

Key Takeaways

AI and the Future of Legal Practice Webinar Series: Effective Verification Habits for AI Output

This summary captures the main lessons from a panel discussion on how lawyers, law firms, and legal educators can build reliable habits for checking AI-assisted legal work.

Why verification matters

A recent appeal shows the risk. A lawyer gave a trial transcript to an AI tool and asked for a summary. The summary included witnesses who did not exist and testimony that was never given, and the lawyer filed it. The filing contained no fake cases; the fabrications were in the facts. Consequences included a contempt finding, a \$5,000 fine, the filing being struck, removal from the case, a bar on appearing before the court, and referral to attorney discipline.

Even when the AI has the source record, the lawyer must still check what it says about that record. Fabricated facts can carry exposure beyond sanctions, including reputational harm, possible civil or criminal liability, ineffective-assistance-of-counsel claims in criminal matters, and client disciplinary complaints.

The AI Ready Lawyer Competency Model

The [AI-Ready Lawyer framework](#) from the Practising Law Institute organizes AI readiness into five pillars, 20 skills, and three competency levels. It is tool-agnostic and designed to evolve with the technology.

- **Understand:** know the technology's capabilities, limitations, and risks.
- **Apply:** use AI effectively while deciding deliberately what to delegate and what judgment to retain.
- **Verify:** independently challenge and check AI-assisted work and remain responsible for the result.
- **Govern:** operate within professional, client, organizational, and regulatory requirements.
- **Evolve:** keep developing as the technology and profession change.

Competency progresses from Emerging (recognizing the duty to verify, with guidance), to Practicing (systematic verification of sources and reasoning while preserving independent judgment), to Leading (setting standards, training others, and establishing quality benchmarks). Apply and Verify must operate together: every use of AI in legal work calls for verification at the same time. Verification is not proofreading and not merely cite-checking.

Core verification habits

- **Form your own view first.** Know what you are asking AI to do and what judgment you are keeping, to avoid anchoring on the first coherent answer.
- **Verify against primary sources.** Confirm that cases exist, say what the AI claims, and support the proposition. Trace every factual assertion back to the record.
- **Reconcile discrepancies.** If the output differs from your expectation, work out why before relying on either.

- **Match rigor to risk.** Polishing an internal email differs from drafting a brief or analyzing a factual record.
- **Be most skeptical of confident answers.** Confident output you also wanted to hear combines anchoring bias with confirmation bias.
- **Account for your expertise and your tool.** Be extra diligent in unfamiliar areas and consider whether the tool is grounded in case law or your case file versus the open web.
- **Know your case.** AI is no shortcut to knowing your witnesses and facts. Use a second reviewer where possible, especially before filing.
- **Guard against complacency.** Experience and past good results increase the risk of letting your guard down at every level.

Building verification into the organization

- **Workflow over policy.** Verification is real when embedded in the workflow, not just written in a handbook. A policy nobody follows can leave a firm worse off.
- **Common standards.** Verification should not depend on each lawyer inventing their own habits.
- **Training from both directions.** Combine policy guidance and formal training with onboarding for new associates and one-on-one coaching from research and knowledge management staff.
- **Train supervisors too.** Supervising AI-assisted work differs from supervising junior lawyers a decade ago, and supervisors must verify as well.
- **Fix first, assign blame later.** When an error reaches a filing, correct it, then examine the process breakdown. Individual lawyers still carry personal duties of competence, diligence, loyalty, and confidentiality; a firm process does not remove them.

Teaching the next generation

- **Legal skills come first.** AI literacy builds on legal literacy. Students need to understand primary and secondary authority, how to read a case, and how to write a brief before they can judge AI output.
- **Start with verification, not prompting.** Give first-year students AI-generated analysis with planted errors and the primary sources and have them identify what is supported and what is not.
- **Third-year students and clerks.** Beyond confirming a case exists, they should check that it is accurately characterized and is the best controlling authority. Clerks should learn whether their judge permits AI use and follow any added rules.
- **The training gap is unresolved.** If AI absorbs routine junior work, development must come from stronger apprenticeship, workshop-style and simulation-based training, and earlier experiential learning in law school. Firms are urged not to abdicate this role.

Using AI to help verify AI

AI can make verification less daunting by organizing the review, but the lawyer still reads the sources. A suggested approach for checking a draft brief:

- **Extract every factual assertion** tied to the record, with any quoted language, the attributed speaker, the draft's citation, and the exact supporting passage. Ask the tool to say "not found" where no support exists, and present results in a table.
- **Extract legal citations** with the full citation, a link to the opinion, and the specific portion relied on, so you can read the authority and judge how it is characterized.
- **Confirm tool access.** The tool can only cross-check against sources it can see: the record for facts and primary law for citations. Beware of an answer delivered confidently when the tool cannot see the sources.
- **Choose tools that show their work.** Prefer systems that link to the underlying documents so you can compare side by side.

One habit to adopt tomorrow

- **Don't outsource your brain.**
- **Employ, Retain, Verify.** Use your own research and reasoning, retain independent professional judgment, and verify citations, quotations, legal propositions, and factual assertions against original sources.
- **Show your work, then check AI's work.** Be the first to form the proposition, then verify the response against case law and statutes.