for example, emails, meeting agendas, or presentation outlines)

Requires consideration

Using GenAI to:

- proof-read written language that includes identifiable, confidential or sensitive information or data that are subject to contractual restrictions. Remember, such data must only be used within the University's protected digital environment.
- summarise sources (for example, producing written or audio summaries of articles) to support understanding, provided you have permission to upload the source material. You must still read and critically evaluate the original sources; summaries should not be used as a substitute for engaging directly with the material and should not be treated as authoritative.
- perform data analysis, or to generate code for data processing or analysis, subject to the expectations in your discipline and guidance from your supervisors. You must document your methods and keep a record of prompts used, any settings or assumptions applied, and key decision points where human judgement was exercised to guide, evaluate, or modify GenAI outputs.
- suggest possible next steps in research design, but only as a prompt for your own decision-making. You must use your academic judgement to assess the credibility, feasibility, and relevance of any suggestions in the context of your research objectives.
- translate individual words or short phrases from one language to another, recognising that GenAI may misinterpret context, tone, or technical terminology. GenAI must not be used to translate extended passages or entire documents, as the ability to communicate effectively in English or te reo Māori is an expectation of research degrees at the University of Waikato.

Not acceptable

Using GenAI to:

- generate content that you then submit as your own original work in a thesis or other research output without appropriate attribution of ideas and information. Remember, citing a source does not remove the need to also express the content in your own words.
- generate content that is copied directly, or lightly rewritten, into a thesis or other research output in a way that disguises its origin without disclosure.
- check for or "correct" factual inaccuracies without validating with primary or authoritative sources.
- fabricate citations, data, findings, quotes, or for any other purpose that contravenes core principles of academic integrity.
- process or proof-read information or data that is sovereign to Māori or Indigenous peoples without appropriate permissions and governance, for any purpose.

Key contacts

If you are unsure about any aspect of using GenAI in your postgraduate research, the following University support services can provide advice and assistance.

Contact	Example question topics	Contact details
Te Iho o Te Manawataki Library	Referencing and attribution of GenAI use; finding and using academic literature using GenAI tools; verifying sources suggested by GenAI; data management planning and responsible data use and sharing when using GenAI	library@waikato.ac.nz
ITS	Access to University-approved GenAI tools; support for GenAI tools provided by the University; questions about the security of GenAI tools	help@waikato.ac.nz +64 7 838 4008 (Service Desk)
Te Puna Ako (Centre for Tertiary Teaching and Learning)	Developing GenAI literacy, including workshops and resources; using GenAI responsibly to support writing or study skills aligned with academic integrity expectations	cettladmin@waikato.ac.nz
Research and Enterprise Office	Use of GenAI in research involving contractual agreements; intellectual property implications; funder requirements related to GenAI; restrictions on data use or disclosure when engaging with external partners	research@waikato.ac.nz
Te Mata Kairangi School of Graduate Research	Guidance on interpreting these Guidelines; requirements for acknowledging GenAI use in theses; proof-reading guidance; examination procedures	sgr@waikato.ac.nz
Divisional or Human Research Ethics Committee	Ethical use of GenAI in research involving people; sensitive or confidential data; or data sovereign to Māori or indigenous people; whether GenAI use requires new ethics approval or an amendment to an existing approval.	humanethics@waikato.ac.nz

Misconduct procedures

Inappropriate use of GenAI may constitute academic misconduct. Concerns about academic integrity involving GenAI are handled under the University's Student Discipline Regulations and the associated academic integrity processes. Outcomes may include required learning or remediation and, where appropriate, disciplinary penalties. Lack of awareness of these guidelines will not excuse poor academic practice. Referrals to the Student Discipline Committee will usually be made by either the Associate Dean Postgraduate Research or the Dean of SGR, following consultation with the supervision panel and examiners where appropriate. Remember, you are accountable for knowing where your information comes from, for its accuracy, and for meeting the disclosure and record-keeping expectations in these guidelines.

If you need advice about the discipline process, you may contact the Academic Integrity Advisor [academic.integrity@waikato.ac.nz]. Support is also available through the Waikato Students' Union advocacy service.

If any inconsistency arises between these Guidelines and any University regulation, policy, or process (including academic integrity requirements), then the regulation, policy or process prevails. These guidelines, and particularly the requirements around documentation, will not be applied retrospectively.