Generative AI tools can help you efficiently develop working knowledge of topics and concepts. Like Wikipedia, these tools offer a first step on the path to deeper knowledge. Unique to generative AI tools is the ability to customize your inquiries about a subject to dig deeper and to request clarification or examples. Information literacy is critical when using generative AI to learn about new subjects. Sometimes it is acceptable to use less credible sources to develop basic working knowledge of a new topic. But often you must use highly credible sources, such as academic works, to verify what you’ve read, deepen understanding, and conduct research.

Be mindful: Generative AI tools regularly fabricate false information—even when they include citations in their output—and may include biased results. These tools currently have no method to highlight potentially false information or score confidence in specific statements for the user. Always treat the information as a starting point for further exploration, and never assume it is true or fair.

You can enhance your comprehension of complex texts by using generative AI tools to summarize challenging content using simpler terms. These tools can illuminate field-specific contexts and assumptions that a non-specialist reader might not initially grasp. You may interact with ChatGPT, for example, to discuss readings and explore and develop your understanding.

Be mindful: Generative AI can synthesize information but cannot offer the benefits readers derive from engaging directly with scholarly sources. Learning to decode and interpret texts in your field of study is an important part of the skill set you develop as a graduate student.

You can input code snippets, ask for explanations of specific functions or algorithms, or seek guidance on debugging. ChatGPT, for example, can assist with various programming languages and offer suggestions for optimizing your code.

Be mindful: Verify the correctness and efficiency of code recommendations that generative AI offers before implementing them. Never share sensitive or proprietary code with ChatGPT or other commercial platforms, since data entered is not private.

Generative AI tools can generate, refine, and scope possible research questions. It can also help you work through the potential benefits and limitations of different research designs.

Generative AI tools can generate scenarios or narratives to illustrate the application of alternative theories, concepts, or models. These tools can also generate hypothetical cases you can use to practice applying theoretical or strategic concepts.

Generative AI tools remain limited in their ability to recommend specific sources and topics relevant to your work. They are better at providing overviews of key themes and concepts in literature on a topic. They can also suggest possible gaps or limits to scholarly understanding of a given issue. Also, generative AI may be helpful in listing keywords and creating compound search terms related to a given subject.

Support your work by discussing the potential or avoidable pitfalls. Be mindful: Discuss the potential or avoidable pitfalls.

Support decisions about document organization. Generative AI can explain research writing conventions and help you consider options for organizing your writing. It can break down a chapter (e.g., an introduction, literature review, or methodology) into a series of tasks and provide you with a checklist for completion to guide the writing process.

If you describe your project, including time frame, hard and soft deadlines, and desired working rhythm, tools like ChatGPT can generate week-by-week plans to help you organize your efforts. Some generative AI tools can even adapt this plan to reflect information about your self-identified strengths and weaknesses (e.g., procrastination or anxiety about sharing early drafts).

Explore generative AI as a research tool. Tools like ChatGPT can assist in designing data collection tools and analyzing research data. For example, they may be used to help draft survey instruments or code the analysis of interview responses. They can randomly generate scenarios to be used in war gaming or strategic analysis projects.

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