

Checklist: How to Minimise AI Hallucinations

AI tools like Copilot sometimes hallucinate. That is, they give answers that sound confident but are wrong, because:

- They predict words, not facts. They're trained to guess the most likely next sentence, not to check whether it's true.
- They fill gaps when the question is unclear. If your prompt is vague, the AI may "make something up" to be helpful.
- AI won't always indicate uncertainty on its own. Tell it explicitly that it's okay to say "I'm not sure," otherwise it may try to guess.

Here are steps you can take to help reduce hallucination.

- ✓ **Be clear about what you want.** Tell the AI exactly what you need. Avoid vague prompts like *"Tell me about safeguarding."* Use: *"Give me a short summary of the key safeguarding duties for trustees of charities in England."*
- ✓ **Give context.** The more context you give, the fewer gaps the AI tries to fill. For example, the purpose, your audience, the format to use and anything to be included or excluded.
- ✓ **Break big tasks into smaller steps.** Instead of: *"Write our whole digital strategy."* Try: *"List the main sections of a digital strategy."* Then build it step by step.
- ✓ **Ask it to check its own work.** A simple line like: *"Now review your answer and highlight anything that might be uncertain."* This forces the AI to slow down and self-correct.

- ✓ **Ask it to stick to known facts.** Add a line such as: *“Only use verified information.” “If you’re unsure, say so.”* This reduces guessing.
- ✓ **Provide source material when you can.** If you have text, guidance, or notes, paste them in and say: *“Use only the information below.”* Or *“Use the Charity Commission England and Wales Safeguarding guidance for trustees”*. This helps to stop the AI inventing details.
- ✓ **Ask for alternatives, not one “final” answer.** Instead of: *“What’s the right approach?”* Try: *“Give me three possible approaches and explain the pros and cons.”* This reduces over-confident answers.
- ✓ **Always sanity-check the output.** AI is a great assistant, but it’s not a replacement for human judgement. If something looks odd, ask it: *“Are you sure about this part? Check again.”* Or, *“Use this web link to <insert credible source>, to check if anything in your draft is wrong or if we’ve missed anything important.”*



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