Artificial Intelligence in Coursework and Exams in the NOHA Joint Master's Degree Programme in International Humanitarian Action at Ruhr-Universität Bochum

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1. Preamble

The use of AI in educational institutions such as schools and universities has become a lived everyday reality. These guidelines raise awareness for the potential opportunities and limits of AI tools in higher education. They also provide criteria and principles for the application of such tools in coursework and exams. These guidelines will be applicable for all coursework and exams from the winter term 2026/2027 (1 October 2026) onwards.

2. Opportunities and Limits of AI Tools in Higher Education

AI tools can support students in their studies, e.g., in summarizing learning materials, brainstorming and conceptualizing their ideas for creative assignments or in checking spelling and grammar for self-generated texts. The NOHA Joint Master's Degree Programme in International Humanitarian Action at Ruhr-Universität Bochum (hereafter: NOHA Master's Programme at RUB) encourages its students to make responsible use of AI tools but also acknowledges the need to coordinate with lecturers and course instructors to respect the following guidelines.

Large language models (LLMs) – one of the most widely used forms of AI tools – draw on extensive training data that recognise statistic probabilities for the composition of language, e.g., with which probability particular words will follow each other in a certain context. In doing so, LLMs can generate word sequences that are not included in the training data.

This generative AI is not a search engine that provides responses based on training data or Internet data that likely fits the prompt. Rather, it creates completely new outputs (texts, images, code, etc.) based on probabilities. Generative AI does not necessarily rely on a corpus of previous responses for identical questions but applies a randomized algorithm, so similar prompts may produce different results. The results are neither replicable nor is the gain of knowledge intersubjectively verifiable. Thus, relying on generative AI as a source does not meet the core criterion of scientificity. It also raises the crucial question of authorship.

The output of tools like ChatGPT is of the nature of probabilistic word orders. These are often correct, but do not always correlate with actual statements or facts. There is no guarantee for the accuracy of a response. AI tools sometimes put out objectively wrong statements as seemingly correct answers which users who trust the infallibility of AI technology might then work with. Thus, AI tools may support academic writing but cannot replace independent academic work. AI tools need to be directed, controlled and reflectively used. This cannot be ensured without building foundational competencies in academic writing. NOHA at RUB would therefore like to highlight that subject-specific training in academic writing remains a key competence in higher education that all students need to have or acquire. Such training needs to specifically address the responsible use of AI technology beyond the application of academic standards. Since AI and similar technologies also generate new challenges in terms of data protection, ethical considerations, dependency, and potentially even deepened inequalities, training should prepare students for these challenges in an academic as well as a professional work context.

Since generative AI tools produce texts based on training data, the generated outputs are limited to the knowledge included in this data. This has far-reaching consequences, including the exclusion of very recent knowledge and a bias in reproducing certain incorrect or misleading social conceptions included in the training data, e.g., stereotypical conceptions or popular misconceptions. The dominance of AI models and technology companies from the Global North and economically richer countries is also concerning in this way, since perspectives from the Global South or technologically less-equipped countries risk being excluded.

Because of how generative AI tools like ChatGPT work, these tools cannot refer to sources in the actual sense. AI tools do not produce sources as such but combine single linguistic components based on probabilistic logics. This may result in so-called AI hallucination, i.e., naming sources that seem to be real but are actually non-existent. Thus, the supportive use of generative AI must be built on a foundational understanding of scientific conceptions, methods and facts, and on critical reflection.

3. Academic Writing

In the interdisciplinary context of humanitarian action in higher education, writing and reading of academic texts is a fundamental skill. Academic texts impart scientific findings and are the foundation for further research. Writing is a process in which the written discussion of problems of relevance for humanitarian action provokes further thinking and allows for the development of critical reflection. Students acquire this core competence throughout their academic studies – from their Bachelor's to their Master's.

Generative AI tools can increase efficiency and quality in this process. However, they also increase the complexity of the academic writing process as their use requires additional theoretical and practical knowledge. If these tools are applied in compliance with good scientific conduct and in support of – not in replacement of – independent academic writing, they can provide a chance for students to receive additional advice and recommendations in their writing process – provided it is critically reflected. Mastering the methods of academic writing is a precondition for the responsible and mindful application of AI tools and the assessment of AI-generated content. At RUB, the Centre for Teaching and Learning in cooperation with the Schreibzentrum (centre for academic writing) provides numerous support services for academic writing and the use of AI tools for students, including workshops and consulting in digital learning.

4. Provisions of the Study and Examination Regulation

In principle, the study and exam regulations of study programmes and the guidelines for good academic practice at RUB apply for all coursework and exams. In this context, particular reference is made to the following principles:

- All coursework and exams must be prepared independently and without making use of impermissible assistance and support.
- All sections that include quotes, paraphrases, or references to other sources need to be properly cited or otherwise identified by making reference to the respective source.
- Presenting scientific insights, findings, hypotheses, teachings or research approaches from others on pretence of authorship (plagiarism) is an attempt at deception.
- In any attempt to influence the result of an exam or coursework by deception or the use of unauthorized assistance, the exam or coursework in question should be graded as "fail" (5.0).

The following guidelines aim at providing additional action-oriented criteria and principles for the particular area of AI. When making reference to AI, this does not only apply to generative AI, i.e., content-producing tools like ChatGPT, but also to AI tools in general, like Perplexity,

Grammarly, Co-Pilot, DeepL, Libre Translate, Google Translate, LanguageTool, Quillbot, Elicit, Jasper, etc.

These guidelines apply to all written or oral coursework and exams in the NOHA Master's Programme at RUB, including presentations, written exams, oral exams, reports, posters, written assignments, papers, essays, exposés, and theses. In any case of uncertainty, please contact your lecturers and course instructors as early as possible.

5. Guidelines for Using AI Tools in Coursework and Exams

5.1. Principles

These guidelines understand generative AI tools as supportive for academic writing, not replacements for autonomous research, writing and critical reflection. AI shall support students to further develop their competencies in their area of study, methods and argumentation while ensuring adherence to academic standards.

Students bear full responsibility for all their submitted coursework and exams, including checking and verifying references and sources. They need to make their level of knowledge, their line of argumentation and their methodological procedure fully transparent. Acquiring competencies in academic writing and research remains a key learning objective in higher education. AI must not interfere with this objective.

The aim of these guidelines is to achieve an informed, responsible, transparent and critically reflected use of AI as part of good scientific conduct. Academic work must fulfil the criteria of intersubjective verifiability and make all applied assistance transparent. Accordingly, the **use of AI must be documented**.

A reflected use of AI by students requires that they have knowledge of its opportunities and its limits. AI tools produce statistically likely outputs that can be incorrect, distorted or scientifically inadequate. Consequently, all content produced by making use of AI must be critically reviewed, contextualized and checked against verified original sources. Risks of bias, hallucination, de-skilling and issues of authorship and data protection need to be considered.

5.2. Use of AI in Coursework and Exams

If adhering to the principles of good scientific practice, AI can be useful to support students' studies in certain areas of application, e.g.:

- summarizing texts and learning material for exam preparation;
- brainstorming for identifying topics for presentations, papers or written assignments;
- producing charts, graphs, or matrixes;

- transcribing audio and video material;
- supporting programming (in R, Python, etc.);
- supporting writing processes (see also 5.2.2.).

Similarly to protocols for citation which ensure intersubjective verifiability, literature research (including reading and reviewing texts) is central in generating academic texts. Writing itself serves the acquisition and production of knowledge in science. With writing, ideas and insights are not only presented but also developed, furthered and consolidated. In this epistemic-heuristic way, writing is an integral part of academic thinking and research. The independent production of texts is key for advancing one's own knowledge progress. Thus, the use of AI in this context should be limited; the comprehension and in-depth understanding of a topic must be sufficiently recognizable as the student's contribution.

The use of AI is to be made transparent and documented. When uploading data to AI tools or databases, data protection laws and practices need to be considered. This is especially relevant while using audio and video material. With GPT@RUB, RUB provides students a data-protection-compliant access to the GPT language model. The Centre for Teaching and Learning at RUB supports students with consulting and workshops for digital learning. However, using this tool does not release students and researchers from their own data protection obligations, such as the data privacy and consent from persons involved (e.g. co-students, interview partners, research subjects, etc.). Also, ethical conduct with regard to power asymmetries and towards vulnerable groups or person remains the sole responsibility of students and researchers.

5.2.1. AI in Written Assignments, Papers, Theses etc.

Using AI to support writing can be helpful. Nonetheless, academic writing is a core competence in higher education. Autonomous text production is central for drafting written assignments, papers, theses, essays, posters, exposés and reports. Coursework and exams aim at documenting and assessing the level of learning and performance of students and are to be prepared independently and autonomously. Texts exclusively generated by AI **cannot** be used.

In case of doubt about text provenance, oral examinations can take place in addition to and for elaborating written coursework or written exams.

5.2.2. Permissible Use of AI

AI can be used by students to support the writing process in certain areas of application, e.g.:

- idea generation, brainstorming and thematic focussing;
- finding sources for literature research that must be verified and reviewed autonomously;
- summarizing texts without adopting texts;
- translating texts of foreign language;
- generating charts, graphs, or matrixes based on own contents;
- programming or scripting of codes, e.g., for statistical analyses.

In general, making use of supporting AI applications (e.g., MS Word spell checkers, Grammarly, Libre Translate, LanguageTool, etc.) to improve spelling, grammar and punctuation of self-generated texts is recommended.

5.2.3. Impermissible Use of AI

Impermissible uses of AI are:

- generating full texts or sections of texts by AI;
- paraphrasing of other's texts with AI tools and adopting these as one's own work;
- structuring self-generated texts with AI tools;
- any undocumented and unlabelled application of AI tools;
- using AI tools for the processing of personal data (e.g. images, video, audio, text, etc.) without considering data protection regulations or obtaining informed consent of persons involved (e.g. co-students, interview partners, etc.).

Unlabelled, impermissible and undocumented use of AI in coursework and exams is to be considered as an attempt at deception for which plagiarism rules will be applied in accordance with the applicable study and examination regulations of the NOHA Master's Programme at RUB.

6. Documenting and Reflecting the Use of AI

For complying to the principles of good scientific conduct, the use of AI is to be documented just as the use of other supporting tools and the referred to literature is. In detail this means that:

- contents and illustrations incl. figures, charts, graphs and matrixes edited with the support of AI, must be labelled accordingly to avoid any attempt of deception and the consequent failing of coursework or exams.

- if AI is applied in written coursework or exams like papers or theses, the process of application needs to be explained in a separate section in the methodological chapter and to be reflected on.
- if students make use of AI in written coursework or exams, this is to be labelled in the coursework or exam and to be documented in a separate list of AI applications.

The documentation should take place in a table covering the following aspects:

applied AI tool	area of application / operation	applied prompt	applicable chapter or section	reflection and further information

7. Declaration of Originality

All written coursework and exams in the NOHA Master's Programme at RUB must be handed in together with a dated and signed declaration of originality of the following wording:

I herewith declare that:

- *I completed the submitted work independently and used only those materials and sources that are listed. All materials used, from published as well as unpublished sources, whether directly quoted or paraphrased, are duly reported.*
- *the submitted work, or any abridgment of it, was not used for any other degree-seeking purpose at any university, department and examination authority.*
- *I have fully labelled all sections generated, edited or revised with the support of software based on artificial intelligence (e.g., large language models, natural language processing like ChatGPT, DeepL etc.), including draft versions and outlines.*
- *a table of documentation is included that provides full reference of the applied AI tool, the area of application / operation, the applied prompt, the applicable chapter or section and reflective performance.*
- *I did not make use of any professional proofreading or editing services for revising the submitted work.*
- *I am fully aware that in case of any attempt of deception or plagiarism (including full or partly plagiarized texts) the submitted work is considered to be graded as "fail" (5.0). This attempt would be reported to the applicable board of examiners.*