

# GenAI Conversation Starters for Thesis Research and Writing<sup>1</sup>

## Context

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Generative GenAI (GenAI) is increasingly affecting how researchers conduct and mobilize their research. GenAI may be a valuable tool at various stages of research including design, analysis, and writing. Consideration with regards to the use of GenAI in research may be influenced by **disciplinary and departmental cultures** along with **personal preferences** and because GenAI tools are **unique and evolving** research institutions **cannot readily set specific rules**. Thus, it is critical that there is a clear understanding between graduate students and their supervisors on the use of GenAI in thesis research.

This resource is intended to provide some ideas for starting **clear and constructive conversations** between **graduate students** and their **supervisors and supervisory committee members** on how GenAI should or should not be used in research and writing. Through practical tips, conversational prompts, and additional resources, this guide can help you navigate your responsibilities as a researcher.

The main goal is to encourage graduate student researchers to engage meaningfully about GenAI.

## Before meeting with your thesis supervisor or supervisory committee members

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- Reflect on your own **values and approaches** related to the use of GenAI in research – e.g., AI enthusiast, use it every chance I get; limited to knowledge searches
- Review basic materials on GenAI awareness (see “[Additional Resources](#)” below)
- Be familiar with what constitutes the responsible use of GenAI (see SGPS Guidance for the use of GenAI)
- Prepare questions **in advance** of the meeting
- Consider **specific scenarios/examples** – e.g., formation of research questions, writing the thesis, analysis of data
- **Consider simulating a conversation with GenAI<sup>2</sup>:**
  - Example prompt: “I am a graduate student in [your department] at [your university.] working with [supervisor name]. My university wants all graduate students to have conversations with their graduate supervisor about the use of generative GenAI in the research process including writing the thesis. They have provided the attached guidelines [attach/link these guidelines], including conversation starters and discussion prompts. I want to practice having this discussion with my supervisor before I meet with them. You will play the role of my supervisor. You will respond to my questions with plausible answers and make up any details related to what you know about my supervisor’s research, the department and university that will enable you to provide

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<sup>1</sup> This guide draws heavily, and often verbatim, from the following resource: Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (2024, Oct) Artificial Intelligence: Considerations for Graduate Research Ontario Council on Graduate Studies <https://cou.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/OCGS-GenAI-graduate-research-considerations-FN-Oct-1-2024.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Be mindful that it is very challenging to guarantee privacy with the use of AI. Accounts like Google may give access to higher level features so balance risk with reward in how much personal information you share. Western endeavours to mitigate privacy concerns by protecting uploaded information and currently (2026) approves CoPilot for this purpose.

nuanced and sophisticated responses. After each of my responses, give me feedback on what I could say to improve my response or more information I could provide. After providing me feedback, continue with the simulation.”

## During the meeting: Conversation prompts

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*The following questions might be helpful prompts to clarify expectations, identify alignments or gaps in grad student and supervisor/committee member approaches to GenAI, and avoid unexpected questions at critical moments in the research and thesis writing process – i.e., to avoid unnecessary progression delays or conflicts.*

### Starting the Conversation: approach to GenAI

- **Knowledge:** How much effort should I spend learning about generative GenAI?
- **Philosophy:** How would you describe your ‘philosophy of GenAI use in research?
- **GenAI use:** Why do you think GenAI should(not) be used in research and thesis writing?
- **Professional goals:** How might generative GenAI intersect with, influence, or affect my professional goals?
- **Prohibited tools:** Are there specific GenAI tools you explicitly recommend or prohibit (elaborate)?
- **Alternatives:** What are the best alternatives to GenAI tools for accomplishing [this task] research/thesis goals?
- **Addressing mismatch:** What are some strategies for addressing any mismatches identified in the above?

### Digging Deeper

- **Benefits:** What scholarly activities within my graduate research and thesis writing may benefit from the use of generative GenAI?
- **Learning outcomes:** How could GenAI enhance my ability to achieve degree-level expectations and program learning outcomes?
  - Examples - critical thinking, development of knowledge competencies
- **Learning experience:** What impact might using generative GenAI for [this task] have on my core learning experience as a graduate student?
  - Examples - speed up or solve routine/mundane problems like coding in R
- **Specifics:** What specific phases of the research process and research activities would most benefit from the inclusion of GenAI?
  - Examples - translation, copy-editing, brainstorming, concept explanation, drafting, coding, data analysis, data visualization, thesis drafting, simulations, literature reviews
- **Prohibited uses:** What scholarly activities within my graduate research and thesis writing should *not* involve the use of GenAI?
  - Examples - translation, thesis drafting, data visualization, interpretation and analysis, synthesis, literature reviews, knowledge mobilization/translation
- **Risks:** What risks do the use of GenAI pose for me as a graduate researcher?
  - Examples - accessibility features, data sovereignty, implicit bias, data protection, privacy, data security, data contamination (hallucinations)

- **Disclosure:** How should I document and disclose when I have used GenAI in my work?
  - Examples - brainstorming, drafting, copy editing, coding) warrants disclosure of use?
- **Integrity:** How far is too far with GenAI, where is “the line” in any use case. Be as specific as possible.
  - Example – testing interpretations with GenAI for robustness completeness vs asking GenAI simply to interpret
- **Transparency:** How do I ensure everyone involved in the work I am doing understands how we will use (or not use) GenAI?
  - Examples – departmental expectations, institutional expectations in multi-university teams
- **Research ethics:** What research ethics implications and obligations do we have to consider with regards to the use of GenAI?
  - Examples – human or animal subjects, privacy, data security, transcripts, confidentiality, disclosure
- **Verification:** What strategies can I use to verify GenAI output/responses? Re: hallucinations.
  - Examples – random spot checking of code or citations, misinterpretation of data, incorrect formulas,
- **Context matters:** Citation and disclosure practices vary by context. Check with colleagues, journals and funding agencies in your disciplinary area up front to consider what emerging norms for GenAI citation or disclosure may be.
  - What might be some reasons our [key consulted groups] might need or want to be aware that GenAI was used in this [type of work]?
  - How do we ensure that everyone involved in a project or process that uses GenAI is aware and agrees to the use?
  - What possible risks to our credibility or expertise are present when we disclose use of GenAI in this [type of work]?

## Additional Resources

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Dilkes, Dani. (2025). [Domains of GenAI Awareness](#). Centre for Teaching and Learning, Western U. eCampus Ontario.

Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (2024, Oct) Artificial Intelligence: Considerations for Graduate Research Ontario Council on Graduate Studies <https://cou.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/OCGS-GenAI-graduate-research-considerations-FN-Oct-1-2024.pdf>

SGPS, (2026, Feb 9) Guidance for the use of Generative GenAI in Graduate Studies, Western University, [https://grad.uwo.ca/about\\_us/policies\\_procedures\\_regulations/ai.html](https://grad.uwo.ca/about_us/policies_procedures_regulations/ai.html)

SGPS, (2026, Feb 9) Harnessing GenAI for Research (asynchronous learning module), Western University, [https://www.uwo.ca/ownyourfuture/workshops/harnessing\\_genai\\_for\\_research.html](https://www.uwo.ca/ownyourfuture/workshops/harnessing_genai_for_research.html)