

AI: Truths & Traps!

AI Overview

Generative AI tools (or AI chatbots) can seem like a great resource to use when trying to find the historical information you are looking for.

While they can be helpful in the searching process it is good to know that these tools have limitations as well which can get in the way of your success. Generative AI doesn't actually "know" things, but instead puts together answers based on patterns of words, guessing what word should come next. This can result in getting an answer that is incorrect rather than being told the tool doesn't know the answer.

Go to the Source!

Go directly to the source instead of relying on AI. Archives' websites often link to resources or explain how to get copies. When unsure, ask Reference Archivists who specialize in guiding patrons through collections. Many materials aren't online, so an AI tool wouldn't know they exist, but an archivist will!

Hallucinations!

AI "hallucinations" happen when a tool produces false or misleading information as if it were fact, often because it's working with incomplete or inaccurate data. The response may include detailed citations or references that appear legitimate but the details may be entirely made up.

AI Best Use

AI tools can be a helpful starting point for shaping your research question and identifying useful keywords. They can give you a sense of where to begin, but the real discovery happens when you take those terms to an archives catalog. Using AI for initial brainstorming is fine, as long as you follow up with the authentic sources themselves.