

Guide for Students of Social and Cultural Anthropology (University of Tübingen)

Responsible use of generative AI in study, teaching and research

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or specialised research tools can be helpful in your studies. At the same time, Anthropology— due to its subject matter, its particular responsibility towards research partners and its strong reliance on qualitative methods – places particularly high demands on data protection, academic integrity and reflection.

This guide explains **what is permitted, what is risky and what is prohibited**, and outlines **specific documentation options**, as recommended within the university-wide framework.

For university-wide documents, please search here: <https://uni-tuebingen.de/lehrende/generative-ki-in-lehre-und-forschung/downloadbereich-1/#c2298576>



I Basic principles of AI use in Social and Cultural Anthropology

1. AI is a tool – not a scholarly source

Generative AI outputs do not undergo academic quality assurance processes. They are therefore **not considered citable academic literature**, but are comparable to the results of an internet search.

You always bear full responsibility

You are responsible for everything you submit, publish or present – even if AI was involved.

2. Social and Cultural Anthropology requires particular sensitivity

Ethnographic data is often personal, sensitive, context-dependent and relational. AI tools are **not suitable** for this purpose, as they cannot capture context or relationships and cannot guarantee data protection.

3. Transparency is mandatory

The use of AI must be documented – either within the work itself or in the appendix.

The university's guidelines recommend various forms of documentation (citation, description, tables, prompt logs, etc.).

II Before use: What needs to be clarified?

- Read the AI tool's **terms of use** (data storage? model training?).
- Outside the university network: **Use a VPN** when accessing university resources.
- Please observe **the examination and course regulations** (course-specific guidelines take precedence).
- Check **copyright**: Do not upload any protected texts or images without permission.
- **Data protection**: AI services are not secure environments for confidential or personal data.

III During use: Rules for input

Prohibited – never upload:

Personal data of third parties, e.g.:

- Real names, photos, videos
- Ethnographic interviews and transcripts
- Field notes featuring identifiable individuals
- Political, religious or ethnic affiliations
- Health data or other sensitive information
- internal documents, unpublished research

Reason: AI tools process data externally – sharing such data is not permitted under data protection law and contravenes the ethics of ethnological research.

Accepted:

- Your own texts, synopses, ideas
- Academic questions
- Methodological work (e.g. explaining theories, coding logic, statistical software)
- Linguistic support (writing style, structure, glossary)
- Simulations/practice questions
- Coding aids (R, Python) with **fictional or anonymised data**

IV After use: What do I need to check?

- **Technical accuracy** (AI hallucinates sources and facts).
- **Logic and plausibility** of the argumentation.
- **Applicability to the subject** (particularly in the case of ethnological theories and concepts).
- **Compliance with copyright law.**
- **Transparency:** Has the use of AI been documented?

V Documentation of AI use (*based on university-wide documentation options*)

There are several accepted formats – course leaders decide what is required – please always check with them.

Option A: Citation

Suitable when sections of text have been copied directly.

Example (APA):

(OpenAI, 2024).

In the appendix: full prompt history.

Note: AI is *not* an academic source – this citation serves **only to ensure transparency**, not to support academic argumentation.

Option B: Description in the methods section / in footnotes

Example:

“ChatGPT (version 4.1) was used for linguistic editing. Decisions regarding content were made by the author.”

Option C: Description in the appendix

- Prompts (questions and instructions)
- Responses/excerpts
- Reflection on use
- Screenshots or exporting the chat history

Advantage: Readers can follow the research process.

Option D: Documentation table

(based on the model from the university handout)

AI tool	Step	Usage	Result/Comment	Reflection
ChatGPT 4.1	Collection of ideas	Request for alternative approaches to my research question	Helpful Structuring ideas	Next time, a more specific prompt

This format is particularly suitable for synopses, research designs and longer projects.

Option E: AI Usage Cards

A standardised, reflection-oriented system (English) for documenting complex AI usage (theory: transparency, integrity, accountability).

Option F: Declaration of Originality

AI usage must be **truthfully** declared

VI What is permitted? (Examples from in Social and Cultural Anthropology)

Ideas & concepts

- Refining research questions
- Explaining theoretical approaches
- Comparing different perspectives

Writing and research support

- Structuring (outline, draft abstract)
- Stylistic revision of your own texts
- Translations (but be careful! Always check them!)
- Practice interviews on methods (e.g. grounded theory, participant observation)

Methodological support

- Code explanations (R, Python) using anonymised data
- Understanding complex statistics

VII What is not permitted? (particularly relevant in in Social and Cultural Anthropology)

AI for the analysis or interpretation of ethnographic data

(e.g. automatic coding of sensitive interviews)

Entry of personal data from research partners

Uploading copyright-protected field data AI-assisted

assessment of individuals or groups (epistemically and ethically unjustifiable)

Use of AI in sensitive, coloniality-related or vulnerable contexts

without the explicit consent of those affected

VIII Responsibility (specifically for ethnology)

1. Responsibility for content

- AI errors = your errors
- All statements must be verified and supported by specialist literature

2. Responsibility for academic quality

- AI does not replace reading, ethnographic thinking, reflection or argumentation
- The theoretical work must be **your own**

3. Responsibility for citation style & transparency

- Indicate the use of AI if it was significant
- Consult your tutor if anything is unclear

4. Responsibility for data protection and field ethics

- Protection of communities, minorities and research partners
- No tools that store data externally

5. Responsibility in the research process

- AI may provide support, but must not make decisions
- No automated interpretation of qualitative data

6. Responsibility towards research participants

- Avoid stigmatisation, bias or harmful statements
- AI can reinforce colonial or stereotypical patterns – you must recognise and reflect on them

IX Best practice examples for ethnology students

Good practice (permitted):

- “ChatGPT helped me develop three alternative structural options for my proposal. Based on my own considerations, I chose option 2 and wrote the text entirely myself.”

Good practice (not permitted, but correctly documented):

- “I had an AI generate sample interviews so that I could practise conversation flows. The data was entirely fictional.”

Bad practice (not permitted):

- Uploading a transcript “with anonymised names” but recognisable contextual details.

X Summary: The most important rules

Permitted: Using AI:

for learning, structuring, formulating, understanding.

Not permitted: Using AI:

for processing ethnographic or personal data.

Always permitted:

Checking output, documenting use, taking responsibility.

Never permitted:

enter real research partners or sensitive field data into AI tools, and have the tools generate and analyse the data.