

GenAI policy RA module

0:00

Welcome and thank you for joining this module from the Research Academy.

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In this session, we will look at how to use generative AI tools when you prepare a manuscript for publication.

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AI tools are increasingly part of how researchers work, and they can help with many tasks such as drafting text and proving language and organising IDs.

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The goal of this module is to help you use these tools responsibly and transparently in a way that protects you and your work.

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So let's get started.

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To set the scene, we need to understand that AI adoption and research is accelerating fast.

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Else of this research, a future report which surveyed over 3000 researchers in 2025, found that 58% of researchers used AI at work, up from just 37% a year before.

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Researchers are using these tools for a wide range of tasks, from literature reviews and data analysis to drafting papers and grant proposals.

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At the same time, important gaps remain.

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Almost half of researchers felt that they didn't have had enough training, and only about 1/3 thought that AI governance at the institution is strong.

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In other words, researchers are using AI more and more, but many still feel unsure about the rules and the right way to use it.

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This is exactly why clear policies and clear guidance are so important, and that is what we will look at next.

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Elsevier's approach to AI is built on three core principles.

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The first is responsible use.

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AI can be a useful support tool, but the human author always remains responsible for the work.

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Being open about how you used AI is what allows readers and reviewers to trust the science.

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The second principle is adaptability.

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We develop our policies in collaboration with broader publishing community, and we'll keep refining them as the technology evolves.

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And the third is protecting authors rights.

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Our guidance for editors and reviewers ensures that unpublished manuscripts stay confidential and authors data is protected.

2:06

These 3 principles run through everything we'll cover today.

2:12

So what can authors use AI for?

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You can use it to help synthesise literature, identify research gaps, brainstorm IDs, structure your manuscripts or prove your language.

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What AI cannot do is replace your judgement.

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You always need to review and verify what the tool produces, checking for accuracy, originality and quality.

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The work is yours and you remain responsible for it.

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When you use AI, be transparent.

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At submission, you should include a disclosure statement in your article in which you name the tool, explain how you used it, and confirm you've reviewed the output and stand behind it.

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It's also worth checking each tool's terms and conditions to make sure your data and intellectual property are protected.

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One note on the scope of this policy.

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This policy covers AI in writing and manuscript preparation.

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If you're using AI in the research itself or for data analysis, that should be described in your method section.

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Now let's look at images, where the same general principle applies.

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AI use is permitted in some cases, but the rules depend on what type of image you're working on.

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For explanatory visuals like flow charts or diagrams, and for data visualisations based on your own data, AI tools can be helpful.

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AI use is not appropriate through primary research images such as microscopy slides, western blots or radiology scans.

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These are a direct record of your experiments and must not be created or altered with AI.

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Graphical abstracts also require special attention.

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General purpose AI image tools are not recommended here due to copyright risks.

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Instead, you may use dedicated scientific illustration tools like [via Render](#).

4:00

As with text, whenever you use AI for images, you should disclose it as submission and in the image captions and check for the tools terms to ensure your privacy and rights are protected.

4:12

Let us now look at a question that we hear very often.

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Where is the line between appropriate and inappropriate use of AI?

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The appropriate examples on the left all share one ID.

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AI supports the author.

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It does not replace the author's own thinking.

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That covers summarising literature, structuring a manuscript, or improving language availability, but also creating explanatory visuals such as diagrams or flow charts, as long as the author checks the content and discloses the use.

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The right side shows inappropriate use, and the key point here is that AI must not generate major sections of a manuscript without real intellectual contribution from the author.

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AI can help with IDs or language that the author must do most of the thinking and stays responsible for the content.

5:00

The second and third points are about fabricating or changing data, results or primary research images.

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That is research misconduct, whether or not AI is involved.

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The simple rule is that you can use AI to support your work, but never to substitute your own judgements.

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A little note of caution on references.

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AI tools can help you find and organise literature, but they can also hallucinate.

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They sometimes change details, and sometimes they invent references that don't exist.

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This is a real and growing problem.

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A 2026 Lancet letter by Tupas and colleagues ordered a two and a half million biomedical papers, and they found that one in every 277 published in early 2026 contained A fabricated reference that is 12 times higher than in 2023, and it is directly linked to the rise of AI.

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Use AI tools in writing.

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The rule is straightforward.

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Always locate and read every source for yourself, verify it exists, and generally support your claim.

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And never cite something that you haven't read.

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Fabricated references can get your manuscript rejected.

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You may use AI tools to help you search for relevant papers, but you should always verify each reference before you decide it.

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So in the next three slides, we will look more closely at the image policy.

6:26

First we look at primary research images, microscopy, Histology, western blots, radiology scans or patient images.

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These are direct records of what was observed or measured in your study.

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The rule for this category is very clear.

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AI must not be used to create them or to alter them in any way, including adjustments to brightness, contrast or colour.

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These should only be made with established image processing software.

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The integrity of these images is fundamental to reproducible science.

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If an image has been changed, even with good intentions, it is no longer a reliable record of the data.

7:06

Explanatory images illustrate concepts, processes or relationships, for example, flow charts, decision trees or timelines.

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They help the reader understand how something works.

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Data visualisations present results that come from your data sets through analytical, computational or statistical methods.

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For example, plots, charts, graphs or heat maps.

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AI tools may be used to create these images, but two conditions apply.

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The output must always be grounded in your actual underlying data and the method must be reproducible.

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As always, you could verify the output and disclose AI use in your submission.

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Graphical abstracts are a special case.

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General purpose AI image tools should not be used to create them, mainly due to copyright risks.

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A graphical abstract is a complex visual that combines many elements such as icons, graphics and

other design components, which increases the chance that the tool draws on 3rd party material without proper licencing.

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Instead, we recommend using a dedicated tool like By Render, which offers licencing terms specifically designed for academic publishing.

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That brings us to the end of our deeper look at the image policy.

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To summarise the three categories, primary research images must not be created or changed with AI, explanatory images and data visualisations may use AI with conditions, and graphical abstracts should be made only with dedicated illustration tools and not general AI image tools.

8:40

Now that we understand when AI can be used, let us look at how to disclose it properly in your paper.

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The 1st is the declaration of AI use.

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When you use generative AI tools to prepare your manuscript, including to create images, you must add a separate declaration section at the end of your paper, just before the references.

9:00

Second, for any AI generated image, include a note in the caption of your image with the tool name, the version and how it was used.

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3rd, when AI tools are used to generate data visualisations or help you with data analysis, you should give more detail in the method section and state the name of the model or tool, the version you used, and the developer or manufacturer.

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For the exact wording of the declaration, please refer to Elsevier's policy page and to your journal's guide for authors.

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They provide suggested text that you can follow.

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Finally, it is helpful to know what does not require disclosure.

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You do not need to declare the use of AI when it was only used for basic grammar, spelling, and punctuation checks.

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Also, you do not need to declare assistive technology that is used only for accessibility purposes.

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Let us now talk about something very important, protecting your data and your intellectual property when using AI tools.

10:00

Before uploading anything into an AI tool, you should always check the tool's terms and conditions.

10:06

There are three questions you should ask.

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First, will your manuscript or your data be kept or retained by the tool?

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Second, can your contact be shared with third parties or used to train the model?

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And 3rd, does the tool allow you to publish the content that you created or edited with it?

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You are responsible for keeping your unpublished research confidential and for protecting your intellectual property rights.

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If possible, only work with AI tools that have been licenced by your institution.

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Enterprise and institutional versions are more likely to be configured so that they do not retain, reuse, share or learn from what you submit, but it is still worth verifying this before you use them.

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Until now, we have talked about your role as an author, but many researchers also work as peer reviewers for journals.

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So let us look at what the policy means for you.

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When you review a paper, AI may support you with improving the language or structure of your review reports or for background literature searches.

11:08

The one thing you must not do is upload the submitted manuscript into an AI tool.

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This is a confidential document and the authors have not consented to sharing it in that way.

11:18

When you do use AI in your review, only use a private AI tool, one that does not retain, reuse, or learn from what you submit.

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And always disclose AI use in the Comments to Authors section of your report.

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Please remember AI cannot replace expert peer review judgement and you remain fully responsible for your assessment.

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We have now covered the main points of the policy, so let us bring everything together with a checklist that you can run through before you submit.

11:48

This pulls everything together.

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That we covered first, how you used AI, that it only supports that your work and that you reviewed and verified every output.

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2nd, references that you read every source you cite and that each one truly supports your claims.

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And 3rd, images that he did not use AI to create or change primary research images and that any AI generated data visualisations come from your own data.

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And finally, transparency and responsibility.

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That you included the declaration of AI use both before the references and in your image captions, and that you take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality and integrity of your manuscript.

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If you can take every box, you are using generative AI in a responsible and transparent way.

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Thank you for completing this module and using generative AI in manuscript preparation.

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We hope it has given you a clear and practical understanding of how to use these tools responsibly.

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The key message is simple.

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Generative AI can support your work, but you remain responsible for all of your work, and you should always be transparent about how you use AI.

13:00

If you would like to learn more, you can find the full policy and further resources through the Research Academy.

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Thank you for your time and good luck with your research.