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Whose Judgement Counts? An Appraisal-Informed Critical Discourse Analysis of Educational AI Communications

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Abstract

Public guidance on generative AI asks students to exercise judgement while institutions and platforms define the conditions of use. This study examines how these texts distribute authority over writing, evidence and assessment. The purposively selected corpus comprises eight official webpages from three UK universities and Google and captions from three educational videos, retrieved in October 2026. Appraisal-informed critical discourse analysis examines 30 decision-focused units: passages addressing a particular choice or responsibility. Analysis also considers modality and legitimation, meaning the reasons offered to justify a practice. The main finding is boundary maintenance: texts distinguish what fluent writing, technical capability or disclosure can establish about learning, reliability and permission. University guidance and Gemini promotion both value learner participation, although they serve different purposes. Staff guidance also encourages discussion of assessment criteria. These findings suggest that teachers should explain acceptable assistance, student responsibilities and opportunities to question criteria. The small documentary corpus supports interpretation of published communications, not conclusions about classroom practice or AI effectiveness.

1. Introduction

A tool can improve a sentence without establishing its truth. Disclosing assistance does not make it permissible, and polished English may not demonstrate the ability being assessed. These distinctions bring several authorities into a writing task: the writer, the institution setting its conditions and the platform offering assistance. This study examines how public documents organise those relationships.

Evaluative judgement concerns defensible decisions about quality, while feedback literacy addresses the capacities needed to engage with feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018; Tai et al., 2018). Generative AI extends these concerns to the appropriateness of processes and tool use (Bearman et al., 2024). Learner independence need not exclude assistance. The question is what accepting an output authorises: reasons supporting clearer wording may not justify accepting its factual content or submitting it for assessment.

Policy research identifies heterogeneous institutional responses and recurring concerns about originality, integrity and local teaching decisions (An et al., 2025; Li et al., 2026; Luo, 2024). Conceptual work also identifies asymmetries between educational responsibility and platform power (Zhang & Li, 2026). The present documentary analysis asks how linguistic choices allocate decision rights, justify their exercise and make standards available for discussion.

In language education, reformulation can enable access, develop an argument or perform the ability being assessed. Critical digital literacy foregrounds the social conditions of assistance (Darvin, 2025); Global Englishes scholarship asks whose language norms are valued (Lee et al., 2025). Neither warrants treating all assistance as empowerment or all restriction as domination. The purpose of the task remains decisive.

The study compares eleven public organisational texts, including three educational video caption tracks. University guidance from Oxford, University College London (UCL) and Newcastle is compared with Google Gemini communications. These sources address intersecting decisions from different organisational positions. Genre, audience and institutional standing inform the comparison. The contribution is to explain how evaluative wording connects expression, evidence and permissible participation while limiting inferences between them, without equating published guidance with implementation.

Three questions guide the study. First, what decision rights and responsibilities do the documents assign to students, staff and platforms? Second, how do evaluative language, modality (expressions of possibility, capability, permission or obligation) and legitimation (reasons offered to justify a practice) make those allocations persuasive? Third, what does comparison across document genres reveal about the relationship between assigned responsibility and the right to define acceptable assistance?

2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

2.1 From Policy Themes to the Language of Authority

Moorhouse et al. (2023) identify integrity, assessment design and communication as central concerns in leading universities' public guidance, locating responsible AI use within educational practice and regulation. Luo's (2024) analysis of how 20 universities frame policy problems questions assumptions that external contributions necessarily undermine originality. The present study shares this concern but examines how language presents reasons for decisions across institutional and platform publications.

An et al. (2025) map concerns and support in 214 documents from 50 United States universities through topic modelling, sentiment analysis and thematic analysis. Li et al. (2026) examine 124 guidelines from a sample of 110 universities in the United States, Japan and China. The present smaller corpus examines how qualifications and evaluative contrasts limit decisions. Positive sentiment towards AI, for example, cannot establish permission or accountability.

Public documents serve different organisational purposes: help pages explain operations, policies classify permitted activity, writing advice justifies practices and promotion associates products with valued outcomes. Documentary analysis must retain these production contexts (Dalglish et al., 2020). An imperative in technical instructions cannot be assumed to carry the authority of an assessment prohibition.

Zhang and Li (2026) argue that generative AI reorganises teacher authority and increases educators' responsibilities within platform-controlled infrastructures. Their conceptual account motivates the distinction between responsibility and decision rights. The present study examines their representation in organisational wording; it does not test the broader account of classroom labour or infrastructural power.

2.2 Evaluative Judgement and Reasons for Decisions

Evaluative judgement involves understanding and applying standards of quality (Tai et al., 2018). Feedback literacy connects judgement with appreciating feedback, managing affect and acting on information (Carless & Boud, 2018). Acceptance or rejection alone therefore reveals little: a learner might accept advice thoughtfully or reject it poorly, while apparent independence may coexist with limited opportunity to challenge standards.

Bearman et al. (2024) distinguish evaluating outputs, evaluating processes and AI-supported assessment of students' judgements. Their account already addresses whether

assistance is appropriate. This study examines how organisational texts allocate the right to define appropriateness and hold students accountable for navigating its criteria.

Gravett (2022) locates evaluative practice in relations and resources rather than individual capability alone. Language-learning autonomy similarly concerns control over learning, not isolation from teachers or tools (Benson, 2011). These perspectives support examining the conditions under which decisions are made. A warrant is a reason offered to support a judgement or decision. The question here is whether that reason is adequate for the decision it is used to settle.

Carless and Winstone (2023) distinguish the design of feedback opportunities, relational conditions and institutional compromises. Their teacher feedback literacy framework connects teacher and student capacities, supporting attention to how AI guidance assigns educators responsibility for enabling judgement alongside its expectations of learners.

In a realist review of 46 studies, Nieminen et al. (2025) emphasise the contextual and relational character of student partnership in assessment. Understanding standards differs from participating in their design. An invitation to review criteria documents a recommendation; its influence requires evidence of enactment.

Three decision domains guide this study; they are an analytical aid, not a validated model. Evaluative judgement and feedback literacy inform the focus on standards, reasons and situated action (Bearman et al., 2024; Carless & Boud, 2018; Tai et al., 2018). The semantic domain concerns expression and meaning, including framing and commitment. The epistemic domain concerns evidence and reasons for accepting information. The procedural domain concerns legitimate participation, including permission, attribution and assessment requirements. A passage may connect several domains, and no domain belongs exclusively to students, platforms or institutions.

Attributed authority is the standing a text assigns to an actor, rule or resource; justified authority concerns the adequacy of that standing for a decision; effective power concerns the capacity to make decisions consequential. Public documents establish attribution and stated requirements, sometimes including sanctions. They offer weaker evidence of justification or enforcement. Institutional wording is therefore not treated as a proxy for effects.

Unwarranted transfer occurs when a reason adequate for one decision is treated as sufficient for another without a defensible connection. Boundary maintenance means explicitly limiting that inference: polished wording, for example, does not establish a claim's truth or permission to submit it. These concepts guide interpretation without presuming that transfer occurs or that every stated boundary is justified. Actual learner decisions require separate evidence.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis and Appraisal

Critical discourse analysis connects language with authority, institutional practice and possibilities for challenge (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Appraisal provides a vocabulary for evaluation (Martin & White, 2005), used selectively rather than as a complete account of authority. Linguistic labels alone establish neither ideology nor social effects (Lukin, 2024). Interpretation connects wording with the document's function, such as advising or regulating, and with the decision rights it represents. Enforcement, reception and private intentions require further evidence.

Appraisal distinguishes Attitude (Affect, Judgement of people or conduct, and Appreciation of things or processes), Engagement (acknowledging, attributing, countering or excluding alternatives) and Graduation (adjusting intensity, extent or category boundaries) (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2003). Capitalised Judgement names a linguistic category; educational evaluative judgement names a capability. They are not interchangeable.

Modality is recorded separately because capability, obligation and possibility depend on clause and genre. Technical availability need not entertain an alternative viewpoint; an assessment duty need not express Judgement. Explicit evaluation is distinguished from

evaluation inferred through context. Ambiguity is retained rather than resolved through a dictionary of positive and negative terms (Macken-Horarik & Isaac, 2014).

Zhao and Ji (2026) find differences in evaluative and dialogic resources between learner revisions following peer feedback and ChatGPT-generated essay revisions. Their study concerns writing; this analysis concerns the organisational discourse framing assistance. Neither dataset establishes that linguistic change improves learner judgement.

Legitimation concerns the reasons texts offer for accepting, valuing or undertaking a practice. Van Leeuwen's (2007) categories distinguish authorisation (appeals to roles or rules), moral evaluation (appeals to values) and rationalisation (appeals to purposes or benefits). Narrative legitimation is not systematically coded here. These categories identify stated justifications without certifying their adequacy. A technical description receives no legitimation code unless it also offers a reason to accept or value the practice.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and Corpus Construction

This qualitative, contrastive documentary analysis uses eight public webpages retrieved on 12 October 2026 and three supplied video caption tracks retrieved on 15 October 2026. Iterative, purposive selection contrasted accounts of writing, assessment permission, evidence, acknowledgement and participation. It was neither preregistered nor exhaustive. The corpus contains no interviews, classroom observations or independently sampled Gemini outputs.

Eligible English texts appeared on official organisational sites or channels, or were embedded as guidance on official institutional pages. Five webpages come from three UK universities and three from Google. Oxford and UCL offer contrasting assessment defaults; UCL's Centre for Languages and International Education (CLIE) links permission to assessed language ability; Newcastle addresses writing and disclosure. Google describes revision, sources and Guided Learning. Table 1 records their functions and dates.

Staff-facing material comprises captions of UCL's first two assessment-design videos and an official Google for Education demonstration for university teachers. UCL embeds both videos in its assessment guidance and provides MediaCentral versions. YouTube metadata identifies "isobel bowditch" as the uploader; references credit that account as Bowditch (2023a, 2023b), without inferring speaker identity. Google lists its video in its education catalogue. A parent-facing Google video was excluded for audience and setting; other videos were not systematically sampled. The screening record documents these decisions without claiming comprehensive coverage.

A Cambridge candidate was excluded after failed retrieval, alongside news, private course spaces, personal accounts and viewer comments. The eleven texts cluster within four organisations, with CLIE as a nested case. The sample supports comparison of document functions, not national or international representation.

Table 1. The Public-Document Corpus

ID	Source and genre	Document focus	Displayed timing
U1	Oxford Student guidance	Safe and responsible GenAI use; assessment and study support	Two update notices: 27 April and 17 March 2026
U2	UCL Assessment guidance	Student use of GenAI in education and assessment	Undated; 2026/27 review banner
U3	UCL CLIE Centre policy	Language study and assessment; policy for 2026–27	Undated; academic year in title
U4	Newcastle Writing advice	AI and the writing process	Undated
U5	Newcastle Disclosure guidance	Acknowledging AI assistance	Undated
G1	Google Product help	Regenerating and modifying Gemini responses	Undated
G2	Google Product help	Related sources in Gemini responses	Undated
G3	Google Promotional article	Guided Learning and its educational rationale	23 September 2025
U6	UCL-endorsed video	Discussion with students; supplied English captions	21 June 2023; YouTube upload
U7	UCL-endorsed video	Feedback and criteria; supplied English captions	21 June 2023; YouTube upload
G4	Google for Education video	Teaching with Guided Learning; supplied English captions	12 January 2026; YouTube upload

Note. Webpages were retrieved on 12 October 2026; video captions and metadata on 15 October 2026. Full titles, links and date qualifications appear in the references and supplementary manifest.

Publication, update and retrieval dates were distinguished. The manifest retains both Oxford update notices and UCL's 2026/27 references. Differing purposes and upload dates preclude temporal-trend claims. U1–U7 and G1–G4 identify sources; E01–E30 identify analytical units.

3.2 Text Preparation and Selection of Units

Main webpage bodies and complete supplied captions provided context. Navigation and unrelated sections were excluded from coding, including Oxford's research, wellbeing, careers and technical-support material. Newcastle's illustrative acknowledgements and embedded outputs were not participant or performance data. Google's automatic article summary was excluded. Appendix A and the selection record specify source-level scope.

Timestamped WebVTT captions were distinguished from automatic tracks in platform metadata. Normalisation removed formatting, decoded entities and joined wrapped lines, preserving wording and timing. Published captions were the analytical object. Local automated transcription supplied an ancillary check of quoted UCL wording; Google audio was unavailable. No independent human listening, visual analysis or prosodic coding is claimed. The screening record retains these limitations.

A decision-focused unit is a clause or set of passages within one document that addresses a particular choice or responsibility, such as whether AI assistance is permitted or who must check an output. Eligible material assigns rights or duties, evaluates conduct or processes, limits a tool's claimed capabilities or justifies decisions. Linked but discontinuous passages retain separate block identifiers. E13, for example, links Newcastle's opening qualification and closing account of responsible use without presenting them as a continuous quotation.

Thirty units were retained: 24 webpage and six caption units. Selection sought coverage of decision domains and contrasting framings. Counterexamples included E06's distinction between explanation and accusation, E13's qualification of technological blame and E28's invitation to scrutinise criteria. Revision revisited recorded contexts and made selection reasons

explicit. Uncoded contextual material includes UCL teaching scenarios, treated as recommendations rather than observed implementation.

The ledger records units used to develop the argument, not every eligible clause. Selection had no predetermined target or claim to saturation and may favour striking passages. Counts describe corpus composition, not the prevalence of a discourse pattern. Recorded contexts, selection reasons and alternative readings make these choices open to scrutiny.

3.3 Coding and Comparative Interpretation

Coding proceeded through a systematic sequence informed by the contextual approach to document analysis described by Dalglish et al. (2020). Each unit was assigned a decision, actor and domain before evaluation, modality and legitimation were considered. Table 2 summarises the distinctions; the codebook gives operational rules.

Table 2. Analytical Distinctions Used in Coding

Level	Coding focus	Interpretative constraint
Decision	Expression and meaning; evidence; permission and participation	Multiple domains permitted; technical conditions distinguished
Actor	Student; staff; institution; platform; attributed expert	Representation does not prove real-world control
Appraisal	Attitude; Engagement; Graduation	Contextual function precedes category assignment
Modality	Capability; obligation, permission or advice; possibility	Force and scope recorded; no automatic Appraisal equivalence
Legitimation	Authorisation; moral evaluation; rationalisation	A stated reason is required; descriptions alone may remain uncoded
Interpretation	Explicit limits on an inference; possible transfer of a reason; alternative reading	No inference of uptake or effects from wording alone

Appraisal codes record evaluative objects, alternatives admitted or displaced, and intensification. Modal capability, possibility, obligation, permission and advice are recorded separately. ENG-C groups concessive and counter-expectational sequences operationally, without equating their subtypes; its memo specifies the admitted position and displaced conclusion (White, 2003). The record distinguishes explicit from inferred evaluation.

A legitimation code requires a role, rule, value or purpose offered to support a practice. Descriptions of features and access conditions may remain uncoded: E17's transformations and E18's sign-in requirement are not automatically rationalisations, whereas E19 connects links with further investigation. A procedural description is therefore not treated as a justification by definition.

Comparison addressed shared decisions and audiences: Oxford and UCL on permission, UCL and Google on educators' responsibilities, and Newcastle and Google on participation. Genre, audience and institutional standing remained possible explanations rather than controlled variables.

The ledger records wording, interpretations, stated justifications and alternative readings or limits. Counterexamples challenged a simple contrast between restrictive institutions and an enabling platform. Boundary maintenance emerged as the principal finding; invitations to discuss criteria qualified an account focused solely on compliance. Appendix C demonstrates when codes are warranted, absent or limited by advisory force.

3.4 Reflexivity and Verification

A focus on decision rights can foreground constraints over pedagogical support. Positive accounts of assistance, staff uncertainty and invitations to discuss criteria challenge this tendency. Organisational wording is not evidence of private motives or effects.

The author independently undertook retrieval planning, unit selection, coding, comparative review and drafting. Custom scripts verified identifiers, source locators, quotations and

reference coverage, enhancing traceability and internal consistency. As no second coder participated, intercoder agreement was neither assessed nor claimed. The author retains full responsibility for methodological decisions and interpretations.

The evidence package records links, retrieval dates, extraction hashes and analytical decisions. Headings and caption times support checking; hashes identify working snapshots but do not recreate them. Live sources may change. The reference audit distinguishes claims checked against accessible texts from those based on abstracts or records.

4. Results

Table B1 in Appendix B maps the findings presented in Sections 4.1–4.6 to the principal analytical units in the evidence ledger.

4.1 Permission Depends on Who Defines the Task

Oxford's assessment guidance states that "all types of AI use are unauthorised unless specifically listed in assessment instructions" and makes the student "fully responsible" for submitted work (U1, E01; University of Oxford, 2026). The exception clause places authorisation within the instructions for a particular assessment. Permission does not travel automatically from an earlier task, while the completeness term intensifies the allocation of accountability. The passage thus combines a restricted source of permission with an extensive statement of student responsibility. This is an observable allocation in the text, not evidence of how staff enforce it.

UCL adopts a different starting point: "the default for assessments should be that you use GenAI in an assistive role", provided the submission remains "substantially your own work" (U2, E04; University College London [UCL], n.d.). The first formulation establishes a default that task-specific instructions may override; the second makes its application depend on the nature of the contribution. The degree expression does not supply a numerical threshold. Students must interpret the boundary in relation to the task, with the module leader identified as a source of clarification. Both universities locate decisions within assessment conditions, but they distribute the initial burden differently: Oxford requires express authorisation, whereas UCL allows qualified assistance where explicit instructions are absent. A single permissive–restrictive label would obscure that difference.

CLIE makes the ability being assessed decisive. Language and writing review in English is "generally permitted unless you are told otherwise by your lecturer"; in Modern Foreign Language modules it is "not permitted", "because you are being assessed on your ability" to translate or use the other language (U3, E09; University College London, Centre for Languages and International Education, n.d.). The qualifying clause reserves local discretion, the prohibition closes the stated permission, and the causal clause supplies an educational rationale. The contrast concerns what the assessment is intended to demonstrate. It cannot establish a hierarchy of languages or unfair treatment of language groups.

Permission depends on the operation, task and authorised decision-maker. Expressions of permission and obligation specify the conditions; institutional authority and educational reasons support them. Students must exercise judgement within criteria the organisation retains the right to define. Whether those criteria are clear and defensible remains a separate question.

4.2 Textual Excellence Is Not Sufficient Evidence of Achievement

Newcastle's writing advice begins its hypothetical concession with "Even if", provisionally entertaining flawless AI writing. It then states: "Your markers don't want to see the best possible work; they want to see your best possible work" (U4, E11; Newcastle University, n.d.-b). The first move grants a demanding hypothetical case without asserting that current AI already produces perfect assignments. The second keeps the maximised standard of quality but changes the relation between that quality and its producer. The possessive is decisive: the assessment is represented as seeking attributable achievement.

Negation rejects the best available product as sufficient; the affirmative clause substitutes learner performance. Concession and countering organise competing positions, while Graduation intensifies quality. The mechanism redirects the criterion from the available product to attributable achievement. It evaluates the product's relation to learning and should not automatically be recoded as moral Judgement of the learner.

The nearby expression "fake perfection" sharpens this valuation by making immaculate appearance compatible with a loss of authenticity (E12). Yet the page also allows responsible assistance and relates misconduct to use and purpose (E13). That qualification prevents an interpretation in which any AI contribution necessarily invalidates achievement. The narrower boundary is that product quality, considered alone, cannot settle what a learner has demonstrated.

Markers' represented expectations supply authorisation; assessment as a demonstration of learning supplies rationalisation. Appraisal identifies how standards are presented, while legitimation analysis identifies the reasons offered to support them. This advisory genre explains a standard without specifying sanctions, positioning learners as responsible for expression and markers as recognising achievement. A supportive reading remains compatible with that allocation.

4.3 Product Instructions Enable Operations without Establishing Justification

Google's revision help states that "you can adjust the length, simplify the language, and change the tone of a response" (G1, E17; Google, n.d.-a). The user is positioned as able to request transformations, and the list identifies dimensions available for modification. Capability is the relevant modal function. Neither the grammatical subject nor the availability of an operation establishes that a user controls all its semantic consequences. A shorter formulation could alter qualification or emphasis; deciding whether it remains appropriate requires a judgement beyond the documented operation.

The same page stipulates that the user "must be signed in" (E18). Here a requirement concerns access to a feature. It specifies a condition of operation without itself supplying an educational justification. Comparing it with the university passages makes a methodological distinction concrete: identical modal force can operate in different authority relations. A platform's technical condition does not confer permission to use the resulting text in an assessment.

The sources page offers "may provide" and describes material "related to parts of Gemini's response"; it introduces access with "When sources are available" and adds that "Not all responses include related links or sources" (G2, E19–E21; Google, n.d.-b). These qualifications concern possibility, relatedness and availability. The surrounding purpose is further investigation, which provides a limited functional rationale for the links (E19). The final negation excludes universal source provision; it does not disclaim every claim to usefulness. Nor should conditional availability be treated automatically as epistemic uncertainty about the response itself.

Oxford asks students to check established sources (U1, E03). Together, the documents distinguish opportunities to investigate from sufficient grounds for acceptance. Links may be relevant without supporting a precise proposition; unlinked responses may be correct. The comparison identifies the user's remaining interpretative work without faulting a help page for lacking a complete theory of evidence.

4.4 Learner Participation Also Legitimates the Product

Google's Guided Learning article states: "It can even do your homework with you. But it won't do it for you" (G3, E22; Meares, 2025). The first clause presents assistance as an extension of capability. The adversative second clause then denies substitution. The prepositional change redistributes the learner's role: the learner remains a participant in the

activity rather than being represented solely as its beneficiary. This is a compact claim about an educational relationship, embedded within product promotion.

Denying substitution helps market the service as a learning product. Promotion thus need not promise maximal completion, nor must institutions alone defend participation. Newcastle and Google both distinguish process from product: one explains assessment purpose; the other makes assistance desirable through alignment with that purpose.

The development narrative invokes learning principles, educator involvement and a product manager's explanation of educational purpose (E22–E23). Attribution presents professional voices as grounds for credibility, but their inclusion within the company's article does not provide independent validation. Multiple voices can support a shared organisational position without creating substantive disagreement. The persona of a "study buddy" and anticipated "joy" add relational and affective value (E24). These feelings are projected within the publication, not reported by participants in this study.

Google's university-facing video addresses educators as organisers of participation. Its caption narrative contrasts a completed explanation with a sequence of questions (G4, E29, 00:38–01:23; Google for Education, 2026). It then labels an adaptive exchange "real learning" and contrasts "speed to answer" with "depth of inquiry" (E30, 01:25–02:11). These appreciations rank educational processes, while the contrast rejects rapid completion as the preferred goal. The educator is invited to model that ranking through a product demonstration. The valued process therefore both guides a teaching role and makes the platform attractive. The declaration about learning is an evaluative claim in the publication, not an outcome measured by this study.

Pedagogical and promotional authority intersect: participation is presented as a product feature, expertise as a reason to trust its design. Across article and video, valued learning processes justify adoption and teacher modelling. This supports promotional legitimation as a textual interpretation; effectiveness requires empirical evaluation.

4.5 Disclosure Makes Decisions Available for Inspection

Newcastle states that "you must acknowledge this contribution" and asks students to explain "how, why, and when" AI was used (U5, E14; Newcastle University, n.d.-a). The obligation extends beyond reproducing generated words: assistance can matter to the production of an assignment even when no AI output appears as a quotation. Asking for reasons as well as a description makes the process available for scrutiny. The object of accountability becomes a sequence of decisions, not simply the origin of a final sentence.

The extent of that account remains conditional. The detailed guidance begins "If your module leader has indicated" that a fuller record is required (E15); further instructions describe information about generation and modification (E16). The condition matters because a requirement for every student to supply every prompt would be a stronger rule than this passage establishes. Local academic authority determines the required level of detail.

Disclosure may encourage reflection or become formulaic; it establishes neither permission nor evidential support. Explanation also need not imply accusation. UCL says a concerned marker "may speak to you", explicitly distinguishing that conversation from automatic suspicion of misconduct (U2, E06; UCL, n.d.). This qualifies an exclusively accusatory reading.

Explaining a decision differs from questioning its standard. These texts permit clarification and inspection without establishing student influence over criteria. The following staff-facing guidance recommends discussing criteria.

4.6 Dialogue Opens Assessment Criteria to Scrutiny

UCL's first video recommends discussion as a means of sustaining assessment integrity. Its opening combines "Arguably" with "most important" (U6, E25, 00:03–00:55; Bowditch, 2023a). The hedge makes room for disagreement while the superlative strongly prioritises dialogue. The addressee is the educator: communicating rules and exploring AI become

teaching responsibilities. Later, a concession recognises that "we may not have all the answers" (E26, 03:13–03:30). This inclusive positioning qualifies an image of institutional authority as complete knowledge. It accompanies recommendations to explore AI's limitations and commercial interests with students. The passage proposes shared inquiry; it does not document its occurrence.

The feedback video makes the qualification more concrete. It identifies the staff–student "balance of power" as a possible obstacle to dialogue (U7, E27, 02:10–03:06; Bowditch, 2023b). The institutional publication thus acknowledges a difficulty within the relationship it recommends. A subsequent invitation asks educators to "review your rubrics and criteria with students and your team" (E28, 03:23–04:11). The directive makes the standard itself available for collective scrutiny, while its surrounding tentative wording presents a pedagogical recommendation. This is stronger than merely asking students to understand a fixed rule. It still does not specify a student veto, an entitlement to alter criteria or evidence that staff adopt proposed revisions. The useful distinction is between formal decision rights and a recommended opportunity to influence their exercise.

Both accounts assign responsibility to educators organising participation. UCL invites discussion of uncertainty and unequal authority; Google models inquiry through Guided Learning (Section 4.4). Joint scrutiny concerns criteria in one and product-supported practice in the other. Genre helps explain this contrast; neither establishes learners' actual influence.

5. Discussion

5.1 Responsibility Does Not Entail Control Over the Criteria

The first research question reveals overlapping but unequal allocations: students answer for compliance and submitted work; assessment setters define acceptable assistance; platforms define operations; educators organise dialogue and inquiry. Table 3 summarises the contrasts and limits.

Table 3. Authority and Responsibility Across the Selected Documents

Source and units	Authority represented	Responsibility assigned	Qualification or limit
Oxford U1 · E01	Assessment setter specifies advance permission for the particular task.	Student answers for compliance and submitted work.	Earlier permission does not carry over automatically.
UCL U2 · E04, E06	Task guidance governs the scope of assistive use.	Student retains responsibility for their contribution and may be asked to explain it.	Module leader provides clarification; concern does not automatically imply an accusation.
UCL CLIE U3 · E09	Centre policy and lecturer instructions link permission to the assessed ability.	Student distinguishes language support from performance of the assessed skill.	The rationale is task-dependent; the passage does not measure fairness in application.
Newcastle U4–U5 · E11, E14–E16	Writing advice states markers' expectations; module requirements set disclosure detail.	Student demonstrates learning and accounts for the process of assistance.	Writing and disclosure expectations do not establish learning outcomes or how appeals operate.
UCL videos U6–U7 · E25–E28	Educators are invited to discuss uncertainty and review criteria with students.	Staff create opportunities for dialogue; students participate in evaluating standards.	Collaborative review is recommended; a change in formal decision rights is not established.
Google G1–G4 · E17–E24, E29–E30	Platform texts define operations and present participation as educational value.	Users request changes and inspect sources; educators model inquiry and participation.	Product capability and promotional credibility do not confer academic permission.

Note. Sources and passage locators are listed in the evidence ledger.

The second question identifies conditional permissions, concessions separating quality from achievement, denials distinguishing assistance from substitution, and attribution invoking expertise. These mechanisms specify which inferences are encouraged or blocked, beyond expressing approval or disapproval.

The third question shows that learner judgement can coexist with organisational control over assessment and product conditions. Restrictions need not be arbitrary: CLIE and Newcastle offer educational rationales, while UCL allows clarification and recommends scrutiny of criteria. The critical issue is how responsibility, standards and opportunities to question them connect.

The findings specify mechanisms within the variation mapped by An et al. (2025) and Li et al. (2026): conditional defaults make permission depend on particular decision-makers. Newcastle accommodates assistance while requiring attributable learning, qualifying an individual-production account of originality relevant to Luo's (2024) critique. Bearman et al. (2024) already connect judgement with appropriate processes; the contribution here is to explain who defines appropriateness and how wording limits a reason's reach.

Zhang and Li (2026) foreground unequal responsibility and platform power. These findings specify represented responsibilities, including educators' obligations, while showing that retained authority can coexist with invitations to scrutinise criteria. They do not establish classroom labour burdens or infrastructural effects.

The strongest evidence concerns boundary maintenance: texts explicitly prevent capability, polish or disclosure from settling other questions. This qualifies the framework's initial emphasis on unwarranted transfer. An exclusive focus on authority transferred to AI would miss these limits. Learners' actual observance or contestation of them remains unexamined.

5.2 What Appraisal Contributes to the Explanation

Appraisal explains how passages position possibilities and conclusions: concessions admit technical excellence while denying its sufficiency; contrasts privilege participation over completion; attribution invokes expertise without necessarily admitting disagreement. Staff-facing advice combines hedging with prioritisation, while promotion makes inquiry a product benefit. These are relations among propositions, not merely emotional tone (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2003).

Explanation connects wording with the decision and institutional circumstances. Intensification alone does not establish coercion (Fairclough, 2003; Lukin, 2024). Newcastle's possessive contrast matters because assessment attributes achievement to a learner. Google's denial of substitution matters because participation makes its product desirable. Documented purpose and institutional position ground these interpretations.

Legitimation analysis distinguishes appeals to authority, values and educational purposes (van Leeuwen, 2007). Institutional authorisation does not establish an adequate justification; a commercial setting does not disprove an educational rationale. Genre remains a competing explanation: help pages foreground operations, while assessment guidance addresses permission. Appendix C shows how these distinctions inform the interpretation of individual units.

5.3 Implications for English and Language Education

Teachers can specify acceptable assistance in each assignment brief by identifying the assessed skill and giving examples of permitted, restricted and prohibited use. Feedback on clarity might be permitted in a disciplinary essay, whereas generating its argument or translating an answer may replace the performance being assessed. The same operation may be appropriate in practice but unsuitable in an assessment of independent language production. These examples illustrate recommendations, not observed institutional practice. Briefs should explain each restriction and identify whom students can contact for clarification.

Students can compare drafts and revisions, identify changes in meaning and check factual claims against appropriate sources. A concise AI-use statement could identify the tool, its

function and stage of use, the checks undertaken and the student's decisions to accept or reject suggestions. Disclosure should remain distinct from permission: acknowledging prohibited assistance does not make it acceptable. These activities connect critical digital literacy with responsibility for the submitted work (Darvin, 2025; Pérez-Paredes et al., 2025). Their educational value requires evaluation through students' reasoning and performance.

Before submission, teachers could ask students to apply the assessment criteria to short examples of AI-assisted work and explain their judgements. Discussion could identify ambiguous terms, such as acceptable language support, and distinguish clearer expression from stronger evidence. Teachers should explain which criteria can be reconsidered, record agreed clarifications and make them available to all students. This gives practical form to feedback literacy and UCL's invitation to scrutinise criteria (Carless & Winstone, 2023), without implying that discussion guarantees shared decision-making.

Institutions can support these activities with consistent disclosure guidance, accessible examples and a clear route for resolving contradictory instructions. Programme teams should allocate time for discussion and record whether student feedback leads to changes in criteria. Student partnership remains context-sensitive (Nieminen et al., 2025): consultation alone does not establish influence. These recommendations follow from the documentary analysis and require evaluation across assessment settings.

Global Englishes research questions a single neutral model of linguistic improvement (Lee et al., 2025). This corpus raises questions about Gemini's preferred varieties, multilingual students' experiences and unequal assessment effects, but cannot answer them.

5.4 Contribution, Transferability and Future Research

The study explains how organisations combine student responsibility, retained authority and invitations to scrutinise criteria, and how participation serves institutional and promotional purposes. Appraisal and legitimation analysis connect these interpretations to specific wording. The decision domains remain an analytical aid; their value depends on explaining distinctions that broader policy themes do not capture.

The small, purposively selected corpus covers eleven English-language publications clustered within three UK universities and one platform. It cannot establish how common these patterns are across higher education or support statistical generalisation. Organisational clustering may reproduce shared assumptions; genre, length and audience also differ. The two retrieval dates provide a snapshot, not evidence of policy development. Staff-facing material is limited to UCL and Google. Caption analysis excludes prosody, visual demonstration and possible speech–caption discrepancies. The recommendations therefore require testing with teachers and students rather than being treated as demonstrated effects.

Curry et al. (2024) identify limitations of ChatGPT for corpus discourse research. Here, contextual checks and consideration of alternative readings form part of the AI-assisted workflow. They support traceability but cannot substitute for independent human adjudication.

Future research could compare guidance with assignment briefs, marking and actual decisions, including similar outputs accepted for different reasons. It could test whether distinguishing expression, evidence and permission improves reasoning, and whether this framework explains more than feedback literacy or policy themes alone.

6. Conclusion

Across eleven publications, conditional permissions, concessions and evaluative contrasts maintain boundaries between expression, evidence and permissible participation. Students answer for their work within institution- and platform-defined conditions. Staff-facing texts also assign educators responsibility for dialogue and recommend scrutiny of assessment criteria.

Appraisal explains how alternatives and processes are evaluated; modality specifies conditions; legitimation identifies their stated grounds. Genre and institutional standing

connect these choices to assessment requirements, collaborative scrutiny or promotion. Formal authority can coexist with opportunities to discuss its exercise, although their practical influence requires further evidence.

Language-education guidance should explain the abilities assessed, the assistance compatible with that purpose and opportunities to question criteria. Educators must enable that dialogue. The educational value of a reason depends on the decision it is asked to justify.

Declarations

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethics and consent: This study analysed eleven public organisational publications, including supplied captions from official or institutionally endorsed educational videos. It involved no participant recruitment, interaction with research participants or access to private records or participant-level data. Participant consent was therefore not applicable. All sources are cited and quotations attributed.

Data availability: The accompanying evidence package provides the corpus manifest, official source links, retrieval dates, extraction hashes, coding ledger, codebook, selection record, worked analytical examples and analytical decision record. These materials can be supplied as supplementary files. Full third-party webpages, caption tracks and audiovisual recordings are not redistributed; live sources may change after retrieval.

Generative AI disclosure: The author independently designed the study and undertook its analysis, interpretation and manuscript preparation. ChatGPT provided limited supplementary assistance with literature discovery, retrieval planning and technical text preparation, including audit scripts. Public webpages, captions, source metadata and manuscript materials were processed under direct authorial oversight. Locally deployed Whisper speech recognition supported a supplementary comparison of UCL audio recordings with captions. Gemini publications, including captions accompanying an instructional demonstration, constituted objects of analysis; no Gemini responses were independently generated, sampled or tested. The author retains full responsibility for the research, accuracy of materials, interpretations and final manuscript.

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Appendix A: Documentary Analysis Protocol

This retrospective account records the procedures used; it is not a preregistered protocol. Official provenance, genre, audience and organisational scope were established before analysis. Publication and retrieval information were recorded separately. For externally hosted videos, institutional embedding or official channel status was checked, with uploader identity distinguished from speaker identity. Caption language, track type and cue timings were retained. Main bodies and complete caption tracks provided context for the selected units.

Selection followed the decision-focused criteria in Section 3.2. Linked but discontinuous passages retained their separate block identifiers. For each unit, the decision, actor and evaluative object were identified before linguistic coding. Modality was distinguished from Appraisal, and legitimation required grounds for accepting or valuing a practice. The revised ledger records the reason for selection, analytical memo, legitimation basis and an alternative reading or inference limit. Technical descriptions without a justificatory function retain no legitimation code.

Contextual checks considered whether another passage qualified the emerging account and whether genre or audience could explain a contrast. Quoted wording was matched to the retained extraction or supplied caption track. Webpage headings and video time ranges support public checking. Revision history, retrieval details and document-specific exclusions are retained in the supplementary records. These procedures document the analytical workflow and its internal checks; they do not establish independent human adjudication.

Appendix B: Analytical Questions and Evidence Map

These questions organise the documentary inquiry and contextual review. They were not administered to respondents.

1. What action, outcome or form of assistance is being evaluated?
2. Who is represented as able, entitled or obliged to decide?
3. What conditions limit a permission or claim of capability?
4. Which alternatives are acknowledged, countered, attributed or excluded?
5. Is a justification offered, and what office, expertise, value or purpose supplies it?
6. Does the reason address expression, evidence or legitimate participation?
7. Does the passage treat a reason for one decision as sufficient for another, or explicitly limit its reach?
8. What evidence would be needed to assess implementation or the adequacy of the stated reason?
9. What rival reading, genre explanation or contrary passage limits the interpretation?
10. Is there a stated route for clarification, explanation or challenge, and what remains unknown about it?

Table B1. Map from Findings to the Evidence Ledger

Section	Analytical focus	Principal ledger units
4.1	Task-specific permission	E01, E04, E07–E09
4.2	Product quality and achievement	E11–E13
4.3	Technical operations and evidence	E03, E17–E21
4.4	Participation in product promotion	E22–E24, E29–E30
4.5	Disclosure and explanation	E06, E14–E16
4.6	Educators, dialogue and criteria	E25–E28

The supplementary ledger retains all 30 units, with selection rationales, contextual qualifications and alternative readings.

Appendix C: Worked Analytical Example

Source and scope. E11 comprises U4-B006–B007 in Newcastle's writing advice, under the question about automated assignment writing. The short extract is quoted in Section 4.2 (Newcastle University, n.d.-b). The surrounding account of assessment and responsible assistance supplies its context. The unit concerns what a submitted text can demonstrate about the learner.

Linguistic sequence. A hypothetical concession admits an exceptionally strong case for AI writing. The following negative and affirmative clauses retain the same maximised quality standard while changing its relation to the producer through a possessive. ENG-C records the conceded possibility and displaced expectation; ENG-D records the negated criterion; GR-F

records maximisation; ATT-AP records the evaluation of the product. This is not automatically a moral Judgement of the student.

Legitimation and authority. AUTH identifies the appeal to markers' represented expectations. RAT identifies the surrounding account of assessment as demonstrating learning. The authority inference depends on this relation: product quality is evaluated through an assessment purpose whose recognition rests with markers. The passage explicitly restricts the inference that an excellent available text is sufficient evidence of the student's achievement.

Alternative and limit. The same passage can be read as supportive advice intended to reduce anxiety about imperfect writing. That reading is compatible with the identified allocation of authority and prevents its automatic interpretation as coercion. The unit establishes a public rationale, not a sanction, a hidden motive or an observed assessment outcome.

Table C1. Contrasting Decisions in the Application of the Framework

Unit	Linguistic and legitimation decisions	Authority interpretation and limit
E11 · U4	Concession, denial, maximised Appreciation. AUTH and RAT: markers' standing and assessment purpose.	Achievement must be attributable to the learner. Supportive advice remains a plausible compatible reading.
E17 · G1	MOD-A: available transformations. No legitimation code: this unit supplies a description of capability.	A user can request changes. This establishes neither assessment permission nor control over every change in meaning.
E28 · U7	MOD-D as advice, qualified by possibility. RAT: shared scrutiny supports evaluative activity.	Educators are invited to review criteria with students. Formal decision rights and actual uptake remain unspecified.

Table C1 contrasts the worked example with a technical description and an advisory invitation. Similar wording can support different interpretations of authority. Full contexts and alternative readings remain available through the ledger locators.

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