

Briefing note for course leaders

Number 1, April 2026

Developing categories for AI use in summative assessment and communicating with students

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Background

This briefing note has been developed for those setting summative assessments within the context of the [AI use in summative assessment policy](#) for taught degrees.

It focusses on the decisions that must be made about how students can use AI in each summative assessment and makes suggestions for how this information might be communicated to students.

The resources included here arise from the Centre for Teaching and Learning's [workshops to support University policy on AI use in summative assessment](#).

Further guidance and resources are available on the [AI use in summative assessment policy and guidance site](#) on OxIntranet. The site has a space for sharing examples of local outputs. Having worked through this briefing note, colleagues are encouraged to upload examples to OxIntranet.

Category statements of AI use

The [AI use in summative assessment policy](#) states that those setting summative assessment must 'declare whether and how students can use AI in summative assessment, for example, by a category system for different assignments on courses.'

This briefing note uses a **category system approach**. Other approaches are possible, for example red, amber, green traffic lights systems to clarify to students authorised use of AI¹.

In workshops with the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), course teams developing statements on AI use for students have found it helpful to make the following decisions:

Decide on the level at which the categories of AI use apply, for example, at department/faculty or course level.

Determine the overall categories of AI use authorised and define these broadly, for example, not authorised, selective use authorised, integral use required.

Generate all possible authorised uses for each category and list in an AI use category statement.

Decide how to communicate AI use categories to taught students

Review and update the list of possible authorised uses as and when new disciplinary practices emerge.

Once these decisions have been taken, those responsible for setting summative assessments will be able to use the course/department's AI use category statement to select the category appropriate for each assessment.

Example of guidance from Department of Sociology (for students)

The Department of Sociology chose two categories for summative assessment: *no AI use permitted* and *AI use permitted* and decided to apply these at the level of the department.

In this example, permitted use is defined broadly as in an assistive capacity, with examples including for background literature searching, proof-reading and editing for grammar, spelling and/or academic tone.

[View the guidance](#) (SSO required)

¹ [IATL's AI Traffic Light System: Clear Guidelines for AI Use in Assessments](#), Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning, University of Warwick

1. Decide on the level at which the categories of AI use apply

Consider agreeing, where feasible, one category use statement for all submission-based summative assessments across the course or department/faculty. This practice is clearer for staff and students. Where there may be a need for different authorised uses of AI, providing clarity to students can be helpful, as in the Faculty of English guidance which emphasises authorised AI use for multiple assessment tasks for UG and PGT teaching.

Example of guidance from Faculty of English (for students)

'The guiding principle is that GenAI tools are permitted to support your learning and to make preliminary inquiries. They may NOT be used for the direct production of text or the conception and structure of your arguments for submitted assessments. You remain responsible for the accuracy of your work and the critical evaluation of any material you write about.'

[View the guidance](#) (SSO required)

2. Determine the overall categories of AI use

Course teams attending the CTL workshops have found it useful to start the process of developing a category statement of AI use by listing all the assessments on their course and considering at a broad level what the corresponding authorised AI use categories might be for a given assessment task. See Table 1 below for an example.

Summative assessment	Authorised AI use
Exam (closed book)	None
Dissertation (submission)	Allow some use of AI
Essay (submission)	Allow some use of AI
Presentation (in class)	Allow some use of AI
Critique of an AI output e.g. Design Validation (submission)	Integral use of AI

Table 1: Example of a summary of AI table with initial thoughts on categories of authorised AI use by assessment task

3. Generate all possible authorised uses for each category

Once the overall categories have been determined, reviewing the list of summative assessments where selective AI use is authorised can generate specific examples of authorised use appropriate to your discipline, as well as highlight any overarching themes.

Example of authorised use from Mathematics (guidance for students)

Examples of generally permissible use of AI:

- searching for literature on a specific topic, provided you verify the relevance, correctness and unbiasedness of the references, and the discussion of the sources is your own
- assistance in writing code, including generation of new code and translation of existing code into a different programming language
- non-substantive alterations to figures that improve clarity and readability
- formatting of lists or bibliographies
- improving your grammar by an AI tool specifically designed and intended for that purpose (such as Grammarly).

In all cases, Gen AI use needs to be declared as outlined above. All Gen AI output has to be checked, and any errors may have an impact on the final mark, even where properly cited.

Examples of generally impermissible use of AI are also provided for students in the guidance.

[View the guidance](#) (SSO required)

4. Decide how to communicate AI use categories to taught students

Students may be referred to the University's [Guidance on safe and responsible use of Gen AI tools](#).

Category statements of AI use may be inserted into assessment briefs, student handbooks and other course documentation as well as forming part of discussions with tutors.

Example of guidance from Department of Biochemistry (for students)

The [Part II Project Guidelines for Research Dissertations in the Department of Biochemistry](#) (August 2025) included the following authorised uses of Gen AI in dissertations:

Searching for literature on a specific topic (but you must verify the relevance, accuracy and lack of bias of references produced in this way. Discussion of such sources must be your own)

Providing assistance with writing computer code, generation of new code and translation of existing code into different programming languages

Identifying errors in labelling of diagrams, charts or figures and making non-substantive alterations to figures that improve clarity and readability

Identifying formatting and layout errors and inconsistencies (e.g. page numbers, font size, line spacing, headers and footers)

Identifying typographical, spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors, or anomalies or ambiguities in phrasing and syntax using an AI tool specifically designed and intended for that purpose (such as Grammarly).

[View the guidance](#) (SSO required).

The course (or department/faculty) level AI-use summary statement should explain which AI category applies to each summative assessment task. See Table 2 below.

Category (check the category for each assessment)	Authorised uses
Not authorised	The only authorised uses are assistive technologies required as a reasonable adjustment to mitigate disability impact, as indicated by the Disability Advisory Service in a Student Support Plan. See The Use of AI in common Disabled Students Allowance Assistive Technology (AT) software for more information on this topic.
Selective authorised use (courses edit this list for our course context)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spelling and grammar checking• Punctuation corrections• Formatting suggestions (layout, referencing guidance)• Brainstorming ideas• Short summaries (max 150 words)

Category (check the category for each assessment)	Authorised uses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested structures/outlines/headings • Explanations of concepts • Translation – AI translation allowed for comprehension, not when translation skill itself is being assessed.
Integral authorised use	You must use AI (or the AI mathematical tools) to produce an initial draft using AI prompts, then critically evaluate and revise it; produce a critique of an AI-generated policy brief; compare AI vs. human analyses and defend which is stronger, use AI to code then and review.

Table 2: Template for creating a course or departmental/faculty level category use statement for students

Courses or departments/faculty have also considered creating a summary table of AI use for assessments to work with the more detailed listing of authorised uses (and in some cases, for example [Biochemistry part II](#), where they have also listed not authorised uses and in the [Mathematics guidance](#)). See Table 3 below for an example of a summary table.

Assessment	AI authorised use Category
Annotated bibliography (submission)	Selective authorised use
Essay (closed-book exam)	Not authorised
Presentation (in-class)	Selective authorised use
Policy paper (submission)	Integral use required
Dissertation/Extended assignment (submission)	Selective authorised use

Table 3: Example of a course level summary AI use table for sharing with students

Note: Communicating AI use to research students

All research undertaken by academic staff and students, including by postgraduate research students, must meet the expectations in the [Policy for using Generative AI in Research: guidelines for researchers and professional staff](#). Further guidance for courses and department/faculties about ethical and appropriate use of AI in support of research activity is outlined in the policy.

5. Review and update the list of possible authorised uses as and when new disciplinary practices emerge

As the capabilities of AI develop, new disciplinary practices may emerge so that Departments or Faculties may want to update the list of possible authorised uses shared with students.

Further resources

The [AI use in summative assessment policy site on OxIntranet](#) provides support for course teams in implementing the policy.

The [Centre for Teaching and Learning](#) offers [support to course teams who are developing new courses or making major changes to existing courses \(UG and PGT\)](#).

[Use of AI in common Disabled Students Allowance Assistive Technology \(AT\) software](#) document helps you to understand how AI is used in common assistive technology software.

The [AI Competency Centre](#) provides resources and training for staff and students to ensure that everyone can use AI tools with confidence, safety and for appropriate applications.