

# Navigating a Legal Issue with Artificial Intelligence

A HANDBOOK FOR THE PUBLIC

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# What is GenAI and what is this handbook?

Generative Artificial Intelligence, or “GenAI”, is a fast-growing technological tool that can be used to help people learn about, and even tackle, a legal issue on their own.

GenAI systems, including ChatGPT, are accessible so long as you have a device and internet connection. There are many helpful ways to use GenAI, but there are also some associated risks.

**This handbook outlines some helpful tips and examples, as well as highlights some of the risks, for using GenAI to help navigate a legal issue.**

*Please note that the contents of this handbook are not meant to substitute for legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. For additional resources, please see page 9.*

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**DEAN’S FORUM**  
ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

# What is GenAI good at?

GenAI is not good at critical thinking (yet), so it can't give you the same legal advice you might get from a lawyer. But, GenAI tools like ChatGPT can provide general legal information on many topics, including explaining legal concepts, outlining basic legal procedures, and explaining legal language. It can help you understand some legal documents, such as a lease or a statute. It can help you to learn about the law that might apply to you. It is good at organizing lists for legal procedures and generating templates for letters or contracts as a starting point. While this type of information is available by doing your own legal research, GenAI tools can make this easier by providing a step-by-step plan and other resources.

## **Summarizing Statutes**

You can ask GenAI to summarize laws, included statutes. If something catches your eye in the summary, you can ask GenAI to explain more about that part. This can be helpful when you are learning about your legal rights and responsibilities.



## **Explaining Processes and Providing Contact Information**

GenAI is good at explaining legal processes that can be very complicated at times. It can also tell you the contact information to help you with your legal process. For example, if you want to incorporate a business, you might ask it, “how do I incorporate a business in Saskatchewan?”, and it will give you a step-by-step plan. You can also ask it to clarify any step in the plan, and for contact information if needed. For example, if the GenAI tool tells you to mail something to the Saskatchewan Corporate Registry, you can then ask for the mailing address.



## **Templates for Basic Contracts and Letters**

Since GenAI is good at writing (but not at thinking), it can help get you started on writing a legal document. For example, try asking it “how do I write a letter to my landlord?” or “what should I include in my spousal separation agreement?” or “what things need to be included in a will in Saskatchewan?”



# What is GenAI not so good at?

GenAI has limits when it comes to helping a user navigate a legal process. While GenAI can be a helpful starting point for understanding your legal issues, it is important to remember that the help is limited. It is always a good idea to fact check by doing some additional research, and, if possible, consult with a lawyer for accurate and personalized legal advice.

## **Giving Personalized Legal Advice**

GenAI can't understand your unique situation like a real person can, so it can't give advice tailored specifically to you. Lawyers are required to spend several years in school to understand the law, and this understanding relies heavily on critical thought which GenAI is not currently capable of.



## **Giving Legal Information Informed by Case Law**

Canada's Common Law legal system relies on written laws from government institutions, called Legislation, Acts, or Statutes, as well as on court decisions, called Case Law. Some Case Law decisions can impact how the written law is interpreted by other courts, meaning your legal argument must reflect these new ways of understanding laws. GenAI is not always capable of incorporating case law into its legal information, so the information it gives you may be incomplete.



## **Staying Up-To-Date**

You might think that since GenAI can access text that is available online, that it would be able to stay up to date. Unfortunately, this is not the case. GenAI systems need to be updated, and there is no set structure for how often this has to happen, so it may not have access to the most current laws.



## **Understanding Jurisdictions**

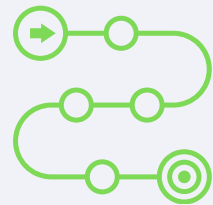
Some laws are the same across Canada, such as the *Criminal Code*. Some laws are different depending on what province you are in, such as divorce and child custody. GenAI does not have "borders" when it is searching for information, so it may not always be giving you legal information that applies to you.



# Recommended Uses

## Learn About a Legal Process

Legal processes can be difficult to understand, even for lawyers. GenAI tools - like ChatGPT - can answer questions related to legal processes. If you don't know where to start with your legal problem, you might want to ask it, "what is the process for evictions in Saskatchewan?" or "what is the process for initiating a divorce in Saskatchewan?". It can give you a step-by-step plan!



## Start Your Legal Process

Many legal processes begin with a formal letter, statement, or contract. For example, if you are starting the process for divorce in Saskatchewan, you may wish to write a type of contract called a separation agreement. You can ask GenAI to write you a template for this type of document, and you may fill in the document so that it is relevant to your circumstances. You can also ask GenAI where to submit the completed document!



## Participate in a Legal Process

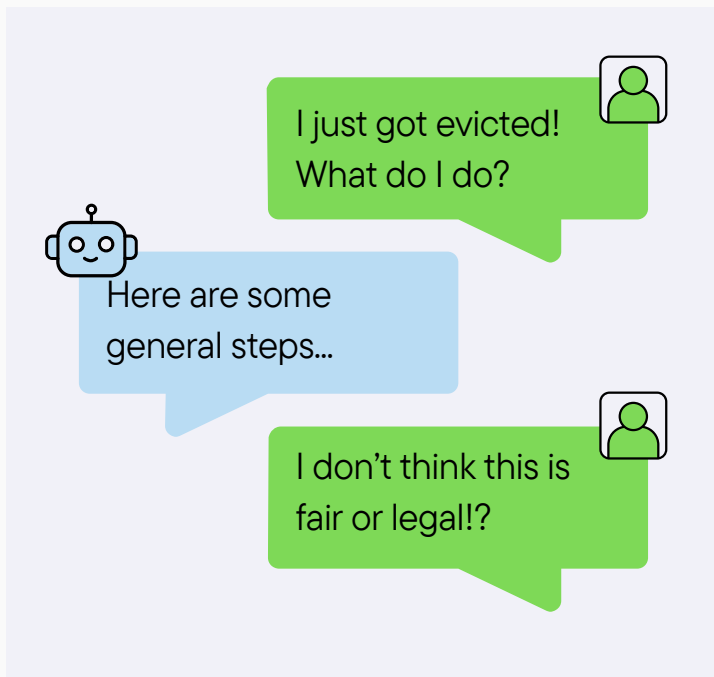
Have you been served with a legal document, such as an eviction notice? You can use GenAI to help you respond to this by helping you to write a letter, helping you identify the next step in a legal process, or helping direct you to a service that can help. You can also ask GenAI for mailing addresses to submit documents to.



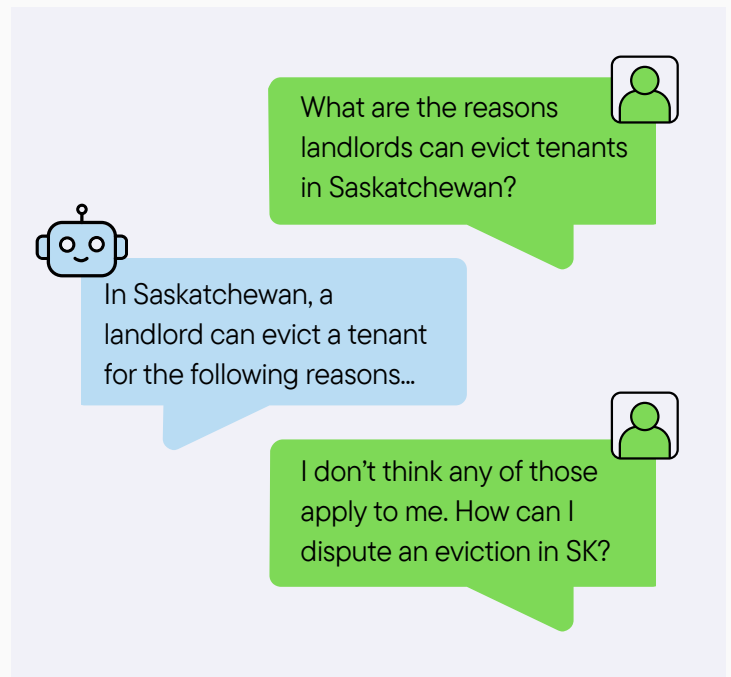
# Prompt Questions

Writing your prompt questions is an important step when using GenAI. The process of writing a prompt question can be called “**prompt engineering**”. The way you word your question can impact the quality of legal information you get from a GenAI system. Look at the following examples:

## Vague Question



## Specific Question



**Tip:** Laws vary depending on where you live. Using your location when identifying your legal need will help you to get more targeted responses from a GenAI system.

# Prompt Question Tips\*

Use the following tips when you are working on your prompt questions.

**1. Be Specific and Clear:** Make sure your question is easy to understand. Avoid language that is unclear or overly broad.

**2. Give Details:** Include relevant background information and context to help the GenAI tool to understand the legal issue. Make sure to describe the facts accurately.

**3. Consider Your Privacy:** You cannot “unshare” information you give to GenAI. The information you share with GenAI is not part of attorney-client privilege, and is not protected once it is inputted. Don’t share sensitive or confidential information in prompts.

**4. Use Legal Words:** If you know some of the legal terms that apply to your situation, it is a good idea to use them to help the GenAI system search for relevant information. These legal words might include “eviction”, “divorce”, “estate”, “incorporation”, “termination”, “criminal charge”, or “immigration”. You can also use phrases such as “grounds for divorce” or “grounds for termination” to help your search.

**5. Ask for Clarification:** If you get a response that is unclear or needs further explaining, you can ask for clarification or more details.

**6. Experiment with Different Phrasing:** You can change the wording of your prompt to try to help the GenAI system give you a more helpful response.

**7. Understand Limitations:** Be aware of the limitations of GenAI. While it can provide information and context, it does not have real-time access to all laws or the ability to provide the most up-to-date legal information.

**8. Adjust “Creativity” of the GenAI:** You can adjust the level of “creative language” that GenAI systems use in their responses, which will help the system to respond with facts instead of creative writing. For ChatGPT, you can say “set creativity to 0”.

**9. Fact Check:** Use the responses as a starting point, but always verify legal information before acting on it.

*\*Note: the text content from “Prompt Question Tips” was provided in part by ChatGPT on January 29, 2024 at <https://chat.openai.com/share/06896a65-004b-44ff-9285-0d0187e050a2>*



# Cheat Sheet: What law applies?

This handbook discusses “jurisdiction” a number of times. Below is a list of common legal issues, their jurisdiction, and relevant written law.

Legal Issue	Jurisdiction	Relevant Statutes
Divorce/separation and spousal support	Federal + Provincial	<b>Provincial:</b> <i>The Family Property Act; The Family Maintenance Act; The Child and Family Services Act</i> <b>Federal:</b> <i>Divorce Act</i>
Wrongful termination and employment law	Provincial	<i>The Saskatchewan Employment Act</i> ; if it was a Human Rights Violation, you can also try your local Human Rights Commission
Criminal charges	Federal	<i>Criminal Code</i>
Evictions/residential tenancies	Provincial	<i>The Residential Tenancies Act</i>
Wills and estate planning	Provincial	<i>The Wills Act</i>
Immigration/refugee	Federal	<i>Immigration Act</i>
Aboriginal/Indigenous	Federal	Section 35 of the <i>Constitution Act, 1867</i>

**Tip:** Statutes are written in legalese and can be difficult to understand. You can ask GenAI to explain any of these laws to you in simple terms, and you can ask it to elaborate on specific sections that apply to you.

**What about case law?** Case law or “common law” legal principles also apply to legal decision making and outcomes in Canadian provinces and territories. Unfortunately, as of the writing of this handbook, GenAI systems that are publicly available are not capable of finding case law or doing legal research for the user.

# Risks

While GenAI can be a helpful tool in navigating your legal issue, it is important to be aware of some of the risks that come with using and relying upon GenAI.

## 1. Privacy & Confidentiality

GenAI is a proprietary technology, which means that it learns from every interaction it has. Any information you input into GenAI is not protected by privilege, the way it would be if you spoke with a lawyer. It is unclear whether information given to GenAI can be used as evidence in a legal matter. Be mindful of the personal information you share with GenAI.

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## 2. Jurisdiction & Accuracy of Information

GenAI is an open system, meaning it does not have any borders when it looks for information. While you can structure your questions in a way that helps GenAI to limit its search, there is no guarantee that it will give you legal information specific to your location or “jurisdiction”.

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## 3. Incomplete Information

Canada's legal system operates as a combination of common law and civil law. Civil law is law written by governments, such as the *Criminal Code* or *The Residential Tenancies Act*. Common law is law that comes from judges in courts, and is also known as “precedent”. GenAI can help explain civil law, but it is not very good at finding or understanding common law. This can make its legal information incomplete.

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## 4. Hallucinations

GenAI is capable of hallucinating - in other words, making things up. There have already been recorded cases where lawyers were caught using GenAI to do their legal research and writing, because their submission to court contained references to case law that was actually fake. GenAI does not have morals or knowledge, but it is good at sounding convincing. It is good practice to double-check any legal information provided by GenAI.

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## 5. Bias of Information

Because the information that GenAI accesses is unregulated and subject to biases, GenAI may be reproducing these biases in its responses. Be mindful of the information you are receiving.

# Additional Resources

If you are looking for more legal information, you can contact the following additional resources.

## **1. Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan (PLEA)**

PLEA provides free legal information based on Saskatchewan laws.

Website: [www.plea.org](http://www.plea.org)

Phone: 306-653-1868

## **2. Government of Saskatchewan**

The Government of Saskatchewan has helpful webpages related to some legal problems. If you do a web search of your legal issue + “Government of Saskatchewan”, you might be able to find a helpful webpage or telephone number. For example, the Government of Saskatchewan has a webpage dedicated to residential tenancies and landlord-tenant rights and responsibilities.

## **3. Government of Canada**

Similar to the Government of Saskatchewan, the Government of Canada has some helpful webpages explaining legal documents, such as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

## **5. Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission**

The SHRC can help you navigate an issue if it relates to discrimination on protected grounds.

Website: [www.saskatchewanhumanrights.ca](http://www.saskatchewanhumanrights.ca)

Phone: 306-933-5952

Toll-free: 1-800-667-9249

## **6. CLASSIC\***

CLASSIC is a legal clinic that offers legal services for low-income residents in Saskatoon.

Website: [www.classiclaw.ca](http://www.classiclaw.ca)

Phone: 306-657-6100

E-mail: [info@classiclaw.ca](mailto:info@classiclaw.ca)

## **7. Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan\***

PBLS provides pro bono legal services to individuals with a demonstrated financial need.

Website: [www.pblsask.ca](http://www.pblsask.ca)

Phone: 306-569-3098

Toll-free: 1-855-833-7257

Email: [info@pblsask.ca](mailto:info@pblsask.ca)

## **8. Legal Aid Saskatchewan\***

Legal Aid provides services for criminal and family law to individuals with a demonstrated financial need..

Application centre: 1-800-667-3764

Website: [legalaidsk.ca](http://legalaidsk.ca)

**\*Financial eligibility requirements must be met in order to receive legal assistance.**