

## In Defense of the House Style: AI screening, footnotes, and *mengapa Retorik tidak dioptimalkan untuk akreditasi SINTA*

Min Seong Kim

Virtually everyone in contemporary academia writes with a number in mind. In Indonesia, that number may be a journal's SINTA<sup>1</sup> tier or a Scopus/SJR quartile—a supposed proxy for the quality of an article published there—or, for more senior academics, their citation counts and the h-index, the prime representative of one's scholarly influence. Owing to processes that are well-documented,<sup>2</sup> we—Indonesian academics and students—have ended up in a world where we are far more cognizant of the SJR quartile rank of the journal in which a colleague or friend has published than of the content of their paper, a world in which “*Q berapa?*” is asked more frequently than “what's the argument?”

Today, yet another number looms over the prospective author: the percentage score determined by tools that identify AI-generated writing. Confronted by challenges to academic integrity posed by generative AI, many journals, both within and outside Indonesia, have adopted the policy of using AI-writing detectors to identify submissions they suspect were generated by LLM-powered AIs. A number of major journals in STM subjects have imple-

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<sup>1</sup> For those not familiar with the Indonesian academic world: SINTA is the government-run platform, introduced in 2017, that tracks the performance of Indonesian researchers. It also acts as a database of accredited academic journals published in Indonesia. Every accredited journal is assigned to a tier that goes from one (highest tier) to six (lowest tier). Publishing in a higher-tier journal begets higher SINTA points (indicator of research performance) for an individual researcher and, by extension, the institution the researcher is affiliated with.

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn Strathern, ed., *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy* (London: Routledge, 2000); Caroline V. Fry, John Lynham, and Shannon Tran, “Ranking Researchers: Evidence from Indonesia,” *Research Policy* 52, no. 5 (June 2023): 104753, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2023.104753>; Kahar, “Arena Scopus: Proletariat, Komoditas, Burnout, dan Tirani Publikasi Pascasarjana,” *Übermensch*, March 31, 2026, <https://ubermensch.id/2026/03/31/arena-scopus-proletariat-komoditas-burnout-dan-tirani-publikasi-pascasarjana/>.

mented tools such as Geppetto, developed by the publishing giant Springer Nature and subsequently donated to the STM community, to detect “AI slop” and exclude paper-mill submissions. Inevitably, services and AI tools that promise to “humanize” AI-generated writing are now routinely advertised on social media.

To my knowledge, most journals produced by major international academic publishers, such as Springer Nature and Taylor & Francis, do not automatically disqualify submissions based on the percentage of a manuscript a detector flags as AI-generated. Imposing some threshold of acceptable percentage of writing that a detector deems AI-generated appears to be a policy that is more common among smaller journals, including, though not limited to, many based in the Global South. These journals tend to use AI-writing detectors in a way largely identical to how traditional plagiarism checkers, namely Turnitin and iThenticate (both run by Turnitin, LLC), have been used: a manuscript is uploaded, and if the detector declares that over twenty percent of the writing is AI-generated,<sup>3</sup> the manuscript is immediately judged to be unpublishable.

This manner of using AI detectors would have been highly questionable until as little as two years ago, when the only widely available detectors were the older generation of stylometric AI detectors,<sup>4</sup> whose basic mode of operation was comparable to that of checking for supposedly telltale signs of AI-generated writing that circulate on social media.<sup>5</sup> However, the newest generation of sophisticated detectors—Pangram being the pioneer on this

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<sup>3</sup> Turnitin’s guide on its AI detection service cautions that a percentage lower than twenty is unreliable (<https://guides.turnitin.com/hc/en-us/articles/22774058814093-Using-the-AI-Writing-Report>, accessed 24 June 2026). Hence, journals that have a threshold-based cutoff policy often set the maximum acceptable percentage of detector-flagged AI writing at twenty—the minimum figure Turnitin displays with confidence.

<sup>4</sup> Reasons why stylometric AI-writing detectors should be used with caution in editorial decisions are well-documented. Worthy of mention specifically in the Indonesian context is an article by two recent Sanata Dharma English Literature graduates: Stefanus Galang Ardana and Merry Christiana, “AI Detectors, Student Anxiety, and Authorial Alienation: A Qualitative Study of Affective Control,” *Teaching in Higher Education*, advance online publication (March 2026): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2026.2643825>.

<sup>5</sup> Even though older stylometric detectors certainly do go beyond looking for uses of the em-dash and the “rule of three,” which an illiterate segment of the English-speaking population appears to believe are markers of AI-generated writing, their mechanism for identifying it is based on a comparable principle: looking for “unusual” (however defined) signatures.

front—*arguably* (and I must emphasize “arguably”) lends greater legitimacy to the use of AI detectors to identify, if not disqualify, AI-generated papers. Given the availability of services like Pangram, which now supports over twenty languages, the question arises as to whether *Retorik*, too, should rely on them to identify AI-generated submissions.

Although the speed at which the technology is developing renders a rigid commitment to a specific AI-use policy risky, I can say that *Retorik*, to date, has never implemented, and has no plans to implement, a threshold-based cutoff. In saying this, I am not suggesting that AI-generated writing today is indistinguishable from human writing, particularly when there is an adequate contextual background—for those old enough to remember how students and academics used to word their emails and papers until just five or so years ago, the shift in language would be impossible to miss—nor that generative AI poses no profound challenge to academic integrity in the humanities and social sciences. Importantly, the absence of a fixed cutoff *does not* mean that *Retorik* will publish articles in which the inclusion of AI-generated content cannot be justified. The point is rather that I do not believe that mechanically rejecting manuscripts on the basis of an AI detector’s verdict is a procedure that *Retorik* should implement at this time.

Even before the advent of generative AI, the usual editorial screening of new submissions involved—aside from assessing their compliance with the author guidelines and running them through a plagiarism detector—checking for the prevalence of non-existent reference items and terminological inconsistencies, and looking out for frictionless, overconfident and superficial glossing that fails to acknowledge the complexity and unevenness of the intellectual terrain with regard to a topic or a concept. While it is true that these qualities have come to be associated with AI-generated academic writing or with a piece of writing whose author used AI without discretion or adequate knowledge of the subject matter, whether a particular submission that exhibits such shortcomings to a high degree was *in fact predominantly AI-generated* is actually irrelevant from an editor’s perspective. For such an article warrants a desk rejection on the basis of the initial screening alone.

The bias of AI-writing detectors (particularly in older stylometric detectors) against ESL authors is a widely discussed issue.<sup>6</sup> Although developers of

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<sup>6</sup> Weixin Liang et al., “GPT Detectors Are Biased against Non-Native English Writers,” *Patterns* 4, no. 7 (July 2023): 100779, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.patter.2023.100779>.

AI detectors claim to have made advances on the matter,<sup>7</sup> for a journal such as *Retorik*, whose contributor base is predominantly Indonesian authors who use English as their second, or more often, third language, a decision to deploy tools that have been problematized for their tendency to systematically disadvantage the journal's own prospective contributors should be made with caution. What needs to be asked is how effective a rigid percentage cutoff would be, considering that stylometric AI detectors—which, after all, are available to authors as well—could be circumvented by subjecting AI-generated text to subsequent human editing. If careful, calculated uses of AI are unlikely to be detected by available tools, while standard initial review is probably sufficient to identify indiscriminate uses of AI, then there remains no strong reason to use AI-writing detectors in spite of persisting doubts about their reliability and systemic biases. Fortunately, *Retorik* is not (yet) flooded with submissions—the journal is, at least for now, in a position to resist turning to AI detectors to automate editorial decisions, and to resist the metastasis of audit culture in academia, which the percentage score such detectors produce risks contributing to.

There is yet another reason to resist implementing a threshold-based automatic cutoff: it goes against *Retorik*'s own self-description as a journal that does not shy away from non-traditional, experimental approaches (this is explicitly stated on the front page of the journal's website). Last year, Catherine Malabou based a lecture on her conversation with ChatGPT.<sup>8</sup> Productive uses of AI are already well-established in biomedical sciences, but as the case of Malabou shows, many critically minded scholars and artists have both experimented with and reflected on AI in their works. Indeed, AI is—and *ought to be*, given the immense impact it is likely to have on human societies in the coming years—an unquestionably legitimate *object* of research, and it would be difficult to justify rejecting an article automatically *simply* because it either reproduces or draws heavily from AI-generated content, be it text, image, or something else. After all, it would be absurd for a cultural studies journal to prohibit a submission that follows in the footsteps of philosophers like Mal-

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the post (originally posted April 2025; updated May 2026) by one of the creators of Pangram: Bradley Emi, "How Accurate Is Pangram AI Detection on ESL?" Pangram, April 23, 2025, <https://www.pangram.com/blog/how-accurate-is-pangram-ai-detection-on-esl>.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Malabou, "Dear ChatGPT, are you an a priori synthetic structure?" Lecture at the European Graduate School, August 12, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlnEVIIfyCpo>.

about and artist-theorists like Hito Steyerl, who wrote an early and influential political critique of diffusion-based image generators.<sup>9</sup>

Considered from that last perspective, the disappointing aspect of the majority of AI-generated manuscripts is not just that they were AI-generated, but also that the individuals behind them purposefully sought to generate content that appears indistinguishable from pre-AI scholarship, thus attempting to effect merely a safe simulation of the conventional scholarly “author function”<sup>10</sup> in lieu of doing anything innovative with what is turning out to be one of the most powerful—and *costly*, both environmentally and socially—technologies in human history...

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Whatever my personal stance on AI-generated writing (or, for that matter, professional correspondence) may be, it will undoubtedly become increasingly difficult for editors to distinguish an excellent piece of human scholarship from competent and judicious uses of AI—partly because the prevalence of AI-generated content online is likely to influence how students and young scholars write, *even without AI*.

An academic journal cannot police the kind of author an academic or student submitting to the journal may have *become* in the age of AI—someone willing to feed sentences they wrote to an AI chatbot to polish them, or a researcher who uses AI to collate or summarize existing literature, or someone to whom AI-generated texts come across as just as “natural” as human-written ones. The best that a journal can ask for, in this situation, is *disclosure*. If publishing a piece of academic writing is, like producing a work of art, a practice that articulates the author’s identity, then it seems reasonable to ask the author to “own” that identity. To put it simply: if an author considers *their* use of AI in writing the article to constitute an acceptable use of AI in research and writing, then they should be transparent about how they have used AI—and be prepared to justify the usage, if need be. If the author, conversely, finds themselves unable to openly state how they have used AI in the preparation of their manuscript, then the article should not be published, for much the same reason a scientific article whose author insists on concealing their methods of data collection and analysis should not be published.

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<sup>9</sup> Hito Steyerl, “Mean Images,” *New Left Review*, no. 140/141 (April 2023): 82–97.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Classics, 2020), 101–20.

Starting with volume fourteen, *Retorik* has formalized the requirement for disclosure, operationalizing the principle that, while there can be legitimate uses of AI in writing and research, the authors bear responsibility for transparent disclosure to the academic community. No author who sends a manuscript to *Retorik* will be disadvantaged for using an AI-assisted tool to correct their grammar, especially when writing in English, an L2 or L3 for the vast majority of the journal's contributor base (*Retorik* accepts articles written in either Bahasa Indonesia or English). More substantive uses of AI in a manuscript merit closer human scrutiny during review, but this will not entail an automatic rejection of the manuscript. The AI-use disclosure statement—along with ethics and conflict-of-interest declarations, after any necessary anonymization—will be displayed on the anonymized copy of the manuscript sent to external reviewers, and reviewers will be encouraged to flag what they suspect to be an *undisclosed* use of generative AI in the writing process. But the final decision to publish will fall to the (human) editor, while the scholarly significance of the article will be left to the readers—the academic community—to decide.

The inclusion of the declaration on the use of generative AI is one part of the mandatory “author statement” section introduced with the present issue (vol. 14, no. 1). The statement, which should be written in the language of the manuscript and appended to the cover page (part of the article template) submitted at the point of submission, has several parts. Authors must declare any conflict of interest. They must disclose if funding was received for the research and, if it was, name the funding body. Multi-authored manuscripts must specify each author's contribution, in prose or by the CRediT taxonomy. Many will recognize these declarations as something that major international academic publishers have long required. I wish to emphasize that *Retorik* has adopted them not to chase the conventions of the metropole but because they are essential to research ethics and transparency.

When I first started working at Sanata Dharma University, one of the first classes that I co-taught was a research methods seminar. In one of the meetings—held online, due to the Covid-19 pandemic at that time—I asked whether there was an institutional review board for ethics clearance set up at the university. While there have been talks about establishing a procedure for ethics clearance for humanities and social science research within the university, there is not yet a formal institutional review board. The situation is not very different in many other Indonesian universities. The lack of a formal ethics board does not, however, exempt Indonesian authors from observing

ethical standards of their discipline. For example, students in cultural studies seeking to utilize an Instagram post of a private person as a datum should be aware of the guidelines on using social media for research. *Retorik* is not a pedagogical institution—it is not the task of the journal to teach research ethics. Yet insofar as it is an academic journal, *it is a gatekeeper* (a word that I use without pejorative connotation here) that must exclude research that has been conducted unethically.

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It might be asked why *Retorik* insists on implementing such extra steps as author statements, which the majority of Indonesian journals do not require from authors. Some readers might have also noticed that *Retorik* publishes things that very few Indonesian academic journals do. It regularly publishes book reviews<sup>11</sup>; it is open to publishing interviews,<sup>12</sup> though not unsolicited ones (those interested in publishing an interview should contact the journal’s editorial team first). The absence of author statements, interviews and book reviews in the majority of Indonesian journals is readily explained by the fact that such things do not contribute to raising the SINTA tier of a journal. To put it differently, then, *Retorik* does things for which the SINTA accreditation rubric does not grant additional points. *Why* the journal diverges from the prevailing norm in the ways that it does is something that deserves consideration.

When I volunteered to “revive” *Retorik* six years ago and subsequently inherited the editorship from the late Dr. Tri Subagya, the journal’s house style for citations was footnotes. The footnotes preference was retained in the new author guidelines that I redrafted at that time, but I formalized it as the notes and bibliography style as set out in the seventeenth edition of the Chicago Manual of Style. My preference for Chicago notes and bibliography—aside from continuity with the footnote citation that *Retorik* was already using under Pak Tri’s editorship—reflected an instinctive attraction to a note-based citation style whose popularity is far greater in the humanities than in STM and the social sciences. I would add that the author-date style, i.e., the (surname,

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Henry Vumjou, “Christianity and Empire in South Manipur Hills: Senvon Encounter and the Dialogic Zo Peoples (Review),” *Retorik: Jurnal Ilmu Humaniora* 12, no. 1 (June 2024): 121–26, <https://doi.org/10.24071/ret.v12i1.8446>.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Heronimus Heron and Min Seong Kim, “Interview with Taring Padi: vanguardism, creativity, symbols, and the events of Documenta Fifteen,” *Retorik: Jurnal Ilmu Humaniora* 11, no. 2 (December 2023): 220–35, <https://doi.org/10.24071/ret.v11i2.7131>.

year) format, appears too much like a *coordinate*—more like a data point to be located than a text to be engaged with—in addition to being unnatural to a Korean person like me, whose surname is shared by over twenty percent of the country’s population. Chicago, by contrast, standardly favors full names over just initials in the bibliography (“Kim, Min Seong” rather than “Kim, M. S.”). The notes style in particular encourages displaying the full unabbreviated name in the first instance of citation and makes it slightly awkward to cite without pagination or a pointer (e.g., a chapter number or section heading) to a location in the cited text.

That the journal’s note-based citation style might sit somewhat awkwardly with students and scholars in Indonesia, where APA’s author-date style is used widely regardless of discipline, is part of the point—ideally, it is supposed to induce a certain defamiliarization, a break from the norms of academic writing that are overly continuous with STM subjects and positivistic social sciences. I do not intend to overstate the significance of the choice of citation style or cast it as a consequential act of defiance. But presenting the choice as something deliberate does, I hope, highlight the existence of multiple points of friction between the kind of intellectual-political practice that *Retorik* supports and the demands of the contemporary academic world, particularly in the Indonesian context. And insofar as that friction or tension exists, the choices that are made against the grain can constitute acts of resistance, as minor as they may be. This commitment to seeing the journal as the embodiment of *minor praxis* is also what explains my reluctance to adopt a practice increasingly common among Indonesian journals: displaying Scopus Author IDs (or SINTA or Web of Science Researcher IDs) next to the names of members of the editorial board. Not only would it be remiss of an open-access journal in a discipline traditionally critical of capitalist exploitation and audit culture—“Scopus fever” being offspring of this culture in Indonesian academia—to valorize the index owned by the giant of for-profit publishing,<sup>13</sup> but it would also potentially go against the ideals enshrined in the Leiden Manifesto, which seeks to move away from using bibliographical metrics as

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<sup>13</sup> There is certainly a postcolonial critique to be developed here, but this editorial is not the place to pursue that line of thought. For a seminal discussion of audit culture in academia, see Strathern, *Audit Cultures*. The expression “Scopus fever” (*demam Scopus*) has been previously used by authors such as Ariel Heryanto. See: Ariel Heryanto, “Nasib Dosen,” Kolom, *Kompas.id*, June 7, 2024, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/nasib-dosen>.

measures of the quality of scholarly output.<sup>14</sup> If there is one identifier that could be displayed, it is ORCID.

It should be admitted that as a journal based in and funded by an Indonesian university, *Retorik* cannot afford to completely ignore the requirements of the country's academic-governance apparatuses. Stated in more general terms, it cannot exit the world in which it exists, a world that is shaped by capital and modernity's *Identitätsdenken*, bent on converting scholarly output into symbolic capital, reducing a human name to a coordinate, and disvaluing the time that is needed to read and think while valorizing ceaseless production. As Theodor Adorno remarked, "[w]rong life cannot be lived rightly"<sup>15</sup>—there is "no right living in our modern social world."<sup>16</sup> It is not within the capacity of any one individual, journal or institution to escape the machinery of the wrong world, and each inevitably partakes in its reproduction in some way. But this does not license political quietism or inaction, or in the case of *Retorik*, passive acquiescence to trends that represent the very objects of cultural criticism. For what is nonetheless possible in a wrong world is to strive to "live less wrongly,"<sup>17</sup> and to abstain from oiling a cogwheel therein.

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<sup>14</sup> Diana Hicks et al., "Bibliometrics: The Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics," *Nature* 520, no. 7548 (April 2015): 429–31, <https://doi.org/10.1038/520429a>.

<sup>15</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 39.

<sup>16</sup> Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 52–53.

<sup>17</sup> Freyenhagen, 66.

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