

FOREWORD

Dear Applicants to ELSA Traineeships,

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now an integrated part of our everyday lives, and to an ever increasing extent part of the professional working life as well. The application of AI therefore also extends to ELSA Traineeships and to how Applicants approach writing their Motivation Letters for ELSA Traineeships.

The ELSA International Team responsible for ELSA Traineeships handle over at least 1500 individual applications each cycle. Trends and developments in CVs and Motivational Letters are quickly noticed given the quantity of applications we process.

In the past terms, we have discovered an ever growing use of Artificial Intelligence for the Traineeship Applications, warranting the development of new AI Guidelines. We provide these to you, to aid in the application process, and to the ELSA Officers, for them to know how better to support prospective Trainees.

We hope these Guidelines will support you in crafting your Motivation Letter in the best possible way.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	3
1.1. Purpose of the Artificial Intelligence Usage Guidelines	3
1.2. Importance of authenticity in Motivation Letters	4
1.3. How ELSA Traineeship applications are evaluated	4
2. Definition of AI	7
2.1. Definition	7
2.2. Examples of AI tools	7
2.2.1. Chatbots and Large Language Models (LLM)	7
2.2.2. Grammar and Style Checkers	7
2.2.3. Translation Tools	7
2.2.4. Integrated Writing Helpers	7
3. Permissible Uses of AI	8
3.1. Grammar and Spelling Corrections	8
3.2. Language Clarity Improvement	8
3.3. Brainstorming Ideas	8
4. Prohibited Uses of AI	8
4.1. Fully Generating the Motivation Letter	8
4.2. Fabricating Experiences, Skills, or Achievements	9
4.3. Using AI to Evade Personal Reflection	9
5. Applicants' Responsibility	9
6. Consequences of AI usage on Application scoring	9
6.1. Supportive AI usage	9
6.2. Generative AI usage	10
6.3. Generated Motivational Letters	10
6.4. How the grade of Artificial Intelligence usage is evaluated	10
7. Contacts	10

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the Artificial Intelligence Usage Guidelines

ELSA Traineeships is the longest running flagship project of The European Law Students' Association (ELSA), and remains one of its most impactful initiatives in supporting the professional development of law students and young legal professionals across Europe. Through international Traineeships in law firms, institutions, and organisations, the programme contributes to ELSA's core purpose of strengthening legal education, fostering mutual understanding, and promoting social responsibility.

As you prepare your application, it is important to recognise that the programme operates within an evolving professional environment, where Artificial Intelligence is increasingly present in recruitment and application processes.

To ensure fairness and equal treatment, the use of Artificial Intelligence within ELSA Traineeships is both acknowledged and must be regulated. Your application will first be reviewed by the National and Local Groups, and then processed by the ELSA International Team before being shared with Traineeship Providers. This means that consistency and integrity in your Traineeship Application Form is essential. These guidelines have therefore been developed to help you understand how to use Artificial Intelligence appropriately, while maintaining the professional standards expected by both ELSA and external legal employers.

Your application will be assessed primarily on the quality of your Curriculum Vitae and Motivation Letter. These documents form the foundation with which both the ELSA International Team and Traineeship Providers evaluate your qualifications, experience, and motivation. In practice, this means that the time, effort, and care you invest in preparing these documents will have a direct impact on how your application is received and assessed by legal professionals, including recruiters and hiring managers.

Artificial Intelligence is a significant and unavoidable development in modern professional life. However, uncritical reliance on such tools can undermine the authenticity of your application. If your submission does not reflect your own abilities, experiences, and motivations, it risks creating a misleading basis for evaluation. This is of particular importance when your application is reviewed by law firms and headhunters, who expect accuracy, integrity, and personal accountability from candidates. A lack of authenticity may therefore weaken your application and, more broadly, affect the credibility of the selection process.

These guidelines are intended to support you in using Artificial Intelligence in a way that is ethical, transparent, and responsible, and in line with ELSA's values. You are encouraged to view Artificial Intelligence as a supportive tool, rather than a substitute for your own input. Its role should be limited to assisting you in refining and presenting your ideas, not generating them on your behalf.

As a general principle, ELSA Traineeships seeks to foster meaningful international exchange and genuine professional development. Your application should therefore be grounded in honesty, individuality, and critical reflection. Law firms and recruitment professionals value candidates who can clearly articulate their own motivations and demonstrate independent thinking, as these qualities are essential in legal practice.

The responsible use of Artificial Intelligence should support your own voice, not replace it. Authenticity is a prerequisite for meaningful professional engagement, and genuine effort is essential for building trust with both ELSA and Traineeship Providers.

The following guidelines will provide you with practical direction on how to use Artificial Intelligence within your ELSA Traineeships Application Form, particularly when drafting your Motivation Letter, without negatively affecting the evaluation of your application. These guidelines apply equally to all applicants participating in the ELSA Traineeships programme.

1.2. Importance of authenticity in Motivation Letters

As outlined in the ELSA Traineeships Selection Criteria, both the ELSA Traineeships Team and the Traineeship Provider must be able to clearly understand your motivation for applying. This includes why you are interested in a particular Traineeship, how you believe your skills can be useful for the vacancy you are applying for, and how the Traineeship will contribute to your professional and academic development. Your Motivation Letter is therefore a key element of your application, as it provides insight into your intentions, your level of commitment, and your suitability for the opportunity.

You are the only person who can meaningfully articulate your own motivations. Only you can assess how a Traineeship aligns with your personal ambitions and professional growth. While tools such as Artificial Intelligence may assist with structuring or refining your writing, they cannot capture your individual experiences, your values, or the reasoning behind your choices. These are inherently personal elements, and they are precisely what the selection process seeks to evaluate.

If it becomes apparent that your Motivation Letter has been entirely or primarily generated by Artificial Intelligence, the ELSA Traineeships Team will not be able to properly assess your application, with your experiences, values and motivation. In such cases, it becomes unclear what reflects your own perspective and what does not, which undermines the purpose of the evaluation, and creates an inequality in the assessment of applicants..

1.3. How ELSA Traineeship applications are evaluated

The general guidelines on the scoring of Traineeship Applications you can find in the [Matching & Verification Guidelines](#). This document is the general guideline for the verification of

applications conducted by National and Local Groups, and the scoring of applications conducted by the ELSA International Team.

National and Local Professional Development officers evaluate all applications based on the following verification criteria:

Requirement	Why?	How?
ELSA Membership	Only ELSA members may apply for ELSA Traineeships.	Consult your Group's membership database.
Internationality	Applicants may apply for max. three ELSA Traineeships, and they must be "international", i.e. there must exist no "substantial link" between the Applicant and the country in which the Traineeship is held. This does not apply to Traineeships with the ELSA International code (TN-EI).	Check where the ELSA Traineeships chosen will take place and whether a "substantial link" exists between the applicant and the country in question. ELSA Traineeships is an exchange programme, and therefore, students should not be sent to their home jurisdictions.
Educational Level	Applicants must possess the education level required by the TNP at the time that the traineeship begins. Therefore, for example, if a TSF requires a "Graduate Bachelor" and the Applicant is an Undergraduate but will have graduated by the start date of the traineeship, then they may apply.	Request for academic transcripts or other proof of graduation/enrolment. Use ECTS points to determine education level if required.
Languages	Applicants must meet the required language skills set out in the TSF as a minimum. This requirement is absolute.	Request for certificates and/or conduct tests.
Legal Skills	At least 60% of the legal skills required by the TNP must be met. Students claiming "Advanced" level legal skills must possess proof of additional learning in this subject, above mandatory courses undertaken in law school.	Request for academic transcripts or other proof of coursework, work experience etc.
Motivation Letter	Applicants must write a customised motivation letter in English for each chosen ELSA Traineeship.	Read through the motivation letter(s) and give constructive comments if necessary.
CV	Applicants may include their CV if it is in English.	Open the attachments and check their content.

ELSA International's scoring of applications in the matching process with the criteria as follows:

If an application scores 0 in any category, it must be rejected. The maximum score is 30.

Points	Motivation Letter	CV	Legal Skills	Language Skills	Proof of Legal Skills
0	No ML	No CV	0% - 59% Match	Does not possess the requirement.	No Proof
1	Very poor ML, one sentence	Very poor CV, one sentence.	60% Match	Possesses required language	Basic description
2	Poor ML, less than five sentences	Poor CV, less than one page, with errors	70% Match	Exceeds skill level on required languages	Excellent description
3	Below average ML, between five and ten sentences with spelling/grammar mistakes	Below average CV, errors, non-English elements etc.	80% Match		
4	Average ML, one to two paragraphs. Generic content, some spelling/grammar mistakes	Average CV, little formatting but largely error-free	90% Match		
5	Mid-range ML, generic, possibly copied. good spelling/grammar	Mid-range CV, few errors, consistent format	100% Match		
6	Above average ML, relevant content, shows customisation, little to no spelling/grammar mistakes	Above average CV, well-formatted, little to no errors.	Exceeds skill level on required legal skills.		
7	Good ML, relevant content and specific to the TNP, not copied, no evident spelling/grammar mistakes	Good CV, formatted very well, no errors			
8	Very good ML, specific to TNP with clear customisation, well-formatted, no spelling/grammar mistakes	Very good CV, only relevant information, no errors			
9	Outstanding ML, relevant, customised with a clear application of skills to the requirements of the TNP	Outstanding CV, shows customisation for ET and no errors			
10	Flawless ML, excellent format, no errors, shows extensive research of the TNP and clear application of skills.	Flawless CV			

2. Definition of AI

2.1. Definition

The EU Artificial Intelligence Act defines AI System as a *“machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments.”*¹

2.2. Examples of AI tools

2.2.1. Chatbots and Large Language Models (LLM)²

Tools like **ChatGPT**, **Claude**, **Microsoft Copilot**, or **Google Gemini** can generate essays, reports, and creative texts in seconds. They rely on massive datasets and advanced language models to predict and construct coherent sentences. This makes them powerful assistants for brainstorming and structuring ideas. However, their outputs may lack originality or accuracy if used without critical review. The real value lies in using them as partners in the writing process, not replacements.

2.2.2. Grammar and Style Checkers³

Grammarly, **ProWritingAid**, and **QuillBot** focus on improving correctness, clarity, and tone. They identify spelling mistakes, awkward phrasing, and stylistic inconsistencies. These tools are especially helpful for non-native (in our case, non-native English) speakers or anyone wanting polished writing. Still, they cannot fully capture nuance, creativity, or cultural context.

2.2.3. Translation Tools⁴

DeepL and **Google Translate** allow users to move between languages. Their AI-driven engines go beyond literal translation to capture natural phrasing. Nonetheless, they remain vulnerable to misinterpretations of specialised terminology and often struggle to accurately translate idiomatic expressions and culturally embedded meanings.

2.2.4. Integrated Writing Helpers⁵

Many platforms now embed AI writing support directly into their systems, like **Notion AI**, **Canva Docs AI**, **Google Docs Smart Compose**, or **Microsoft Word Editor**. These tools suggest sentence completions, generate drafts, or refine text on the spot. This integration streamlines the writing process by reducing practical obstacles such as repetitive editing, routine corrections, and structural adjustments that often slow writers down. At the same time, it

¹ <https://artificialintelligenceact.eu/article/3/>

² Gao, C. et al. (2024). *Use of large language models as artificial intelligence tools among medical and paramedical researchers. Scientific Reports.*

³ Park, J. (2019). *An AI-based English Grammar Checker vs. Human Raters in Evaluating EFL Learners' Writing*

⁴ Forcada, M. L. (2020). *Making sense of neural machine translation. Translation Spaces, 9(1), 135–162.*

⁵ Wang, Y. et al. (2025). *Patterns and Purposes: A Cross-Journal Analysis of AI Tool Usage in Academic Writing.*

introduces the risk of over-reliance on automated outputs, where Applicants may begin to accept suggestions uncritically. Such dependence can make Applicants less involved in their own writing, limit their independent decision-making, and gradually weaken authentic patterns of language, style, and personal expression.

3. Permissible Uses of AI

3.1. Grammar and Spelling Corrections

You are allowed to use AI tools to identify and correct grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and typographical issues in Motivation Letters. This will help to enhance the readability and professionalism of the text, ensuring that errors do not distract the ELSA Traineeships Team from your motivation and the substance of the application. AI in this context serves purely as a technical support tool, rather than a content generator, to help you present your ideas clearly and accurately without altering your personal voice.

3.2. Language Clarity Improvement

AI may also be used to improve the clarity, conciseness, and fluency of your writing. This includes adjusting sentence structure, refining word choice, or smoothing transitions between ideas. The principle is that AI should assist in conveying your own thoughts more effectively, rather than creating new ideas or reshaping the meaning of the content.

It should also be noted that using the words or sentence structures that come naturally to you whilst writing will only contribute to the authenticity of the piece, strengthening your personal voice. English is a flexible language, and there are multiple ways to convey the same meaning, tone or idea. Try to use language clarity AI tools sensibly and sparingly.

3.3. Brainstorming Ideas

You may also use AI as a tool to brainstorm or plan potential topics, organise ideas, or structure the content of your Motivation Letter. This can help you to overcome writer's block, identify relevant experiences, or improve the overall flow of the letter. However, AI should *only* be used to stimulate thinking or suggest organisational frameworks. This ensures the Motivation Letter continues to authentically represent your motivations, experiences, and goals.

4. Prohibited Uses of AI

4.1. Fully Generating the Motivation Letter

You **are not allowed** to submit Motivation Letters that have been entirely written or drafted by AI. The letter must reflect your own experiences, motivations, and personal voice. Relying on AI to produce complete paragraphs, stories, or reflections will undermine the authenticity of the application and misrepresent the Applicant's abilities and intentions as ELSA Trainees.

4.2. Fabricating Experiences, Skills, or Achievements

Using AI to invent or exaggerate personal experiences, qualifications, or accomplishments is **strictly prohibited**. Motivation Letters must present truthful information about your background. AI should never be used to create experiences or attributes that you do not genuinely have.

4.3. Using AI to Evade Personal Reflection

AI should not be used to generate answers to reflective or introspective questions. Motivation Letters are intended to communicate your personal motivations, values, and goals. Delegating these deeply personal reflections to an AI removes the individual's voice and defeats the purpose of the Motivation Letter.

5. Applicants' Responsibility

Applicants bear the responsibility for verifying the content, accuracy, and authenticity of their Motivation Letters. Even when AI tools are permitted, the Applicant remains accountable for ensuring they wrote a Motivation Letter that genuinely reflects their experiences, skills, and motivations. This responsibility includes:

- Carefully reviewing any AI-generated suggestions and corrections to ensure the text preserves the Applicant's personal voice.
- Critically evaluating all input from AI tools to make deliberate decisions about what to accept, modify or reject, rather than passively incorporating the AI's outputs.
- Verifying the accuracy and relevance of the AI's outputs, endeavouring to remove any AI-generated content that is inaccurate, false or misleading.
- Ensuring the work is not a direct copy of an existing text, either in part or in whole.
- Ensuring the language choices and sentence structures suggested by AI, which you choose to incorporate, are a true and accurate reflection of your level of English.

Ultimately, the Applicant's responsibility is not only about adhering to rules but about maintaining the authenticity, credibility, and personal value of the Motivation Letter. A strong, honest letter communicates not only qualifications, but character, motivation, and the ability to reflect on one's own experiences. These qualities cannot be replicated by AI.

6. Consequences of AI usage on Application scoring

6.1. Supportive AI usage

As outlined in Section 3, certain uses of Artificial Intelligence are considered permissible and may support Applicants in the drafting process. Such supportive use is regarded as a tool to enhance the presentation of an Applicant's own thoughts, rather than to replace them.

Accordingly, the use of Artificial Intelligence in this limited and supportive capacity will not have any negative impact on the evaluation of Applications, whether assessed by Local or National

Groups or by the ELSA International Team. Applicants still remain fully responsible for the final content and must ensure that the Motivation Letter reflects their own reasoning, experience, and voice.

6.2. Generative AI usage

Where the ELSA International Team identifies substantive reliance on Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Motivation Letter, this will be taken into account during the evaluation process. Whenever it is reasonably assessed that approximately 40% - 80% of the Motivation Letter has been generated through Artificial Intelligence, the score awarded for the Motivation Letter will be capped at a maximum of 5 out of 10.

This threshold reflects an understanding that detection methods may produce false positives. For this reason, the lower boundary is set at 40%, allowing for a margin of discretion in the assessment. Nevertheless, Applicants are strongly advised to ensure that their submissions are predominantly their own work.

6.3. Generated Motivational Letters

Motivation Letters that are assessed as having been fully, or near fully, generated by Artificial Intelligence are treated as equivalent to a missing Motivation Letter. Therefore they fail to meet the requirement that the submission must represent the Applicant's own motivations and qualifications.

In these circumstances, the Application will receive a score of 0 for the Motivation Letter. They will therefore be disqualified during the verification or matching stages of the ELSA Traineeships administrative process.

6.4. How the grade of Artificial Intelligence usage is evaluated

The verification and matching criteria for ELSA Traineeships operate on semi-objective criteria. The guidelines suggest concrete measures for the quality of an application, e.g. as "Average CV, little formatting but largely error free" qualifying for 4 points. While the wording is specific, the actual evaluation of how an application scores is subjective in accordance with the evaluation of the ELSA International Team.

In the same manner, the usage of Artificial Intelligence follows the aforementioned ranges specified in 6.2. And 6.3., but these are semi-objective criteria, which in the end will be up to the interpretation of the ELSA International Team.

Artificial Intelligence Usage	ELSA International's Evaluation
Supportive AI Usage: - <i>Grammar and Spelling Corrections</i> - <i>Language Clarity Improvement</i> - <i>Brainstorming Ideas</i>	Permitted by ELSA International.
Generative AI Usage: - <i>Partial Motivational Letter generation</i> - <i>Extensive apparent use of general AI</i> - <i>Motivational Letters consisting of 40% - 80% AI</i>	Maximum points awarded for Motivational Letter reduced from 10 points to 5 points .
Generated Motivational Letters: - <i>Application consists of completely AI generated information</i> - <i>Motivational Letters shows no personal specification</i>	Applications completely generated with the assistance of AI will receive 0 points and be disqualified .

7. Contacts

Should you have any questions, feel free to contact the Director for ELSA Traineeships at director.traineeships@elsa.org or the Vice President in charge of Professional Development of the International Board of ELSA at professionaldevelopment@elsa.org.