



Guidelines for generative AI in editorial offices



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Generative AI is a kind of AI (Artificial Intelligence) that has been released onto the market relatively recently and can be used to create digital content. This can be anything from writing a text to producing images and videos. The development of generative AI means that the world of journalism is facing a number of new challenges. It also means that new issues are emerging in editorial offices. The Swedish Union of Journalists' guidelines for generative AI in editorial offices are intended to serve as a guide for the union's members on these issues.

Technological development that benefits journalism

Generative AI brings totally new opportunities for the world of journalism. The technology will be able to offer a great deal of help in its work, which is positive. It is also important that media companies keep pace with technological developments, to avoid any risk of being outcompeted by AI companies that want to enter the media market, but do not have the same tradition of safeguarding independent, high-quality journalism. There are therefore many reasons to welcome this new technology into the editorial office. This does not, however, mean that we as journalists must embrace everything that comes under the heading of generative AI. One guiding principle should be that the technology should benefit the field of journalism.

Use generative AI responsibly

Tools such as ChatGPT and Bard can offer help in the work of a journalist, but it is important to be aware of the risks involved. Do not enter sensitive or source-protected data into an online AI tool. Data from ChatGPT, for example, should always be fact-checked, as generative AI tends to produce incorrect data, it "hallucinates".

Clear guidelines from employers and clients

Tools based on generative AI should be viewed as work tools when used professionally. If your employer has not already informed you about how to use the tools, you should ask for clear guidelines. If there are no guidelines, this is an issue that the local trade union can raise with the employer. It is important that guidelines are developed in consultation with employees in the editorial office. It should be clear whether, and if so how, AI tools are to be used by editorial staff. It should also be clear when and how employees are obliged to inform their employer that they have used an AI tool in their work. If you are a freelancer using generative AI, you should inform your client of this, and ask whether there are any guidelines for generative AI in the editorial office in question.

Inform about the use of generative AI

The large number of tools now available that are based on generative AI can already produce content that appears to be the work of a journalist. Text, images and moving material can all be generated with just a few keystrokes. This makes it more important than ever to show that what we as journalists produce is different from other material. If AI-generated material is published, it should be labelled in accordance with the rules applied in the editorial office.

Protect copyright

The large language models, so-called foundation models, are based on huge volumes of data from the internet. Opinions vary on whether there is legal support for using this data, without consent, to train these language models. AI companies themselves believe that it is legal as long as the person providing the information online has not made use of the option of a reservation, also known as an opt-out. In practice, an opt-out means that the provider of an online website enters a code that prevents the information on the page from being used for machine learning. The problem with this is that it is not, for example, the journalist who wrote a text who has the power to decide whether or not the option of an opt-out should be used, as that power lies with the person who owns the website, usually the media company. The Swedish Union of Journalists protects the copyright of its members and believes that companies that use copyright-protected material to train language models must obtain consent and pay compensation to the author. This also applies to companies that develop so-called fine-tuned models, i.e. AI models built on foundation models, based on copyright-protected works. In some cases, this right is regulated in collective agreements. If you want to find out what applies in a specific editorial office, you can check with the local trade union or centrally with the Swedish Union of Journalists.

Skills development – the employer’s responsibility

Generative AI will make the work of journalists easier. The technology can already be used to quickly transcribe audio files. It is also possible to analyse large volumes of data quickly, which can be very helpful in research work. If all members are to have the opportunity to benefit from technological developments, it is important that everyone receives skills development and learns how to master these tools. Otherwise, there is a major risk that certain groups will fall behind in terms of skills and lose their attractiveness in the labour market. Talk to your employer about the skills development opportunities available in the field of generative AI. Skills development of the staff is also an issue that the local trade union should raise with the employer. Provisions on an employer’s obligation to offer skills development are contained in both the development agreement and the Swedish Union of Journalists’ collective agreement.

Technological development that protects employees

When technological development moves quickly, we humans react differently. Some find it enjoyable and go with the flow, while others become concerned and stressed. When there are indications that AI is going to take our jobs, it is natural to feel concern. This is why it is important that the implementation of new technology in the workplace takes place in a way that does not have an adverse impact on the work environment and create unnecessary stress. Under the Swedish Work Environment Act, the employer has an obligation to collaborate with health and safety representatives to map out any risks from an occupational health and safety perspective. Just like other changes in the workplace, technological changes are covered by the employer's obligation to negotiate. This naturally also applies to changes that involve AI. It is important that you and your colleagues are provided with clear information about what changes are being planned, and that the employer fulfils its obligation to negotiate with the local trade union, in accordance with the Swedish Employment (Co-Determination in the Workplace) Act. The local trade union also has the right to be involved in the planning of technological development if it involves more important changes for employees, as stated in the development agreement.

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