

# Temporal, multimodal, and open: Research assessment in the Age of AI

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AI writing tools are now active participants and agents in knowledge 'production'. A hardbound thesis could offer one perspective, but the idea of originality and intellectual engagement might also be evaluated through more diverse or new lenses.

## Beyond text

The dominance of text as the primary medium for theses is a legacy framework ill-suited to the complexity of current-day knowledge production. Videos, visualisations, simulations, and audios may also offer rich representations of critical thinking. Already in disciplines like design and art the text of the thesis is supported by such methods. Such forms may track the research journey not limited to the final hardbound thesis.

## Multimodal and longitudinal theses

Final submissions often speak less about the journey of the research candidate. Longitudinal theses, developed over multiple semesters in transparent ways can document a more realistic journey of the scholar.

The bias, contradictions, adjustments, and compromises on the methodological front will be more visible for the academic community in such attempts. It shifts the locus of value of thesis from polished outcomes to the iterative development.

## Wiki-Theses

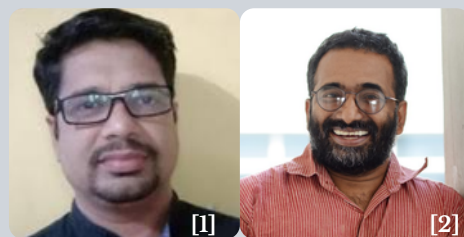
Collaboration is not ancillary to research; it is imperative. The idea of Wiki-theses utilises public platforms where students build, revise, and present research collectively.

Just as in real-world problem-solving, this model brings together expertise to address complex challenges. Wiki-theses function as evolving portfolios, capturing individual contributions, peer feedback, and the development of ideas openly over time; though every discipline cannot do that.

## Failure-first research models

Focusing on failures rather than or along with polished outcomes better captures the non-linear nature of research. A failure-first thesis documents dead-ends and unviable hypotheses. It can show the resilience and the iterative process instead of optimised results of final outcomes.

In a world where AI can generate flawless text, valuing failure becomes a powerful pedagogical tool for research.



## Embodied research outputs

In disciplines intersecting with human behavior, performative theses can replace textual outputs. Live enactments, immersive experiences, or sensory installations engage evaluators beyond intellectual cognition, broadening the scope of research evaluation. This approach challenges the hegemony of text and aligns assessment with experiential understanding.

## Algorithmically co-authored theses

In fields where machine-generated insights drive research, formalising the role of AI can redefine authorship norms more ethically. Crediting AI as a co-author pushes the boundaries of accountability and intellectual labour.

In *Wicked Problems: What Can We Do in This Time of Collapse?* (March 2025), Christian Sarkar and Philip Kotler credit ClimateGPT not just as an acknowledgment but as a co-author on the book cover. Each chapter has this collaboration, with the authors acknowledging the role of AI in research and ideas.

## Challenges in Implementation

Expanded thesis formats offer broader avenues for authentic knowledge production but demand vigilant oversight to prevent aesthetics from outweighing substance. As research grows more complex, the thesis must shift from a static endpoint to an open reflective process. Such shifts need to face institutional resistance due to concerns over standardisation, comparability, faculty readiness, resource allocation, and challenges in assessing non-textual outputs. Intellectual rigor and critical thinking will continue to be essential to research scholarship, but adaptability to unconventional thesis approaches is equally important for academic progress.

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