How to Reference ChatGPT and AI Tools in Harvard Style

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Learning how to reference ChatGPT in Harvard style is an essential skill for every student. Plenty of students use AI tools for brainstorming and drafting, and universities expect you to declare that use and cite it correctly. Don't wing the format. This guide follows the Cite Them Right 13th edition rules and shows you the format, the in text pattern and the mistakes that'll cost you marks.

1. What Cite Them Right 13th Edition Says About AI

Cite Them Right is the referencing manual most UK universities follow, and its 13th edition finally addresses generative AI directly. It's simpler than most students expect. Cite Them Right treats AI output as a personal communication, because the response was written for you alone and nobody else can retrieve it. Every time you use a tool, record three things. Don't skip any of them: which tool you used, the date of the exchange, and a copy of the chat itself. If any detail is missing, your reference is incomplete and your marker has every right to penalise you. Referencing rules exist to show where ideas came from, and AI generated text is no exception.

2. The Exact Reference List Format

Your reference list entry follows a fixed pattern. Begin with the name of the AI, then the year in brackets. Next write the tool name with the words 'response to', then your own name as the person who received the response, and the day and month of the exchange. There's no web address and no accessed date, because a private chat can't be retrieved by your reader. Here's the template to copy, with a sample name standing in for yours. OpenAI ChatGPT (2026) ChatGPT response to Jane Smith, 14 October. Notice what the entry does. It names who produced the words, who they were produced for, and when, which is exactly what a personal communication reference is meant to show. Swap in your own name and the real date from your chat, and change the tool name if you used a different service, for example Microsoft Copilot or Google Gemini.

Harvard AI reference template

Name of AI (Year) Tool response to Your Name, day month.

Example: OpenAI ChatGPT (2026) ChatGPT response to Jane Smith, 14 October.

3. How to Cite AI Inside Your Text

In text citations for AI follow the normal Harvard author date pattern you already know. Put the tool name and the year in brackets at the end of the sentence that uses the AI generated idea. For example: Recent explanations of quantitative easing often draw on AI generated summaries (OpenAI ChatGPT, 2026). If you name the tool inside your sentence, put only the year in brackets. There's no special AI format here. For example: OpenAI ChatGPT (2026) suggests three main causes of the crisis. You've seen this pattern before. Keep it identical every time you cite AI in the same paper, because inconsistent citations look careless to markers.

4. A Worked Example You Can Copy

Say you asked ChatGPT to explain opportunity cost for your economics essay. Your in text citation reads (OpenAI ChatGPT, 2026). Your reference list entry reads: OpenAI ChatGPT (2026) ChatGPT response to Jane Smith, 14 October. To adapt this, replace the sample name with your own name and the date with the day of your chat. Keep the full chat saved, prompts and all. Your marker can't open your chat history, so if anyone questions the entry, your saved copy is the proof of what the tool actually said.

5. What to Do When Your University Bans AI Tools

Some universities, and some individual modules, ban AI tools completely. In that situation correct referencing doesn't protect you. Using a banned tool and citing it properly is still a breach of academic integrity rules. Always check your module handbook before you touch an AI tool. Where AI use is allowed with declaration, many universities also ask for a short statement, often in an appendix, describing how you used the tool. Write one honest paragraph there. It takes two minutes and it can prevent serious trouble during marking.

6. Three Mistakes That Cost Students Marks

The first mistake is leaving your name or the date out of the entry. Without them the reference isn't complete under the 13th edition rules. The second is dressing the entry up with a web address and an accessed date, as if your chat were a public page. It isn't one, and markers who know the format will spot it straight away. The third is the most dangerous one. Students reference AI generated facts without checking them. AI tools confidently produce wrong dates, fake citations and invented statistics. Verify every factual claim against a genuine source before you submit, or the error becomes yours. Don't trust the tool blindly.

7. Referencing Other AI Tools the Same Way

The same pattern works for every AI tool, not just ChatGPT. Swap the name of the AI and the tool name. Everything else stays the same. Microsoft Copilot becomes: Microsoft Copilot (2026) Copilot response to Jane Smith, 14 October. Google Gemini becomes: Google Gemini (2026) Gemini response to Jane Smith, 14 October. Don't mix them up. Cite the tool you actually used. If you drafted with ChatGPT and polished with Gemini, reference both. Your reference list should mirror your real process, nothing more and nothing less.

Check that your university actually allows the tool before you cite it. A correct reference to a banned tool won't save you. It doesn't make the use acceptable. Keep your in text citations consistent: company name plus year, next to the claim the tool helped with.

8. Keeping a Record of Your AI Use

Save proof of how you used AI until after your work is marked. Keep the full chat transcripts, screenshots of key exchanges, and the dates you used the tool. This takes two minutes and it protects you. Do it the same day, while the details are still fresh. Don't wait a week. If your university questions your declaration, you'll have proof of exactly what the tool did and what you wrote yourself. A declaration without evidence is just your word against a suspicion. A dated record ends the argument. Keep it simple: a folder with the chats and dates is enough. This is also what honest writers do, which is why our assignment writing team keeps a dated record of

every AI session involved in a paper.

Referencing AI correctly takes about five minutes and it protects both your grade and your integrity record. Record the tool, the date and a copy of the chat. Use the author date pattern inside your text. Check your university policy before you start. Follow these habits in every assignment and your markers will see an honest student, not someone hunting for shortcuts. Don't skip it.