

Authentic Assessment in the Age of Generative AI: Guidance for MSU Denver Faculty

1. Purpose and Scope

This guidance outlines key principles and strategies for designing, delivering, and evaluating student assessments in an educational environment shaped by the widespread availability of generative AI tools. It establishes shared terminology and expectations that apply across delivery methods and assignment types, grounded in the principle that student work must truthfully reflect their own knowledge and skills.

2. The Shifting Landscape for Teaching and Learning

Artificial intelligence is reshaping the digital environment in which teaching and learning take place across all instructional modalities. At MSU Denver, whether courses are taught in person, online, or in hybrid formats, faculty and students rely on shared digital infrastructure to access materials, complete assignments, and communicate.

When instructors and students use Canvas and other digital platforms, they are operating within an ecosystem that now routinely includes AI-enabled features. Regardless of concerns about the ethical, environmental, or business practices associated with AI technologies, these tools are increasingly embedded in everyday academic systems. Enforceable bans on generative AI use are becoming impractical as AI capabilities are integrated directly into standard browsers, operating systems, and productivity software that students must use to engage with coursework.

In addition to generative AI tools, emerging agentic technologies pose challenges for authentic assessment. These systems combine automation and AI models to interpret tasks and produce responses that can imitate student behavior across digital learning environments. When misused, such tools can undermine course integrity by automating quizzes, harvesting assessment items, generating superficial discussion contributions, or submitting AI-generated work without meaningful student engagement.

These risks are not limited to online courses. Any assessment that relies heavily on generic prompts, automated grading, or surface-level participation can be vulnerable. The most effective response available to faculty is not increased surveillance or reliance on detection tools, but intentional assessment design. Assessments that emphasize reasoning, disciplinary thinking, contextual application, and reflection remain the strongest means of preserving authentic evidence of student learning in an AI-saturated digital environment.

3. Guiding Principles

MSU Denver's approach to assessment in the context of generative AI is anchored in these core principles:

- a. **Academic Integrity:** All assessments must uphold the highest standards of honesty. Unauthorized use of AI tools constitutes academic misconduct as defined in MSU Denver's [Student Code of Conduct](#).
- b. **Transparency:** Expectations for authorized and unauthorized AI use must be clearly communicated in syllabi and assignment instructions. Faculty should rely on the terminology and usage levels outlined in this guidance to reduce ambiguity and promote consistent understanding.
- c. **Andragogical Alignment:** Assessments should be purposefully designed to measure the intended learning outcomes. Each task must emphasize student-generated results that directly align with the course's stated objectives.
- d. **Equity and Fairness:** All students should be held to consistent standards regarding AI use. The availability of AI tools should not create unfair advantages. Course AI policies will be applied uniformly to all students in the class, and any allowed AI tools should be equally accessible.

MSU Denver's stance is neither to ban AI outright nor to embrace it uncritically, but to adopt a calibrated, educationally grounded approach. These guidelines will continue to evolve based on emerging best practices and ongoing feedback from faculty and students.

4. The Importance of Alignment

Artificial intelligence is a tool, and its impact in education depends on how it is aligned with learning goals and ethical boundaries. Faculty at MSU Denver play a central role in defining how AI may be used in coursework and assessment. When AI use is addressed only through broad bans, without explanation or alignment to learning objectives, students are incentivized to focus on circumventing restrictions rather than demonstrating genuine understanding and skill development.

A more effective approach is for faculty to actively define and communicate an ethical framework for AI use in their courses. This includes establishing clear norms around transparency, accountability, and human oversight, shaped through inclusive and discipline-appropriate processes. While many technology companies prioritize speed, scale, and profitability, higher education has a different responsibility: to ensure that emerging tools support learning rather than replace it.

By engaging intentionally in this work, faculty help ensure that AI use in coursework reinforces core academic skills such as critical thinking, reasoning, and reflection. Alignment between course goals, assessment design, and AI expectations is what allows these tools to be used in ways that strengthen, rather than undermine, student learning.

5. Defining Ethical Uses of Generative AI for Assessment

MSU Denver's framework for AI use in coursework includes three instructional options on a continuum of Allowed, Mixed, and Restricted which instructors select at the course or assignment level. These options provide clarity on what constitutes permitted and

impermissible use of generative AI tools such as Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, DALL·E, GitHub Copilot, or others.

Each option below outlines general expectations for faculty and includes examples of how students may or may not use AI under that model. These descriptions are intended to support consistent application, inform syllabus language, and help instructors identify where follow-up clarification or redesign may be needed.

a. Option 1: Allowed Use:

- i. Instructors selecting this option are choosing to allow or encourage students to use generative AI across most or all aspects of the course. Faculty adopting this approach should:
 1. Clearly state that AI use is permitted on all assignments.
 2. Require students to submit a brief disclosure statement indicating what tools were used and how (e.g., “Used ChatGPT to generate examples; revised in my own words”).
 3. Provide examples of responsible and ethical AI engagement.
- ii. *Faculty Considerations:*
 1. Ideal for courses where AI tools align with industry expectations or course outcomes (e.g., technical writing, marketing, data analytics).
 2. May require revision of rubrics to assess student understanding, editing, and integration rather than simply original creation.
 3. Consider follow-up checks such as self-reflections, short oral defenses, and/or peer review to verify learning.
- iii. *Disallowed Student Use in this Option:*
 1. Failing to disclose AI use.
 2. Submitting AI-generated work while misrepresenting it as fully their own.

b. Option 2: Mixed Use:

- i. This option allows for nuanced implementation where generative AI is permitted on certain assignments or tasks and prohibited on others. Faculty who adopt this model should:
 1. Include a course-level AI policy in the syllabus that outlines general guidance.
 2. Provide assignment-specific instructions clarifying whether AI is allowed, restricted, or required.
 3. Require students to disclose AI use whenever it is permitted.
- ii. *Common Patterns:*
 1. AI may be allowed for brainstorming, editing, or outlining in written assignments, but prohibited in reflections, discussion forums, or exams.
 2. Students may be invited to use AI in early-stage drafting but must submit final versions in their own words.
- iii. *Faculty Considerations:*

1. This model offers the most flexibility but demands clarity at the assignment level to avoid confusion.
 2. Strong alignment with courses that combine foundational skill-building with professional or technical applications.
 3. Instructors should prepare to monitor compliance through disclosures and reinforce expectations regularly.
- iv. *Disallowed Student Use in this Option:*
1. Using AI on assignments explicitly marked as no-AI.
 2. Submitting AI-assisted work without accurate disclosure.
 3. Copy/pasting AI output into prohibited assignment types (e.g., exams, personal reflections).
- c. Option 3: Restricted Use: In this model, faculty restrict the use of generative AI across most or all coursework unless a particular assignment directly calls for it. Instructors choosing this approach should:
- i. Explicitly prohibit AI use in all standard coursework.
 - ii. Indicate in the syllabus that students may only use AI if an assignment requires it.
 - iii. Define violations clearly as academic misconduct under MSU Denver's [Student Code of Conduct](#).
 - iv. *Faculty Considerations:*
 1. Best suited for courses that focus on foundational writing, reasoning, or problem-solving skills.
 2. Consider in-class, supervised, or staged work (e.g., outlines, drafts, peer review) to support integrity.
 3. Encourage students to reflect on their learning process to affirm personal authorship.
 - v. *Disallowed Student Use in this Option:*
 1. Any generative AI use on assignments where it is not explicitly called for.
 2. Submitting AI-generated content, even in part, on standard course tasks.
 3. Using AI for brainstorming, summarizing, or editing unless the instructor has made a clear exception.

6. Assessment Design Guidelines for Faculty

The options above explain when generative AI may be used. Equally important is how assessments are designed so that they measure what the instructor intend students to learn, rather than what an AI system can produce on their behalf. The following guidelines synthesize MSU Denver recommendations and emerging practice across peer institutions to support authentic assessment and academic integrity in the age of generative AI.

- a. Backward Design and Learning Outcomes First: In a teaching environment increasingly shaped by generative AI, backward design provides a strong framework for creating assessments that promote authentic learning and reduce vulnerability to

automation. This approach shifts course planning away from content coverage and toward intentional, outcome-driven design.

Backward design begins by clearly defining what students should know and be able to do by the end of the course (the SLOs). Assessments are then designed to measure those outcomes, followed by the selection of learning activities and instructional materials that prepare students for success. This process ensures andragogical alignment, where every component of the course directly supports the development of targeted competencies.

Backward design is particularly important in an AI-present environment, where generic or recall-based assessments can be completed easily by tools such as ChatGPT, Google Lens, or Copilot. By foregrounding reasoning, creativity, and critical thinking, backward design helps faculty avoid tasks that are easily compromised by AI and instead create assessments that require meaningful student engagement.

For a concise overview of backward design, see [this Ohio State University resource](#) recommended by our Center for Teaching, Learning, and Design (CTLTD).

- b. **AI-Resistant Tasks**: AI-resistant tasks are not AI-proof, but they are structured so that a student must still think, apply, and explain in ways that are difficult to outsource.
 - i. *Emphasize process over product*: Design assignments that require visible steps: brainstorming notes, outlines, drafts, revisions, and final products.
 - 1. Collecting this process work makes it more difficult for students to simply paste in AI output and helps the instructor coach their development as writers, problem solvers, and designers.
 - ii. *Use personalized, contextual, or experiential prompts*: Frame prompts around students' own experiences, local contexts, or recent events.
 - 1. For example, asking students to connect a theory to their workplace, community, or lived experience requires judgment that AI can mimic only superficially and is easier for the instructor to probe through follow-up questions.
 - iii. *Incorporate real-world and interdisciplinary problem solving*: Build tasks that require students to synthesize concepts from multiple course units or disciplines and to justify decisions for a realistic audience (a client, a supervisor, a policymaker).
 - 1. These authentic tasks invite AI as a potential tool but still require students to interpret, critique, and adapt information rather than simply reproduce it.
- c. **Authentic Assessment**: Authentic assessment places students in situations that resemble the professional, civic, or scholarly contexts where they will use what they are learning.

- i. *Use collaborative projects, case studies, and scenario-based evaluations:* Group projects and realistic scenarios make it harder for a single student to offload all work to AI. They also require coordination, negotiation, and division of labor that are themselves learning goals.
 - 1. When AI is permitted, the instructor can ask groups to document how, when, and why they chose to use it.
- ii. *Require students to explain reasoning and decision-making:* Build into the instructor rubrics explicit criteria for logic, justification, and reflection on choices, not just the correctness of final answers.
 - 1. Explanations of why a particular approach was chosen (and what alternatives were rejected) foreground human judgment even when AI tools are part of the workflow.

7. AI-Resilient Assessment Strategies: The strategies below offer concrete ways to make assessments more resilient to unauthorized AI use while still supporting student learning. They can be combined and adapted to fit different disciplines, modalities, and AI options (Allowed, Mixed, Restricted).

- a. Reflective Components: Require students to submit a brief reflection alongside major assignments that explains their thought process, key decisions, and any use of generative AI.
 - i. What this looks like:
 - 1. A short reflection (for example, 200–400 words) that addresses prompts such as: *“Describe how the instructor approached this problem, what challenges the instructor encountered, and what resources (including AI tools, if any) the instructor used. How did those resources shape the instructor final work?”*
 - ii. Why it helps.
 - 1. Reflections surface students’ metacognition and make it harder to hide wholesale AI authorship. They also gives the instructor insight into where students are struggling, which can guide future instruction.
- b. Oral Defense: Incorporate brief oral components where students must explain or defend their submitted work.
 - i. What this looks like:
 - 1. After a paper, project, or coding assignment, the instructor schedules a short (for example, 3–10 minute) conversation, live or recorded, in which the student:
 - a. Summarizes their argument or solution.
 - b. Answers one or two targeted follow-up questions.
 - 2. Example prompt: *“Summarize the instructor main argument in three minutes and then respond to two questions about how the instructor applied course concepts.”*
 - ii. Why it helps:

1. Oral defenses can reveal whether students understand what they submitted, regardless of whether AI was involved. They do introduce some noise related to presentation skill, so grading emphasis should remain on conceptual understanding rather than polish.
- c. Iterative Drafting: Design major assignments as multi-stage tasks that require visible progression.
- i. What this looks like:
 1. A sequence such as proposal > annotated bibliography > draft > peer review > final submission. For example, a research paper might require:
 - a. A topic proposal with a working research question.
 - b. An annotated bibliography with rationale for source selection.
 - c. A full draft that the instructor or a peer reviews.
 - d. A final version that responds to feedback.
 - ii. Why it helps.
 1. Iterative drafting reduces the incentive to rely on AI for a one-time “finished product” and instead supports sustained engagement with the assignment. It also gives the instructor multiple touchpoints to notice sudden shifts in voice, complexity, or quality that may signal unauthorized AI use.
- d. Personalized and Contextual Prompts: Write prompts that require students to situate course content in their own contexts or in very recent, local, or class-specific situations.
- i. What this looks like:
 1. Asking students to apply a theory to a recent event in Denver or in their own community.
 2. Having students analyze data or artifacts generated within the class.
 3. Example prompt: “*Analyze how this theory applies to a recent event in the instructor community, drawing on at least two course readings and one local source.*”
 - i. Why it helps:
 1. AI can generate plausible general responses, but it is weaker at integrating specific local details, class discussions, or personal experiences without significant human scaffolding.
 2. Contextual prompts therefore push students toward original contributions and make it easier for the instructor to spot generic AI output.
- e. In-Class Components: Pair take-home tasks with in-class or synchronous checkpoints that are clearly AI-free.
- ii. What this looks like:
 1. An in-class quiz or problem set that aligns with a take-home assignment.

2. A brief in-class writing task that asks students to explain or extend an argument from their submitted paper.
 3. Case study analysis completed at home, followed by an in-class small-group discussion where students must articulate their reasoning.
- iii. Why it helps:
1. In-class components provide anchor points for comparison. If a student's in-class work and out-of-class submissions are wildly misaligned, that discrepancy can trigger a conversation about process and possible misuse of AI.
- f. Process Documentation: Ask students to document how they worked, especially on complex or extended assignments.
- iv. What this looks like:
1. Screenshots showing stages of a project.
 2. Exported version histories (for example, from Google Docs).
 3. Brief "method sections" describing tools used, including AI, and the sequence in which tasks were completed.
- v. Why it helps:
1. Process documentation makes students' workflow visible and provides evidence if concerns arise. It also normalizes the expectation that tools, including AI, will be named and justified rather than hidden.
- g. AI Disclosure Requirement: Embed a consistent AI disclosure requirement into the instructor course for any option where AI use may occur.
- vi. What this looks like:
1. A standard statement attached to assignments such as:
 - a. *"AI Use Disclosure: Briefly describe any generative AI tools the instructor used for this assignment and how the instructor used them. If the instructor did not use any AI tools, write 'No AI tools used.'"*
 2. Example student response:
 - a. *"I used ChatGPT to brainstorm potential counterarguments but wrote and revised all text myself. I did not paste any AI-generated sentences directly into this essay."*
- vii. Why it helps:
1. A disclosure requirement reinforces transparency, clarifies expectations, and gives the instructor a structured way to see how students are engaging with AI under each course option. It also aligns with the broader principle that students should truthfully represent their own work and appropriately credit any AI assistance.

8. Additional Considerations for Asynchronous Online Courses

These guidelines apply across modalities, but asynchronous online courses require some additional design attention because students complete all work outside of scheduled class meetings.

- a. Make AI expectations highly visible in Canvas: Place your course AI option (Allowed, Mixed, or Restricted) and a short explanation in multiple locations: the syllabus, the “Start Here” module, and the instructions for every major assignment or quiz. Use consistent wording so students see the same expectations each time.
- b. Use asynchronous versions of oral checks: Replace live oral defenses with short, recorded explanations. For example, require students to upload a 3–5-minute video in which they summarize their argument or walk through a solution, and answer one or two prompts you provide. You can sample or spot-check these rather than hold live meetings with everyone.
- c. Build time-bound, individualized quizzes and checks: For key knowledge checks, use timed quizzes with randomization (question banks, shuffled order, varied data sets). Make it explicit that no AI tools are permitted on these assessments, and pair them with higher-order take-home work where AI use may be more flexible, depending on your option.
- d. Leverage process documentation in the Canvas: Ask students to submit drafts, intermediate files, or version histories through Canvas for major projects. In online writing assignments, for example, you might require an outline in one submission, a draft in another, and the final version in a third.
- e. Use online discussion and reflection strategically: When AI is restricted for discussions or reflections, say so explicitly and explain why. Consider pairing discussion posts with brief, low-stakes video or audio replies so students’ voices and reasoning are visible over time.

These moves translate the same authenticity and integrity goals into a fully online, asynchronous environment without relying on live class meetings.

9. Communicating Expectations to Students: Faculty are encouraged to explain not only their own use of this guidance but also what is expected of students. The following “Student Responsibilities” can be adapted for syllabi, assignment sheets, or first-day explanations.

- f. Student Responsibilities:
 - i. You may choose to include language such as:
 1. Engage with generative AI tools ethically and transparently.
 - a. Students are responsible for understanding when AI use is permitted, using tools in ways that support rather than replace their own learning, and being honest about any AI assistance they use.
 2. Follow course-specific AI guidelines.
 - a. Students must adhere to the AI option you have selected for the course (Allowed, Mixed, or Restricted) and any assignment-level instructions. Using AI outside those boundaries constitutes academic misconduct.
 3. Seek clarification and report concerns.
 - a. Students should ask questions when AI expectations are unclear and are encouraged to report suspected misuse of AI or

ambiguity in AI-related instructions to the instructor or appropriate university office.

Instructors can reference these responsibilities when they introduce an assignment, explain a syllabus AI statement, or discuss why authentic assessment and integrity matter in the discipline. This keeps the student message aligned with the faculty guidance while leaving room for disciplinary nuance.