



FREE FIELD GUIDE

AI Writing Tells

The 12 most common ways
writing gives itself away, and
the fix for each.

- A free sample of the 150+ tell encyclopedia
- Independently fact-checked · 2026

AI Writing Tells: The Free Field Guide

12 of the most common ways writing gives itself away as AI, and how to fix each.

This is a free excerpt from *The Complete Encyclopedia of AI Writing Tells* (verified 2026 edition). One rule governs all of it:

No single tell is proof. These are probabilities, not verdicts. Use them to write more human and read more carefully, never to accuse a person. Detection is the cumulative absence of authentic presence, and it is a weakening signal as models improve.

The tells

- 1. The em-dash pile-up.** AI reaches for em-dashes where a comma or period would do. It became *the* pop-culture AI tell in 2025 and is now weaker (both models and writers have adjusted), so treat it as a hint, not a verdict. *Fix:* Use commas, colons, and periods. Reserve the em-dash for rare effect.
- 2. "In today's fast-paced world..."** The quintessential AI opener. Along with "In an era of," "In the realm of," and "As businesses strive to." *Fix:* Cut it. Open with a specific fact or a concrete example.
- 3. "It's not about X, it's about Y."** A formula AI loves, along with "not only... but also." Reads profound, says little. *Fix:* Use it once per piece at most. Find another way to show contrast.
- 4. delve, tapestry, underscore, leverage.** The AI vocabulary. "delve" is peer-reviewed as an AI marker (its use surged in 2023-2024). These words peaked and then *declined* in 2025 as writers scrubbed them, so their presence now signals careless AI use. *Fix:* Plain, concrete verbs and nouns. Describe the actual thing.
- 5. Announced candor.** Text that advertises it is being honest instead of just being honest: "To be honest," "Stated plainly," "The honest truth is," "For the avoidance of doubt." *Fix:* Be the thing; do not narrate being it. Cut the label and let the plain sentence carry it.
- 6. The document narrating itself.** "This article will explore," "This report argues," "what follows," "everything to this point." Plus stage-directing the reader: "Sit with that," "Let that sink in," "Read this twice." *Fix:* State the thing directly. Trust the reader to feel it without instructions.
- 7. Copy-paste model artifacts.** The closest thing to a smoking gun: citation markers that leak from the chatbot UI, like `oaicite`, `contentReference`, `[cite: 1]`, or `【 】` brackets. *Fix:* Search for these strings before anything ships. Delete on sight.
- 8. "Aims to explore" and "notable works include."** Stock filler. Per GPTZero's 2024 analysis of 3.3M texts, "notable works include" appears over 120x more often in AI writing. *Fix:* Say the specific thing. Name the work, the number, the result.

9. The rule of three, every time. AI defaults to lists of exactly three items, traits, or adjectives. *Fix:* Use two, or four, or develop one point in depth.

10. Hype adjectives. pivotal, profound, nuanced, seamless, robust, comprehensive, multifaceted, vibrant. *Fix:* Pick one, and ask whether it earns its place. Usually it does not.

11. Uniform sentence length. Human writing bursts: short sentences cluster, then a long one carries weight. AI runs even. *Fix:* Vary hard. Short. Then a longer sentence that does real work. Then a fragment.

12. The recap conclusion. "In conclusion," "Overall," "At the end of the day," followed by a restatement of everything already said. *Fix:* End on a new implication or a genuine insight, not a summary.

The master fix

Everything above collapses into one idea: **AI optimizes for probability; humans write for meaning.**
To read human:

Be specific. Be inconsistent. Be opinionated. Be imperfect. Be personal. Be surprising. Be culturally grounded. Be emotionally variable. Be digressive. Be human.

AI text reads like it was written by something trying to write well. Human text reads like it was written by someone trying to *say something*.

Get the full thing

This is **12 of 150+ tells**. The complete verified edition covers the statistical signatures detectors actually use, the 2026 model lineup (GPT-5.x, Claude, Gemini, Grok) and each model's fingerprint, domain-specific tells for journalism, fiction, marketing, legal, and academic writing, the honest truth about AI detectors, and a real citation behind every claim.

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Independently fact-checked. Every statistic sourced. Current as of 2026.