How to Detect AI-Generated Content: A Practical Guide for Journalists

Maria Cattini | 20/12/2025 | AI

Artificial intelligence is no longer a background technology. It writes emails, drafts reports, produces news summaries, and floods social media with convincing text. The problem is not that AI exists. The problem is that it often looks human enough to pass unnoticed.

For journalists, editors, and fact-checkers, this creates a new professional risk. Publishing AI-generated material as if it were human-written undermines credibility, accountability, and trust. Detecting synthetic text is now part of newsroom literacy.

This guide explains how AI-generated content can be identified using editorial judgment, linguistic signals, and verification workflows, without relying blindly on automated detectors.

Why AI-Generated Text Is Hard to Spot

Large language models are trained on vast amounts of existing writing. They learn patterns, not facts. Their output tends to be grammatically correct, coherent, and stylistically neutral. That makes detection difficult, especially when the text avoids obvious errors.

AI does not “know” anything. It predicts what word is statistically likely to come next. As a result, its writing often sounds polished but shallow. The danger lies in mistaking fluency for reliability.

Linguistic Patterns That Raise Red Flags

Overly Smooth and Predictable Writing

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AI-generated text often feels too balanced. Paragraphs flow evenly. Arguments are neatly symmetrical. There are few interruptions, digressions, or personal touches. Human writing usually contains friction: small inconsistencies, tonal shifts, or subjective emphasis.

When every paragraph reads like it was edited to perfection, skepticism is justified.

Generic Language and Vague Assertions

Synthetic text relies heavily on general statements. It explains topics broadly without committing to precise details. Names, dates, locations, and firsthand observations are often missing or blurred.

Statements sound reasonable but remain untestable. That vagueness is not accidental. It is a byproduct of prediction-based writing.

Repetitive Structures

AI tends to recycle sentence patterns. Similar paragraph openings, repeated syntactic rhythms, and formulaic transitions appear frequently. This structural repetition becomes more visible in longer texts.

Editors should scan for recurring sentence shapes rather than just repeated words.

The Problem With Automated AI Detectors

Tools that claim to detect AI-generated content are unreliable. Their results change depending on text length, topic, and language. False positives are common, especially for non-native English writers or highly edited text.

These tools should never be treated as definitive evidence. At best, they offer weak signals. At worst, they create misplaced confidence.

Editorial judgment remains more reliable than algorithmic scoring.

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Fact-Checking as a Detection Strategy

One of the most effective ways to expose AI-generated text is simple verification.

AI frequently invents:

- Academic references that do not exist
- Quotes attributed to real people who never said them
- Statistics without traceable sources

Checking even one or two factual claims often reveals whether the text was produced by a system that cannot verify reality.

If references loop back to the same vague sources or cannot be independently confirmed, suspicion increases.

Contextual Clues Beyond the Text

Detection is not limited to language. Metadata, publication timing, and author behavior matter.

Sudden bursts of high-volume content, identical writing styles across unrelated topics, or rapid publication cycles may indicate automated generation. Human workflows rarely behave that way.

Editors should examine the full context, not just the paragraph on the screen.

Why Human Review Still Matters

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AI detection is not about catching machines. It is about preserving editorial standards.

Journalism relies on responsibility: someone must stand behind what is written. AI cannot be held accountable. That alone makes transparency essential.

Human review introduces skepticism, experience, and ethical judgment. These cannot be automated.

Editorial Takeaway

AI-generated text is not inherently malicious. The risk comes from uncritical acceptance. Detection requires attention, not paranoia.

Read closely. Verify selectively. Question fluency. Look for substance, not style.

That mindset remains the strongest defense in an AI-saturated information environment.

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