

Appendix C: Department of Special Education Generative AI Usage Policy for the Special Education Ph.D. Program

Based on information from the [Library at the University of Illinois](#), Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is anything that uses machine learning to “generate new text, images, video, or audio.” Examples of GenAI tools include, but are not limited to, ChatGPT, Copilot, and Gemini.

Our goal is to support doctoral students in developing thinking and decision-making skills, as well as the ability to use a range of research tools. This document gives examples of how GenAI usage might look, but it is not all-encompassing. When deciding if and how to use GenAI, we encourage you to be forthright and transparent. If you’re unsure about how to enact these guidelines, reach out to your advisor or the Director of Graduate Studies and ask questions before moving forward.

*These are the minimum expectations of the department; however, individual faculty may develop more restrictive guidelines for their advisees or students.

Guidance for GenAI Use in Doctoral Milestones

If you are using GenAI to “ghost write” or “ghost analyze,” then you are likely misusing GenAI, according to the guidance laid out in this document. “Ghost writing” is when the GenAI is producing the words and a human is taking credit. Similarly, “ghost analyzing” is when you input your data into GenAI, and it produces outcomes (e.g., codes, themes) for which you take credit. In these instances, GenAI is doing the “thinking” and writing. If, however, you create a draft or an idea and *then* turn to GenAI, you may be using GenAI as a supplemental tool and not a replacement for your own ideas or effort.

Grappling with the use of GenAI as a student, scholar, and teacher educator is an opportunity for doctoral students to articulate and enact their values with respect to conducting ethical research and engaging in deep critical thinking--the latter of which is what students are primarily assessed on in this program.

For the following milestones, the Department has determined the ways in which it is acceptable to use GenAI. If the row says, “yes,” students must follow the guidelines listed (or their advisor’s guidance, whichever is more restrictive). If the row says, “no,” the alternatives listed are recommended, but not required. It is the student’s responsibility to familiarize themselves with these guidelines.

It should be noted that the ERP, special field qualifying exam, and dissertation all require an oral defense. A strongly written document, although important, will not alone be sufficient for passing these milestones.

Use	Example	Yes/No	If Yes, Guideline If No, Alternative
Doctoral Milestones: Early Research Project, Special Field Qualifying Exam, and Dissertation			
Generating ideas	Conceptualizing study ideas and/or research questions; identifying theoretical frameworks	Yes*	In a supplementary document, provide a citation , the prompt entered, and the output generated.
Developing tools for research	Developing an interview protocol, survey, or statistical code	Yes*	In a supplementary document, provide a citation , the prompt entered, and the output generated.
Analyzing data	Inputting quantitative data into a GenAI tool and prompting it to perform descriptive statistics; inputting qualitative data into a GenAI tool and prompting it to identify codes and themes.	No	Use statistical software (e.g., SPSS, R) and/or computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (e.g., MAXQDA, Dedoose) to support analysis.
Data analysis consultation	After qualitatively coding an interview transcript yourself, inputting the codes into a GenAI tool and asking it to identify which codes occur most frequently.	Yes*	In a supplementary document, provide a citation , the prompt entered, and the output generated.

Use	Example	Yes/No	If Yes, Guideline If No, Alternative
Outlining	Describing an idea for a manuscript to a GenAI tool and prompting it to develop an outline of the paper.	Yes*	In a supplementary document, provide a citation , the prompt entered, the output generated, and how it was revised (e.g., through a reviewer table, tracked changes, etc.).
Writing	Inputting the quantitative results of your ERP into a GenAI tool and prompting it to generate a Results section.	No	Engage in iterative feedback with your advisor or someone at the Writers Workshop to gain support in rewriting/rewording paragraphs that are unclear. Look at other examples of articles that use similar research methods to help you make decisions about how to organize and describe your results.
Revising writing	Inputting the Introduction section of your ERP into a GenAI tool and prompting it to rewrite/reword the text to make it sound “more academic.”	No	Ask GenAI for specific guidance, such as: “What is guidance for writing in active voice?” Consult APA manual and other resources, such as JARS . Consult reputable writing resources, including those on the curated list provided by the department.
Editing or proofreading writing	Asking a GenAI tool to check your writing for passive voice.	Yes*	In a supplementary document, provide the prompt entered.
Doctoral Milestones: General Field Qualifying Exam			

Use	Example	Yes/No	If Yes, Guideline If No, Alternative
The purpose of the General Field Qualifying Exam is to assess student’s ability to convey knowledge about the special education field and/or education of students with disabilities through original academic writing; it cannot be completed with any support from GenAI.			
Generating ideas	Inputting a General Field prompt into a GenAI tool as a prompt and using the generated text to help you answer the question.	No	Look at other examples of articles that use similar research methods to help you make decisions about how to organize and describe your results. Ask GenAI for specific guidance, such as: “What is guidance for writing in active voice?”
Outlining	Inputting your ideas for addressing a General Field prompt into a GenAI tool and using it to generate an outline you will follow for writing your response.	No	Consult APA manual and other resources, such as JARS . Consult reputable writing resources, including those on the curated list provided by the department.
Writing	Inputting an outline you created to address your General Field prompt into a GenAI tool and using text and/or ideas generated in the response within your writing.	No	
Revising writing	Inputting a draft of your General Field response that you generated into a GenAI tool and prompting it to revise spelling.	No	Use word processing spelling and grammar check; use Grammarly with the AI feature turned off.

Use	Example	Yes/No	If Yes, Guideline If No, Alternative
Editing or proofreading writing	Asking a GenAI tool to change all past tense to present tense.	Yes*	In a supplementary document, provide the prompt entered.

GenAI Misuse for Doctoral Milestones

Given the stated guidelines, if students use and do not disclose the use of GenAI or otherwise use GenAI in a way that contradicts the uses defined in this document:

1. The concerned faculty member will consult the committee chair and/or the Director of Graduate Studies in writing (i.e., email).
 - a. If the concern is resolved, the concerned faculty member will document this in writing.
 - b. If the concern is not resolved, the concerned faculty member will contact the advisor(s) in writing and proceed to Step 2.
2. Advisor(s) will convene the committee for discussion.
 - a. If the concern is resolved, the concerned faculty member will document this in writing.
 - b. If one or more committee members have concerns:
 - i. If the committee agrees that a GenAI use infraction is “more probably true than not true,” that milestone attempt will be marked as “fail.”
 - ii. If one or more (but not all) committee members agree that a GenAI use infraction is “more probably true than not true,” individuals may exercise their right to mark the milestone attempt as “fail.”
3. If applicable, the committee will agree on the parameters for another milestone attempt, including but not limited to:
 - a. The degree to which the original milestone needs to be revised or redone.
 - b. Requesting the student provide documentation of AI usage (e.g., the prompt entered, and the output generated).
 - c. The timeline for this next milestone attempt, if applicable.
4. The advisor(s) will communicate the outcome of the committee discussion to the student in writing.
5. If a student has repeatedly misused GenAI, the committee may decide that a second milestone attempt is not allowed.

Guidance for Use of GenAI for Teaching

Students should consult with instructors of record or co-instructors prior to using GenAI for teaching. GenAI can be used as a tool in teaching, including generating ideas for course content; creating activities, case studies, or discussion questions; writing content; and developing assignments. The use of GenAI should be [cited](#) when used in teaching. We discourage using GenAI to grade, evaluate, or assess student work.

Guidance for Use of GenAI as a Student in Coursework

The principle of academic freedom allows individual instructors to establish the parameters of using GenAI within their course. Before using GenAI to complete course assignments, read the syllabus for course-specific expectations. Individual instructors may establish their own procedures and consequences for GenAI misuse. Though not required, instructors may adopt the guidelines and/or responses outlined in this document.

Guidance for Use of GenAI for Journal Writing

Many peer-reviewed journals and journal publishers have established guidelines for using GenAI to conduct research and write manuscripts. Students should investigate specific journals and publishers and understand the expectations for reporting GenAI usage.

- [Elsevier's guidance for using AI](#)
- [Sage's guidance for using AI](#)
- [Taylor and Francis' guidance for using AI](#)
- [Wiley's guidance for AI](#)