UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Student Success Centre

Talking to Your Instructor About AI Use

Depending on your course aims, your instructor might focus on promoting certain skills like critical thinking, problem solving, comprehension, and literacy. When used properly, generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) can supplement your learning and develop reflective and critical engagement. However, it is important to understand your instructors' expectations before using AI tools in coursework.

Many students may feel reluctant to talk to their instructor about using AI for coursework, but starting the conversation shows that you care about critical thinking, academic integrity, and transparency. This resource is designed to help navigate the conversation with your instructor.

Approach the Topic with Respect and Understanding

It is important to recognize that different instructors have different expectations. The University of Calgary has no institution-wide policy regarding the use of generative AI in teaching and learning. Instead, course instructors are responsible for determining whether generative AI has a place in their courses.

Some of your courses may permit the use of AI, and others may not. As a student, it is your responsibility to understand and follow your instructor's expectations for their class— including the use of Gen AI.

Check your Course Outline First

Course outlines define the institution's academic integrity policy. In some cases, your instructor may have included a statement about student use of artificial intelligence in the course.

If there is an explicit statement that prohibits the use of AI, it is very unlikely that a conversation with your instructor will change their mind.

Additionally, you should never assume that you are permitted to use an AI tool. If there is no statement on the course syllabus about AI use, it is a good idea to approach your instructor with questions for clarification.

If there is an explicit statement about permissible use of AI, take note of any questions you may have. Consider what your instructor says about:

- Permissible use cases of AI (e.g. editorial help, citation generation, discussion questions)
- Specific tools that are allowed/prohibited (e.g. Microsoft CoPilot, Grammarly, etc.)
- Different assignments that may have different expectations
- Expectations for transparency and citing AI use

Find the Right Opportunity to Start the Conversation

Consider approaching your instructor during office hours, after class, or by email. Focus on asking questions to clarify their expectations. If you suspect the conversation may be a longer one, consider visiting during their office hours or requesting an appointment to speak.

Prepare for the Conversation

When preparing for the conversation, you should consider the tasks that you want to use AI to help you with (e.g. brainstorming, structuring, editing, coding). Being transparent about how you would like to use AI can help you demonstrate to your instructor how AI tools may be ethically used to support your learning process.

You can also provide examples of how you plan to use AI. Here are some ways to help you start the conversation:

- "I want to be transparent about how I use AI tools for my studies. Could you please clarify how AI use aligns with your expectations around academic integrity in this course/assignment?"

- "I'm working on my assignment, and I want to make sure I'm following academic integrity expectations. Would it be okay to use an AI tool to help me brainstorm by generating topics?"

- "I just finished writing a draft of my paper, and I'm wondering if it's okay to use ChatGPT or Grammarly to help me edit the content. I want to make sure I'm meeting expectations and maintaining my academic integrity."

Based on your initial conversation, you can get a better sense of your instructor's stance. If they seem open, you can try suggesting a class discussion, especially if AI use is a larger class concern.

Conclusion

Instructors may have specific rules, preferences, or concerns regarding use of AI. Understanding your instructor's viewpoint helps you to ensure you stay within the appropriate guidelines.

Don't be afraid to ask for your instructor's rationale. Instructors carefully consider course learning outcomes and ethics when forming their guidelines. Some courses might not permit AI use because it does not alight with certain educational goals, such as developing individual critical thinking and creative skills.

Having conversations about using AI tools to support your learning can feel challenging, but if you prepare your questions in advance and seek to understand your instructor's perspective on the topic, it can make these conversations much easier.

If you need help crafting questions around generative AI that you could ask your instructor, feel free to book an appointment with an SSC Writing Support Tutor or a member of the Academic Development Team in the Student Success Centre.