



Academic Integrity and AI Policy

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Departments of Photography, Media, and Journalism

1. Our Commitment to Academic Integrity

At the MCAST Institute for the Creative Arts (ICA), we are committed to fostering a culture of creativity, innovation, and honesty. Academic integrity is the cornerstone of this culture. It means submitting work that is entirely your own, acknowledging the contributions of others, and taking pride in your learning.

This document serves as the official policy regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within that framework. It outlines the principles of academic integrity when using AI, explains what constitutes misconduct in this context, and provides clear guidelines for ethical and responsible use. This policy should be read in conjunction with MCAST's main Programme Regulations concerning plagiarism and academic misconduct. By enrolling at MCAST, you agree to uphold all of these standards.

2. What is Academic Misconduct?

To understand how AI fits into our standards, it is important to remember the college-wide definition of academic misconduct. It is any action that gives a student an unfair advantage or misrepresents their own work. The primary form of academic misconduct is **plagiarism**.

Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work, ideas, words, or creations as your own without proper attribution. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Copying text, images, or code from a website, book, or another student without citing the source.
- Paraphrasing someone else's ideas too closely without giving credit.
- Submitting an assignment that was completed, in whole or in part, by someone else.
- **Submitting AI-generated content as your own original work without declaration.**

Any act of plagiarism is treated as a serious offense and will lead to disciplinary action, which can range from a failing grade for the assignment to expulsion from the college, as outlined in MCAST's official Programme Regulations.

3. Our Policy on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

We recognize that AI is a powerful and transformative tool for creative professionals. Our goal is not to ban AI, but to guide you in using it as an ethical and effective **creative assistant**, a tool that assists and enhances your own skills, rather than replacing them.

Our AI policy is built on one fundamental principle: **Transparency**.

You are free to use AI tools to support your learning, but you **must always be honest and transparent** about how you have used them. We are assessing *your* process, *your* ideas, and *your* skills, not your ability to prompt an AI.

4. The Rules of Engagement: AI Usage and Submission Requirements

To ensure transparency and fairness, the following rules apply to every assignment submitted at the ICA:

4.1 The AI Use Declaration Form

A key part of our transparency policy is the AI Use Declaration Form. This short document is your formal statement on how the technology was used in your project.

- You are **required** to submit a completed form with any assignment where AI was used. The form must provide a detailed and honest account of which tools you used and for what purpose.
- Submitting the form to declare that you did *not* use AI is optional, but it is good practice for clarity.
- **If no form is submitted** with your work, it will be taken as your formal and final declaration that no AI was used.

4.2 Showing Your Process

When you use AI, you are required to submit your complete process work alongside your final submission. This is non-negotiable and is essential for proving your creative ownership.

This process work must include:

- **Development Materials:** Rough scripts, sketches, storyboards, mood boards, and any other evidence of your own creative thinking.
- **Prompt Logs:** A record of the text prompts you used to generate ideas or assets from AI tools.
- **Raw Inputs:** The original images, text, or other content you fed into an AI tool.
- **Raw Outputs:** The original, unedited images, text, or other content generated by the AI.

4.2.1 Examples of How to Show Your Process

To help you meet this requirement, here are some practical examples of how you can document your workflow. This list is not exhaustive, and the best method will depend on your specific project:

- **Screen Recordings:** A short video of your session with an AI tool, showing your prompts, the generated results, and your selection process.
- **Layered Digital Files:** Submitting your native project file (e.g., .psd, .ai, .prproj) that clearly shows how you edited, manipulated, and integrated AI-generated assets into your own work.
- **Annotated Screenshots:** Key screenshots of your process with brief text explanations of what you were trying to achieve at each stage.
- **Version History / Tracked Changes:** For written work, a document that shows the history of your edits, demonstrating how you have substantially reworked any AI-generated text.
- **Reflective Log:** A brief written journal or mind map explaining where and why you chose to use an AI tool, and how it influenced your creative decisions.

4.3 Why We Require This

Submitting your process work demonstrates how you used AI as a tool within your own creative workflow. It allows us to assess your critical thinking, your aesthetic choices, and the skills you applied to refine and integrate the AI-generated elements. Ultimately, **you are graded on your ability to meet the unit's Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria; it must be evident from your submission and process work that this achievement is your own**, not the AI's. It proves that you were the creative director of the project.

5. Smart vs. Misuse of AI

The following examples will help you distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI. Please note that these lists are not exhaustive. The following assume AI use where the component being created is not being assessed.

Examples of Acceptable Use (AI as a Creative Assistant):

- **Ideation & Brainstorming:** Using ChatGPT to generate a list of potential themes for a documentary, which you then research and develop yourself.
- **Research & Summarization:** Using an AI tool to summarize a dense academic article to help you quickly grasp the key arguments for your own writing.
- **Text Refinement:** Using Grammarly's AI features to check your script for spelling errors and improve sentence clarity on text you have written.
- **Asset Generation:** Using Midjourney to create a background texture that you then heavily edit in Photoshop and integrate into a larger, original design.
- **Coding Assistance:** Using an AI tool to debug a piece of code you have written or to explain a complex function you are trying to learn.
- **Image Analysis:** Using AI tools to analyse an image for colour correction suggestions which you then apply manually.

Examples of Unacceptable Use (Academic Misconduct):

- **Plagiarism:** Copying a paragraph from ChatGPT and pasting it directly into your essay without citation or declaration.
- **Contract Cheating:** Using an AI tool to write an entire script, create a final piece of artwork, or complete an entire assignment for you with minimal to no personal input.
- **Failure to Declare:** Using any AI tool to assist in your work but failing to declare it on the AI Use Declaration Form.
- **Misrepresentation:** Claiming an AI-generated image as a photograph you have taken, or an AI-generated piece of music as your own composition.
- **Data Fabrication:** Using an AI to generate fake sources, quotes, or data to support an argument in a research paper.

Crucially, any use of AI that is not declared is considered a breach of this policy and **will be treated as plagiarism**.

6. Final Word

Your education at the ICA is an opportunity to develop your unique creative voice and a robust set of professional skills. We encourage you to explore new technologies, including AI, with curiosity and integrity. By being transparent and focusing on your own learning process, you will not only succeed in your studies but also prepare yourself to be an ethical and innovative professional in the creative industries.

7. A Note for Lecturers: Our Assessment Approach

This section clarifies the assessment protocol for academic staff, ensuring a consistent and transparent application of this policy.

How to Approach Grading

Your assessment should focus on the student's individual contribution, not their ability to prompt an AI. The fundamental goal is to grade the student's work against the unit's **Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria**. Students are required to submit their process and workings, along with the final product as the primary evidence for you to evaluate their:

- Creative Ownership and Original Ideas.
- Critical Thinking and Aesthetic Choices.
- Technical Skills applied to edit, refine, and integrate any AI-generated elements.
- Ability to meet the requirements set by the assignment brief.

The final submission must be the student's own work, and it must be clearly evident that the student has met the assessment criteria set by the assignment brief. AI cannot be used to replace the student's core skills or be the sole creator of the final output being assessed.

When a Student Declares AI Use

When a student submits an AI Use Declaration Form, your role is to verify their process and assess their work.

1. **Review the Declaration Form:** Understand which tools were used and for what stated purpose.
2. **Scrutinise the Process Work:** This is non-negotiable. Examine their development materials, prompt logs, and raw inputs/outputs to confirm they were the "**creative director**" of the project.
3. **Assess the Final Submission:** Grade the work based on how effectively the **student's own efforts and skills** meet the assignment's learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

When You Suspect Undeclared AI Use

If you suspect a student has used AI without declaring it, it is good practice to first discuss your concerns with another member of the academic team, ideally the Internal Verifier (IV) or the Second Assessor if there is one assigned, or the Course Coordinator.

If you both agree that undeclared AI use is evident, the policy is unambiguous in how to proceed:

1. **Absence of a Form is a Declaration:** If no AI Use Declaration Form is submitted, it is considered the student's **formal declaration that no AI was used**.
2. **Undeclared Use is Plagiarism:** Any use of AI that is not declared is a breach of this policy and **will be treated as plagiarism**. This is listed as an unacceptable use and a form of academic misconduct.
3. **Follow Standard Procedure:** In such cases, you should follow MCAST's established Programme Regulations for investigating and penalising plagiarism and academic misconduct.