

# REFLECTIONS: THE ETHICS OF GENERATIVE AI

FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS



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## INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) developed over decades in the 20th century. Still, recent advances in the 21st century have given rapid rise to the dominance of language models that power generative AI. This shift has significantly changed how content is created and delivered. Generative AI transforms technical documentation by automating a large part of the process.

The momentum of AI recently shifted into high gear with the development of AI tools like Chat-GPT (OpenAI), Gemini (Google), Copilot (Microsoft), and Claude (Anthropic), which use large language models to acquire human-like language abilities. Users can interact with them conversationally, using a keyboard, and ask questions, get recommendations, have a document analyzed, create content, and perform many other tasks. These tools can be used in many ways to increase efficiency and boost productivity.

However, the increasing reliance on AI in more and more areas of life and work has also raised ethical concerns. The ethics of AI is a rapidly developing field of research that seems to be playing catch-up with technology development. Ethical issues with AI impact us at multiple levels: personal, societal, and environmental. Technical communicators must reflect on these issues and best practices for using generative AI in their workflow.

## REFLECTIONS

As technical communicators, we operate at the intersection of technology and humanity. It's crucial to approach the use of AI with a deep sense of responsibility and thoughtfulness. Our role goes beyond simply leveraging AI to boost productivity. We must also carefully consider how AI impacts our work, audience, and environment.

### Ethical concerns with using AI:

- **Accuracy and accountability**  
Our audiences trust us as technical communicators, and this trust should extend to any content created by generative AI. We are the guardians of the content we publish, even when these tools assist us. It's crucial to remember that they are tools, not a source of truth, and we are accountable for the final output.
- **Bias in AI-generated content**  
Generative AI is limited by the data that it is trained upon and can be incomplete. Technical communicators should foster neutrality and inclusivity in our content and, therefore, must check that AI tools uphold the same requirements.
- **Transparency and disclosure**  
Transparency and disclosure are key when it comes to AI use in technical communication. Your audience has the right to know if AI generated the content they are engaging with. This is a fundamental best practice for technical communication: honesty and integrity. Therefore, as technical communicators, we should always acknowledge our use of generative AI, ensuring our audience is informed without overwhelming them.
- **Automation vs. Human labor**  
The rapid growth of generative AI in recent years has also inspired a rapid growth of fear of AI taking work and jobs from humans. We should be careful to balance the convenience of the automation and efficiency of AI with

the human element of personal expertise and persuasion. There is something to be said about the emotional intelligence that a human brings into communication that computers aren't capable of recreating.

Technical communicators should establish a set of best practices to guide them in integrating generative AI tools into their workflows. These best practices will ensure that AI is used responsibly and consistently and enhance productivity without compromising ethical standards.

#### **Best practices for using AI in workflows:**

- **Use AI as a supplement, not a replacement**  
AI tools help complete mundane tasks but should only partially replace the human touch. Humans can improve upon creativity, add objectivity, understand context, and make decisions.
- **Always review AI-generated content**  
AI tools should not be used without review. A thorough review process will help identify biases or inaccuracies that might be overlooked.
- **Identify areas where AI can be used most efficiently**  
Continually analyzing workflows helps identify places where AI will benefit the process.
- **Ensure depth of content by consulting SMEs**  
Fact-checking AI content with subject matter experts will ensure that it has depth and expertise that the AI might not produce. Collaborating with SMEs adds a layer of validation to the process of writing.
- **Keep up-to-date with AI technology and tools**  
Technical communicators must understand and use new tools and the related capabilities, limitations, and ethical considerations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The rapid rise of generative AI in technical communication presents an incredible opportunity and an enormous responsibility. As AI technology continues to evolve and reshape workflows and industries, technical communicators find themselves at the frontier of navigating this technological transformation. AI undoubtedly offers advantages, from automating repetitive tasks to generating content more quickly and efficiently, but it also introduces ethical complexities that cannot be ignored.

Looking ahead, the ethical use of AI in technical communication is an ever-present consideration. As AI technology becomes more sophisticated and part of the fabric of our daily lives, the role of technical communicators will continue to evolve. We must stay informed, critically engaged, and willing to adapt our workflows and practices to reflect both AI's capabilities and limitations. In doing so, we embrace the future of technical communication and ensure that it remains ethical, human-centered, and impactful.

In conclusion, while AI has great potential to revolutionize technical communication, it has ethical challenges. By acknowledging these challenges and implementing thoughtful strategies, technical communicators can harness the power of AI in a way that aligns with our core values of accuracy, transparency, and human responsibility. This balance—between technological advancement and ethical stewardship—will ultimately shape our profession's future. communication.