

Writing a Memorial Article with the Assistance of AI by Ralph Artigliere '69

A Practical Guide for Classmates, West Point Class of 1969

For generations, West Point graduates have honored their classmates through Memorial Articles published in **TAPS**. These articles ensure that the lives and contributions of our classmates are remembered with dignity and accuracy. Writing one is both a privilege and a responsibility.

Today, new tools—particularly artificial intelligence systems such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude, and other large language models (LLMs)—can assist writers with drafting, editing, and research. Used thoughtfully, these tools can make the writing process easier and help improve clarity and organization.

But they must be used carefully.

Use AI to improve your writing, never to replace your judgment.

AI can assist with writing and research, but it **cannot replace the judgment, memory, and voice of the author**. Memorial Articles ultimately reflect the care taken by the writer to tell a classmate's story faithfully and respectfully.

This guide explains how AI tools can be used responsibly to assist in that process.

Use AI as an Assistant, Not the Author

The most productive way to use AI is as a **writing assistant or editorial helper**, not as the author of the article. AI is best at editing what already exists, not generating original memorial content.

AI tools can help with:

- Improving clarity and readability
- Suggesting better organization or structure
- Identifying repetition or awkward phrasing
- Helping refine tone while preserving your voice
- Proposing transitions or narrative flow

A good approach is to begin with your own notes or a rough draft. Then ask the AI tool to help improve what you have already written.

For example:

“Here is a draft memorial article about my classmate, the AOG guidelines for memorial articles, and information I have gathered about my classmate. Please suggest edits that improve clarity and organization of the draft while preserving my voice.”

This keeps the substance and perspective of the article in your hands while allowing the tool to assist with editing and refinement.

The final article should always sound like it was written by someone who cared enough to understand the life being remembered.

Safeguards When Using AI

AI tools are powerful, but they have limitations. Understanding those limitations is essential.

Verify Every Fact

AI systems can produce convincing prose that contains factual errors. They generate language based on patterns in data rather than genuine understanding.

For that reason:

Never assume facts produced by AI are correct.

Every factual statement—dates, places, assignments, education, awards, or quotations—should be verified independently.

If you provide the facts yourself, confirm that they remain accurate after revisions.

The responsibility for accuracy always belongs to the author.

Protect Privacy and Sensitive Information

Be careful about entering private or sensitive information into AI systems.

Some platforms store prompts or use them to improve their models. Unless you clearly understand the privacy policies of the tool you are using, avoid entering information that is confidential or highly personal.

As a practical guideline:

- Avoid uploading private correspondence
- Avoid sharing medical or family details unless already public and appropriate
- Avoid including information that the family might consider sensitive

When in doubt, confirm the information independently and consider whether it is appropriate to include at all.

Preserve Your Voice

Memorial Articles should reflect the voice of someone who respects the life being remembered.

AI-generated language can sometimes sound polished but generic. If the writing begins to sound impersonal or unlike your own style, revise it.

The goal is not to produce a perfect-sounding tribute.

The goal is to produce an **authentic one**.

Watch for “Confident Errors”

AI responses can sometimes sound authoritative even when they are wrong.

Smooth writing is not proof of accuracy.

Always review AI-generated material carefully. The writer—not the AI tool—is responsible for every statement that appears in the final article.

Using AI to Assist with Research

AI tools can also help locate **possible sources of publicly available information**.

For example, they may help identify:

- Newspaper archives
- Public obituaries
- Military unit histories
- Historical accounts of events or conflicts
- Educational or institutional records

However, one rule should guide the use of AI-generated research.

Cite or Silence

If AI suggests information or makes a factual claim, ask it to provide sources.

Example:

“Using the information I’ve provided, suggest additional sources I should check to verify or expand these facts. Do not generate new facts about the person. If you summarize information from a real source, provide the citation. If you cannot cite a real source, remain silent. (‘Cite or silence.’)”

If the system cannot provide a reliable source, **do not use the information.**

This is the most reliable way to prevent fabricated facts, but it does not replace human verification from the actual source.

Even when a source is provided, open the source yourself and confirm that it supports the statement.

CAUTION: Some AI systems cannot actually “search” external sources unless connected to a live search tool. If you are using offline or non-search models you’ll get hallucinations and think the model is doing real research. Know your tool. ****“Do not ask the AI whether it has access to external sources. AI cannot be trusted to accurately describe its own capabilities. Instead, give it clear instructions: If it cannot cite a real source, it must remain silent.”****

Practical Workflow for Using AI

A Simple Five-Step Approach

1. **Start with your own material.**
Begin with notes, memories, research sources, and a rough draft in your own words.
2. **Optional: AI can assist by suggesting an outline and flow for the article.**
3. **Draft, then use AI to refine—not replace—your writing.**
Ask the tool to improve clarity and organization while preserving your voice.
4. **Check every fact.**
Review the revised text and verify all factual statements.
5. **Verify research sources.**
Confirm that any historical or contextual information suggested by AI is supported by reliable sources.

6. Finalize the article yourself.

The final editing and judgment should always remain yours.

Practical Do and Don't Checklist

DO

- Use AI to help organize and polish your writing
- Begin with your own notes and draft whenever possible
- Verify every factual statement independently
- Ask AI to provide sources for research claims
- Confirm that the article still reflects your voice
- Review the final article carefully before submitting it

DON'T

- Don't rely on AI to write the article from scratch
 - Don't assume AI-generated facts are correct
 - Don't include information that cannot be verified
 - Don't upload private correspondence or sensitive family information
 - Don't allow the writing to become generic or impersonal
 - Don't forget that the author—not the AI tool—is responsible for the final article
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A Brief Example

When writing the Memorial Article for a classmate, I began with notes and a basic draft describing his life and service. There was very little information available. He was a private person and left no writing or oral guidance for us or his family.

During research, AI helped identify historical material about his career as a lawyer and law professor. That material suggested a promising narrative theme—his early adoption of mediation and negotiation strategies that were relatively new to the legal profession at the time.

Discovering this information about his willingness to adopt new approaches, refine them, and later teach them at two law schools provided a valuable anchor for the article. It reflected a form of service to the profession and community that was not apparent from the limited information we initially had.

After verifying the sources independently, I incorporated that theme into the article in my own words. I later used AI again to help refine the organization and clarity of the draft. I also used ChatGPT to assist in tightening the writing and connecting that theme to the classmate's character and performance as a cadet and officer in Vietnam.

The final article remained my work and voice, but the tool helped improve the structure and presentation. **In this way, AI served as a research and editing assistant, while the judgment and narrative remained entirely human.**

A Final Thought

Writing a Memorial Article is an act of respect for a classmate and a contribution to the history of our class.

Artificial intelligence tools can assist with drafting, editing, and research. Used carefully, they can make the writing process easier and help present ideas more clearly.

But the responsibility for the article—its accuracy, tone, and authenticity—always belongs to the author.

**These articles ultimately reflect something more important than writing skill.
They reflect our commitment to remember one another faithfully and well.
That responsibility remains ours alone.**