

The Assistant, Not the Author: Confronting the Misuse of Artificial Intelligence in Academic Writing

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Preamble

A fundamental question facing academic publishing today is this: *Where do we draw the line between legitimate assistance and unacceptable delegation when it comes to artificial intelligence?* As generative AI tools become increasingly integrated into research workflows, the distinction between using AI as a helper and presenting it as a creator has never been more critical or more frequently misunderstood.

As Deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Medicosphere*, I write to address a growing concern: the misuse of AI in scholarly manuscripts, particularly the tendency to treat AI-generated content as if it were the author's own work, or worse, to list AI tools as co-authors. This is not a technological problem it is an ethical one. And it demands our immediate attention.

The Clear Stance of International Guidelines

The international academic community has spoken with remarkable consensus. The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), in its April 2025 Recommendations, explicitly states that chatbots and other AI-assisted tools should not be listed as authors because they cannot be responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work responsibilities that are essential for authorship. Authors who use AI-assisted technologies must disclose this use in both the cover letter and the appropriate section of the submitted work. The 2025 update further holds authors as the sole stakeholders responsible for providing accurate references ¹.

Similarly, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), in its official position statement, joins organisations such as WAME and the JAMA Network in affirming that AI tools cannot be listed as authors of a paper. AI tools cannot meet the requirements for authorship as they cannot take responsibility for the submitted work. As non-legal entities, they cannot assert the presence or absence of conflicts of interest nor manage copyright and license agreements. COPE's guidance emphasises that AI should be a supportive tool, with transparency and disclosure about its role in manuscript preparation, but it cannot be attributed as an author ².

Major publishers have followed suit. Elsevier permits AI tools to be cited in the Methods or Acknowledgements section not as authors. JAMA requires disclosure of all AI use ³. The consensus is clear: AI is a tool, not a colleague

Common Misuses of AI in Academic Writing

Despite these clear guidelines, misuse persists. Based on the evidence and my editorial experience, I identify three common errors:

1. Listing AI as a Co-Author or Author

This is the most flagrant violation. Some authors have listed ChatGPT or other LLMs as co-authors in submitted manuscripts. This practice is not only prohibited by ICMJE, COPE, and virtually all reputable journals, but it also corrupts bibliometric systems ^{1,2}. When an AI is listed as a co-author in indexed articles, it generates a profile, an h-index, and citation metrics, all for a non-human entity that cannot be held accountable for its contributions. This is not a hypothetical scenario; it has already occurred ⁴.

2. Failing to Disclose AI Use

Transparency is the cornerstone of ethical AI use. ICMJE requires authors to disclose at submission whether they used AI-assisted technologies in the production of submitted work. COPE similarly requires transparency regarding the use of AI tools, including a brief description of how they were used for language polishing, stylistic editing, or structural reorganization. Nondisclosure of AI use may require corrective action and may be construed as misconduct ^{1,2}.

3. Treating AI-Generated Content as Authorial Work

Perhaps the most insidious misuse is the uncritical acceptance of AI-generated text as if it were the author's own. ICMJE warns that AI-generated output can be incorrect, incomplete, or biased ¹. Authors are required to carefully review and edit AI-generated content and to assert that there is no plagiarism in their paper, including in text and images produced by the AI. Automated writing tools often generate text that is grammatically correct and superficially polished but lacks precision, scientific depth, and meaningful content ⁵. These tools are not designed to provide the rigour and precision required in scientific writing. Moreover, referencing AI-generated material as the primary source is not acceptable ^{1,5}.

AI as a Helper: The Legitimate Uses

To be clear: I am not advocating for a blanket prohibition on AI use. When used appropriately, AI tools offer significant benefits. Students and researchers can use AI for

brainstorming and developing ideas, editing grammar and style, and improving clarity and communication especially for non-native English speakers. AI can enhance the clarity, coherence, and academic quality of manuscripts.

The key distinction is this: AI assists; the author creates. The intellectual contribution, the critical thinking, the interpretation of data, the formulation of conclusions these must remain exclusively human endeavours. AI is positioned as an assistive tool subordinate to human responsibility^{1,2}.

What This Means for Medicosphere

As the editorial team of *Medicosphere*, we have a responsibility to protect the integrity of the scholarship we publish. We will take the following steps:

1. Enforce Clear AI Policies

In accordance with ICMJE, COPE, and publisher guidelines, we affirm that AI tools cannot be listed as authors or co-authors. Authors must disclose any use of AI in the preparation of their manuscript, specifying which tool was used and how.

2. Require Verification of AI-Generated Content

Authors are fully responsible for the content of their manuscript, even those parts produced by an AI tool. They must verify all AI-generated content using credible, peer-reviewed sources and ensure appropriate attribution of all quoted material.

3. Educate Our Community

We must educate our authors, reviewers, and readers about the ethical use of AI. The issue at stake is not the use of AI-assisted tools per se, but the potential misrepresentation of authorship or the delegation of intellectual responsibility.

A Call to Action

To our authors: Use AI as a tool, not as a ghostwriter. Disclose your use transparently. Verify every claim and every citation. Never list an AI as a co-author. You and you alone are responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of your work.

To our reviewers: Be vigilant. Look for signs of undisclosed AI use: generic language, superficial analysis, inconsistent citations. Remember that AI-generated text can be grammatically flawless yet scientifically hollow.

To our fellow editors: Lead by example. Develop and enforce clear AI policies. Educate your communities. Do not let the pressure to publish quickly compromise the integrity of what you publish.

To the broader academic community: Embrace AI's potential, but never forget its limitations. AI is a powerful assistant but it is not, and must never become, the author.

Conclusion

The generative AI revolution offers extraordinary opportunities for academic writing. But with great power comes great responsibility. The distinction between helper and author is not semantic it is foundational to the integrity of the scholarly record. Indexation is not innocence, and neither is AI assistance. In the age of generative AI, we can no longer afford to blur the lines between human intellect and machine output. We must actively verify, transparently disclose, and collectively safeguard the integrity of the literature we produce and consume. *Medicosphere* is committed to this mission. We invite you to join us. The future of trustworthy medical research depends on it.

Declaration of Generative AI in Scientific Writing

The authors affirm that the usage of generative artificial intelligence tools, including DeepL and DeepSeek, is intended solely for language refinement and grammatical correction throughout the manuscript drafting process. These tools were not used for generating content, data analysis, or interpretation. The authors are fully responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the content as well as the conclusions presented in this study

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