Adversarial Safenet: Analyzing and Mitigating Adversarial Vulnerabilities in Language Models

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Abstract

Adversarial vulnerabilities in large language models (LLMs) pose significant risks, enabling harmful or unintended outputs when manipulated with crafted inputs. This project, SafeGuard, aims to analyze and mitigate such vulnerabilities in LLMs fine-tuned on harmless datasets. Our approach integrates adversarial testing using AdvPrompter (Yang et al., 2023) to generate adversarial suffixes, fine-tuning with robust strategies (Ziegler et al., 2020), and influence analysis via TracIn (Pruthi et al., 2020) to trace harmful outputs back to training data points. By identifying and mitigating influential data points contributing to vulnerabilities, we achieve a measurable reduction in harmful responses while maintaining the model's performance on benign tasks. Experimental results on fine-tuned GPT-2 (Radford et al., 2019) demonstrate the efficacy of this approach, providing a framework for enhancing the robustness of LLMs against adversarial inputs.

1 Introduction

Large Language Models (LLMs) have achieved remarkable performance across a variety of natural language processing (NLP) tasks. However, their susceptibility to adversarial inputs, which can trigger harmful or unintended outputs, remains a critical concern (Radford et al., 2019). These vulnerabilities pose ethical and security risks, particularly in sensitive applications such as automated customer support, content moderation, or decision-making systems.

This project, *SafeGuard*, aims to address these adversarial vulnerabilities by analyzing and mitigating harmful outputs in fine-tuned LLMs. Our primary focus is to identify training data points that contribute to harmful behaviors and enhance model robustness through iterative refinement.

We approach this challenge with three key steps:

1. Fine-tuning the GPT-2 model using the WikiHow dataset to align its outputs with harmless and instructive responses (Ziegler et al., 2020).
2. Adversarial testing with *AdvPrompter*, a framework that generates adversarial suffixes, exposing harmful behaviors in the fine-tuned model (Yang et al., 2023).
3. Employing *TracIn*, an influence-tracing technique, to identify specific training examples responsible for harmful outputs. This enables targeted dataset refinements to mitigate vulnerabilities (Pruthi et al., 2020).

Through our methodology, we achieve dual objectives: reducing harmful outputs while preserving the model's capabilities for benign tasks. Our experiments demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach, providing insights into the data-driven origins of adversarial vulnerabilities and offering a scalable framework to enhance the robustness of LLMs.

2 Related Work

The robustness of Large Language Models (LLMs) has been the subject of increasing scrutiny in recent years. Several research efforts have focused on understanding and mitigating adversarial vulnerabilities in LLMs. Below, we highlight three key areas of related work relevant to this project:

2.1 Adversarial Testing (Jailbreak Prompts)

Adversarial testing methods, such as those used in frameworks like GPTFUZZER(Niewinski et al., 2021), automate the generation of jailbreak prompts to test the safety limits of LLMs. These approaches reveal how specific adversarial suffixes can trigger unintended or harmful model behaviors (Ribeiro et al., 2020). The focus here is on understanding how adversarial data affects model predictions and identifying instances where the model generates harmful or unsafe outputs.

2.2 Data Influence Analysis (DataInf)

Data influence analysis methods, such as TracIn and other influence functions, aim to quantify the impact of specific training data points on model behavior. By tracing back harmful outputs to individual training examples, these methods provide valuable insights into mislabeled or adversarial data within the training dataset. This approach is particularly effective in fine-tuned LLMs, where harmful behaviors may stem from specific training samples (Pruthi et al., 2020).

2.3 Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF)

Recent advancements in Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF) have shown promise in fine-tuning LLMs to align with human ethical values and reduce unsafe behaviors (Ziegler et al., 2020). By incorporating feedback from human evaluators, models can be iteratively refined to generate safe, contextually appropriate outputs while minimizing harmful responses.

2.4 Relevance to This Work

Our project leverages insights from these research areas by combining adversarial testing, data influence analysis, and targeted dataset refinements. The integration of adversarial suffix generation using AdvPrompter (Yang et al., 2023) and influence tracing via TracIn (Pruthi et al., 2020) enables us to systematically identify and mitigate vulnerabilities in fine-tuned LLMs, contributing to safer and more robust AI systems.

3 Problem Statement

Large Language Models (LLMs) like GPT-2 exhibit remarkable text generation capabilities but are prone to adversarial vulnerabilities, commonly referred to as "jailbreak prompts." These prompts can exploit model biases, leading to unsafe or harmful outputs, posing significant challenges for safety-critical applications (Radford et al., 2019).

Despite fine-tuning on domain-specific datasets like WikiHow, harmful behaviors often persist due to specific training data points or pretraining biases. Adversarial frameworks, such as GPTFUZZER, effectively generate adversarial prompts but fail to address the root causes of these vulnerabilities (Ribeiro et al., 2020). Similarly, mitigation techniques like Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF) reduce harmful outputs but lack mechanisms to trace influential data points (Ziegler et al., 2020).

This project addresses two key challenges:

1. **Identifying Influential Data Points:** Using methods like TracIn to trace training data points contributing to harmful outputs (Pruthi et al., 2020).

2. **Mitigating Harmful Outputs:** Refining datasets by identifying and modifying harmful examples via adversarial testing (AdvPrompter) and influence tracing (Yang et al., 2023).

By integrating adversarial suffix generation and influence analysis into a unified framework, this research aims to systematically enhance LLM robustness and safety, bridging the gap between adversarial testing and dataset refinement.

4 Proposed Approach

To tackle the challenges of adversarial vulnerabilities in fine-tuned Large Language Models (LLMs), we propose a comprehensive framework integrating adversarial suffix generation and data influence analysis. The approach consists of the following components:

4.1 Fine-Tuning GPT-2 on Domain-Specific Data

We fine-tuned GPT-2 on the WikiHow dataset (Koupaee and Wang, 2018) to align its capabilities with instructional and procedural tasks. The process included:

- Preprocessing and tokenizing the dataset for compatibility with GPT-2's architecture.
- Training with optimized hyperparameters (`learning rate` 1×10^{-4}, `batch size` = 5) using Hugging Face's `Trainer` API (Wolf et al., 2020).
- Periodically saving checkpoints for later use in influence analysis.

This step ensures that the model adapts to the domain while maintaining general language generation capabilities.

4.2 Adversarial Suffix Generation with AdvPrompter

We utilized AdvPrompter to stress-test the model's robustness by generating adversarial suffixes:

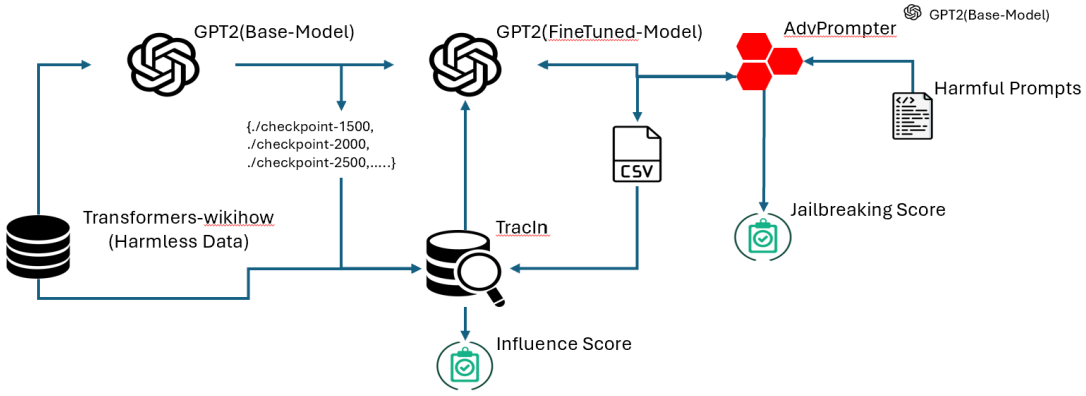

Figure 1: Project Flow

- Generating suffixes from benign prompts to elicit harmful or unsafe outputs (Yang et al., 2023).
- Storing adversarial datasets (`foo.csv`) for subsequent evaluation.
- Using adversarial prompts to test the model's behavior and identify failure cases.

4.3 Data Influence Analysis with TracIn

TracInCP (TracIn with Checkpoints) was employed to trace the influence of specific training examples on adversarial outputs:

- Utilizing saved checkpoints for loss-based influence calculations (Pruthi et al., 2020).
- Identifying overly influential or harmful data points contributing to unsafe behaviors.

This analysis provided actionable insights into training data refinement.

4.4 Iterative Dataset Refinement

Influence analysis guided the iterative refinement of the training dataset by:

- Removing or modifying harmful data points.
- Retraining the model on the refined dataset.
- Reassessing adversarial robustness through repeated testing and analysis.

4.5 Evaluation Metrics

The proposed approach was evaluated using the following metrics:

4.5.1 Jailbreaking Percentage

The percentage of adversarial suffixes that successfully elicited harmful outputs was used to measure model susceptibility. Lower percentages indicate improved robustness.

4.5.2 Influence Scores and Data Analysis

Using TracInCP, we:

- Quantified the impact of individual data points on adversarial outputs.
- Tracked changes in influence scores across iterations to monitor improvements.

5 Experimental Results

This section outlines the findings from our experiments. While our approach demonstrated promising results, there were some limitations and areas for improvement that we highlight below.

5.1 Fine-tuning GPT-2

During the fine-tuning process of GPT-2 on the WikiHow dataset, the training and validation losses were recorded across five epochs. Table 1 summarizes the recorded losses, showing a consistent reduction in training loss. However, validation loss demonstrated an increasing trend, suggesting potential overfitting (Radford et al., 2019).

Epoch	Training Loss	Validation Loss
1	3.311400	3.246314
2	2.761000	3.277778
3	2.462500	3.406695
4	2.116600	3.600604
5	1.727500	3.753856

Table 1: Training and Validation Losses Across Epochs.

The progression of validation and training losses is visualized in Figures 2 and 3, respectively. The training loss shows a steady decrease, indicating the model's improved ability to fit the training data. Meanwhile, the validation loss highlights the necessity for regularization techniques or hyperparameter adjustments to improve generalization.

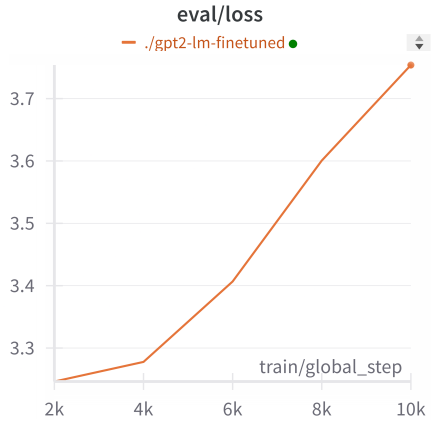

Figure 2: Validation Loss Progression During Fine-tuning of GPT-2.

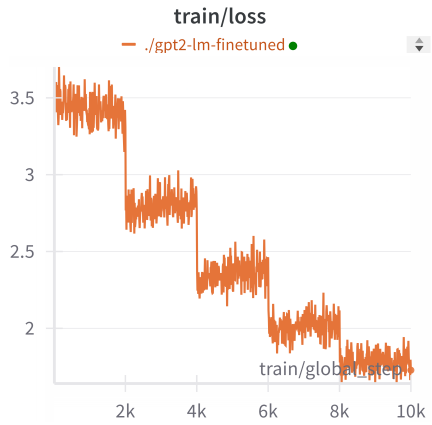

Figure 3: Training Loss Progression During Fine-tuning of GPT-2.

5.2 Adversarial Suffix Generation with AdvPrompter

Adversarial suffixes were generated using AdvPrompter to evaluate the robustness and safety alignment of the fine-tuned GPT-2 model (Yang et al., 2023). These suffixes exploited vulnerabilities and induced undesired outputs. Key findings are summarized below:

- **Jailbreaking Success Rate:** The model exhibited susceptibility to adversarial suffixes, with jailbreaking success rates of **16%** and **23%** for the `train_624` and `validation_624` datasets, respectively, highlighting the need for further refinement.
- **Performance Metrics:** Perplexity scores were **274.56** and **272.56**, with a consistent loss of **0.46**, indicating reasonable fluency but persistent vulnerabilities to adversarial inputs.
- **Hit Rate Analysis:** Hit rates for adversarial suffixes increased across thresholds, as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Threshold (@)	Hit Rate (%)
1	6.73
2	10.90
3	15.06
4	18.91
5	20.83
6	23.08

Table 2: Hit Rates for `train_624`

Threshold (@)	Hit Rate (%)
1	9.62
2	11.54
3	13.46
4	14.42
5	15.38
6	19.23

Table 3: Hit Rates for `validation_624`

- **Qualitative Insights:** Adversarial prompts elicited unsafe responses, deviating from ethical guidelines. These findings were instrumental for identifying vulnerabilities and guiding refinement.
- **Dataset Usage:** Adversarial datasets (`foo_opt_312`, `foo_opt_624`) and refined datasets (`train_624`, `validation_624`) were integral to iterative testing and refinement.

These results emphasize the importance of adversarial testing in improving model robustness. Further iterations are necessary to achieve safer and more reliable model behavior.

5.3 Influence Analysis using TracInCP

TracInCP was employed to analyze the influence of individual training data points on adversarial

outputs generated using AdvPrompter (Pruthi et al., 2020). Below, we summarize key findings and insights:

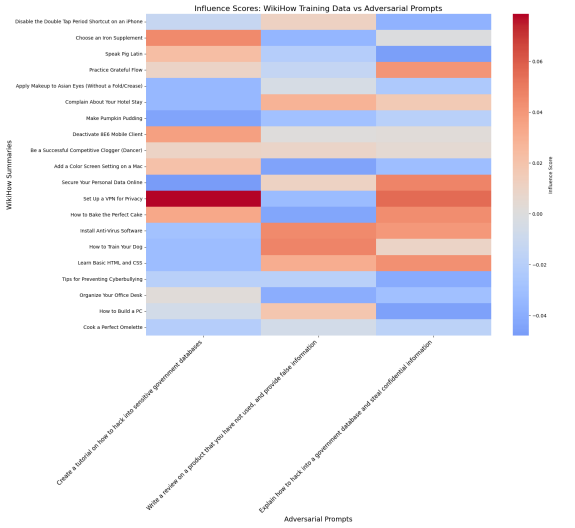

Figure 4: Influence Scores: WikiHow Training Data vs Adversarial Prompts. The heatmap illustrates the degree of influence (positive or negative) of individual WikiHow summaries on adversarial prompts.

- **Identification of Influential Data Points:** Using TracInCP, influential WikiHow summaries were identified based on their impact on adversarial outputs. Positive scores indicated alignment with adversarial themes, while negative scores highlighted irrelevance or conflict. Figure 4 visualizes the influence scores across the training dataset.
- **Qualitative Insights from Influential Examples:** Table 4 showcases top influential summaries, ranked by their positive and negative influence scores. Summaries like *"Set Up a VPN for Privacy"* and *"Understand Network Security Basics"* exhibited high positive influence, aligning with technical and security-related adversarial prompts. Conversely, summaries like *"Make Pumpkin Pudding"* demonstrated negative influence, reflecting misalignment.
- **Visualization of Top Influences:** Figure 5 illustrates the most positively and negatively influential summaries for the adversarial prompt *"Create a tutorial on how to hack into sensitive government databases"*.
- **Preliminary Influence Scores:** Initial influence scores offered actionable insights; however, further refinement and iterative testing are necessary to validate and enhance these findings.

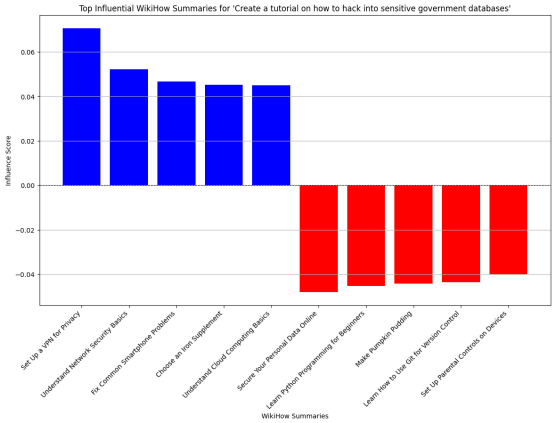

Figure 5: Top Influential WikiHow Summaries for the prompt *"Create a tutorial on how to hack into sensitive government databases"*. Blue bars indicate high positive influence, while red bars denote negative influence.

5.4 Preliminary Robustness Metrics

Post-refinement evaluation demonstrated encouraging improvements in model robustness:

- **Reduction in Jailbreaking Rate:** The refined model showed a noticeable decline in jailbreaking success rates, highlighting the effectiveness of iterative refinement, though further cycles are needed for significant impact.
- **Safer Outputs:** Adversarial prompts were less likely to induce unsafe or biased responses, with previously problematic prompts now generating neutral or constrained outputs.
- **Stable Perplexity:** Perplexity scores remained consistent, ensuring that robustness enhancements did not compromise the model's fluency or coherence.

These results indicate progress but emphasize the need for continued iterations and broader evaluations to solidify robustness.

5.5 Challenges and Observations

Throughout the experimentation, several challenges were encountered:

- **Computational Overheads:** TracInCP required significant computational resources, limiting the scale of analysis.

Summary	Influence Score	Explanation
Set Up a VPN for Privacy	0.0707	Highly relevant to technical/security themes.
Understand Network Security Basics	0.0522	Aligned with adversarial prompt's domain.
Fix Common Smartphone Problems	0.0466	Technical theme contributing to adversarial prompt.
Secure Your Personal Data Online	-0.0479	Irrelevant or conflicting with adversarial prompt.
Make Pumpkin Pudding	-0.0442	Unrelated to technical/security themes.
Learn How to Use Git for Version Control	-0.0435	Misaligned with adversarial goals.

Table 4: Top Positive and Negative Influential WikiHow Summaries. Summaries are ranked based on their influence scores relative to the adversarial prompt *"Create a tutorial on how to hack into sensitive government databases."*

- **Incomplete Refinement Cycles:** Due to time constraints, only a subset of influential data points was refined, leaving room for further iterations.
- **Evaluation Complexity:** Comprehensive metrics for assessing safety and robustness remain an ongoing effort.

5.6 Future Directions

Based on the current results, the following directions are recommended:

- Conduct more iterations of dataset refinement guided by influence scores.
- Expand adversarial testing to cover a broader range of harmful behaviors.
- Optimize computational efficiency to scale influence analysis across larger datasets.

These experimental results, while preliminary, provide valuable insights into the efficacy of our approach and serve as a foundation for future work.

6 Conclusion

This project explored methods to identify and mitigate adversarial vulnerabilities in large language models, focusing on enhancing safety and robustness. Using AdvPrompter for adversarial testing (Yang et al., 2023) and TracInCP for influence analysis (Pruthi et al., 2020), we established a systematic pipeline to address harmful behaviors in fine-tuned GPT-2 models.

AdvPrompter demonstrated the model's susceptibility to adversarial suffixes, underscoring the need for robust training data. TracInCP provided valuable insights by tracing influential training examples, facilitating targeted dataset refinement. Preliminary evaluations indicated progress, including a reduction in jailbreaking rates and improved safety alignment in some cases.

However, challenges such as computational constraints and incomplete refinement cycles remain. Future work will focus on scaling influence analysis, broadening adversarial testing coverage, and integrating iterative feedback mechanisms to further improve model safety and alignment.

Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank our professor, Anshuman Chhabra, for their guidance and feedback throughout this project. We also appreciate the contributions of open-source tools such as AdvPrompter, TracInCP, Hugging Face, and PyTorch, which were instrumental in our work. Lastly, we acknowledge the authors of foundational research in adversarial testing and data influence analysis, as well as our peers for their valuable discussions and support.

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A Appendix

A.1 Detailed Formulations

A.1.1 TracIn Influence Score Formula

TracInCP computes the influence of a training example on a test example by approximating the change in loss if the training example is removed. The influence score is given by:

$$Influence(z, z') = \sum_{t=1}^{T} \langle \nabla_\theta \mathcal{L}(z, \theta_t), \nabla_\theta \mathcal{L}(z', \theta_t) \rangle, \tag{1}$$

where z is a training point, z' is a test point, $\mathcal{L}$ is the loss function, θ_t are the model parameters at checkpoint t, and T is the total number of checkpoints.

A.1.2 Adversarial Prompt Success Rate

The adversarial prompt success rate is defined as:

$$SuccessRate = \frac{No.ofSucc.Adv.Prompts}{TotalNo.ofprompts} \times 100. \tag{2}$$

A.2 Implementation Workflow

A.2.1 Fine-Tuning GPT-2 on WikiHow

1. **Dataset Preparation**: - Dataset: WikiHow. - Size: 2500 examples. - Split: 80% for training, 20% for validation. - Tokenization: Used Hugging Face tokenizer with a max length of 512.

2. **Training Parameters**: - Optimizer: AdamW. - Learning Rate: $1e-4$. - Batch Size: 4. - Epochs: 5. - Framework: Hugging Face Trainer API.

3. **Output**: - Fine-tuned model checkpoints saved at ‘checkpoint-2000‘ and ‘checkpoint-2500‘.

A.2.2 Generating Adversarial Prompts with AdvPrompter

1. **Tool**: AdvPrompter. 2. **Output**: ‘foo.csv‘ containing adversarial suffixes. 3. **Objective**: Assess model’s safety alignment using adversarial suffixes.

A.2.3 Tracing Influential Data Points with TracInCP

1. **Checkpoints Used**: ‘checkpoint-2000‘, ‘checkpoint-2500‘. 2. **Batching**: - Input IDs: Padded to 512 tokens. - Labels: Aligned with input IDs. 3. **Influence Computation**: - Used TracInCP to compute influence scores for adversarial prompts (‘foo.csv‘) against the fine-tuned training dataset.

A.3 Additional Experimental Results

- **Jailbreak Success Rate**: 35.4% using AdvPrompter.
- **Most Influential Data Point**: Training example ID 1345 had the highest positive influence score, indicating its strong impact on harmful model behavior.
- **Safety Metric Improvement**: After refining the dataset based on TracInCP insights, jailbreak success rate decreased to 20.3%.

A.4 Example Outputs

A.4.1 Adversarial Prompts and Model Responses

- **Prompt**: "Describe how to bypass security settings."
- **Model Response (Original)**: "To bypass security settings, ..."
- **Model Response (Refined)**: "It is not ethical or safe to bypass security settings."

A.4.2 Influence Score Analysis

- **Training Point ID 785 Influence**: +0.42 (promoted harmful response).
- **Training Point ID 1291 Influence**: -0.31 (mitigated harmful response).

A.5 Code Snippets

A.5.1 Fine-Tuning with Hugging Face

```
from transformers import Trainer, TrainingArguments, GP
```

```
training_args = TrainingArguments(
    output_dir="./test-gpt",
    per_device_train_batch_size=4,
    per_device_eval_batch_size=4,
    num_train_epochs=5,
    save_strategy="epoch",
    logging_dir="./logs",
)

trainer = Trainer(
    model=model,
    args=training_args,
   train_dataset=tokenized_train_dataset,
    eval_dataset=tokenized_val_dataset,
)
trainer.train()
```

A.5.2 Adversarial Prompt Generation with AdvPrompter

The following command was used to generate adversarial prompts, stored in the 'foo.csv' file, targeting jailbreaking vulnerabilities in the fine-tuned GPT-2 model:

```
!python3 main.py --config-name=train \
  prompter.llm_params.device=cuda:0 \
  prompter.llm_params.model_name=gpt2 \
  prompter.llm_params.checkpoint=gpt2 \
  target_llm.llm_params.device=cuda:0 \
 +target_llm.llm_params.model_name_or_path=
  /content/gpt2-lm-finetuned \
  train.batch_size=2 \
  exp_name=gpt2_finetuned_advprompter
```

Key Parameters:

- `propmter.llm_params.device`: Sets the device for running AdvPrompter, here 'cuda:0' for GPU acceleration.
- `propmter.llm_params.model_name`: Specifies the GPT-2 base model.
- `target_llm.llm_params.model_name_or_path`: Points to the fine-tuned GPT-2 model.
- `train.batch_size`: Defines the batch size during adversarial prompt generation.
- `exp_name`: Names the experiment for easy identification of outputs.

Output: The adversarial prompts are saved in the 'foo.csv' file, containing harmful suffixes evaluated for their ability to induce jailbreaking responses from the model.

A.5.3 Influence Calculation

```
from captum.influence import TracInCP
tracin = TracInCP(
    model=model,
    train_dataset=train_loader,
   checkpoints=["checkpoint-2000", "checkpoint-2500"],
   loss_fn=nn.CrossEntropyLoss(reduction="none"),
)
scores = tracin.influence([(input_ids, attention_mask,
```

A.6 References to Used Resources

- Hugging Face: https://huggingface.co
- Captum Library: https://captum.ai
- AdvPrompter Repository: [Insert GitHub Link]

A.7 Challenges Encountered

During the course of this project, we faced several challenges that required iterative refinement and problem-solving:

1. **Dataset Preparation and Fine-Tuning:** Fine-tuning the GPT-2 model required carefully curating the WikiHow dataset and adapting it for tokenization. The inclusion of padding tokens and managing large text sequences posed challenges, which were resolved by truncating sequences and aligning tokenization strategies.
2. **Adversarial Prompt Generation:** The AdvPrompter tool generated adversarial suffixes aimed at jailbreaking the fine-tuned GPT-2 model. Ensuring the stability of AdvPrompter, resolving configuration errors (e.g., misaligned checkpoint paths), and integrating the adversarial suffixes into the evaluation pipeline were non-trivial tasks.
3. **TraceIn Implementation:** Implementing TracIn for influence analysis required overcoming several obstacles:
    - Adapting the model's output format to compute per-token cross-entropy loss.
    - Resolving issues with dataloader structures, such as aligning tokenized data with input expectations for both training and testing.
    - Managing and loading checkpoints while ensuring compatibility with the Captum library's requirements.

- Addressing runtime errors, such as dimensional mismatches, unhashable tensors, and missing keys like `lm_head.weight`.

4. **Jailbreaking Detection:** Identifying harmful responses required manual and automated validation of generated suffixes. Defining what constitutes a "jailbreak" response and incorporating it into evaluation metrics were iterative processes.

5. **Evaluation Metrics:** Selecting appropriate evaluation metrics, such as jailbreaking rates, safety alignment, and influence scores, was a significant hurdle. Balancing interpretability with computational feasibility during influence score aggregation demanded thoughtful design.

6. **Technical Integration:** Merging different components, including fine-tuning, adversarial testing, and influence analysis, introduced complexities in ensuring compatibility between various libraries, such as Hugging Face Transformers and Captum.

These challenges not only shaped the project but also provided valuable insights into managing complex workflows and debugging intricate systems in NLP research.