

Use of Citation and AI¹

Small-Group Discussion Scenarios

We have several scenarios below- some involve the use of citation, some about AI. We'll break into small groups to discuss each scenario. Make notes about what you discuss, and at the end we'll discuss each one as a class. There are no trick questions- think through each together and discuss.

Scenario 1 — The Paraphrased Paragraph

The Situation

Maya is writing a history paper on the causes of World War I. She finds a paragraph in a scholarly book that explains the alliance system clearly. She rewrites it completely in her own words—different sentence structure, different vocabulary—and includes it in her paper without a citation.

“I put it in my own words,” she tells her roommate, “so I don’t need to cite it.”

Discussion Questions

1. Is Maya’s reasoning correct? Why or why not?
2. What exactly needs to be cited—the words, or the ideas?
3. What would the citation look like in this case? Would it look different from a direct quote?

Scenario 2 — Common Knowledge?

The Situation

Jordan is writing an essay about climate change. He includes the following statements without citations:

- “Earth’s average temperature has risen approximately 1.1°C since the pre-industrial era.”
- “Carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas.”
- “The 2015 Paris Agreement aimed to limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.”
- “Many scientists are concerned about rising sea levels.”

His professor marks the first and third items as needing citations, but not the second and fourth.

¹Generative AI was used in the construction of this activity.

Discussion Questions

1. Why might the professor have made those particular distinctions?
2. How would you define “common knowledge” in an academic context?
3. What’s a practical test you can apply when you’re unsure whether something needs a citation?

Scenario 3 — The AI Brainstorm

The Situation

Priya has a paper due on the ethics of genetic engineering. Before writing, she asks an AI chatbot: “*What are the main ethical arguments for and against genetic engineering of human embryos?*” She reads the response, closes the window, and then writes her paper entirely from scratch using the framework of arguments the AI outlined—but she does her own research, finds her own sources, and writes every sentence herself. She does not mention the AI in her paper.

Discussion Questions

1. Is this an appropriate use of AI? What are the strongest arguments on each side?
2. Does using AI to *brainstorm* feel different from using it to *write*? Should it be treated differently?
3. Does Priya need to disclose that she used AI? Does it depend on the course policy?

Scenario 4 — The Polished Draft

The Situation

After writing a full draft of his psychology paper, Darius pastes it into an AI tool and asks it to “improve the clarity and flow.” The AI returns a version that has reorganized some paragraphs, rewritten several sentences, and tightened the conclusion. Darius reviews the changes, accepts most of them, revises a few, and submits the paper. The final ideas are entirely his; the prose in several paragraphs is substantially the AI’s. The course syllabus says: “*Students must submit their own work.*”

Discussion Questions

1. Has Darius submitted “his own work”? Where would you draw the line?
2. How is this similar to—or different from—having a writing-center tutor suggest revisions?
3. What should Darius do if the syllabus policy is ambiguous? Who should he ask?
4. Draft a one-sentence policy you think would be fair and clear for a course like this.