

The “Is This Ethical?” Decision Tree

Five questions. Thirty seconds. Works for any assignment in any classroom.

START: I want to use AI for this assignment.

Step	Ask Yourself	If No...	If Yes...
1	Did I attempt the work myself first?	✗ NO: Stop. Go try it. AI is far more useful after you've engaged with the problem.	✓ YES: Continue to Step 2.
2	Is AI helping me think, or thinking for me?	✗ NO: Stop. This crosses the line from amplify to replace.	✓ YES: Continue to Step 3.
3	Could I explain this work without AI in front of me?	✗ NO: Not ready to submit. You need to understand the work well enough to own it.	✓ YES: Continue to Step 4.
4	Would I be comfortable telling my teacher how I used AI?	✗ NO: Pay attention to why. If the rules are unclear, ask first. If you crossed a line, reconsider.	✓ YES: Continue to Step 5.
5	Does this match my teacher's or school's expectations?	✗ NO: Ask first. Teachers would much rather answer a question beforehand than deal with a problem afterward.	✓ YES: Proceed with confidence.

What Does This Look Like in Practice?

Scenario	Amplifying ✓	Replacing ✗
Writing an essay	Writes a draft, then asks AI: “What’s the weakest argument in my essay?”	Types the prompt into AI and submits what comes back with minor edits.
Studying for a test	Asks AI to quiz them on the material and explain wrong answers.	Asks AI for a summary and reads only that instead of the source material.
Solving math problems	Works the problem, gets stuck, asks AI to explain the step they missed.	Pastes in the problem set and copies the answers.
Research project	Asks AI: “What angles haven’t I considered?” then researches independently.	Asks AI to write the report section by section.