

# Academic Writing with AI: A Practical Introduction for Researchers

Sam McIlroy



# Academic Communication / English for Academic Purposes (EAP)?

EAP is a theory-framed, research-led academic discipline which aims to enable students and researchers to develop the discourse competence to communicate and participate effectively in higher education.

[Our Pedagogical Approach](#)

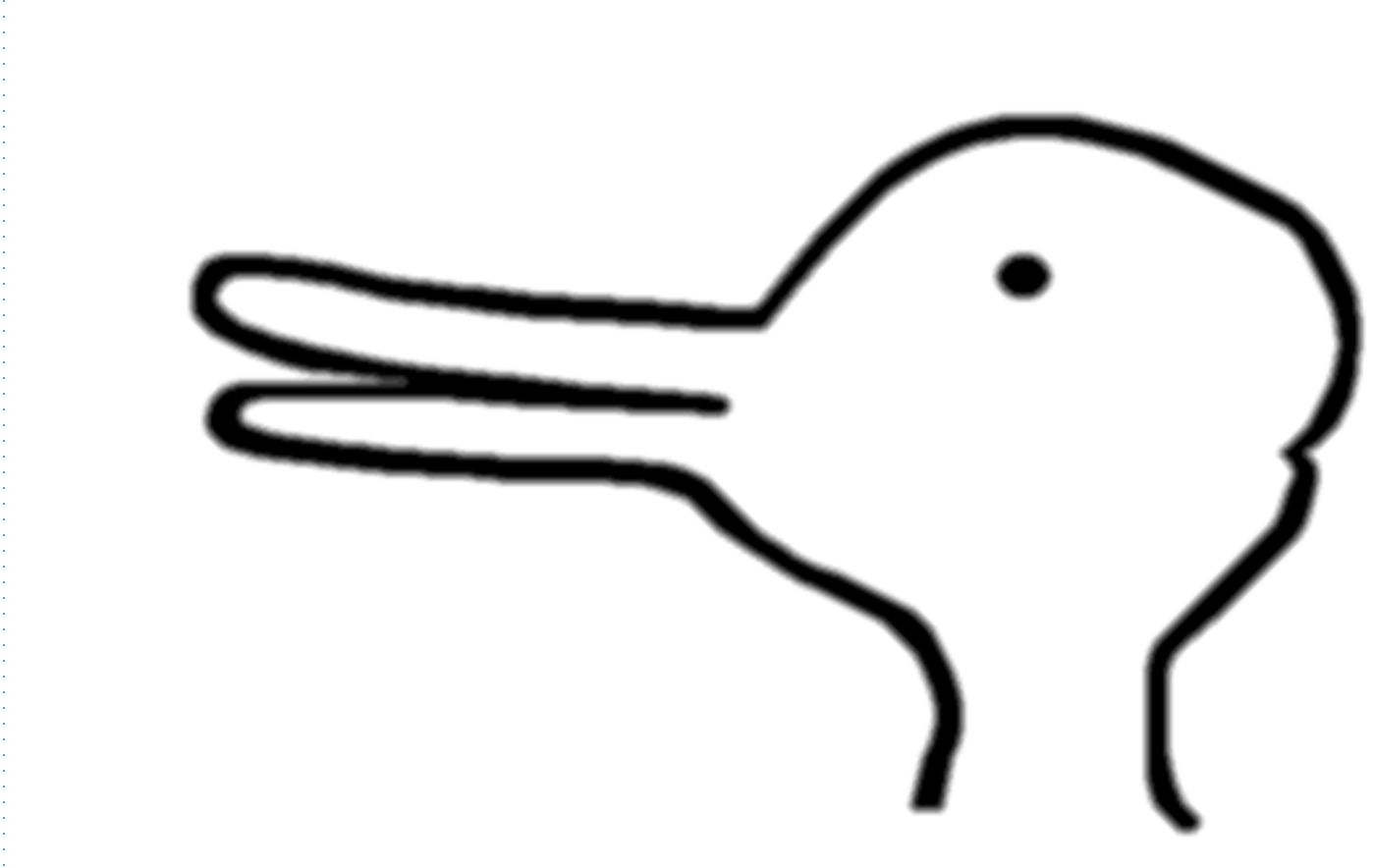
[Reading List](#)



# Academic Writing

Type of knowledge	Description
Content knowledge	What we are going to write about
System knowledge	How to put it together using spelling punctuation grammar
Process knowledge	How to construct the text through different stages – drafting, revision proofreading etc
Genre knowledge	How to put the content together as a message (What is the communicative purpose?)
Reader knowledge	How do/will readers react to the text

# What vs How



# Aims

- Show how AI can support different stages of academic writing
- Consider responsible and ethical use of AI in practice
- Highlight the use of AI as an editor and critical reader
- Offer a simple framework for informed decision-making



# The academic writing process

- Pre-writing and Planning
- Drafting
- Revising, Editing and Proofreading
- Transparency and Acknowledgement

Different stages → different uses → different risks



# AI use in research writing: no clear consensus

## **Pre-writing**

Broadly accepted uses (e.g. planning, translation, orientation)

## **Drafting**

Most contested stage, especially for Results and Methods

## **Post-writing**

Widely accepted for editing, proofreading, and feedback

Source: Nature (2025). *Scientists split on ethics of AI use*. Nature, Vol. 641, 577.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-01463-8>



# AI is not one thing

Its value and its risks depend on where you are in the writing process.





# Example prompt: pre-writing and planning

I am a DPhil student in [field].

I am preparing to write [section].

Help me:

- identify key sub-questions
- suggest relevant literatures
- flag conceptual gaps

Do not draft text for me.



# Discussion Questions

- What is the AI being asked to do here? Does this feel ethical or ethically risky? Why?
- How do you use AI in the Pre-writing stage? (Or is this less relevant for your subject/MPLS subjects?)



# Drafting prompts: contrasting risk

Prompt 1. Write a draft discussion section for my paper based on these results.

Prompt 2. Analyse the structure and logic of my draft discussion section. Suggest improvements in a bulleted list without rewriting.



# Questions

- Do either of these feel ethically risky? Would you feel comfortable:
  - a. explaining this use to a supervisor or journal editor, and
  - b. publicly acknowledging it in a thesis or journal article?
- Where does authorship sit in each version?



# What does authorship mean to you?

- a. You wrote the text yourself without any assistance.
- b. You used AI to research the topic, and edit and revise language, but you drafted the text unaided.
- c. You have collaborated with AI during each stage of the writing process, and you are happy to sign off on the final text as accurately representing your work and ideas.



# Using AI in the Post-writing stage

For many researchers, AI is most useful as:

- a discipline-aware editor
- a critical reader
- a sense-checker

Not as the author



# Post-writing prompts

## Example 1:

- Can you improve this section?

## Example 2:

- Please act as a critical reader.
- Comment on clarity, structure, and disciplinary conventions.
- Do not add content.



# Analysis

The second prompt:

- specifies a role
- limits scope
- protects authorship

It doesn't ask *AI* to *write* better but to it asks *AI* to *read* better.





# Discipline-aware editing prompt

- I am a DPhil student in [field].  
This \_\_\_\_\_ section is written for [audience or journal].
- Please:
  - assess clarity and organisation
  - flag ambiguous claims
  - note where disciplinary expectations may not be met
- Avoid rewriting - highlight issues only.



# Discussion: what feels acceptable?

- Which kinds of feedback would you feel comfortable asking AI for? Would you avoid asking AI for anything?
- Does this differ by subject area?



# Acceptable vs problematic uses

1. Using AI to comment on clarity and structure of your draft
2. Asking AI to generate a first draft from your notes
3. Using AI to suggest alternative ways of presenting results

# What changes the ethical judgement?

- Stage of the writing process
- Role AI is playing
- Degree of reliance
- Transparency and acknowledgement



# From policy to practice

Ask yourself:

- Could I explain this use to my supervisor/editor?
- Does this usage preserve my authorship and voice?
- Would I acknowledge this use if required?



# A simple decision framework

1. What stage of writing am I in?
2. What role am I giving AI?
3. Does this preserve my authorship?
4. How would I describe this use?



# Where to go next

This session was a snapshot.

Academic Writing with AI:

- an 8-hour course
- discipline-specific versions
- guided practice and discussion

HT Weeks 5-8: [www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training](http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training)



