



AI-generated translations

You can use AI tools to output seemingly correct machine translations quickly and easily. But can you really use these translations without a second thought? This handout provides an overview of the most important aspects that you should consider.

How does machine translation work?

Certain translation tools such as DeepL generate neural **machine translations** whose translation output is better and more precise in comparison to other tools such as Google Translate and ChatGPT. Neural tools are based on a large amount of human translations (e.g. Linguee database), which results in a **greater accuracy of the output**.

How should I deal with machine translations?

- The more complex, professional and official the occasion, the more you have to pay attention to the translation's **quality** (e.g. e-mail vs. studying for an exam vs. research vs. academic thesis) and be able to check the generated translation yourself.
- Check the generated translation so that it is appropriate for your **target audience and for your purpose**. For this, you can search for comparable texts in the target language, for example, to compare the text type and expectations of the target group of both the source text and the comparable text. You can draw lessons from this comparison for your translation.
- A machine- or AI-generated translation is an **unedited translation** that you should always cross-check against the original:
 - How closely does the translation match the source text? Pay attention to the existing or missing information, the technical terms used and the style.
 - Can you read the translation as an independent text? Consider how precise and appropriate the text is and whether you can read it smoothly.
 - How close/free does the translation have to be in comparison to the source text? Legal texts, for example, require greater proximity to the source text, while for advertisement texts, the target audience and target culture are more important.
- Ideally, you should be **proficient in both the source and the target language**. Especially if you have a very good language proficiency, you will be able to critically assess the output and work with it. If you do not have basic language competences, you are taking a risk. You can minimise this risk by asking another person to proofread the translation.
- Before you use machine-generated translations, you can evaluate the relevant tool and the **quality of the generated translation** by following these points: Take a source text in a foreign language that you understand well. Choose a text on a topic of your degree programme with which you are very familiar. Translate it into your first language to get an idea of the translation quality in this language combination and in the subject area.
- **Be very careful when using the revision function of AI tools:** Tools such as DeepL Write or Hemingway Editor offer alternative suggestions for wording, error diagnoses and correction suggestions that you have to check as thoroughly as the machine-generated translation itself.

What should I consider when using the output?

- AI translation tools usually translate **new terms and meanings** creatively but incorrectly, especially if they have not (yet) been trained on these. In addition, words from everyday language might function as specialised terminology in specific academic fields, warranting close attention in translations.
- **Not all language combinations produce high-quality texts:** Sufficient and high-quality training data, for example in case of DeepL, are only available in a few language combinations (good DE<->EN, EN->ES; moderate EN<->FR, ES->EN). If you are currently not receiving any useful output for the required language combination, discipline and specific purpose, try again a few months later and **re-evaluate** the translation output.

The tools are growing rapidly!

- **Translation plagiarism is still forbidden.** If you paraphrase or directly quote original texts in a foreign language, you should proceed in the same way as with all other texts, even if you are translating them. If you want to indicate your translation in the text, you can add the phrase “translated by the author”/“(transl. by a.)” to the quotation.

What advantages and disadvantages do I have if I use AI translation tools?

- **Saving time:** You will quickly receive an (automated) output, **but** you should avoid the uncritical use of raw machine translations. Use the translation rather as a template and raw text that you further edit, especially when translating complex texts or texts for professional purposes.
- **Access** to information in different languages, **but** creative phrases in the output may hide errors in content.
- **Strengthen your own expertise:** If you have sufficiently good **language and translation competences**, AI can encourage deeper reflection and strengthen your competence. However, AI tools alone are not suitable for learning languages and/or translating from scratch.
- **Suggestions for wording:** AI tools such as DeepL offer alternative suggestions for wording, for example by switching from the function *Translate* to *Write*. **Ultimately**, you **decide** which phrases you would like to use. The goal is to sound like yourself, not like a machine.

What should I consider and which decisions do I have to take?

- **Acquire a new competence:** The ability to understand and to use AI is a competence that you can learn. Therefore, you should engage in continuous learning to ensure the best possible use of this technology.
- **Functional principles:** Generative AI tools are language models with no consciousness. They are based on linguistic data and thus simulate human language. This is why AI may generate biased, unclear and incorrect information that seems plausible. As part of your learning process, you should always cross-check the generated contents by using multiple sources and comparing the results. If an automated translation does not make sense, for example, try to understand the context and to critically assess the translation.
- **You remain the author of your text:** You can also decide on **not** using AI.
- **The requirements of the course apply:** The teacher decides on (non-)permitted materials in the course. Everything that is not explicitly permitted is forbidden.