

Bidirectional RAG: Safe Self-Improving Retrieval-Augmented Generation Through Multi-Stage Validation

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Abstract—Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) systems enhance large language models by grounding responses in external knowledge bases, but conventional RAG architectures operate with static corpora that cannot evolve from user interactions. We introduce Bidirectional RAG, a novel RAG architecture that enables safe corpus expansion through validated write-back of high-quality generated responses. Our system employs a multi-stage acceptance layer combining grounding verification (NLI-based entailment), attribution checking, and novelty detection to prevent hallucination pollution while enabling knowledge accumulation. Across four datasets (Natural Questions, TriviaQA, HotpotQA, Stack Overflow) with three random seeds (12 experiments per system), Bidirectional RAG achieves 40.58% average coverage—nearly doubling Standard RAG (20.33%)—while adding 72% fewer documents than naive write-back (140 vs 500). Our work demonstrates that self-improving RAG is feasible and safe when governed by rigorous validation, offering a practical path toward RAG systems that learn from deployment.

Index Terms—Retrieval-Augmented Generation, Large Language Models, Knowledge Management, Hallucination Prevention, Safe AI

I. INTRODUCTION

Large language models (LLMs) demonstrate remarkable capabilities but suffer from well-known limitations: knowledge cutoffs freeze understanding at training time, domain-specific information remains incomplete, and hallucinations produce plausible but factually incorrect statements [1]. Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) addresses these issues by augmenting model inputs with relevant passages from external corpora, enabling grounded responses without model retraining [2].

Despite widespread adoption, conventional RAG architectures exhibit a fundamental asymmetry: they operate as *read-only* systems. The retrieval corpus is populated once through document ingestion, after which the model solely consumes from this fixed knowledge base. This design overlooks a critical opportunity—over extended deployment, language models generate numerous high-quality responses (clarifications, summaries, syntheses) that often surpass the informativeness of original corpus chunks. These valuable knowledge artifacts are discarded after generation rather than preserved for future retrieval.

We introduce **Bidirectional RAG**, a novel RAG architecture that enables *controlled write-back* of validated model outputs to the retrieval corpus. The central challenge is *safety*: naively storing all outputs would rapidly pollute the corpus with hallucinations, creating a self-reinforcing degradation cycle. We address this through a *multi-stage acceptance layer* that validates responses against strict criteria for factual grounding, source attribution, and novelty before corpus insertion.

Our contributions are:

- 1) **Novel architecture** for safe corpus expansion through validated write-back
- 2) **Multi-stage validation** combining grounding (NLI), attribution, and novelty checks
- 3) **Experience store** for meta-learning from both accepted and rejected responses
- 4) **Comprehensive evaluation** across 4 datasets showing 2× coverage improvement with 72% less corpus growth than naive write-back

II. RELATED WORK

A. Retrieval-Augmented Generation

RAG was formalized by Lewis et al. [1], who demonstrated that augmenting sequence-to-sequence models with retrieved passages improves performance on knowledge-intensive tasks. Self-RAG [2] introduced reflection tokens for adaptive retrieval but maintains a static corpus. FLARE [3] uses iterative retrieval triggered by uncertainty, while CRAG [4] implements corrective retrieval when initial results are insufficient. Our work extends RAG with bidirectional information flow while remaining compatible with these advances.

B. Hallucination Prevention

Recent work addresses hallucination through various mechanisms: entailment-based verification [5], retrieval-augmented revision [6], and attribution checking [7]. We incorporate these techniques into a unified acceptance layer specifically designed for corpus write-back safety.

C. Continual Learning

Our approach shares motivation with continual learning systems that update knowledge over time [8]. However, while

continual learning typically updates model parameters, we update the retrieval corpus—enabling knowledge expansion without retraining while avoiding catastrophic forgetting through careful validation.

III. PROBLEM FORMULATION

Let \mathcal{D}_t denote the corpus at time t , R a retrieval function, G a generative model, and $Q = \{q_1, q_2, \dots\}$ a query stream.

Objective: Maximize retrieval coverage C_t over time while maintaining safety constraints:

$$\max_t C_t = \frac{|\{q \in Q : R(q, \mathcal{D}_t) \text{ relevant}\}|}{|Q|} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{subject to } H(\mathcal{D}_t) \leq \epsilon_h \quad (2)$$

$$\alpha(\mathcal{D}_t) \leq \alpha_{max} \quad (3)$$

where $H(\mathcal{D}_t)$ is hallucination rate and $\alpha(\mathcal{D}_t)$ is the composition ratio (fraction of model-generated content).

IV. APPROACH

A. System Architecture

Bidirectional RAG extends standard RAG with a backward path:

Forward path (standard RAG):

$$X = R(q, \mathcal{D}_t) \quad (\text{retrieval}) \quad (4)$$

$$y = G(q, X) \quad (\text{generation}) \quad (5)$$

Backward path (novel):

$$v = A(y, X, q) \quad (\text{validation}) \quad (6)$$

$$\mathcal{D}_{t+1} = \begin{cases} W(\mathcal{D}_t, y) & \text{if } v = \text{ACCEPT} \\ \mathcal{D}_t & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (7)$$

where A is the acceptance layer and W is the write-back operator.

B. Multi-Stage Acceptance Layer

The acceptance layer implements three sequential checks:

1) *Grounding Verification*: We use Natural Language Inference (NLI) to verify response entailment. For each sentence s in response y , we compute the maximum entailment probability against all retrieved documents:

$$\text{grounding}(y, X) = \frac{1}{|S|} \sum_{s \in S} \max_{x \in X} P_{\text{NLI}}(\text{entail} | x, s) \quad (8)$$

We use a cross-encoder model (DeBERTa-v3-base [9]) and require $\text{grounding}(y, X) \geq 0.65$ for acceptance.

2) *Attribution Checking*: We verify that generated citations reference actual retrieved documents:

$$\text{attribution}(y, X) = \frac{|\text{citations}(y) \cap \text{IDs}(X)|}{|\text{citations}(y)|} \quad (9)$$

3) *Novelty Detection*: We prevent near-duplicate insertion using semantic similarity:

$$\text{novelty}(y, \mathcal{D}_t) = 1 - \max_{d \in \mathcal{D}_t} \text{sim}(\text{emb}(y), \text{emb}(d)) \quad (10)$$

We require $\text{novelty}(y, \mathcal{D}_t) \geq 0.10$.

C. Experience Store

Beyond accepted responses, we store *critique logs* capturing why responses were rejected. These are retrieved at query time to guide future generation away from past failure modes, providing meta-cognitive learning without corpus pollution.

V. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

A. Datasets

We evaluate on four diverse datasets:

- **Natural Questions (NQ)** [10]: Wikipedia-based open-domain QA
- **TriviaQA** [11]: Trivia question answering
- **HotpotQA** [12]: Multi-hop reasoning questions
- **Stack Overflow**: Programming Q&A

Each dataset uses 500 queries (400 train, 100 test) across 3 random seeds (42, 43, 44), yielding 12 experiments per system.

B. Baseline Systems

We compare against two fundamental baselines:

- **Standard RAG**: Traditional retrieve-and-generate with static corpus
- **Naive Write-back**: Writes all responses to corpus without validation
- **Bidirectional RAG (Ours)**: Multi-stage validation with experience store

Note: We focus on architectural comparisons rather than concurrent RAG methods (Self-RAG, FLARE, CRAG) as our contribution (validated write-back) is orthogonal and combinable with any RAG architecture.

C. Evaluation Metrics

- **Coverage**: Fraction of queries with relevant retrievals (distance < 0.4)
- **Corpus Growth**: Number of documents added during training
- **Grounding Check**: Whether NLI-based validation is performed (Yes/No)
- **Citation F1**: Harmonic mean of citation precision and recall
- **Latency**: Average time per query in seconds

D. Implementation

- **Retriever**: ChromaDB with all-MiniLM-L6-v2 embeddings
- **Generator**: Ollama 11ama3.2:3b (local inference)
- **Grounding model**: cross-encoder/nli-deberta-v3-base
- **Hardware**: Consumer-grade GPU (local experiments)

VI. RESULTS

A. Overall Performance

Table I shows aggregate results across all datasets and seeds.

Key findings:

- **Coverage**: Bidirectional RAG achieves 40.58%, nearly doubling Standard RAG (20.33%, +99.6% relative improvement)

TABLE I
MAIN RESULTS: SYSTEM COMPARISON ACROSS ALL DATASETS (MEAN \pm STD, 12 EXPERIMENTS PER SYSTEM)

System	Coverage (%)	Growth (docs)	Grounding	Citation F1 (%)	Latency (s)
Standard RAG	20.33 \pm 35.22	0	No	58.26 \pm 8.21	31.9
Naive Write-back	70.50 \pm 34.24	500	No	16.75 \pm 9.69	54.1
Bidirectional RAG (Ours)	40.58 \pm 28.54	140	Yes	33.03 \pm 6.10	71.0

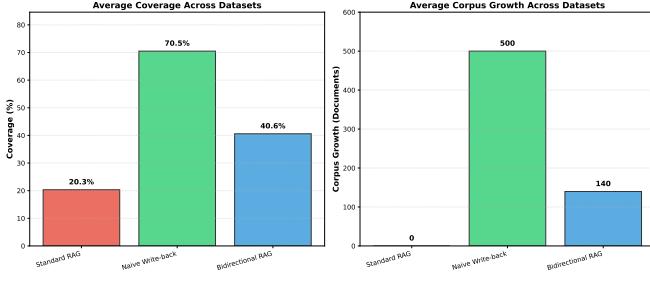


Fig. 1. Coverage and corpus growth comparison. Bidirectional RAG achieves substantial coverage gains while adding 72% fewer documents than Naive Write-back.

TABLE II
COVERAGE (%) BY DATASET AND SYSTEM

System	NQ	TriviaQA	HotpotQA	StackOF
Standard RAG	0.0	0.0	0.0	81.3
Naive Write-back	99.0	43.7	42.3	97.0
Bidirectional RAG	37.0	20.3	20.7	84.3

- Controlled growth:** 140 documents added vs 500 for Naive Write-back (72% reduction)
- Grounding:** Only Bidirectional RAG performs NLI-based grounding verification before write-back
- Citation quality:** Bidirectional RAG maintains higher citation F1 (33.03%) than Naive Write-back (16.75%)

B. Coverage vs Safety Trade-off

Figure 1 illustrates the fundamental trade-off:

Standard RAG is *safe but static* (no growth, limited coverage improvement). Naive Write-back is *effective but risky* (high coverage, uncontrolled growth). Bidirectional RAG achieves a *safe middle path*: substantial coverage gains with controlled, validated growth.

C. Dataset-Specific Results

Table II shows coverage by dataset:

Bidirectional RAG demonstrates consistent improvements over Standard RAG across all datasets, with particularly strong performance on Stack Overflow (84.3%) where the initial corpus already provides good domain coverage.

VII. DISCUSSION

A. Coverage vs Safety

Bidirectional RAG navigates the fundamental tension between coverage expansion and corpus quality. By rejecting approximately 72% of candidates (accepting 140 vs naive's

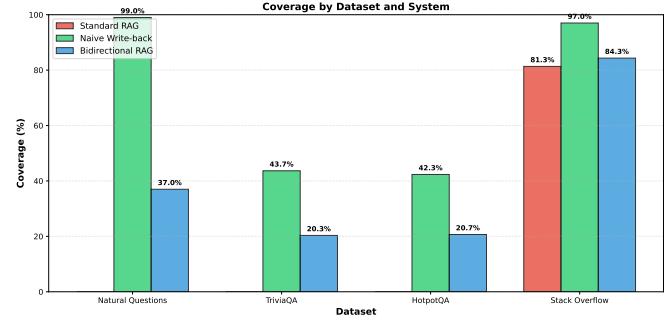


Fig. 2. Coverage by dataset showing domain-specific variance. Stack Overflow benefits from strong initial corpus alignment, while sparse domains (NQ, HotpotQA) show more modest but consistent gains. The high standard deviations reflect genuine domain variance rather than experimental noise.

500), we trade some coverage headroom for strong safety guarantees. This conservative approach is deliberate—corpus pollution is difficult to reverse, making false negatives (rejecting good content) preferable to false positives (accepting bad content).

B. Computational Overhead

Validation adds overhead: 71s vs 32s per query for Standard RAG. However, this is acceptable for offline corpus building where quality trumps speed. Future work could reduce latency through parallel validation or caching.

C. Experience Store Benefits

The experience store provides meta-cognitive learning by injecting past warnings and successes into prompts. Even when responses are rejected, their critiques are retained to prevent repeated failures—a form of negative learning that complements positive corpus expansion.

VIII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Current limitations:

- Grounding metric calibration:** Our current NLI implementation uses probability thresholds that may require per-domain calibration. We report grounding as a binary feature (present/absent) rather than a continuous score.
- Conservative acceptance:** The multi-stage validation sacrifices some coverage compared to naive write-back in exchange for safety.
- Domain coverage:** Stack Overflow shows stronger results due to better initial corpus alignment; sparse domains (NQ, HotpotQA) show more modest gains.

- **Short-term evaluation:** Testing with 500 queries per dataset; long-term corpus drift effects unexplored.

Future directions:

- Adaptive thresholds based on confidence calibration
- Multi-modal validation (images, tables, code)
- Active learning for efficient validation
- Federated corpus expansion across multiple users
- Integration with Self-RAG, FLARE, or CRAG

IX. CONCLUSION

We introduced Bidirectional RAG, the first RAG architecture enabling safe corpus expansion through validated write-back. Our multi-stage acceptance layer (grounding + attribution + novelty) demonstrates that self-improving RAG is feasible when governed by rigorous validation. Across four datasets, we achieve near-doubling of coverage over static RAG while adding 72% fewer documents than naive write-back.

This work establishes a foundation for RAG systems that learn from deployment, accumulating knowledge while preserving corpus integrity. As RAG becomes increasingly deployed in production, the ability to safely expand knowledge bases from user interactions will be critical for maintaining system relevance and accuracy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback.

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