FOR LECTURERS AND EXAMINATION OFFICES

Suspected AI in a term paper. Five steps that count.

This page is your short desk version, with one practical tip per step. From page 2 we go deeper: why the steps are what they are, what courts have said, a conversation guide with a record template and how Mentafy supports you.

1 Secure the evidence before you talk

Secure the submitted version, submission date, version history and your exam system's timestamps. Overwrite nothing, delete nothing, no comments in the original file.

Practical tip: Store the original as read-only and work only on a copy. Note what you secured and when.

2 Don't confront anyone with the number

A score from a detection tool can open a case. It must never close one. It's a reason to look closer.

Practical tip: Record the percentage in your notes and leave it out of the conversation. Start with the number and you get a debate about the number.

3 Have a conversation, not a hearing

Ask how the paper came about, not whether someone cheated. Record the date, people present, questions and answers.

Practical tip: Ask about one specific passage: "On page 11 you cite a study. How did you come across it?" A writer's own work comes with a story. Someone else's work comes with a summary.

4 Gather independent indicators

Do the cited sources exist? Does the timeline fit? Are there sudden shifts in style? Does what's written match what the person can explain out loud?

Practical tip: One indicator alone is never enough. Several together can be. Record each indicator separately, with location and date.

5 Keep the procedure cleanly separate

Check in your examination regulations who decides on an appeal. Ideally not the same person who issued the finding.

Practical tip: Examine the student's counter-evidence explicitly and document that you did. In New York, not considering it was one of the reasons a court overturned a decision.

The burden of proof lies with the university. A detector score opens a case. What counts is the overall picture of the indicators.

This handout is practical guidance and doesn't replace legal advice. Your examination regulations and your legal office are what count. As of 30 October 2026. Sources on page 11.

Three routes that promise a solution and aren't one

In the video we called them false friends. All three are obvious and all three fail at the same point: in the end they give you nothing that holds up in a procedure.

1 · The percentage from the AI detector

76 to 81%
accuracy of the best of 14 tested detection tools, depending on the calculation. Tested against language models from 2023.[3]

61.3%
of 91 English essays by people for whom English is a foreign language (TOEFL) were on average wrongly classified as machine-generated by seven detectors.[4]

98%
accuracy is what one vendor advertised. The US Federal Trade Commission took action and the vendor accepted a consent order, neither admitting nor denying the allegations.[5]

The authors of the study on false positives strongly caution against using such tools in evaluative or educational settings.[4] Vendors point out that today's versions are better. Maybe so. For a decision about a person's studies, a probability score still isn't enough. That's why step 2 reads the way it does.

2 · Direct confrontation

You state your suspicion and the evidence is just as thin as before. In our experience some students will then admit something, though not necessarily the ones who matter. The relationship is strained afterwards and you haven't gained a single additional indicator. Step 3 turns this around: the conversation asks how the work came about, which makes the conversation itself an indicator.

3 · "Just change the exam format"

An accompanying oral exam helps. But do the math: one hundred students, one examiner and twenty minutes per conversation come to more than thirty hours, for one single module. And a conversation tests something different from a term paper, in which students spend weeks developing their own research question, from the literature search to the method.

THE SCALE

81%
of surveyed students in business, law and social work regularly use AI in their studies, 46.5% daily. The survey covered 28,584 students at 202 higher education institutions in Germany and Austria.[1]

94%
of exam papers written entirely by AI went undetected in a field test at the University of Reading. On average they even scored higher than the work of real students.[2]

The CHE figures apply to the subjects surveyed and not to all students. The previous year's wave surveyed other subjects, so it isn't a clean comparison.[1]

STEP 1

Secure the evidence before you talk

It sounds like admin and it's the step that later decides whether you have anything to go on at all. If you talk first and secure later, you risk intermediate versions vanishing or files being changed after the fact.

What to secure

- the submitted version in its original format, not just as a PDF printout
- submission date and submission channel
- the version history, if the paper was written in OneDrive, Google Drive or a similar environment
- all timestamps your exam or learning system records
- earlier submissions, proposals and notes from status meetings

Typical mistakes

- writing comments or highlights directly in the original file
- sending the file to a detector before an unchanged copy is secured
- asking students for a "new version" before the submitted one is secured
- not recording when and how something was secured

WHERE MENTAFY HELPS

With Mentafy's writing process documentation (Mentafy Trail, in pilot), the history of a paper is already analyzed before any suspicion arises. You don't have to reconstruct it afterwards.[14]

STEP 2

Don't confront anyone with the number

A score from a detection tool can open a case. It must never close one. The reason is on page 2: scores vary between tools and in one study of English texts, people writing in English as a foreign language were often wrongly flagged.

THE CASE OF NEWBY V. ADELPHI UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK

In January 2026 a court in New York overturned a university's decision. The university had relied mainly on a detector score of one hundred percent, plus the student's statement that he had used Grammarly. The student submitted results from two other detectors that, by his account, rated the text as human. The court gave several reasons, including procedural errors (see step 5) and the instructor's own email, which weakened the accusation. It didn't decide whether detectors are reliable.[6]

How to handle a high score

- Note the tool, version, date and score.
- Don't mention the score in the conversation. Ask how the work came about (step 3).
- Look for indicators that don't depend on the tool (step 4).
- Put this in your policy: a score can trigger a review but can't carry a finding on its own.

WHERE MENTAFY HELPS

Mentafy treats AI classification as one hint among four signals and never as a verdict. The report describes observations such as "added between 14:02 and 14:03" and says "unclear" when the data isn't sufficient.[14]

STEP 3

Have a conversation, not a hearing

The goal of the conversation is to understand how the paper came about. Anyone who wrote a paper themselves can answer questions about it easily and is usually happy to. Anyone who didn't will notice right there that things are getting thin. And the conversation carries weight: in one of the Kassel cases, the university inferred the use of AI from precisely the gap between the written paper and the oral account.[7]

Question bank: ask how it came about

Topic	Sample question
Getting started	What did you start with? How did you arrive at your research question?
Sources	On page 11 you cite a study. How did you come across it? Which source changed your thesis?
Structure	Why does chapter 3 come before chapter 2? What did you rearrange along the way?
Method	Why did you choose this method over others?
Terms	Please explain in your own words what you mean by this term here.
A passage	Please read this paragraph and explain to me what you wanted to say with it.
Earlier versions	Do you have earlier drafts, notes or a version history you'd like to show me?

What helps

- open questions about how, not whether
- a second person in the room taking notes
- a calm setting and enough time
- explicitly inviting students to present their own evidence
- saying at the end how the procedure continues

What hurts

- naming or showing the detector score
- leading questions like "You did use ChatGPT, didn't you?"
- making a confession the goal of the conversation
- promises or threats about the outcome
- no written record

WHERE MENTAFY HELPS

The report shows you where a closer look is worth it, for example a paragraph that arrived all at once. That gives you precise questions instead of a general suspicion.[14]

A record template for this conversation is on page 7.

STEP 4

Gather independent indicators

This is the step that matters most. One indicator alone is never enough. Several together can be. That's exactly how a German court saw it.

Indicator	How to check it	What it can show	Limits
Sources	Open every cited source: does it exist and does it say what's cited?	Invented or misattributed sources	People cite inaccurately too. The pattern is what counts.
Timeline	Lay status meetings, proposal, drafts and submission side by side	Major gaps in understanding two weeks ago, an almost finished paper today	Some people write late and fast. Without drafts it stays a guess.
Shifts in style	Compare sections: tone, word choice, sentence structure, recurring phrasing	Parts that stand out clearly from the rest	Revision, co-authors or writing support explain a lot.
Written vs. oral	From the conversation (step 3): does what's explained match what's written?	A gap in knowledge about the paper's own topic	Take exam anxiety and language barriers into account.
Writing process	Analyze documented drafts of the paper	Whether a text grew or arrived all at once	Text retyped from another source stays invisible. Evidence, not a decision.

ADMINISTRATIVE COURT OF KASSEL, 25 FEBRUARY 2026

The court dismissed two lawsuits by students against a university's cheating decisions. In the first case the claimant admitted using AI. In the second, the university inferred the use of AI from the gap between the written and the oral account. On top of that came linguistic irregularities and a timeline that didn't add up.[7]

The court speaks of **prima facie evidence**: an overall view of indicators points to a typical course of events. **The burden of proof stays with the university.**[7, 9] Anyone who fights back has to make a plausible case that a different course of events is a serious possibility.[7] The court granted leave to appeal against both rulings.[7]

This area is moving. Under the Kassel rulings a single undisclosed use can already count as cheating. In May 2026, by contrast, the Administrative Court of Berlin expressly left open whether one isolated use is enough. And that court doesn't apply the rules of prima facie evidence.[8] Your examination regulations should therefore say clearly what's allowed and how AI use has to be disclosed.

WHERE MENTAFY HELPS

Mentafy checks two of the indicators with you: the reference check finds sources that don't exist and the writing process analysis (Mentafy Trail) makes the timeline visible. On top of that come a plagiarism check with semantic search for reworded and translated passages and AI classification as a hint.[14]

STEP 5

Keep the procedure cleanly separate

Good indicators don't help much if the procedure leaves questions open. If you separate the finding from the review and can show that counter-evidence was examined, you can show how the decision was reached.

NEWBY V. ADELPHI UNIVERSITY, JANUARY 2026

The court overturned the university's decision and gave several reasons. One: the same person had issued the finding and handled the appeal. Another: the student's counter-evidence wasn't considered. It's a decision by a trial-level court in the US state of New York and says nothing about German law. Even so, there's a strong case as good practice for separating the finding from the review, as far as your examination regulations allow.[6]

Checklist for your procedure

Question	Where to find it
Who establishes a suspicion of cheating and who decides on it?	Examination regulations, general part
Who decides on an appeal? Is that a different person or a committee?	Examination regulations, appeals procedure
Does it say whether and how AI tools are allowed as aids and how their use has to be disclosed?	Examination regulations, module description, declaration of independent work
Do students get the chance to respond and to present their own evidence?	Examination regulations, hearing
Is it documented that counter-evidence was examined and with what result?	Your case file
Is the legal office involved before a sanction is imposed?	Internal rules

A LOOK AHEAD: BAVARIA

According to the report on the cabinet meeting of 23 June 2026, a bill by the Bavarian state government provides that universities may not, as a general rule, ban the use of AI in unsupervised written exams. The justification is strikingly open: for such exams "it must as a rule be assumed that impermissible use of AI systems or a breach of a disclosure duty cannot be proven with legal certainty often enough". That's where the "ban on banning" comes from. In return it says: "In this case, however, requirements must be set for the extent and type of documentation of the use."[10] (Quotes in our translation.) This means students have to disclose their AI use. In our view, a documented history of the paper can complement that disclosure and make it verifiable.[14] Please check the status of the legislative process before making any change to your regulations.

WHERE MENTAFY HELPS

The report comes in three levels: a traffic light for screening a whole cohort, a one-pager for regular assessment and a full report with all four signals for disputes. And with Mentafy Trail, students can upload their own drafts and so strengthen their own record. That's exactly the counter-evidence a sound procedure has to examine.[14]

Record: conversation on how a paper came about

To fill in during or right after the conversation from step 3. Record answers as close to verbatim as you can and evaluate only afterwards.

Item	Entry
Paper, module, submission date	
Date, time, place of the conversation	
People present and their roles	
Materials secured (step 1)	
Reason for the conversation, neutrally worded	

#	Question asked	Answer, as close to verbatim as possible
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

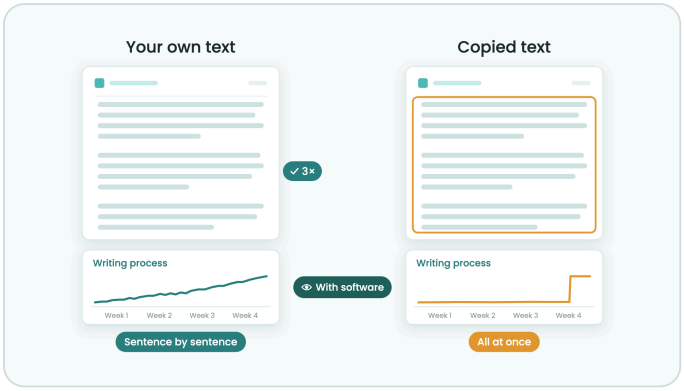
Item	Entry
Evidence presented by the student (drafts, notes, version history)	
Informed about the further procedure?	☐ yes ☐ no
Next steps and deadlines	
Signature of record keeper, date	

Indicator overview (step 4)

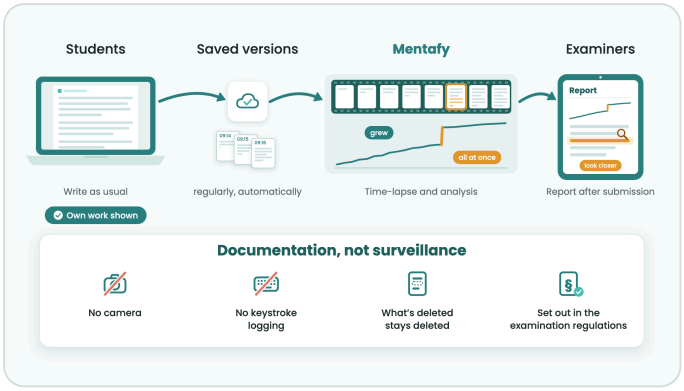
Indicator	Finding, with location	Date, checked by
Sources		
Timeline		
Shifts in style		
Written vs. oral		
Writing process		

Showing your work in writing

Remember math class? There you also had to show your work. Writing has exactly the same thing. A text of your own grows sentence by sentence, with detours and corrections. A copied text, on the other hand, is suddenly just there, finished and in one piece. Without documentation that work stays invisible. That's exactly why we built Mentafy.



Your own text grows sentence by sentence. Copied text arrives all at once.



From writing to the report after submission.

How it works

- **Students write as usual,** in Microsoft Word for example, with no new program and no separate editor.[12, 14]
- **Drafts are captured:** uploaded, from the version history, from OneDrive or Google Drive or through a Word add-in. The university decides how often.[14]
- **Mentafy Trail lines up the versions** like the frames of a time-lapse and analyzes whether a text grew or arrived all at once.[12, 14]
- **After submission comes the report.** It shows at a glance where a closer look is worth it.[14]

EVEN ONE VERSION A WEEK SHOWS A LOT

You don't need a record of every keystroke. In our assessment, for a paper written over more than ten weeks, one version a week is already enough to see clearly how it grew. Students can upload further versions voluntarily and so strengthen their own record.[14]

Documentation, not surveillance

No keylogging

Mentafy compares drafts. Keystrokes aren't recorded.[11, 13, 14]

No camera, no screen

No image or screen recording, no general monitoring of browsing.[11, 14]

What's deleted stays deleted

Anything written and deleted between two versions stays invisible.[14]

Four signals, one report

Mentafy brings four independent signals together in one authorship report. The first three check the finished document, the fourth comes with Mentafy Trail. Each signal is an indicator. Together they give the overall picture that step 4 depends on.[14]

1 · Plagiarism check and S³

Classic plagiarism checking plus semantic tracing that also finds reworded and translated passages.

2 · Reference check

Checks whether the cited sources exist and finds invented entries in the bibliography.

3 · AI classification

Marks passages that look AI-revised. As a hint, never as a verdict.

4 · Writing process analysis

Shows how the text came about: grew or arrived all at once.

What Mentafy adds at each step

Step	Without Mentafy	With Mentafy
1 Secure	Drafts have to be gathered afterwards and often there are none.	The history of the paper is already analyzed (Mentafy Trail).
2 Number	A single detector score that tempts you into confrontation.	AI classification is one of four signals and is reported only as a hint.
3 Conversation	A general suspicion with nothing to start from.	Specific passages worth talking about, with timestamps.
4 Indicators	Sources and timeline are checked by hand.	Reference check and writing process analysis (Trail) supply two of the indicators, plus plagiarism and paraphrase search.
5 Procedure	The student's counter-evidence is missing or hard to examine.	A report in three levels up to the full report for disputes. Students can show their own work themselves.

What you get out of it

Lecturers

An overview of a whole cohort by traffic light, instead of reading every paper under suspicion. Precise reasons for a conversation instead of gut feeling.

Students

They can show that they wrote it themselves. That especially helps people detectors are more likely to flag wrongly, such as people writing in a foreign language.[4, 14]

University

Indicators others can check in a procedure. In our view, a documented history can complement the disclosure of AI use and make it verifiable.[14]

> The Mentafy report is evidence too, like every indicator from step 4. People have to decide, in a sound procedure.[11]

Two ways into Mentafy

READY TO USE

Mentafy Check

Checks the finished document, whether PDF, DOCX or TXT, with plagiarism check, S³, reference check and AI classification for German texts. Your examination regulations stay unchanged. Create an account and upload a file, also as a replacement for your current plagiarism check, with no IT project.[14]

IN PILOT

Mentafy Trail

Also documents how the work came about: writing process analysis, research recorder and feedback on citation while writing. Needs a passage on documentation in the examination regulations. We offer universities pilot projects for Mentafy Trail.[14]

Four steps to your own pilot

#	Step	What happens
1	Talk to a founder	30 minutes on your situation, your exam formats and your examination regulations
2	Free test	With anonymized papers from your department. You see the report on real material.
3	Start small	One course, one semester. Examination office and lecturers look at the same data together.
4	Set rules and inform	A passage on documentation in the examination regulations, data protection sorted out, students openly informed

Data: Mentafy compares document states rather than capturing input and follows data minimization under Art. 5 GDPR (manufacturer's statement). We'll go through hosting, service providers and data processor agreements with your data protection officer.[14] To try it out, mentafy.com offers a free allowance of 2,000 words (as of 30 October 2026).[13]

Book a call with Markus Goldbach
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Learn more and test for free
mentafy.com
Mentafy GmbH, Cologne

Mentafy was founded by Dr. Johannes Knabe and Markus Goldbach, who previously built PlagScan.[13]

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Statements about Mentafy are based on manufacturer's statements (sources 11 to 14). The other figures and legal statements were checked against the sources named, as of 30 October 2026. Review date: 30 November 2026. Not checked: how the Bavarian legislative process has developed since and whether appeals were filed in the Kassel proceedings. This handout doesn't replace legal advice.