

Viewfinder

Case Study

Device Descriptions

Robin Camille Davis, Associate Head of User Experience,
North Carolina State University Libraries

September 2026

[DOI: 10.15788/1788283333](https://doi.org/10.15788/1788283333)



Project page for Viewfinder:
www.lib.montana.edu/responsible-ai/

Abstract

On the North Carolina (NC) State University Libraries website, users can find information about nearly 300 devices that they can borrow, such as charging cables and DSLR cameras. Because the descriptions of each device were inconsistent and not always useful, a colleague suggested using AI to generate improved descriptions. I used Viewfinder to compare my values and concerns as a staff member with students' values and concerns, as informed by related user research that I had already conducted. One outcome of using Viewfinder was that in considering the value of "service quality," I was convinced to endorse moving ahead with this project, given that the generated, reviewed descriptions were a clear upgrade that would aid users in making a decision about which devices to borrow. In the future, I would like to consider quantifying the environmental impact of projects like this, in order to demonstrate transparency and social responsibility.

Project details and background

The NC State University Libraries has a sizable collection of devices that our patrons can borrow, from calculators to projectors to full-size skeletal models. Each of these 294 devices has a dedicated page on our website, the purpose of which is to describe the device, note how long patrons can borrow it, cite the replacement fee, and include any other essential information. The device descriptions were inconsistent, however. Some were a single phrase; others were multi-paragraph descriptions copied and pasted from the manufacturer's website, which included marketing language that did not comply with our style guide. Drafting consistent descriptions was not part of the intake process for newly purchased devices. While it would have been possible to ask staff members to evaluate and rewrite all 294 descriptions, it would have been a substantial undertaking, particularly during a year in which we were undertaking a library-wide system migration.

Colin Nickels, Lead Librarian for Experiential Learning Services, experimented with using Claude (an AI assistant) to generate new device descriptions following a template: two to four sentences about what the device can do, followed by two to four example uses. The prompt included instructions to avoid subjective language, such as marketing or promotional verbiage. He further describes the process this way:

“Using a GitHub Copilot agent with Claude Opus 4.6 as the underlying model in VS Code, we retrieved all device pages from the Libraries' web API. For each device, the agent ... produced a draft description following our defined [template] ...

“To evaluate the rewrites, we developed a small web application that displayed each device's original description alongside the AI-generated version. ... Libraries staff read each of the 294 pairs and made one of three decisions: approve the rewrite; prefer the original; or flag the entry for a manual rewrite.

“Of the 294 proposed descriptions, 27 were flagged for additional review or manual rewrite, including six where we preferred the original description. The items flagged for manual rewrite contain requesting or workflow information or need manual attention from a subject matter expert.”

Once these descriptions were reviewed and finalized, Erik Olson, a senior developer in the User Experience department, imported the descriptions into Drupal, the content management system (CMS) behind our main website. Note that there was no direct connection between an AI agent and the CMS. Erik used a built-in JSON import function.

The project moved forward in consultation with the Web Content Team (Carolyn Argentati, Deputy Director of Libraries; Rob Rucker, Chief Strategist for Student Success; Chris Tonelli, Director of Libraries Communications; Josh Boyer, Head of User Experience; and myself, Robin Davis, Associate Head of User Experience). This team also determined how and where to mention AI usage. A citation was added in fine print after description on each device page: “Libraries staff used an AI agent, Claude, to generate this description, then reviewed it for accuracy. Our project page details the entire process, both for transparency and to share innovative AI-related work with our peers in the profession (Nickels et al., 2026).

Example: description of the Sigma-Aldrich Chem Tutor Modeling Kit

Before	After
Useful for Organic Chemistry modeling.	This ball-and-stick molecular modeling kit is designed for building 3D models of organic chemistry structures. It can be used to visualize molecular geometry, bond angles, and stereochemistry for coursework or study.

Viewfinder exercise

This project was the first time that we deployed a large amount of text that was initially written by generative AI. (It is possible that smaller amounts of AI-generated text have been added to our website, which is collaboratively edited by dozens of library staff members.)

The first step in Viewfinder is a prompt to consider the values that are relevant in a given scenario from my perspective. For the scenario described in the section above, the three values I considered as a library staff member:

- Trust
- Service quality
- Human-centeredness

The next step is a prompt to consider relevant values for a stakeholder identity different from my own. As I considered the perspective of a student, I examined these values, based on conversations I have had with students about using the library website and about AI usage in general:

- Trust
- Service quality
- Social responsibility

Trust is a significant point of concern for both stakeholders considered, in terms of whether the device descriptions are accurate. The students I spoke to about AI (at a pop-up interview table for a study about learning preferences) were knowledgeable about the tendency of generative AI to hallucinate and output information that is convincing yet wholly inaccurate. In the context of this project, this reflection exercise prompted the questions: how much should we share with users about our use of AI? Will using AI-generated text erode users' trust in our content's accuracy? Similarly, staff members who heard about the device description project wanted to know where the "human in the loop" was, as well as how strictly we were reviewing the text for accuracy.

Another shared value between library staff and students is service quality, which Viewfinder describes in part as “Ensuring the library’s ability to deliver quality services.” As a library staff member, I was not proud of the previous state of device descriptions. Some were useful, but many were insufficient, of low quality, and did not adhere to the writing conventions put forth in our internal style guide. Students expect our website to be reliable, particularly if they are going to visit the library in person to check out a device. Complete, accurate information provided upfront about a device could help answer a question a student has about it, confirm that the device fulfills their need, or save them a trip if it doesn’t.

Students are aware of how water- and energy-intensive the data centers behind AI are. Their value of social responsibility may conflict with their desire for high-quality web content if it is generated through AI. While social responsibility was part of staff conversations about this project, human-centeredness was more of a concern, since we pride ourselves on putting a great deal of thought and care into the content that users encounter. If we moved forward with this project, how might we avoid a “slippery slope” effect with other web content? We considered writing up criteria for AI usage on the website, but decided that for now, the Web Content Team would consider projects like this one on a case-by-case basis.

Discussion and outcomes

Viewfinder helped me to prioritize students’ need for complete, consistent information on our website. With multiple library staff members reviewing each generated description, my own concerns about accuracy were allayed. Now that we had 267 accurate device descriptions in our pocket, why *wouldn’t* we want to provide them to our users (who are primarily students)? In comparing the originals to the generated texts, it was clear that the latter were better and would uphold the value of service quality. This consideration convinced me to endorse the project.

One unresolved question is how to characterize the environmental impact of this work, given that I ranked social responsibility as one of students’ top three values. We published a project page detailing the process with the goal of transparency, but the page does not address environmental impacts—partially because it is difficult to characterize them. In a presentation called “Measuring the Cost of Computation” at Code4Lib 2026 (Lynema, 2026), Emily Lynema recommended some initial steps to quantify the ecological impact of AI projects, such as using

EcoLogits (Rincé & Banse, 2025), a calculator that estimates the environmental footprint of a short list of sample tasks and AI models. We should consider citing such estimates in the project page, as long as we feel confident in the figures.

Another unanswered question is the degree to which students trust the new device descriptions, given that AI usage and library staff evaluation are both plainly cited. I would like to run an informal usability study or survey to ascertain students' reactions to the updated device pages, the attribution that mentions both AI and staff review, and the project page.

For other practitioners considering using AI-generated text on their library's website, I recommend using Viewfinder to consider the perspectives and values of an intended end user. Conducting user research or relying on previously conducted user research may help reduce biases and misconceptions of stakeholder views. During the exercise comparing values, consider a realistic use case along the lines of, *This patron is going to make a decision about ___ based on this text.* Identify some best and worst case scenarios, and take into consideration how those align with the values you identified.

References

Rincé, S., & Banse, A. (2025). EcoLogits: Evaluating the Environmental Impacts of Generative AI. *Journal of Open Source Software* 10(111): 7471. <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.07471>.

Lynema, E. (2026, March 2). Lightning talk: Measuring computation. *Code4lib* 2026. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18864968>

Nickels, C., Olson, E., Prince, C., Essic, J., Hawks, S., & Ausby, B. (2026). *Refreshing Software and Technology Lending Descriptions with Agent-Based AI*. North Carolina State University Library Projects. <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/projects/refreshing-software-and-technology-lending-descriptions-agent-based-ai>