K12 ACADEMICS — AI LITERACY SERIES

AI Literacy for Students

A student's guide to using AI wisely — what it really is, why it's often wrong, how to learn *with* it instead of cheating, and how to stay a sharp, honest thinker.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — for every kind of learner.

YOUR TOOL — NOT YOUR BRAIN

AI tools like chatbots are powerful, but they're not magic and they're often wrong. Used well, AI is a great **learning helper**; used badly, it undermines your learning and your integrity. This guide shows students how to use AI wisely, honestly, and in a way that makes you *smarter*, in **ten steps**.

General guidance. AI tools and school policies change fast, and rules vary by school and teacher. This guide teaches principles; always follow your own school's and teachers' specific rules on AI use.

1

STEP 01 OF 10

Understand What AI Really Is

WHAT TO KNOW

AI chatbots don't "know" things or "think" like a person. They **predict likely words** based on patterns in huge amounts of text. That makes them fluent and useful — but also confidently wrong at times.

BY THE NUMBERS

Predicts words	Not thinking	Fluent
from patterns	no real understanding	but not always right

HOW TO HELP

Treat AI as a **clever text-prediction tool**, not an all-knowing oracle — that mindset keeps you skeptical and in control.

GOOD TO KNOW

AI sounds confident even when it's wrong — fluency is not the same as accuracy.

2

STEP 02 OF 10

Know That AI Can Be Wrong

WHAT TO KNOW

AI regularly **makes things up** (called "hallucinations"), gets facts wrong, invents fake sources, and reflects **biases** in its training data. It can be outdated too. Never assume its answers are true.

BY THE NUMBERS

Hallucinations	Fake sources	Bias & outdated
made-up "facts"	it invents citations	built in

HOW TO HELP

Always **verify AI's claims** against reliable sources — especially facts, quotes, and citations, which it frequently gets wrong or fabricates entirely.

WATCH OUT

AI will confidently invent quotes, statistics, and sources that don't exist — check everything important.

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STEP 03 OF 10

Learn *With* AI, Don't Cheat With It

WHAT TO KNOW

The key line: use AI to **help you learn**, not to do your work for you. Having it explain a concept helps you; having it write your essay and turning it in as yours **skips the learning and is cheating**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Learn with it	Not for you	The line
understand better	don't submit its work	help vs. do

HOW TO HELP

Ask yourself: **"Am I using this to understand, or to avoid the work?"** Use AI to learn, and do the actual thinking and writing yourself.

WATCH OUT

If AI does the assignment and you just submit it, you learned nothing — and that's exactly what school (and later, life) will test.

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STEP 04 OF 10

Respect Academic Integrity

WHAT TO KNOW

Submitting AI-generated work as your own is **a form of cheating** at most schools, with real consequences. Rules vary by teacher and assignment, so **know and follow your school's AI policy**.

BY THE NUMBERS

It's cheating	Real consequences	Know the rules
when passed off as yours	academic penalties	they vary

HOW TO HELP

Learn your **school and each teacher's specific AI rules**, and when unsure, **ask before you use it** — "I didn't know" rarely helps after the fact.

WATCH OUT

AI-detection is imperfect and unfair to rely on — but the real point is your **learning and honesty**, not just getting caught.

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STEP 05 OF 10

Be Transparent About AI Use

WHAT TO KNOW

When AI *is* allowed, **be honest about how you used it** — disclose or cite it if your teacher asks, and never hide it. Transparency protects you and builds trust.

BY THE NUMBERS

Disclose	Cite it	Never hide
if asked	when required	honesty first

HOW TO HELP

When you use AI on allowed work, **be upfront** — say how you used it, cite it if required, and keep your process honest and clear.

GOOD TO KNOW

Honesty about AI use is always safer than hiding it — and it's the right thing to do.

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STEP 06 OF 10

Use AI in Genuinely Helpful Ways

WHAT TO KNOW

Used well, AI is a **great study partner**: explaining tricky concepts, brainstorming ideas, quizzing you, giving feedback on *your* writing, practicing a language, or breaking down a hard problem step by step.

BY THE NUMBERS

Explain concepts	Brainstorm & quiz	Feedback
in simpler terms	then you do it	on your own work

HOW TO HELP

Use AI as a **tutor and thinking partner** — to explain, quiz, brainstorm, and give feedback — while *you* do the actual writing, solving, and creating.

GOOD TO KNOW

AI as a **patient tutor** that explains things a different way is one of its best, most honest uses — lean into that.

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STEP 07 OF 10

Protect Your Privacy

WHAT TO KNOW

AI tools can **store what you type**. Don't share personal information — your full name, address, school, passwords, photos, or private details about yourself or others — and mind age limits and terms of use.

BY THE NUMBERS

Don't overshare	It's stored	Age limits
no personal info	your inputs may be kept	check the terms

HOW TO HELP

Keep **personal and private information out** of AI chats, and be aware that what you type may be stored and used — treat it like a public space, not a private diary.

WATCH OUT

Never put passwords, private photos, or personal details about yourself or others into an AI tool.

8

STEP 08 OF 10

Think Critically About AI Output

WHAT TO KNOW

AI output is a **starting point to evaluate, not a final answer to trust**. Question it, cross-check it, notice what it left out or got wrong, and apply your own judgment — you're the thinker, it's the tool.

BY THE NUMBERS

Evaluate	Cross-check	You judge
don't trust blindly	verify claims	AI assists

HOW TO HELP

Read AI output **critically** — does it make sense, is it accurate, what's missing? — and always run it through your own understanding and judgment.

GOOD TO KNOW

The skill of the future isn't using AI blindly — it's **thinking critically** about what it gives you.

9

STEP 09 OF 10

Keep Building Your Own Skills

WHAT TO KNOW

Don't **outsource your brain**. Skills like writing, reasoning, and problem-solving grow through practice — and AI can't practice them for you. Use it to learn, but keep doing the hard thinking yourself.

BY THE NUMBERS

Skills need practice	Don't outsource	Do the hard part
AI can't do it for you	your thinking	that's the growth

HOW TO HELP

Let AI **support** your learning, never replace it — the struggle of writing, solving, and figuring things out is exactly what makes you capable.

WATCH OUT

If you let AI do all your thinking, your own skills **wither** — and those skills are what you'll actually be hired and valued for.

10 STEP 10 OF 10

Be a Responsible Digital Citizen

WHAT TO KNOW

AI raises real **ethical issues**: deepfakes, misinformation, AI-generated content, and using AI to harm or deceive. Use it **honestly and kindly**, question what you see online, and never use AI to hurt others.

BY THE NUMBERS

Deepfakes	Question it	Be kind
+ misinformation	don't believe blindly	never use AI to harm

HOW TO HELP

Use AI **ethically** — be skeptical of AI-generated content and deepfakes online, verify before sharing, and never use AI to deceive, cheat, or harm anyone.

GOOD TO KNOW

AI makes fake images, videos, and text easy to create — being a smart, kind digital citizen matters more than ever.

QUICK REFERENCE

AI Dos & Don’ts for Students

A quick guide to using AI wisely and honestly — always follow your own school’s and teachers’ specific rules first.

DO use it to learn

Ask it to explain concepts, quiz you, brainstorm, give feedback on *your* work, and break down hard problems.

DON’T pass off its work

Never submit AI-written work as your own — that’s cheating, skips the learning, and has real consequences.

DO verify everything

AI makes up facts, quotes, and sources — cross-check anything important against reliable sources.

DON’T overshare

Keep personal info, passwords, and private details out of AI tools — your inputs may be stored.

DO stay the thinker

Evaluate AI critically, keep building your own skills, know your school’s rules, and be honest about how you use it.

SMARTER WITH AI, NOT BECAUSE OF IT

Find Your Community.

Explore our AI Literacy for Parents & Teachers, Digital Citizenship, and study-skills guides — among **1,297 free resources** to help every student thrive.

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