

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance for *Live Your Dream Awards* Applications

REVIEWERS

Overview

Technology is ever-changing and constantly evolving, so it is important for SIA to keep up and acknowledge its widespread usage amongst our applicants. As Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage continues to grow, it's important to find a balance between leveraging these ever-evolving tools and setting clear boundaries for acceptable use to maintain program integrity. As a result of feedback from clubs, applicants, and application system user experiences surveys, we understand that AI is used in many different ways – some acceptable and others not, so we hope to provide some guidance to help reviewers identify whether AI was used appropriately or in ways that go beyond the guidelines provided to applicants.

Applicants were informed that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools may be used in limited ways to support their writing, but that all responses must reflect their own thoughts, experiences, and goals. All applications are reviewed by humans.

This guide supports fair, consistent evaluation across all submissions.

What Applicants Were Told

Applicants received guidance on acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI. Please review the [AI Guidance for Applicants](#) for details.

Context for Reviewers

All 25-26 recipients who applied on the application system were invited to complete an application system user experience survey. Based on their responses, the most common AI uses were:

- Grammar and spelling correction
- Rephrasing for tone and professionalism, while keeping original ideas
- Clarifying instructions, especially for non-English speakers
- Getting a general outline of what to include before writing independently

The sections most frequently assisted by AI were:

- Written section: How this award could help you live your dream
- Written section: Career goals
- Financial section

Applicants consistently stated that their personal content, experiences, and core ideas were their own, and were generally aligned that AI can be a great tool to help but should not replace personal writing.

Signs of Potentially Problematic AI Use

The following may indicate that AI was used to write rather than simply support a response. Use these as signals, not as definitive proof, and consider the full context of each application.

A note on interpretation: These signals are meant to prompt a closer look, not to serve as a checklist for disqualification. Several of them, including formal tone, highly structured paragraphs, technical or literal answers, more reserved emotional expression, can also reflect an applicant's neurodivergence (including autism), cultural background, second-language writing, or an individual voice. Reviewers should weigh these signals holistically and avoid penalizing an applicant for a writing style alone. If AI use is suspected, look for a pattern of multiple signals together (especially the bracket-placeholder and prompt-repetition signals, which are harder to explain another way) rather than any single trait in isolation.

- Overly formal language that does not match the tone in other communication or essays
- Generic, polished language that lacks personal detail or specific lived experience
- Responses that feel templated or generic (like you've already read it before) and could apply to almost any applicant
- Unusual formality or complexity inconsistent with other parts of the application
- Vague or abstract career goals without concrete personal context
- Responses that answer the question technically but lack the sense of a person telling their own story— e.g., an essay describing career goals, coursework, or financial need in complete, logical detail, but without any reference to why the goal matters personally, what obstacles felt like to live through, or how the applicant felt at a turning point.
- Overuse of transitional phrases or structured paragraph formats (e.g., 'Firstly... Secondly... In conclusion...')
- Repetition of the question prompt back to the reader in a formulaic way or explains what the Live Your Dream Awards is
- Inconsistencies between the essays or the essays and other parts of the application (for example, a mismatch in desired career goals, education program, or major)
- Anything where there is information in brackets, such as [Applicant's Name] or [College's Name]

How to Handle Concerns

If the application seems lightly AI-assisted (grammar/editing only):

Proceed with normal review. Light editing assistance is permitted and does not affect eligibility.

If the response feels impersonal or templated but is not clearly AI-generated:

We recommend reviewing the whole application and consider the applicants' experience, education level, and subject of study. The reviewer can decide whether or not they want to consider the application.

If the response appears to be substantially AI-generated:

Options of suggested steps to take:

1. Mark the application as ineligible and do not consider this application for an award.
2. If the rest of the application is eligible but just extremely weak, mark the application as complete and ready to judge and later mark it as "No Award" in the indicate your club's decision stage. (That is what we do with applications that come to our headquarters. We mark all the applications that have questionable AI or are extremely weak as "No Award" after the deadline. This cuts down on inquiries about why they were ineligible.)
3. Mark it as incomplete and send it back for confirmation/edits
 - We suggest sending the application back to the applicant to verify the information. We want to be careful and not accuse anyone outright of using AI, since it is not provable (unless there is something obvious like seeing something like this [Education Program] in their essay).
 - Per the applicant guidelines, applications that appear AI-generated may be sent back for verification or may not be considered.
 - You can remind them that judges are unlikely to favor their applications that read like they were written using AI. Responses should contain their own writing and be in their own words. The more personalized the written response, the stronger it will be.
 - Use the [canned response](#) provided regarding AI usage.

Ultimately, it is up to the club's discretion as to how strict they want to be with AI usage. We encourage club chairs to decide what level of usage they find acceptable. This can be determined by reviewing the whole application and perhaps a conversation/interview with the applicant to get the full picture of her situation; or this can also be determined by the volume of applications received. It can be a helpful way to eliminate applications if the club has received a high number.

However, it is also important to look at the whole picture. It could potentially be used by an applicant who might not be a strong writer in English as a second language. Could there be disabilities that affect the applicant's writing ability? We understand that AI can be a helpful tool but still want to see writing that is personalized and contains the applicant's voice.

Reference AI Usage

The updated reference form reads: “By submitting this recommendation form, I certify that AI tools may have supported my writing, but my responses and thoughts are entirely my own. I confirm that I am not related to the applicant by blood or marriage.”

If it looks like the reference used AI to complete their responses, you are welcome to call the reference and/or request another one. As with the applicants, it is up to the club’s discretion as to how strict they want to be with AI usage.

Questions? Contact the Program Team at lydawards@sroptimist.org.