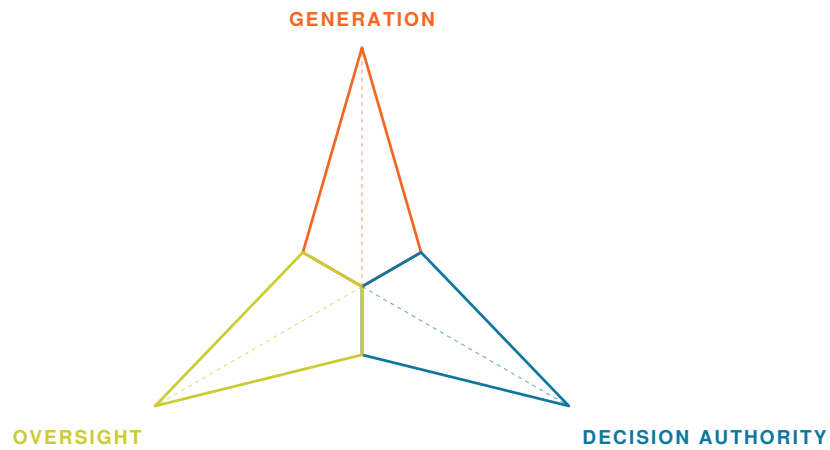


MAKER'S THUMBPRINT

How much human, how much AI — at a glance.



THE EMPTY BADGE

Three axes, three colours. The longer the point, the more human the work — from 1 (least) to 5 (most).



WHY THIS BADGE EXISTS

We are living through a quiet revolution in how things get made. A blog post, a report, a piece of music, a school assignment, a marketing campaign, a piece of code, a novel — all of these can now be produced in seconds by an AI, in months by a human, or anywhere along the vast continuum in between. Most of what you read, watch, or use today sits somewhere on that continuum, but you have almost no way of knowing where.

This isn't a problem we can solve by asking "Was AI used?" That question is already obsolete. The interesting questions — the ones that actually tell you something meaningful about a piece of work — are different:

Who produced the raw material? A human typing, an AI generating, or a mix?

Who made the creative and structural decisions? Who decided what this piece would say, how it would be shaped, what it would argue, what it would feel like?

Who oversees it? Whose name and expertise stand behind the result? Who did the checking? Who would you go to if something were wrong?

These three questions — *Generation*, *Decision Authority*, and *Oversight* — are independent of one another. A piece can be entirely AI-generated but human-directed and expert-reviewed (think of a doctor using AI to draft patient notes, then carefully verifying and signing them off). It can be entirely human-written but unverified (a personal essay). It can be AI-generated, AI-directed, and unreviewed (the worst of the content-farm internet). Each of those is a different kind of artefact, with a different kind of trust attached. Lumping them all together as "AI content" or "human content" tells us almost nothing.

The Maker's Thumbprint is built to make those distinctions visible, in a single image that takes about a second to read.

WHAT THE BADGE IS

The badge is a three-pointed star. Each point represents one of the three continua — Generation, Decision Authority, and Oversight — and the **length of each point** encodes a score from 1 to 5 on that axis.

A balanced, fully extended star (5/5/5) shows work that is human-created, human-directed, and expert-authored. A short, stunted shape with one or two long points shows a mixed or AI-heavy profile. The shape itself becomes a fingerprint of how the work was made — readable at a glance, even before you look at the numbers.

Each axis is colour-coded:

- **Orange** for Generation



- **Blue** for Decision Authority
- **Green** for Oversight

The full key — explaining all five levels of each continuum — accompanies the badge so that anyone seeing it can decode it without prior knowledge. Readers don't need to study a manual; the legend is the manual.

WHY WE DON'T JUST SAY “AI” OR “NO AI”

The standard AI label asks one question: *Was AI involved? Yes or no.* It is the wrong question, and the cost of asking it is rising every month.

The binary collapses everything that actually matters into a checkbox. A surgeon who uses AI to draft patient notes and then carefully verifies and signs them gets the same label as a content farm churning out a thousand unread articles a day. A novelist who used AI to brainstorm chapter titles gets the same label as a novelist who fed a prompt into a machine and pasted the output. A student who used AI to grammar-check an essay gets the same label as a student who had AI write it for them. The label cannot tell these apart, so in practice it tells us very little.

It also creates the wrong incentives. The careful person who used AI for a small task has to declare “AI used” and accept the same suspicion as the bad actor — there is no ladder to climb, no way to show that their use was responsible. The bad actor, meanwhile, has every reason to stay quiet, because ticking the box puts them in the same bucket as the surgeon. So they don't tick it at all. The binary ends up punishing scruples and rewarding silence — the opposite of what an honesty signal is supposed to do.

The same flatness works in reverse. *No AI* label tells you nothing about whether anyone qualified actually checked the work. Plenty of entirely-human content is sloppy, unverified, or written by someone who shouldn't have been near the topic. Treating “human-made” as automatic proof of quality is its own kind of dishonesty.

The Maker's Thumbprint is built to replace one blunt question with three sharper ones. Generation, Decision Authority, and Oversight are independent of each other, and scoring each from 1 to 5 gives every kind of work a recognisable shape — one that distinguishes the surgeon from the content farm, the grammar-checker from the prompt-paster, the careful expert from the careless one. The binary asks whether AI was used. This badge asks the questions that actually matter.

WHERE AND HOW TO USE THE BADGE

Anywhere a reader, viewer, listener, student, customer, or audience encounters something you've made. The badge is meant to be displayed, not hidden.

Concretely, this includes:

- **Articles and blog posts** — at the top, near the byline, or in the footer.



- **Reports, white papers, and academic submissions** — on the cover or inside the front matter.
- **Books, ebooks, and printed publications** — on the copyright page or back cover.
- **Marketing copy, advertisements, and brand collateral** — in a small footer mark.
- **Social media posts and newsletters** — alongside the author credit.
- **Videos and podcasts** — in the description, end card, or show notes.
- **Music and visual art** — on the listing page or in liner notes.
- **Code repositories and software documentation** — in the README.
- **Student work, essays, and assignments** — on the title page or as a standalone declaration.
- **Internal company documents** — at the top of the document, especially when the work will be relied upon.
- **Course materials and educational content** — visible to students before they engage with the content.

The badge is most useful when it is **visible, not buried**. A reader should be able to see the shape before they decide whether to invest their time.

SCORING HONESTLY

Score the work as it actually was, not as you wish it had been. If you generated 80% of a draft with AI and then heavily edited it, your Generation score is probably a 2 — not a 4. If you reviewed AI output but lack the expertise to truly validate it, your Oversight score is a 2, not a 4.

A low score on one or more axes is not a confession of failure. It is a statement of what the work is. Some entirely-AI-generated pieces are fit for purpose — quick first drafts, brainstorming material, decorative imagery, casual social posts. There is nothing wrong with publishing them, as long as you label them honestly. The dishonesty isn't in using AI; it's in using AI and pretending you didn't.

Equally, a high score is not a boast. A 5/5/5 simply tells the reader: *a human made this, a human chose what it would be, and a qualified person stands behind it*. No more, no less.



THE THREE CONTINUA

The badge has three independent axes. Each is scored from 1 to 5. The full meaning of every level is below.

GENERATION

Who produced the raw material?

- 1 Fully AI Generated**
AI produces nearly all of the text, design, code, or media.
- 2 AI-Dominant Generation**
AI produces most of the material, with human editing or additions.
- 3 Hybrid Generation**
Roughly balanced human and AI creation.
- 4 Human-Dominant Generation**
Humans create most of the work, with AI assisting in small parts.
- 5 Fully Human Generated**
All material created directly by humans without AI generation.

DECISION AUTHORITY

Who made the creative and structural decisions?

- 1 AI Directed**
AI determines structure, themes, or design with minimal human control.
- 2 AI Guided**
AI suggests direction or options that strongly influence outcomes.
- 3 Collaborative Direction**
Humans and AI iteratively shape decisions together.
- 4 Human Directed (AI Assisted)**
Humans determine the structure and ideas; AI acts as a tool.
- 5 Fully Human Directed**
Humans make all conceptual and structural decisions.

OVERSIGHT

Who is responsible for the quality and correctness of the result?

- 1 Unverified Oversight**
No clear responsible reviewer.
- 2 Basic Human Review**
A human checks output but without expertise or deep validation.
- 3 Competent Oversight**
A knowledgeable person reviews and approves the work.
- 4 Expert Oversight**
A recognized domain expert supervises and validates the work.
- 5 Expert Authorship**
A domain expert personally creates and stands behind the work.

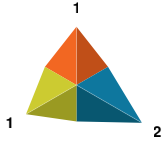


FOUR PROFILES, FOUR SHAPES

The badge does its work most clearly when you see different scores side by side. Here are four profiles you might encounter in the wild, each with the shape its scores produce.

AI CONTENT FARM

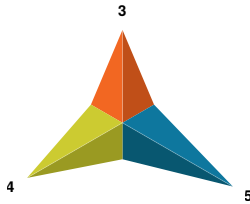
G 1 · D 2 · O 1



The familiar shape of low-trust internet content. The AI generated almost everything (G 1). A human typed a prompt and accepted whatever came back, but exercised no real direction over what the piece would say or how it would be shaped (D 2). No one with relevant expertise checked the result before it was published (O 1). The badge is barely a star at all — three stubby points, all close to the centre. The shape itself is the warning. A reader doesn't need to read the words “content farm”; the silhouette already says it.

DESIGNER + AI TOOLS

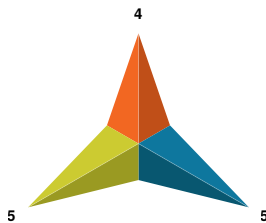
G 3 · D 5 · O 4



A working graphic designer using AI image generators, AI-assisted layout tools, and AI brainstorming as part of their daily practice. Roughly half of the raw material — colour palettes, mood images, copy variations — comes out of AI (G 3). But every creative and structural decision is the designer's: which images to keep, which to discard, what the piece should communicate, how it should feel (D 5). The designer is a recognised domain expert who supervises and validates every output before it ships (O 4). The shape is asymmetric — a short orange point, full blue and green points — and that asymmetry is the truth of the work: AI-assisted, human-directed, expert-overseen.

EXPERT-LED CREATION

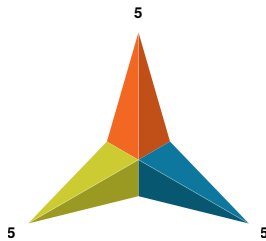
G 4 · D 5 · O 5



A subject-matter expert who wrote most of the piece themselves, used AI sparingly — to suggest a section structure, tighten a paragraph, check grammar — and then verified and finalised every word (G 4). All decisions were theirs (D 5). They are the named, qualified author who stands behind the work (O 5). The shape is nearly fully extended, with just one slightly shorter point. To a reader, the message is clear: this is human work that used AI as a tool, and an expert stands behind it.

ENTIRELY HUMAN

G 5 · D 5 · O 5



No AI involvement at any stage. A human created every word, made every decision, and stands behind every claim. The badge is a fully balanced three-pointed star — all three points at maximum extension. This shape is becoming rarer. It is also not, on its own, a guarantee of quality — entirely-human work can still be wrong, careless, or out of its depth. But it is an honest declaration of how the work was made.



A CALL TO ADOPT

We are asking you to use this badge — on everything you publish, share, ship, or submit — for as long as the question of “who actually made this” matters. Which, we suspect, is going to be a very long time.

The value of the Maker’s Thumbprint compounds with adoption. One badge on one blog post is a curiosity. Ten thousand badges across a publication, a school, a profession, an industry, become a culture. Readers begin to expect them. Their absence becomes the conspicuous signal. Honesty becomes the default, not the exception.

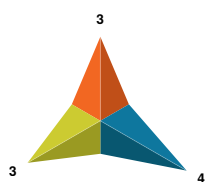
You don’t need anyone’s permission to start. The badge is free to use, free to copy, and free to display. There is no certification body, no registration, no fee. The only requirement is that you score yourself honestly. The rest is a quiet act of trust between you and the people who encounter your work.

If you write, design, code, teach, research, market, broadcast, or create in any medium — please consider adding the Maker’s Thumbprint to whatever you publish next. And if you find it useful, please share it with the people whose work you read and value, and ask them to do the same.

In a world where almost anything can be produced by almost anyone in almost any way, telling the truth about how something was made is a small, generous act. This badge exists to make that act easy.

Create your own thumbprint at makersthumbprint.org

This document carries its own Maker’s Thumbprint, scored honestly:



G 3 · D 4 · O 3

Hybrid Generation · Human Directed (AI Assisted) · Competent Oversight. The text was drafted through extensive back-and-forth between ed clark and an AI, with both contributing materially to the wording; every meaningful structural and creative decision was made by ed clark; the work has been reviewed and approved by its author but has not yet been independently expert-reviewed.

