

## **Guidance on the Use of AI by research students (DPhil and MLitt degrees) in the History Faculty**

Graduate research is defined by the production of original scholarship and by sustained demonstration of intellectual independence, critical judgement, and methodological responsibility over an extended period. The History Faculty recognises the need for guidance to address the specific contexts in which research students in the Humanities may encounter AI tools, particularly in relation to research design, writing practices, and examination.

This guidance note explicitly situates expectations within the framework of the University's [Policy on the Use of Generative AI in Research](#). That policy emphasises that researchers retain full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, originality, and ethical conduct of their work, regardless of whether AI tools are used. The aim of this guidance is to translate these general principles into expectations appropriate to History students, and it is informed by guidance offered by the Humanities Division. We recognize some of our D.Phil and M.Litt students' research projects are multi-disciplinary, and recommend checking guidance in cognate departments if you believe this could apply to your research project.

The university-level policy covers all researchers in the university, and is therefore designed to cover scientific and social-scientific disciplines in which the management and analysis of large amounts of research data are paramount. The priority in the Humanities on critical thinking, persuasive expression of argument, and detailed and sustained analysis thus requires different emphases and considerations, discussed below.

By setting out common principles and expectations, the guidance aims to:

- reduce uncertainty for students about acceptable AI use;
- support supervisors in advising students consistently;
- protect the integrity of assessment and examination;
- uphold the intellectual values of disciplines within the Humanities.

It is recognised that practices and expectations may vary across periods, methodologies, and subfields within a faculty. Research students are therefore encouraged to discuss with their supervisor(s) where uncertainty arises about acceptable or appropriate use of AI, and to treat AI as a subject for critical reflection, where relevant.

We encourage you to read critically how historians are engaging with AI. The Reading Guide and Blogs offered by the Royal Historical Society is a useful place to start: [Generative AI, History and Historians, a reading guide | Historical Transactions](#).

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### **1. Purpose and Scope**

This guidance note sets out principles and expectations governing the use of AI tools by students studying for research degrees in History. Where a student wishes to explore the use of such tools in research, writing or professional development, this guidance seeks to ensure that such engagement is responsible, ethical, and intellectually rigorous.

## 2. Graduate Research in History

Graduate research in History is characterised by the sustained development of original research, the formulation of independent arguments, and a deep, expert-level engagement with primary texts, critical traditions, and scholarly debates. Central to such endeavours are:

- intellectual independence and originality of argument;
- rigorous critical judgement and methodological self-awareness;
- precise, attentive, and responsible use of language;
- sustained, deep analysis of primary material;
- accountability for evidence, interpretation, and scholarly claims.

AI tools must not displace or obscure the researcher's development of and responsibility for these core intellectual activities, and the reflection of them in students' written work.

## 3. Transparency, Integrity, and Attribution

In accordance with the University's [policy](#), research students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. This includes:

- **Transparency:** Where AI tools have made a material contribution to research processes or outputs then this should be acknowledged where appropriate. The place to do this might be in the introduction, footnotes or in a separate methodology chapter if its use is integral to the research design.
- **No Misrepresentation:** AI-generated text, analysis, or ideas must not be presented as one's own work. Doing so can constitute plagiarism, and lead to investigation for academic misconduct.
- **Verification:** All facts, quotations, references, and claims produced with any AI assistance must be independently checked against reliable sources. No source should be cited by a student which hasn't been consulted by them.

## 4. Data Protection, Intellectual Property, and Confidentiality

Research students must exercise particular care with unpublished research materials, archival content, their own chapter drafts and the work of others. Sensitive or confidential material (including archival data subject to restrictions) must never be shared with external AI tools. As a general principle, material owned by another author should only be shared with their permission. Where AI tools are used, students are strongly encouraged to use University-licensed systems, which offer greater protections for data security and their intellectual property.

## 5. Permissible Uses

### 5.1 Generally Acceptable Uses

Research students may use AI tools, with appropriate caution, for purposes such as:

- proofreading for spelling and minor grammatical errors;

- translating short passages of text from other languages into English, checking them as far as possible, and quoting the originals in full in the footnotes. The original-language text should be deducted from the word count, as it is your translation which is being examined. Any use of AI translation tools should always be acknowledged;
- formatting bibliographies and managing references (with careful checking);
- organising, notes, timelines, or research plans;
- exploring large bodies of material at a very general, preliminary level (e.g., identifying themes or keywords to investigate independently);
- Where appropriate, AI tools may be incorporated into students' formal research methodology (e.g., automated transcription, topic modelling or other computational or text-analytical methods). However, you should ensure your use is in line with University's Code of practice and procedure for Academic Integrity in Research.

Students should be able to justify the methods they have used to collect data or delimit their topic. In all cases, responsibility for accuracy, interpretation, and scholarly judgement remains entirely with the student.

### ***5.2 Uses that are not permitted***

Generative AI should not be used for:

- planning or writing sections of thesis chapters, articles, conference papers, or other research outputs. You may not use AI assistants to write. AI tools may offer create sentences or even generate full paragraphs, but will not capture your own critical reflections on the materials you have compiled nor the argument you seek to make. Writing is thinking.
- generating interpretations, arguments, or critical positions. Some searches using Generative AI tools will make suggestions of this type; these should never be adopted without your own refinement, interrogation, and evaluation.
- summarising primary texts or scholarly works in ways that replace direct reading and analysis. Any cited work must have been consulted by the student, and its contents and arguments evaluated independently.
- producing translations of texts into English without independent verification.
- selecting evidence (i.e., quotations) for arguments.

Uses of the kind listed above risk undermining your own intellectual capacities and may compromise your scholarly integrity.

When approaching the question of whether AI crosses the boundaries of acceptable use, it is worth asking the simple question of how far you would be comfortable asking a friend or colleague for help with writing, interpretation or translation when presenting the work as all your own. It is essential that you think of AI as a tool for assisting your work. Use of it is not essential, and you may well find you have no use for it beyond spell-checking.

The Bodleian Library has produced a guide to referencing AI, which is available [here](#).

## **6. Milestones, Assessment, and Examination**

### **6.1 *Transfer and Confirmation of Status milestones***

We recommend discussing the use of AI at transfer and confirmation of status interviews. Materials submitted for these examinations must demonstrate the student's own capacity to:

- define a viable and original research project (in the case of transfer of status);
- situate that project within relevant scholarly debates;
- undertake close, critical analysis of primary material;
- articulate an independent research methodology and argument;
- present analysis independently and persuasively.

AI must not be used to produce or shape the substantive intellectual content of materials submitted for assessment.

### **6.2 *Draft Chapters***

Draft chapters and other written work shared with supervisors are part of an evolving research process. They should accurately represent the student's own thinking and analytical development. Reliance on generative AI to draft or substantially rework scholarly prose is not permitted. Supervisors should not be asked to comment on text which is not the student's own work, or which has been produced either in argument or in expression by Generative AI.

### **6.3 *The Thesis***

The thesis must be the student's own original work. Any use of AI that compromises authorship, originality, or accountability is incompatible with the requirements and aims of the degree.

Candidates must be able to account for and defend all aspects of the thesis, including arguments, expression, interpretations, evidence, and scholarly judgements, without recourse to AI tools.

### **6.4 *The Viva Voce Examination***

The viva voce examination tests the student's intellectual ownership of their research. Examiners may probe any element of the thesis, including its methods, claims, and conceptual frameworks. Students should therefore ensure that no AI-assisted processes have displaced their own understanding, critical agency, or independent writing.