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Training the AI-Enabled Lawyer

How Law Firms Educate Attorneys on Effective and Ethical Use of Generative AI Tools



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The legal profession stands at a technological inflection point. Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) has rapidly evolved from experimental novelty to operational necessity, fundamentally transforming how attorneys conduct legal research, draft documents and develop case strategy. This transformation has occurred with remarkable speed, creating a critical challenge: Attorneys are implementing GAI tools in live client matters faster than many institutions can provide adequate training in responsible deployment.

This gap creates substantial professional risks. Courts continue to confront filings containing hallucinated citations fabricated by AI systems,¹ and confidential client information has been inadvertently exposed through improper use of public AI platforms.² These avoidable failures typically stem from inadequate understanding of GAI capabilities and limitations, and a lack of proper protocols for working with these tools.

Law firms have recognized that comprehensive associate training represents a critical component of responsible GAI integration. This article provides a snapshot in time of the emerging landscape of law-firm-driven GAI training programs by reviewing applicable rules for professional conduct, documenting firm-specific initiatives and identifying best practices.

AI's Role in Competent Representation

Professional responsibility rules require that attorneys provide competent representation to clients, which includes understanding the benefits and risks associated with technology that an attorney uses.³ Although not yet required, it is entirely possible, if not likely, that GAI tools will become necessary to fulfilling an attorney's duty of competent representation.⁴ The American Bar Association (ABA) instructs that in order to competently use GAI tools, lawyers must have a "reasonable understanding" of GAI technology and select (or build) the best GAI tool for the specific task at hand.⁵ ABA Formal Opinion 512, issued in July 2024, states:

To competently use a GAI tool in a client representation ... lawyers must have a reasonable understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the specific GAI technology that the lawyer might use. This means that lawyers should either acquire a reasonable understanding of the benefits and risks of the GAI tools that they employ in their practices or draw on the expertise of others who can provide guidance about the relevant GAI tool's capabilities and limitations. This is not a static undertaking. Given the fast-paced evolution of GAI tools, technological competence presupposes that lawyers remain vigilant about the tools' benefits and risks. Although there is no single right way to keep up with GAI developments, lawyers should consider reading about GAI

1 See, e.g., *Mata v. Avianca Inc.*, No. 22-cv-1461, 2023 WL 4114965 (S.D.N.Y. June 22, 2023) (sanctioning attorneys for submitting AI-generated brief containing fictitious case citations), law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/new-york/nysdce/1:2022cv01461/575368/54. See also "AI Hallucination Cases," Damien Charlotin, www.damiencharlotin.com/hallucinations (database tracking legal decisions in which GenAI produced hallucinated content) (unless otherwise specified, all links in this article were last visited on Feb. 17, 2026).

2 "Practical Guidance for the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Practice of Law," Cal. State Bar Standing Comm. on Pro. Resp. & Conduct (November 2023), calbar.ca.gov/sites/default/files/portals/0/documents/ethics/Generative-AI-Practical-Guidance.pdf.

3 Model Rule 1.1, and cmt. 8.

4 ABA Formal Opinion 512.

5 ABA, NYSBA and NYCBA.

tools targeted at the legal profession, attending relevant continuing legal education programs, and, as noted above, consulting others who are proficient in GAI technology.⁶

The ABA expressly cautions that GAI systems cannot substitute for attorney judgment, as every GAI output requires human review by a qualified lawyer.⁷ Under ABA Model Rules 5.1 and 5.3, managerial attorneys bear the responsibility for establishing clear institutional policies and ensuring adequate training for subordinate lawyers and non-lawyer staff:

These responsibilities have implications for the use of GAI tools by lawyers and nonlawyers. Managerial lawyers must establish clear policies regarding the law firm's permissible use of GAI, and supervisory lawyers must make reasonable efforts to ensure that the firm's lawyers and nonlawyers comply with their professional obligations when using GAI tools. Supervisory obligations also include ensuring that subordinate lawyers and nonlawyers are trained, including in the ethical and practical use of the GAI tools relevant to their work as well as on risks associated with relevant GAI use. Training could include the basics of GAI technology, the capabilities and limitations of the tools, ethical issues in use of GAI and best practices for secure data handling, privacy, and confidentiality.⁸

State bars also have issued guidance tailoring national principles to local requirements. For example, the New York State Bar Association's AI Task Force "recommends that NYSBA prioritize education in addition to legislation, focusing on educating judges, lawyers, law students and regulators to understand the technology so that they can apply existing law to regulate it."⁹ Additional state guidance has been issued by, among others, California,¹⁰ Florida,¹¹ New Jersey¹² and Pennsylvania.¹³

Current State of GAI Training

Law firm training programs must operate within an evolving framework designed to ensure that GAI deployment aligns with fundamental professional and ethical responsibilities. To this end, firms have developed diverse approaches to GAI training, from intensive boot camps to sustained mentorship models, all recognizing that effective deployment requires both technical understanding and ethi-

cal grounding. The training can cover various topics, including prompt engineering, selecting the best GAI tool and confidentiality considerations.

Overall, according to *Law360* Pulse's 2025 AI Survey, about two-thirds of Big Law attorneys report receiving GAI training from their firms.¹⁴ The following is a brief survey of existing programs at large firms, based on publicly available information.

AI Academy Model

Latham & Watkins LLP has pioneered a structured approach through its mandatory AI Academy. Launched in 2024, the Academy requires all first-year associates to complete a two-day training session, and features internal and external speakers and multiple follow-up sessions throughout the year. Latham initially targeted junior associates for attendance at the Academy, but anticipates expanding it further as time passes, eventually incorporating partners.¹⁵

Experiential Learning

Ropes & Gray LLP has adopted an experiential model that restructures new associate workload expectations, so that first-year associates might dedicate up to 400 hours, 20 percent of their 1,900-hour billable requirement, to GAI training and experimental application. This "Trailblazers" initiative is in its first pilot year.¹⁶

Sustained Mentorship and Training

K&L Gates LLP's training for summer associates and junior attorneys includes foundational content and training from experienced users and outsider speakers. Dechert LLP has developed one-on-one training pairing summer associates with experienced attorneys while creating DechertMind, a proprietary internal chatbot.¹⁷

Levenfeld Pearlstein, LLC has focused on GAI training both in small group settings in which attorneys are taught about the risks of using GAI, how to talk to clients and what tools are available for use, and in firm-wide presentations by third-party experts and providers about proper use and prompting. Levenfeld Pearlstein also recently implemented an "AI Ambassador" program to help develop and promote efficient use cases on a practice-group-by-practice-group basis.

Partnership with Third-Party Vendors

Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP is in an "active testing phase" and working with AltaClaro to develop a new learning module to train its summer associate class in prompt engineering.¹⁸ Jackson Lewis PC, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind,

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.* Moreover, the candor toward tribunal obligation also requires scrupulous verification of all AI-generated research before court submission.

⁸ *Id.*, *supra* n.4. Formal Opinion 512 also addresses additional responsibilities with respect to confidentiality (Rule 1.6), client communications (Rule 1.4) and billing (Rule 1.5).

⁹ Report and Recommendations of the New York State Bar Association Task Force on Artificial Intelligence (April 6, 2024), at 10, 54-55, nysba.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2024-April-Report-and-Recommendations-of-the-Task-Force-on-Artificial-Intelligence.pdf.

¹⁰ See Cal. State Bar Standing Comm. on Pro. Resp. & Conduct, Practical Guidance for the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Practice of Law (November 2023).

¹¹ Fla. Bar Ethics Op. 24-1 (January 2024), floridabar.org/etopinions/opinion-24-1.

¹² "Legal Practice: Preliminary Guidelines on the Use of Artificial Intelligence by New Jersey Lawyers," N.J. Sup. Ct. Notice to the Bar (January 2024), njcourts.gov/sites/default/files/notices/2024/01/n240125a.pdf.

¹³ Pennsylvania Bar Association Committee on Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility and Philadelphia Bar Association Professional Guidance Committee Joint Formal Opinion 2024-200 Ethical Issues Regarding the Use of Artificial Intelligence (June 2024), lawnext.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Joint-Formal-Opinion-2024-200.pdf.

¹⁴ "The 2025 AI Survey," *Law360* (March 4, 2025), law360.com/pulse/articles/2299612/the-2025-ai-survey.

¹⁵ Patrick Smith, "Latham's New Academy Starts Associate Training on AI," *Am. Lawyer* (Oct. 31, 2024), lw.com/people/admin/upload/SiteAttachments/Latham-New-Academy-Starts-Associate-Training-on-AI.pdf.

¹⁶ Sara Merken & Mike Scarcella, "Law Firm's AI Experiment Gives Lawyers a Break from Billable Hours," *Reuters* (Nov. 6, 2025), reuters.com/legal/government/law-firms-ai-experiment-gives-lawyers-break-billable-hours-2025-11-06 (subscription required to view article).

¹⁷ Sarah Martinson, "How Dechert Is Navigating, and Building, Generative Tech," *Law360* (Jan. 26, 2024), law360.com/pulse/articles/1788765/how-dechert-is-navigating-and-building-generative-tech (subscription required to view article).

¹⁸ Stephanie Wilkins, "Orrick Trains Summer Associates in Prompt Engineering with New Course from AltaClaro," *Law.com* (Aug. 9, 2023), altaclaro.com/hubfs/Legaltech%20Orrick%20Feature.pdf.

Wharton & Garrison LLP and other firms have collaborated with GAI vendors to develop customized training on the use of GAI. The specific types of training adopted and implemented varies across firms and may “include hackathons, lunch-and-learns, short videos, one-on-one sessions, virtual and in-person lessons, pop-up notifications, biweekly email success stories and more.”¹⁹

Multi-Firm Collaboration

Recognizing the challenges posed by GAI’s impact on the entire legal industry, some firms have decided to pool their resources and create joint programs. The Generative AI Training Consortium is a collaborative initiative among several global law firms partnering with SkillBurst to create standardized training modules. Member firms include Eversheds Sutherland LLP, Hogan Lovells US LLP, Norton Rose Fulbright US LLP, Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP, Thompson Coburn LLP and Womble Bond Dickinson (US) LLP.²⁰

Emerging Best Practices

Law firms are translating ethical guidance into operational reality through the creation of internal policies and best practices that can be organized around four main categories.²¹

Validation

Firms must create layered review protocols that ensure that attorneys validate all outputs and verify sources. This might include requiring that AI-assisted research memoranda be cross-checked with primary sources before being circulated, or that every AI-generated clause in a contract be checked against templates in the firm’s document-management system.

Confidentiality

Because of the data-security risks associated with AI models, firms must choose vendors carefully and enforce internal practices and protocols regarding acceptable use of various GAI tools. Some firms are using nondisclosure agreements with vendors that cover AI-related risks to ensure that confidential data is not used in training. Internally, firms must control access to datasets, with role-based permissions in place and deployment of closed GAI systems.

Informed Consent

Firms are beginning to draft AI usage policies and proactively share them with clients to ensure transparency around what GAI tools are being used and how, explain how the firm is safeguarding client data in connection with that use of GAI, and clarify fee structures that align with professional and ethical responsibilities.

Bias Detection

Because AI models are trained on datasets that reflect historical inequities or incomplete representation, outputs might perpetuate bias in such areas as employment law, unless people implement safeguards. Bias-detection protocols involve using human reviewers to audit AI outputs for these issues. Bias concerns also should factor into decisions made as to which GAI tools can be used for what use cases.

Conclusion

The varied landscape of GAI training in law firms reflects a profession grappling with technological transformation at unprecedented velocity. While training models and practices differ across firms, leaders appear unified in understanding that responsible GAI deployment requires systematic education addressing both technical proficiency and ethical obligations.

Best practices continue to crystallize through national and state bar guidance, recommendations and requirements. ABA Formal Opinion 512 establishes baseline competency requirements, while state-specific guidance creates additional jurisdiction-particular obligations. Firms have translated these into operational policies governing tool approval, data classification, verification protocols and vendor management. Best practices emphasize “human-in-the-loop” verification and validation as non-negotiable, comprehensive risk-management frameworks and emerging protective-order provisions.

However, this remains a dynamic landscape subject to continued evolution, as GAI capabilities are advancing rapidly. Training programs that might be effective today will require revision tomorrow. The profession must commit not merely to training associates on current GAI tools, but also to enabling lawyers to responsibly evaluate and deploy AI systems that do not yet exist.

The challenge extends beyond mastering today’s technology to developing the judgment, ethical grounding and technical literacy necessary to navigate an AI-enabled legal practice whose ultimate form remains unknown. Law firms that recognize this imperative (and commit to sustained, evolving training rather than episodic instruction) will best serve both their clients and the profession’s fundamental obligations of competence, confidentiality and candor. **abi**

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¹⁹ Sarah Martinson, “Big Law Leaps Ahead in Generative AI Training,” *Law360* (March 4, 2025), [law360.com/pulse/articles/2299565/biglaw-leaps-ahead-in-generative-ai-training](https://www.law360.com/pulse/articles/2299565/biglaw-leaps-ahead-in-generative-ai-training).

²⁰ Justin Henry, “Norton Rose, Hogan Lovells, Other Global Law Firms Join Gen AI Training Consortium,” *Law.com* (Oct. 4, 2023), [law.com/americanlawyer/2023/10/04/norton-rose-hogan-lovells-9-other-global-law-firms-join-gen-ai-training-consortium](https://www.law.com/americanlawyer/2023/10/04/norton-rose-hogan-lovells-9-other-global-law-firms-join-gen-ai-training-consortium) (subscription required to view article).

²¹ Nate Baker, Ethics and Accountability in Legal AI: 4 Pillars for Responsible Adoption (Sept. 3, 2025), dailyjus.com/news/2025/09/ethics-and-accountability-in-legal-ai (based on ILTACON panel that included Reed Smith LLP, Levenfeld Pearlstein, LLC and Paul Hastings LLP).