



AI Literacy for College Students

Thinking Critically, Ethically,
and Creatively with AI

Module 6:

Citing and Acknowledging AI

Citing AI is about transparency and protecting your credibility. Just as you cite a website, book, article, tutor, dataset, or software tool when it meaningfully contributes to your work, acknowledge AI when it plays a substantive role in creating or shaping your final product.

Always follow your instructor's, department's, or institution's AI-use policy; requirements vary across courses and disciplines.

When to Cite AI

Cite AI when it:

- generated ideas, research questions, or project directions that influenced your work
- created outlines, drafts, examples, or content that you used, adapted, paraphrased, or quoted
- produced explanations, summaries, interpretations, or analyses that informed your conclusions
- helped generate data, code, images, tables, or other materials included in your submission
- contributed language or structure beyond routine editing

When You May Not Need to Cite AI

Citation is often unnecessary when AI is used only for limited editorial support, such as:

- correcting spelling, grammar, punctuation, or formatting
- suggesting clearer wording without changing your ideas or arguments
- helping reorganize sentences when you independently decide what to keep
- performing functions similar to spell-check, autocomplete, or standard writing tools

General Guidelines

If removing the AI's contribution would materially change your final work, disclose or cite it. If the AI only polished work you already created, citation may not be necessary.

Acknowledging AI without Formal Citation

In some cases, instructors may prefer a brief acknowledgment instead of a formal citation. If AI provided limited support—such as brainstorming, organization, or grammar and style suggestions—you may acknowledge its use without treating it as a cited source.

Example: *“Portions of the brainstorming and revision process for this paper were supported by ChatGPT.”*

Important Note

Tools like Grammarly can sometimes rewrite entire sentences or passages. If you allow the program to do this automatically, you could end up with large portions of text flagged as AI-generated, which should be cited. Always set boundaries.

Example boundary:

“Check only for spelling and grammar; do not rewrite sentences or change my tone.”

How to Cite AI in Common Academic Research Styles

Because guidance on citing AI continues to develop, check course and institutional policies in addition to the Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), or other style requirements.

MLA (9th ed.)

- Do not list AI as the author.
- Use MLA's standard citation elements to describe the AI-generated content.
- Include a description of the prompt or generated content (when needed) and the AI tool name, model/version, organization, date generated, and URL (preferably a shareable conversation link).

Works Cited Entry Example

“Describe the Theme of Nature in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*” prompt. *ChatGPT*,

model GPT-4o, OpenAI, 23 Sept. 2024, chatgpt.com/share/66f1b0a0

d704-8000-be9a-85f53c850607.

In-Text Citation Example

(“Describe the Theme”)

APA (7th ed.)

- Cite AI-generated output when it contributes content to your work.
- Include organization, date, AI tool name and model/version, description of the prompt or output, and URL.

Reference List Entry Example

OpenAI. (2025, September 12). *ChatGPT* (GPT-4) [Large language model]. Response to

the prompt “Explain photosynthesis in simple terms.” <https://chat.openai.com>

In-Text Citation Example

(OpenAI, 2025)

Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) (17th ed.)

CMS offers two citation systems. Follow the system required for your course.

Notes-Bibliography (NB)

- common in the humanities
- citation in footnotes or endnotes
- identification details: AI tool, model/version (if relevant), prompt or interaction description, organization, date, URL
- bibliography entry only if required by instructor or course policy

Example in Text

The Industrial Revolution transformed economies by increasing industrial production and changing patterns of labor.¹

Footnote Example

1. Response to “Describe the economic effects of the Industrial Revolution,” ChatGPT (GPT-4), OpenAI, September 12, 2025, edited for style and accuracy.

Important Note

On transparency: Whenever possible, include a shareable link to your AI conversation. This helps show how you used AI and provides a record of your work.

Bibliography Example (if required)

OpenAI. Response to “Describe the economic effects of the Industrial Revolution.” ChatGPT

(GTP-4), <https://chat.openai.com>.

Author-Date

- common in the sciences and social sciences
- in-text author-date citation
- matching reference list entry
- identification details: organization, AI tool, model/version (if relevant), prompt or interaction description, date, URL

Reference List Entry Example (if required)

OpenAI. 2025. Response to “Describe the economic effects of the Industrial Revolution.”

ChatGPT (GPT-4). <https://chat.openai.com>.

In-Text Citation Example

(OpenAI 2025)

Try It

Practice Transparent AI Use

Choose a scholarly article related to your field of study (or use one provided by your instructor).

Directions

1. Read the article yourself before using AI. Identify the article’s main argument, key evidence, and conclusions.
2. Use an AI tool to support one part of your process (for example: generating a summary, clarifying terminology, brainstorming questions, organizing notes, or revising wording).
3. Write a 100–200 word summary of the article in your own words. Your summary should accurately reflect the article, not the AI output.
4. Decide how your AI use should be documented. Based on your course policy and citation style, determine whether your AI use requires:
 - a formal citation,
 - an acknowledgment/disclosure statement, or
 - no documentation.
5. Document your AI use appropriately. Include the correct citation or acknowledgment using MLA, APA, CMS, or your assigned style.
6. Write a brief reflection (2–3 sentences):
 - What did the AI help you do?
 - What decisions did you make independently?
 - Why did you choose to cite, acknowledge, or not cite the AI?

Optional: Include a shareable link or transcript of your AI conversation if permitted by course policy.