



GenAI guidelines for legal academic writing

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Legal writing is an important skill law students and legal scholars need to learn and practice. The skills connected to legal academic writing are diverse and manifold, ranging from identifying and formulating a legal problem that leads to a clearly formulated research question, analysing rules and documents critically and systematically in their legal context, formulating arguments that are based on sound legal analysis, and presenting the results by choosing the structure, language and style that is persuasive. Developing these skills is crucial for law students at the Faculty, since legal reasoning and writing are core activities performed by professionals and academics in the legal field.

Given the significant recent advancement in Artificial intelligence (AI), in particular generative AI (GenAI) models, such systems are to an increasing extent able to support or even fully automate some of these tasks. In light of this development, it is crucial to ensure that students are still able to learn and refine their own legal academic writing skills at the Faculty. We believe these skills to be an important precondition for the effective and ethical use of GenAI for parts of the research and writing process.

This document serves as guidelines for our bachelor and master students as well as PhD candidates when using GenAI in legal academic writing at UM Faculty of Law. As these guidelines reflect the norms in legal academia in general, they are also relevant for all other researchers. We distinguish the use of GenAI in teaching students legal academic writing on the one hand, and for PhD, master and bachelor thesis writing on the other.

Student learning on legal academic writing

The Faculty strives towards creating room for students to experiment, make mistakes, in order to learn and hone their legal academic writing skills. Allowing students to use GenAI without limits in drafting tasks before they have properly developed these skills risks hampering this process, as students may uncritically leverage these tools to pass the assignments, without having to rely on and develop their own skillset.

Besides the inherent importance of teaching law students to write and think for themselves, we also believe that these skills are an important requirement for being able to use GenAI tools effectively. Using such tools today requires the user to be able to critically assess the output provided by it, such as whether the output is correct and verifiable, whether the choice of tone and words is aligned with the message they want to convey, that the suggested text does not contain biases or hallucinations, etc.

Beyond the skills of writing legal academic texts, students need to be trained to work with GenAI tools. With the rapid development of GenAI, such models are poised to be integrated into professional and academic contexts across disciplines, including the legal discipline. Students undoubtedly will have to be able to work with GenAI tools in a professional context, and it is the task of a Faculty of Law to teach them how they can act as confident yet critical users of these tools. For example, students need to learn for which kinds of tasks it is appropriate to use GenAI, how GenAI can be used to support legal processes effectively and how they can verify the quality and validity of information provided by GenAI. Understanding the concepts underlying such models, as well as opportunities, limitations and risks inherent in their use is imperative for using GenAI in legal processes, including legal academic writing. The Faculty is already a pioneer in these topics. For example, in the "Advanced Legal Analytics" course and in the new Master's specialization on Law & AI, students are taught how GenAI works, how to interact with it effectively and what risks it entails for legal tasks.

Our legal educators are tasked with the development of educational programmes that provide a long-term vision on how to train students in developing their own language and skills in legal academic writing, as well as to teach them how to use GenAI tools to their benefit, in a responsible and critical way. This development is ongoing, in MILE (Maastricht

Insights in Innovation and Impact on Legal Education) and elsewhere. The Faculty will invest in training teachers and educators in digital literacy in order to teach our students on what a “critical” user of AI is.

In the meantime, this means that course coordinators should design their tasks and courses following the above expressed vision. Being aware that licenses for GenAI tools are not yet available to staff and students at UM level, teachers should be careful and raise students’ awareness about:

- the need to understand the policies of the GenAI tools they want to make use of, such as how and where the data will be stored, what the data will be used for, and how to opt-out of additional training on provided data if possible, and
- that sharing IP-protected material and data-sensitive information is not allowed.

With this premise in mind, teachers should consider whether it is a good idea to integrate various use-cases of GenAI tools in their teaching and assignments. They are then encouraged to clearly define the skills that a task is trying to achieve and whether the use of AI in that context is allowed, according to specified rules, or rather not, meaning that the use of AI for the completion of the task is unacceptable.

Being clear about the purpose of teaching tasks and the reason why GenAI use is allowed, to what degree, or not, will become paramount in teaching students to become aware of the reasons that inform the choice to use GenAI or not. Students can likewise be asked to provide a “statement on the use of generative AI”, which critically examines and explains how they used generative AI to accomplish the tasks. The Faculty may provide templates that allow course coordinators to specify the allowed/disallowed uses of GenAI for a specific task.

Bachelor, master and PhD thesis writing

While learning how to carry out legal academic writing is at the core of our educational programmes, the thesis is a proof of competence at the end of educational programmes, demonstrating the skills obtained during their education. Students and researchers need to show that they possess legal academic writing skills, at different levels for a bachelor, master or PhD thesis. Here, it is the output, not the process, that is assessed. Since the focus is not on learning but on proving competence, we provide clear guidelines about what use of AI is considered acceptable and unacceptable. This is important to ensure the continuing trust in the proof of competence provided by the Faculty and University.

Below, we distinguish common GenAI use cases and indicate whether they are unacceptable, allowed to be carried out with caution, or allowed.

These guidelines will be revisited regularly to ensure that they correspond to the expected level of use of AI in academia and the capabilities of the models.

Accountability, transparency and version management

What is clear is that even for use cases that we consider to be allowed (with caution), students and PhD researchers bear the responsibility for the end-result of their work – including any inaccuracies or invented content that may have arisen due to GenAI – and will have to be fully transparent about their use of GenAI tools at the different stages of the research process. This concretely entails:

- explaining in the methodology section for which steps in the research process a GenAI model was used, why the choice to use GenAI was made and how the risks of using the tool for that query have been managed;
- keeping prompting histories, including details about the time and GenAI model used.

In order to make sure that assessors can verify and understand the research process, we require students and PhD candidates to share with their supervisors/assessors

- parts of the bachelor, master and PhD thesis at different stages of the process, such as the research proposal, a detailed structure, each chapter separately and the final thesis at different moments in time, demonstrating the development of the thesis; and
- where assessors determine such need, (at least) two versions of the thesis where GenAI is used to carry out a language review: the version(s) before language review and after.

Assessors will make agreements with students and PhD candidates which parts of the thesis they are to share with them. Assessors keep those parts of the thesis on file until the final assessment of the thesis.

Allowed use of GenAI

The use of GenAI is allowed for (green)

Use-Case	Example Prompts
Searching for literature and information (like a search engine).	What are some important journal articles on the principle of proportionality in EU law? Search the web.
Translation of third-party text, words and phrases (but writing the thesis in another language and translating it is not acceptable).	Translate this French legal phrase into English: 'force obligatoire du contrat.'
Explaining the meaning of words (like a dictionary).	What does the legal term 'stare decisis' mean?
Explaining concepts (like an encyclopedia).	Explain the concept of 'consideration' in contract law. Suggest some relevant readings where I can learn more about it.
Grammar and language editing, without using verbatim reformulated text suggested by GenAI.	Check the grammar in this sentence: 'The court have decided in favour of the claimant.' Point out grammar and language mistakes, but do not suggest reformulated versions.
Formatting based on a citation style (in footnotes, bibliography).	Format this case citation in OSCOLA: Donoghue v Stevenson, [1932] AC 562 (HL).

Careful use of GenAI

Careful use of GenAI is allowed for (orange)

Use-Case	Example Prompts
<p>Summarizing and explaining laws, case law, or documents.</p>	<p>Summarize the main holding and reasoning in <i>Donoghue v Stevenson</i> [1932] AC 562.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>What are the main principles of the GDPR?</p> <p>OR</p> <p>I have uploaded a Dutch legal case. Can you find the key section regarding the right to be forgotten, and provide an English summary?</p>
<p>Brainstorming, challenging and generating general research ideas (but formulating concrete research questions is not acceptable).</p>	<p>Suggest general topics for research related to constitutional law and digital privacy, without suggesting concrete research questions.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>"How does the AI Act interact with the GDPR?"</p> <p>Is this a good research question? Point out some areas for improvement, without directly suggesting a new research question.</p>
<p>Peer-reviewing and improving an already detailed structure.</p>	<p>Here is my detailed thesis outline on EU competition law.</p> <p>[[STRUCTURE]]</p> <p>The thesis seeks to answer the research question: [[RESEARCH QUESTION]].</p> <p>Point out flaws and suggest ways of improving this structure, without suggesting specific wording.</p>
<p>Peer-reviewing one's text, in particular asking GenAI to criticize the text, check for missing information, verify accuracy.</p>	<p>Here is a draft paragraph about judicial review in Dutch law:</p> <p>[[PARAGRAPH]]</p> <p>Point out flaws and general ways of improving this paragraph, without suggesting alternative wording.</p>

The red line of what is not acceptable anymore is where GenAI drafts texts that are used in the thesis. This line may become blurry when using GenAI for summarizing, generating research ideas and peer-reviewing. This is why extra caution is required on the side of the student and researcher to make sure that the information generated by the AI tool is used in a responsible manner, namely to feed into their own critical thinking and writing, not to use it in their texts. In all instances, the user of GenAI should be critical of the outputs and verify the provided information.

Unacceptable use of GenAI

Unacceptable use (red)

- defining a research question, methodology or structure;
- drafting text, even if based on own ideas and arguments;
- reformulating text, for example, to improve the (style of) the text or to edit the text, even if based on own ideas and arguments;
- suggesting legal arguments;
- carrying out legal analysis (doctrinal, comparative, etc.).

Defining a research question, setting up a methodology and research structure, carrying out legal research and drafting legal analysis and argumentation is the essence of legal academic writing. A bachelor, master and PhD thesis needs to display the competence of the student and researcher themselves, as the assessment pertains to those individuals' skills that lead to the conferral of the relevant academic degree.

The above restrictions do not apply where AI is itself the subject of the research or a defined component of the methodology, such as in AI & Law research, computational legal studies or similar fields. In such cases the uses of AI that are integral to the study are excluded from the prohibitions.

Approved by the Faculty Board on 16 September 2025.