DSA policy on the use of AI in blogs, panels and paper submissions

Underpinning any discussion of AI must be a recognition of the environmental and climate-related impacts of its energy and water use, and social justice issues around access to AI tools, siting of data centres and other aspects of AI technology use and structure. We would encourage all of our development studies colleagues to reflect on the use of AI, both from the perspective of research ethics (as we focus on here), but also the wider social and environmental impact of its use.

We understand that AI is a useful tool for researchers, and that its use is becoming more widespread to help streamline and support various aspects of the research process: from compiling reading lists for literature reviews, assisting with translation processes, summarizing concepts and ideas, or helping those for whom English is a second or third language express their ideas, to name but a few. However, we also recognise that AI brings with it an increasingly powerful tool for unfair practice, for writing rather than helping find ways to frame large sections of a paper or thesis and using it to do – rather than support – the research and analysis itself.

All institutions have or are in the process of developing their own response to the challenge of AI use in research and assessments. At the DSA, recognising it can be both helpful and harmful, and that openness and transparency in its use is important, we have decided that:

- All submissions for the annual Development Studies Association Masters and PhD prizes be accompanied by a statement by the student on how AI was used in the research and writing (if at all). Please see our AI policy for the Prizes for full information.
- All blog submissions should be in an author's own voice, with AI use limited to grammar and spelling but not for full editing (See below for more details). The DSA Communications Officer can and will offer editing support to all submissions.
- All DSA conference panel submissions should be the convenors' own work.
- All DSA conference paper submissions should reflect our AI policy below.

The DSA principles for fair AI use:

Underpinning our approach is our understanding that effective and fair use of AI should reflect **full cognitive engagement in their use, and must avoid cognitive surrender** (Shaw and Nave 2026) in its use. Above all, research must reflect **human-led and -centred learning**. By this we mean that AI should always be used as a tool to support the research and writing process, not as a replacement for the researcher's scrutiny, analysis, intuition and expertise that are core to the research.

Fair and legitimate use of AI, for the DSA, entails:

1. Asking questions of the responses given by AI and not assuming it is sufficient or complete.
2. Testing the logic of AI: using our critical skills and learning to 'test' the accuracy of a response.
3. Using AI to develop the argument, shape our own critical thinking or take the lead in providing insights in the production of new knowledge and ideas.
4. Being open, clear and explicit in how AI has been used in the production of that knowledge and the specific output.

Examples of ***acceptable human-centred uses of AI*** might include (but are not limited to):

- Testing ideas and theories through the use of AI (but **not** asking AI to develop those theories and ideas).
- Making use of AI translation tools, subject to the results being checked for accuracy or presence of AI hallucinations.
- Making use of AI to find relevant research on a particular area, and helping to compile reading lists and/or bibliographies, subject to verification of sources.
- Using AI to summarize theories prior to undertaking more in-depth reading
- Using AI to translate or transcribe discursive evidence and discourses.
- Using AI to prepare visual representations of evidence the researcher has collected and provided.

In all cases, it is expected that the researcher would not simply accept what the AI tool has produced, but engage with it critically and interrogatively as a starting and not an end point.

Areas where ***AI might be used*** (and its use should be indicated), ***but which may be more problematic***, include:

- The use of AI to help write for a particular standard of written English. It is legitimate to use it to spot spelling or grammatical mistakes; but it should not be editing the tone, refining or polishing the writing, changing the meaning or adding to analysis and critical insights. The written work must be the work of the author, not of AI and the author's voice should be retained.
- Whilst using AI to help understand theories and concepts as a first step to deeper reading and immersion can be helpful in learning and understanding, this can only be a first step and should not replace reading those texts.
- The use of AI for analysis of data: whilst it may be used as a tool to help in the process, this must be subject to the cognitive engagement of the researcher.

Areas where AI use would be considered ***unacceptable*** include:

- Using AI to write whole or substantial sections of written work (for example, asking AI to write the literature review, or to write a context section for a case study).
- Using AI to provide the data analysis without checking for accuracy or any substantive input from the researcher.
- Using AI to create the theoretical framework.
- Using AI to generate information or evidence which is about the ethics and politics of AI itself.
- Using AI to generate content for presentation slides for a conference or seminar panel, beyond visual / design support.

The DSA reserves the right to ask the author(s) for earlier drafts of work where we feel that AI may have altered the original meaning, tone or submission of content, or may ask authors to edit their work to articulate their own voice and thoughts.