Build Your Own AI Writing Assistant

An advanced, hands-on course in AI-assisted academic writing, for doctoral researchers in the social sciences

by Sergueï Spetschinsky, PhD

Over 18 hours, this workshop aims at making you a competent academic writer with AI.

Used skillfully, AI can offer immense leverage to a young social science or humanities researcher, with the ability to multiply quality, speed of execution, and ambition of their work. Expert at AI, a PhD student with a 20 euro subscription can now mobilise resources which, up to very recently, were only accessible to a full professor or a lab director. Yet, beyond efficiency alone, AI also has the potential to make research much more enjoyable. With the right system, academic writing can become more like the work of a newspaper chief editor — responsible for ideas, strategy and the oversight of a team of AI assistants — but also of a poet — focusing on high quality segments, the ones where style and voice matter most.

This class is a hands-on, deep dive into AI system design applied to academic writing. You'll learn to build, maintain and grow your very own academic writing assistant, tailored to your specific style, voice, objectives and ways of working. The work moves through three strands:

> **Setting your own personal style and voice.** You learn to build your writing assistant from your own texts and instructions, so that it writes the way you want rather than like a consumer-grade chatbot, test it on the project you brought, and learn to fold back each correction into your system, so that it grows along with you, your work, your career.
>
> **Using AI as a reviewer of your writing.** You learn to customise your assistant to think along with you and review your work at any stage, from specific perspectives you choose (a discipline, a school of thought, a supervisor, a dissertation panel, a journal's editorial board), so that you sharpen your arguments and your structure on demand, against criteria you control.
>
> **Reviewing AI writing.** You learn how and when to apply your critical thinking to AI output as well as harness AI's own critical abilities to review its own work, so that your system compounds and that your attentional energy is preserved.

The workshop will be the occasion for getting acquainted with fundamental notions of agentic AI system design, such as context management, token optimisation, system prompting, iterative reviewing, praxis-oriented design, and meta-prompting. You will also become able to easily abide by the highest international scientific standards in terms of research integrity and data safety policy in AI use (including the University of Basel's guidelines).

The class is geared towards hands-on, collaborative experience, rather than abstract, solitary, theoretical learning. AI work is an art as much as it is a technique, and it is best learned through immediate praxis. Most of the learning will materialise through you building your own system within the group context of the class, where all participants are encouraged to share their own questions, experiences and knowledge. Working with AI is, quintessentially, human work: it is about listening to ourselves and others, about reflecting our very human practices — in this case, writing — so that AI may learn to mimic them.

We will use Claude (20 euro subscription required). We will not review any other tools, but the class aims at giving you the deep skills necessary to use any other ones.

APPLYING

Applicants should send in a motivation letter, which must have been written with AI, and which includes a brief presentation of:

- themselves and their research, and their greatest challenge with PhD work and writing;
- their AI skills, what they use AI for specifically in their research but also in general, what they find most useful about it but also frustrating, limiting or problematic (no prior AI knowledge is necessary to participate in the workshop);
- how motivated they are, and how available time-wise, to work on implementing AI into their research and writing over the duration of the workshop (in case of over-subscription, this is the deciding factor for selection).

You can read more about how I work at spetschinsky.com. If you have any question or inquiry, you can contact me through my website or directly at: contact@spetschinsky.com.