

Reflections on developing a departmental AI policy: challenges, troubleshooting, and feedback

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Outline

- Context
- Designing a departmental policy
- Policy impact
- Student evaluation
- Staff evaluation
- Next steps

Context

- DGES: most UAP cases in FELS
- 24 Interviews of authenticity for AI-related UAP cases in 2024-25
 - 13 cases related to one second-year module
- ‘Black box’ of student AI use
 - Beyond ‘smoking gun’: planning, proofing, and polishing
 - False positives

Designing a departmental policy

- DGES's complex eco-system
- Updated AU guidance, summer 2025
- Learning from other departments
- Expectations of AI literacy for (science) graduates
- Differing views among staff
- Need for:
 - 'Slotting-in' within AU framework
 - Providing clear guidance
 - Cross-referencing among module resources

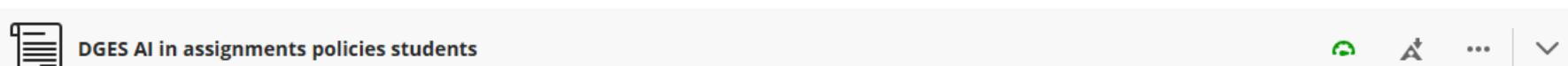
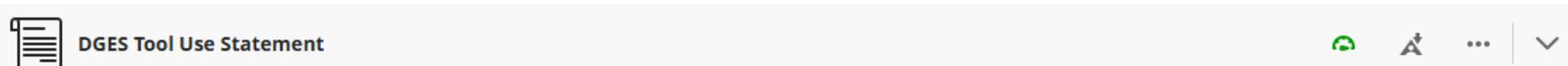
Designing a departmental policy

- Every assessment will need a statement on what (if any) AI use is permitted
 - Dos and Don'ts list
 - LOR
- Students to copy and complete DGES AI Tool Use Statement for every assessment
- Students (and staff) to read DGES AI policy
- Checklist to be provided for students

Key points to remember:

- Consult the guidance on the use of AI (see below for DGES guidance, AU guidance, and the DGES 'dos and don'ts' list)
- The AI tool use statement (see below) must be appended to each assignment - copy it into your work after the bibliography.
- AI should be used sparingly. Part of a degree is learning to develop reading, writing, critical thinking, and analytical skills. This takes time and effort, and is developed by experimenting and engaging with feedback. Relying on AI to summarise articles/book chapters/other reading does not develop your critical reading skills. Similarly, relying on AI to plan your assignments may limit your creativity and planning skills.
- AI is no substitute for academic staff, who are experts in their field and will mark and provide feedback on your work. You are encouraged to discuss any queries about the course and/or assignments with them in the first instance, rather than relying on AI.
- Make use of the Aspire Reading List on Blackboard to find sources. These have been curated by staff as appropriate starting points.
- *Under no circumstances should any learning materials be uploaded into AI/LLM platforms. This is a serious breach of intellectual property rights.*
- AU's recommended AI tool is Microsoft Copilot, which is incorporated into its Microsoft Office license. It is not recommended that you use other AI tools.
- All AI outputs/chat histories must be saved, and exported into a time-stamped document (which can be done by asking the AI to do so at the end of the chat). If no history is provided in a UAP case involving suspected (undisclosed) use of AI, it may be concluded that the use has been extensive.
- **Any fact, reference, or claim made by AI must be corroborated by other sources that you have read yourself (e.g., an article)**

Please note that each assignment will have its own guidance as to AI usage. It is your responsibility to know what that is. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch (emb72@aber.ac.uk)



Assignment 2: Written Essay (60%)

Visible to students ▾

This is where you will find the Assessment Brief, the Submission Portal, and any additional information for this assignment. Please ensure that you are uploading a WORD DOCUMENT, not a PDF. DEADLINE FOR ESSAY SUBMISSION: 12th Dec 10am *Due to the nature of this assignment, the use of GenAI is not permitted in the preparation of your work. Spelling and Grammar checkers are permitted, but cannot be used to rewrite your work*

...

^

No Generative AI Tool use for this assessment

Visible to students ▾

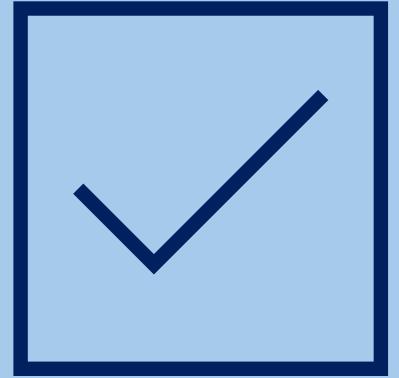
This item is managed by your institution.

...

Policy Impact

Implementation, usage and keeping track...

Tool-use statement

- I have not used any AI tools
- I have used word processing software that includes generative AI functionality (e.g., Google Docs, Word) 
- I have used AI enabled spelling or grammar checking software (e.g., Grammarly)
- I have used AI enabled translation (e.g., Google Translate), and acknowledged where this has been used. 
- I have used AI as to search for additional sources and have corroborated these independently
- I have used AI as a research tool to sift, analyse, and interpret data
- I have used an AI image generation tool
- I have used AI to design and structure slides through the in-built design generators in MS PowerPoint (or equivalent presentation software)
- I have used an AI text generation tool
- I have used other AI tools (Please specify:)

GS13020 Researching the World – Literature Review

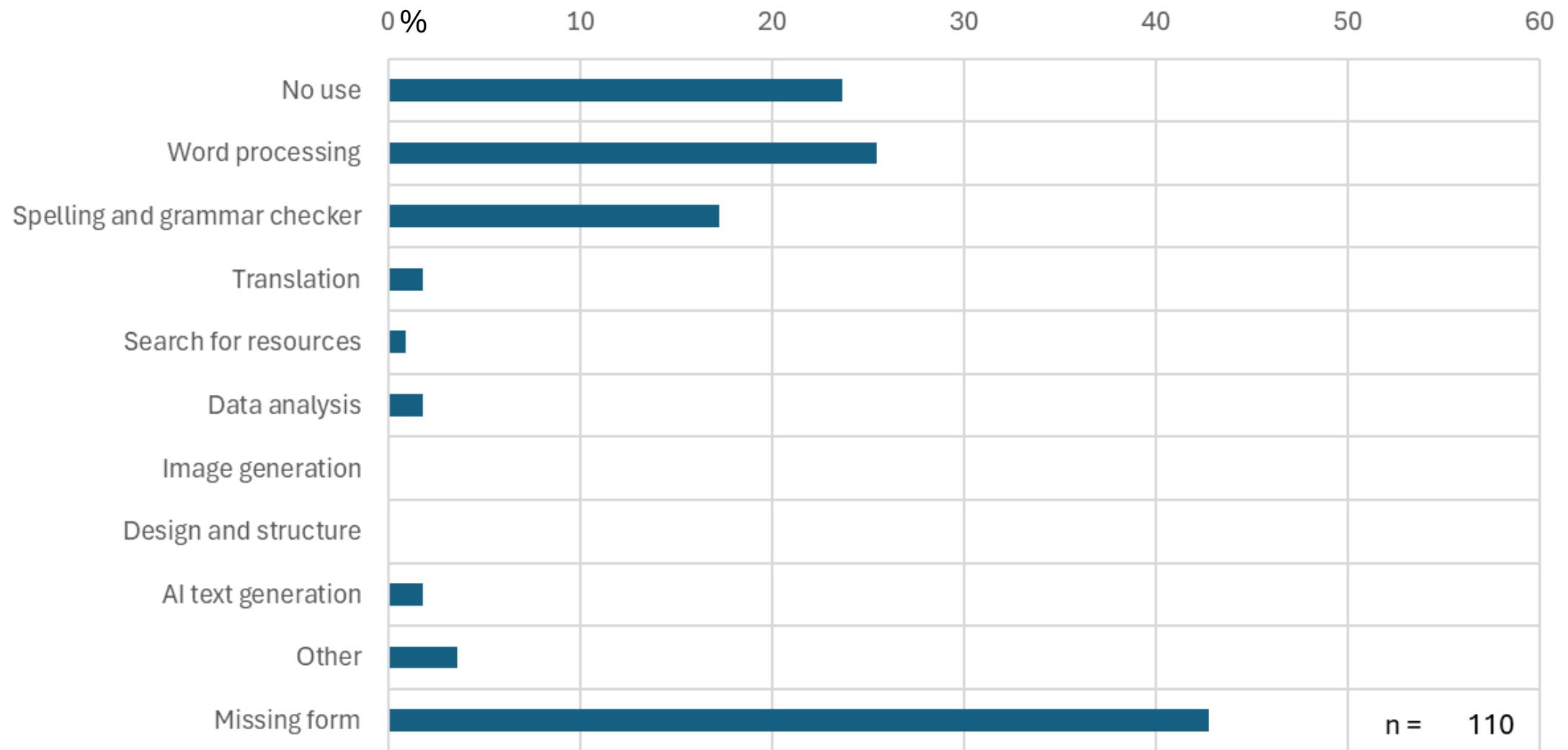
Can/Do use AI for:

- Spelling and grammar checking
- Helping with writing style
- Helping organise notes (e.g., from classes, from readings, or on the assignment)

Plus:

- Ensure that all prompts into AI are exported into a time-stamped word document and retained. You can ask Copilot to do this.

GS13020 Literature Review



Other: Checking translation of terminology

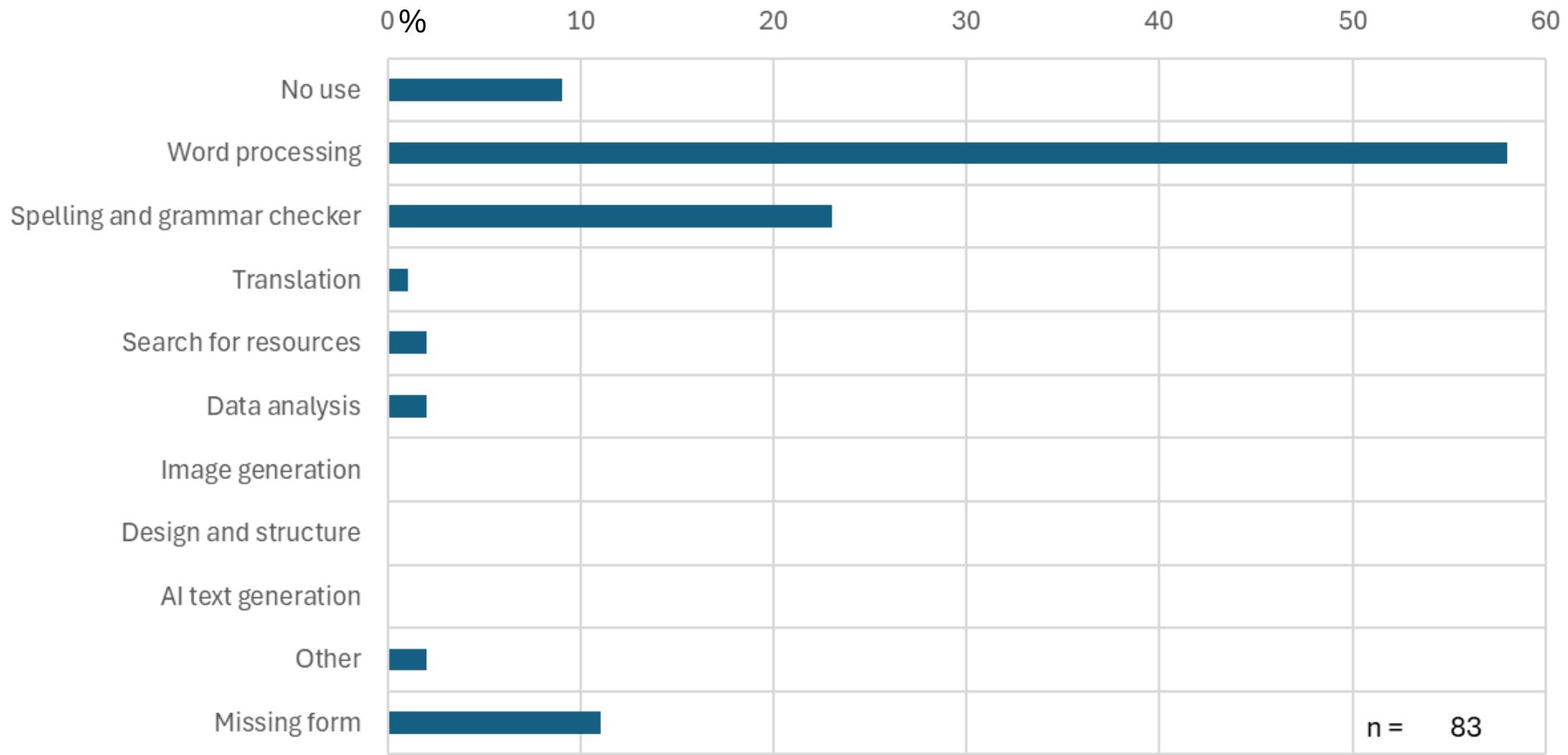
GS20120 Geoscience Laboratory Techniques – Sedimentology Report

Students were given a list of “safe prompts” to use that allowed them to:

- Ask AI for additional guidance on writing a laboratory report if the advice given above requires further explanation
- Ask AI to help explain the choice of graphs and how to interpret them...
- Ask AI to suggest ways to improve punctuation and grammar of your final draft report...
- Use AI to help with anything listed in the Green category in the Guidance for Students on Using Generative AI document.

Students were also asked to save a copy of any conversations with an AI – time-stamped.

GS20120 Laboratory Report



Other: Checking translation of terminology; Safe prompts!

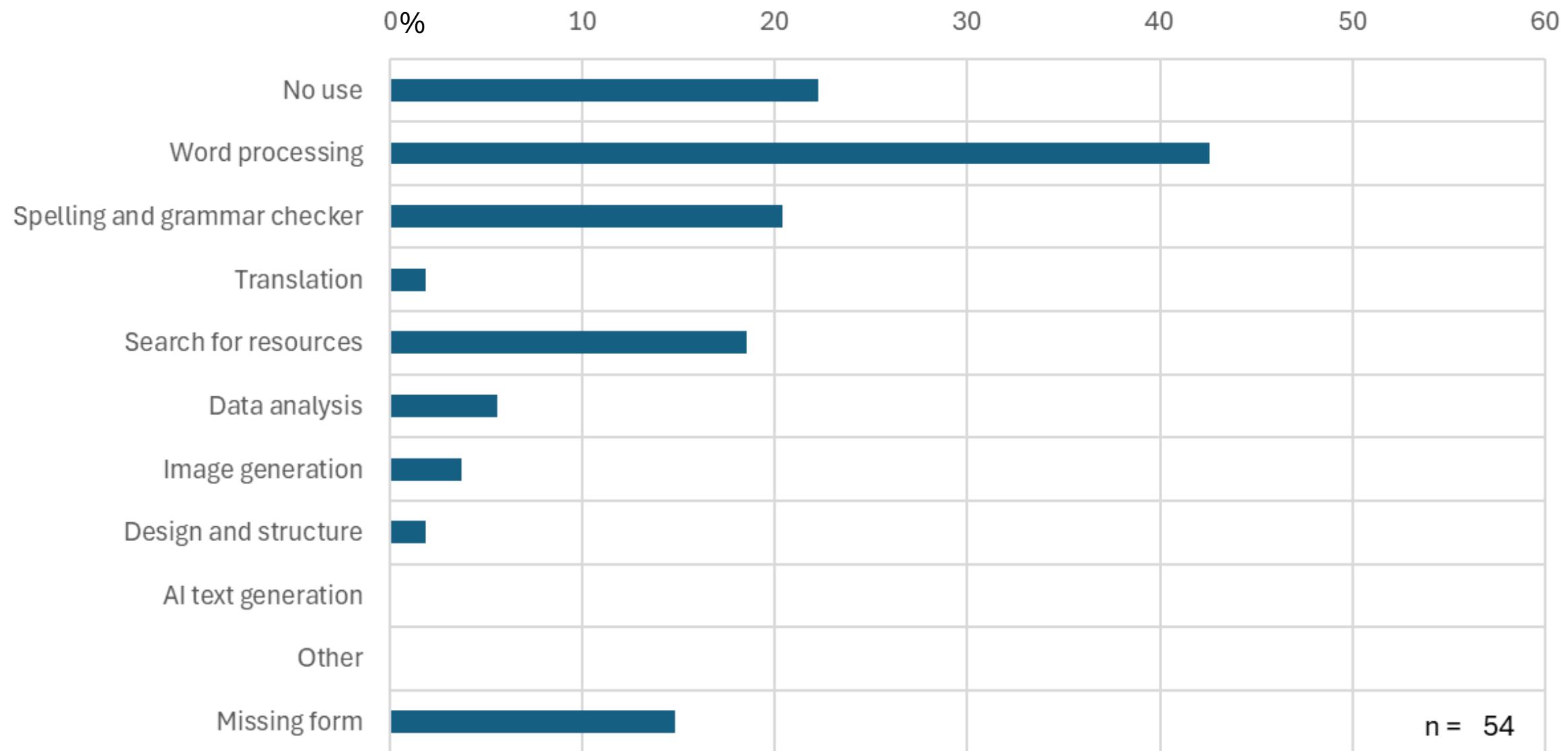
GS30520 Debates in Climate Science

Climate-change myth-busting pamphlet

May use AI to:

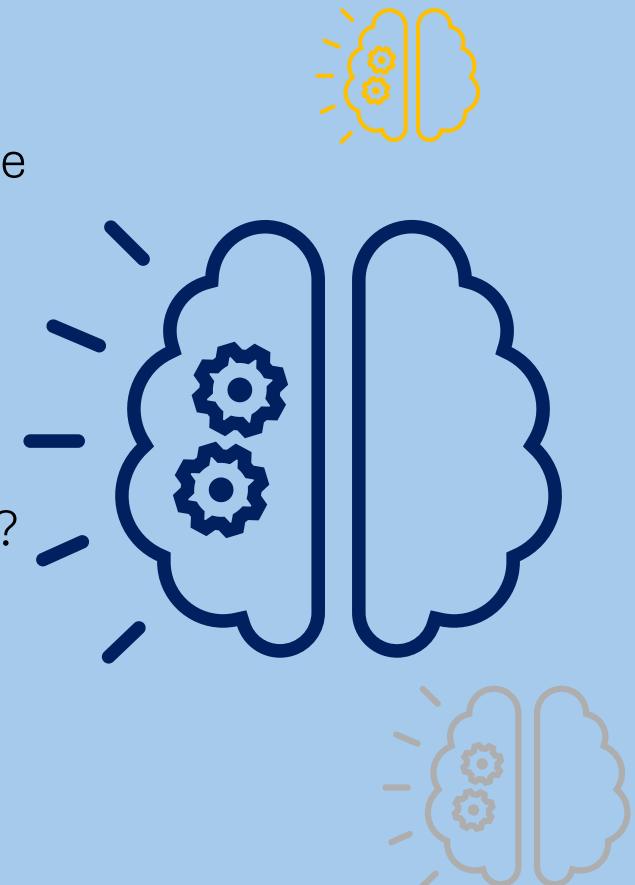
- Help find a suitable topic.
- Help identify literature that is relevant to topic.
- Help structure the pamphlet.
- Help make writing more concise.
- Help to understand the needs of the audience the pamphlet is aimed at.
- Generate images or animations that are used purely for decorative purposes, but their source (including Ai generated) should be in the figure caption.

GS30520 Pamphlet



Preliminary reflections...

- Data fog?
 - Not enough data analysed to date, plus not far enough into the cycle
 - Tool use statements unreliable?
 - Self-reporting = misreporting.
 - Missing tool use statements.
- Legacy learners leading the way
 - Final year students show higher AI engagements – habits from past?
- Freedom without uptake
 - Students shy away from Gen AI despite policy allowing its use.
 - **Fear** of getting penalised vs **desire** to learn...
- UAP cases = 2 in 2025-26 (no change on 2024-25)



Surveys overview

- Student survey: 3-14th November
 - 27 responses (from ~475 students?)
 - 7% IFY (2); 15% 1st Yr (4); 44% Yr 2 (12); 30% 3rd Year (8); 4% PGT (1)
 - 26% Environmental Science (7); 30% Physical Geography (8); 26% Human Geography (7); 11% Sociology (3)
- Staff survey: 10-28th November
 - 10 responses (32 teaching staff + 3 GTAs)
 - 20% (2) each from Integrated Foundation Year, Environmental Earth Science, Physical Geography, Human Geography, and Sociology
- Email promotion and posters around Llandinam building with QR code linked to student survey.
- Positionality: Tom more open to AI; Emma and Rhys more sceptical

Student evaluation

- 100% Aware/Very aware of AU of AU AI guidance
- 56% Aware/Very aware of AU Library Guides on AI
- 82% Aware/Very aware of Blackboard's AI literacy course
 - 19% had completed it
- 100% Aware/Very aware of DGES policy on AI use

Student evaluation

- 'Personally i don't use AI because I feel its environmental impact is horrendous and its use only encourages the ever increasing destruction of our planet by corporations. It does have practical uses but for personal use especially academic I feel its bad. I also feel that its unfair because some people will be able to afford better AI models and therefore are likely to have over other students purely based on what they can afford.' (First Year ES student)
- 'Again, I think it's fair. My only issue is how opinions differ from lecturer to lecturer.' (Second Year HG student)
- 'I think the promotion of AI use, in a geography department is something to reflect on. As a subject that prides themself on understanding injustices in the world I think it's very tone deaf to promote the use of AI as much as the department has. (Second Year Physical Geog student)
- 'I feel like I'm sort of scared to use AI as to not get told off for it. It makes me anxious to use software that has really helped me in the past with my spelling and grammar (I am dyslexic).' (Second Year HG student)

Student evaluation

- 85% Agree/Strongly Agree that ‘I understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate use of AI in my assessments’
- 30% Agree/Strongly Agree that ‘I feel supported to use of AI appropriately in assessments’ (34% Disagree/Strongly Disagree)
- 45% Agree/Strongly Agree that ‘I feel that I would be disadvantaged compared to my peers using AI by not using AI in my assessments’ (30% Disagree/Strongly Disagree)
- 63% don't feel that DGES policy has not changed their habits
 - Comments suggest that many didn't use Gen AI in any case.

Staff evaluation

- 80% (8 out of 10) agree/strongly agree 'AI represents a challenge to how we teach students in higher education'
- 100% agree/strongly agree 'AI represents a challenge to how we assess students in higher education'
- 30% agree/strongly agree 'AI provides new opportunities for assessing students in higher education' (40% disagree/strongly disagree)
- 60% agree/strongly agree 'I am concerned that incorporating AI into teaching and assessment will reduce students' critical skill development'
- 100% agree/strongly agree 'Universities have a responsibility to teach responsible use of AI'

Staff evaluation

- AU guidance: seen as too permissive
 - "It is too confusing, particularly the yellow zone. My understanding from students is they want an unambiguous policy that everyone will follow in the same way. Currently the yellow zone allows for a lot of variety in terms of student practice. So students that do not want to use AI at all feel like they are competing with students who use AI in a manner just shy of the red zone. Would be better for university to designate a certain number of AI allowed modules (where AI skills can be enhanced) and keep it outlawed elsewhere. Or just outlaw AI wholesale." (Human Geography Lecturer)
 - "I find the traffic light idea useful for teaching staff, but its presentation to student risks confusing matters. It gives a sense that certain practices are ok, and others aren't when departments also have their own 'guidance/policy' and then we also have 'module guidance' and 'assignment guidance' - all of which might contradict the AU guidance. Despite the clear signposting (Amber means module coordinator should give express permission) students might rightly believe they are allowed to do something in the AU guidance but find they aren't in assignment guidance." (IFY Lecturer)

Staff evaluation

- DGES Policy:
 - 'It's good - clear. I do worry about having multiple layers of policy sometimes' (Sociology Lecturer)
 - 'I think we should have a general disciplinary specific policy. Students are confused that it is assessment based. And, how are we to regulate its use anyway, when we have no way of detecting or proving its use?' (Sociology Lecturer)
 - 'I think it is clear and makes sense. I know the students don't like that the policy is that each module has a different policy, but this is just how it has to be, and working with these policies is a skill they need to master.' (Environmental Earth Science Lecturer)

Next steps

- Ensuring students with additional learning needs don't feel they can't use support entitled to.
- Consider change to AI guidance on assessment type, rather than module coordinator to confirm
- Request LOR to be tweaked to reflect DGES wording?
- Support among staff and student for further restrictions
- Continuous review of the policy and AI-related UAP cases
- Request for tweaking AU guidance's 'green zone'?
- Revision of assignment marking criteria, summer 2026?