



# AI AND JOURNALISM EDUCATION: **A guide for building a practical workshop**

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This document provides a simple how-to guide for journalism educators to incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) technology into course curricula. It outlines steps for creating practical workshops that can help students understand ethical and legal risks stemming from generative AI. The guide is applicable for both higher education and continuing professional development.

The guide is based on research investigating the thought processes of journalism students and recent graduates when they used generative AI to produce articles (Tunney et al., 2023). We believe practical exercises such as the type outlined here can lead to not only a greater awareness of the risks associated with AI, but also a clearer understanding of ways to address them.

# 1. Why is it needed?

As generative AI technology becomes more sophisticated, easier to navigate and more widely available, its use in newsrooms is only expected to increase. The adoption of AI in journalism production presents ethical and legal challenges for journalists, particularly those just entering the field. This is now a pressing issue for journalism educators.

## **Ethical risks include:**

- the possibility of biased content originating from an AI
- the potential for AI systems to produce inaccurate or misleading information
- the implications from users working with powerful systems that are often not transparent about their operation or about the sources of information they provide.

## **Legal risks concern:**

- the possibility of libel
- breach of copyright
- unintentional invasions of privacy
- contempt of court as AI systems scour vast online databases (Tunney et al., 2023).

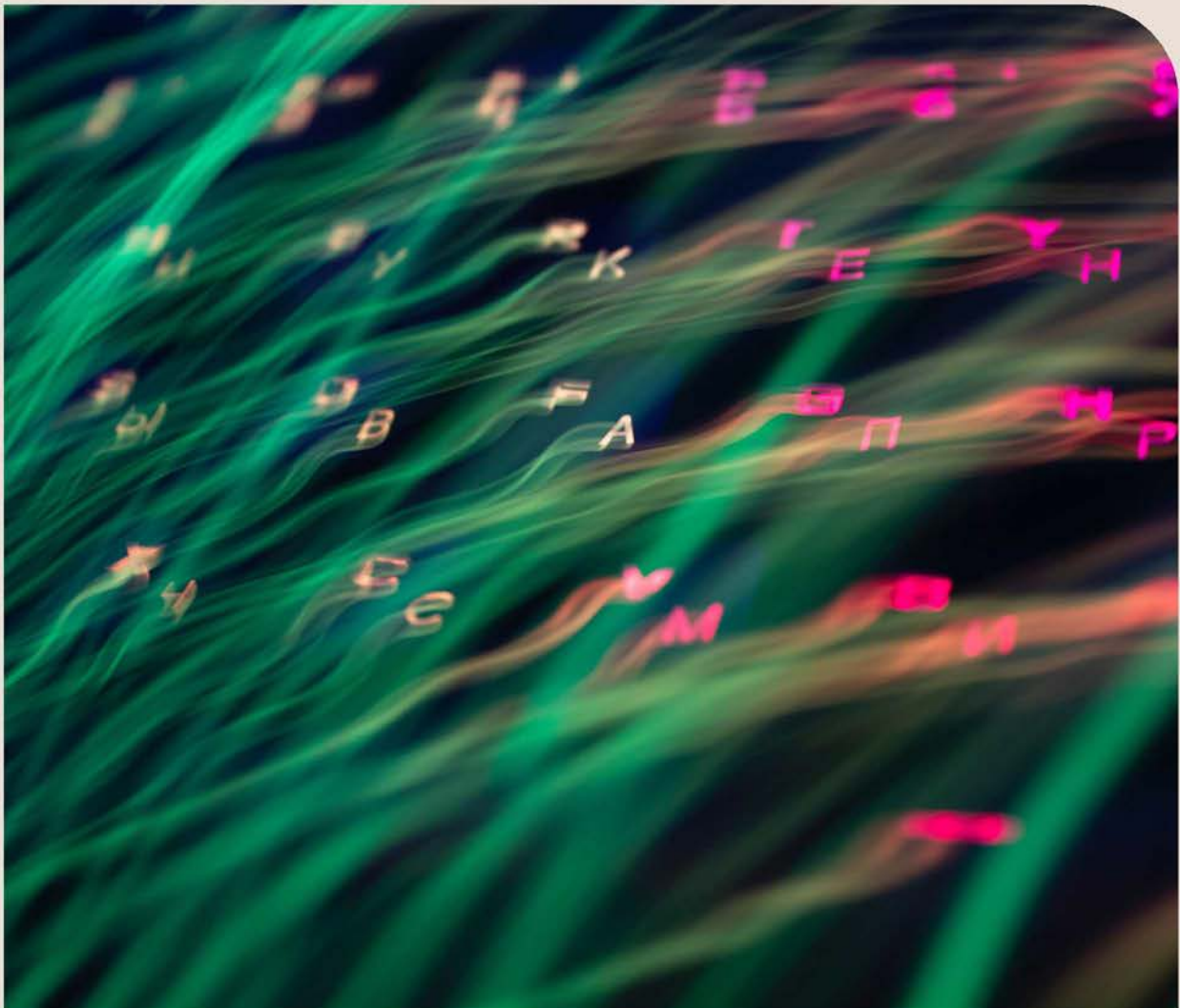


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## 2. Who is it for?

The workshop is suitable for undergraduate and MA journalism and media students, as well as in continuing professional development. The workshop can form part of a course on journalism law and ethics, a component of a practice-oriented module or a section of a module on media practice and society. Undergraduate journalism students should be in their second or third year and should have been introduced to basic legal issues such as libel and the right to privacy, and to ethical issues such as bias, impartiality and objectivity.

The method we suggest here is based on role play and guided discussion. The advantages of using role play to increase student interest and understanding of course material are well documented (Jarvis, Odell and Troiano, 2002). We offer a template for creating workshops where students are asked to write articles with the assistance of AI, followed by discussion about issues encountered during the exercise.

By encouraging participants to use AI themselves, the workshop prompts them to think about the ethical and legal implications of the technology in concrete terms. A key element therefore is the post-exercise discussion, where students' own observations can be used to draw lessons about the ramifications of AI. Subsequent exercises could focus on giving students the chance to practice writing with an AI tool to help them develop techniques for using it responsibly and ethically.



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## 3. What is required to build an AI workshop?

Journalism educators need not become experts in AI in order to incorporate it into their teaching. A basic understanding of what generative AI is and how large language models (LLMs) work is all that is needed. In addition to those authors listed in the reference section, we have recommended some writers/academics instructors can consider for developing an understanding of the key issues.

A simple technique for creating an AI workshop is to envision a mock newsroom setting where students are tasked with creating articles with the assistance of an AI tool. ChatGPT and Bing Chat are obvious candidates. In our experiment, we used GPT-3, which is highly similar to ChatGPT. The only other requirement is imagination and a little time spent using the tool to understand its operation. At the time of writing, the database for ChatGPT-3.5 has been extended to January 2022, so factors such as that need to be built into exercise scenarios.



PHOTO BY: ANNIE SPRATT/UNSPLASH

## 4. How to do it: A step-by-step guide for creating an AI-based workshop

**Step 1** – If you don't have one already, create an account for a publicly available AI tool. In the case of either ChatGPT or Bing Chat, it is likely to only take a few moments to learn how it works. You can pose questions or create prompts such as, "I want to write an article about \_\_\_\_\_. Can you help?" You can then have a dialogue with the tool to begin to understand what it is capable of.

**Step 2** – Consider possibilities for an article that students could write using the AI tool. We recommend a Q&A "explainer" feature article, of the kind often produced to bring readers up to speed on a running story or a controversial issue (c.f. Birthisel, 2014). The advantage of this is that the AI can be treated as a source, making it simple to produce a Q&A or FAQ-style article by asking a series of questions of the tool and then making use of the responses.

For our research, we chose the subject of fracking. That topic can be considered hard news (it concerns economic policy, energy, the environment, national regulation and local government) or soft news (it receives attention from celebrities). We expected students would be vaguely familiar with the topic but also not know much about it; this belief proved correct. We would suggest educators aim for topics that have similar characteristics as that can increase the chance of lively post-exercise discussions.



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**Step 3** – Test out your story example using the AI tool. Pose questions and see if, based on the answers, you could quickly construct a story. The subject needs to be suitable given the database constraints of the AI. We recommend the exercise should be achievable in about 20-30 minutes. You will need to allow for 5-10 minutes to get students ready for the exercise.

**Step 4** – Design the instructions and exercise guidelines. Ensure that students have created their AI accounts beforehand. We recommend including an example of a published explainer article so that students understand what they are being asked to produce. Instructors should prepare a handout or slide with simple workshop instructions. It may be helpful to write a brief script for introducing the exercise. The workshop plan needs to allow at least 20 minutes for discussion about students' experiences and concerns. This can be focused on any of the ethical and legal risks noted above or views about how this technology may change the industry.

**Step 5** – Run the exercise. We recommend that the instructor engages in the role play as an "editor", telling students what is expected and treating the classroom as a newsroom. We also recommend providing sample questions to ask the AI tool so that students can quickly get started. They can be encouraged to come up with their own questions, treating the AI as an interviewee, and to use the internet for fact-checking or additional research.

A sample script for starting the exercise: "We're going to do some role play. I am your editor and I need you to write something to go along with the day's lead news story. As you know, our newspaper has just adopted guidelines that allow you to use an AI tool, provided you do so carefully and responsibly. You should all have created accounts for ChatGPT or Bing Chat, so go ahead and log in to those. As your editor, I want you to write an explainer article, in a Q&A format. Many newspapers write these to help their readers understand complex stories. Here is where you can find some published by the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/tone/explainers>. I've also offered some questions you can use to get started, but you should ask your own questions as well. And you may use the internet to check information if needed and/or gather additional information."

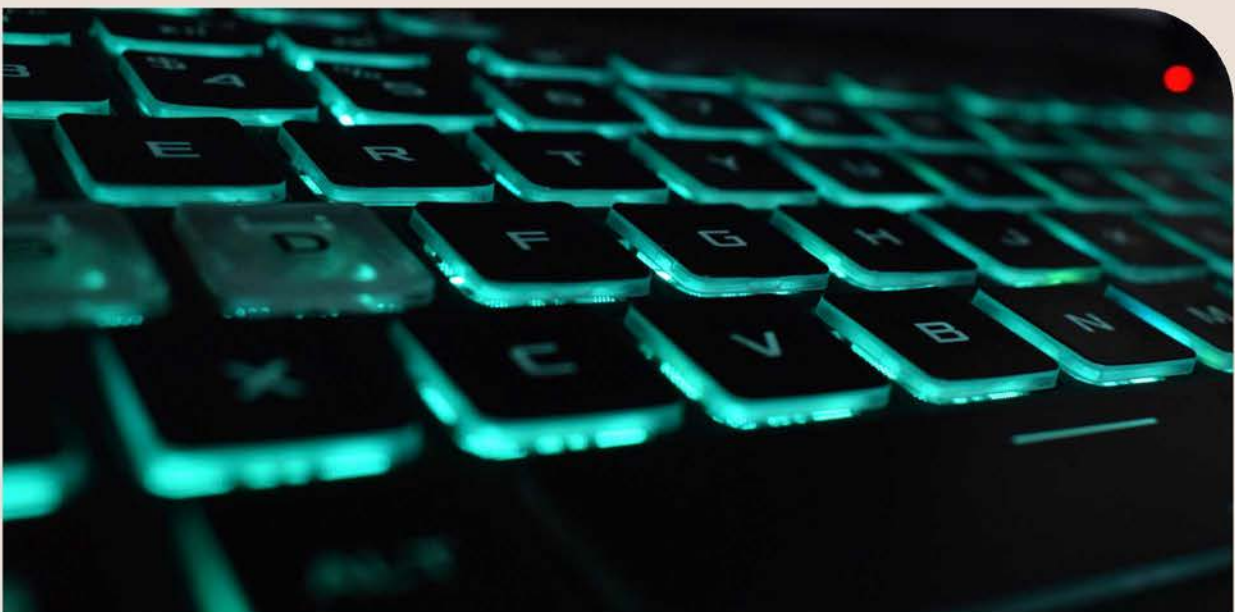


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## 5. What to explore in guided discussions

Our suggestions here are easily adaptable according to your own requirements. Three potential areas for guided discussion are prompted by our research, which highlighted risks from the adoption of AI-assisted journalism:

■ One risk is that AI could encourage inexperienced users to do less of their own fact-checking. To the extent that AI tools are able to produce authoritative-sounding text, there is a risk that users will not appreciate the fallibility of AI systems. This is particularly the case if students display positive machine heuristics (Tunney et al., 2023). **Questions prompted here could focus on students' assumptions about the accuracy of all the tool's information.**

■ A second risk concerns the degree to which users consider their own agency and the need to rely on their own journalistic instincts, rather than passively accepting whatever an AI generates. **Instructors, for instance, can ask students about their perception of the need for fact-checking.**

■ A third risk is that students who have positive experiences using AI may fail to think critically about the lack of transparency that is inherent in such a system, ultimately compromising a foundational aspect of good journalism. **Questions about the need for clear sourcing in journalism could be explored here.**

We would expect each class using exercises along the lines described above will have different issues come to the fore. In our research, there was a wide range of concerns and topics that came up during qualitative semi-structured interviews we conducted with each participant. The risks we identified above represent the synthesis of that range of issues.

We would expect the minimum time to run the practical workshop, including the guided discussion, would be 50 minutes, though we would allow for more time if possible. If your module structure allows, a lengthier workshop from 90 minutes to 3 hours would work well as it would give the students more time to experiment with the AI and, particularly, give more time for in-depth discussions.

### Recommended reading

Here are a few of the texts we considered for our research, which may help for conducting guided discussion about ethical and legal risk.

■ On transparency: Bathaee, 2017; Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2017

■ On legal issues: Ombelet et al., 2016

■ On AI bias: Montal & Reich, 2017; Thurman et al., 2017; Kothari & Hickerson, 2020; Mayson, 2019



