

The Ghost in the Machine

Nine documented failures · More Than An Editor · morethananeditor.com · valid as of August 2026

Nine distinct failures, not nine instances of one. Different mechanisms, different causes — **somebody who has learned to watch for one will not catch the others. All of them are serious.**

What every case has in common: the output reads perfectly well.

No error. No flag. No gap on the page. The prose closes over the loss and the writer reads straight past it.

Somebody told that AI hallucinates will check their citations. Nobody checks whether a paragraph they wrote three weeks ago still says what it said.

The nine

Tick anything you have seen. If you have seen none of them, you have not looked.

- ☐ **It deletes true material and calls the deletion a correction.** A real term, a real source, a real distinction — reported as invented, and removed.
- ☐ **It reads precision as redundancy.** Two sentences specifying different things get merged into one. The prose improves. The meaning goes.
- ☐ **It replaces a specific claim with a vague one.** *Fewer than forty* becomes *around forty*. Nobody queries it, because nobody can.
- ☐ **It drops insertions silently.** Text you added does not come back, and nothing reports it. Replacements announce their own failure; insertions do not.
- ☐ **It forgets what it told you** — and gives no signal of having forgotten. It reports a finding instead.
- ☐ **It misreports what just happened**, from a record still in front of it.
- ☐ **It shifts the meaning while keeping the shape.** Ask it to adapt a passage for a different reader and you get something that reads like the same argument and makes a different claim. **Nothing looks wrong. It is simply about something else now.**
- ☐ **It reproduces its own work from memory, and the copy is worse.** Ask for the same passage on a second page and you get a paraphrase — shorter, reworded, items missing — presented as the thing itself. **This is the most frequent failure on this list by a wide margin.**
- ☐ **It agrees with you.** Ask whether your argument holds and it will say yes. **This one needs no case log** — it is built into how these systems are trained, and you can reproduce it in seconds with your own work.

The cases behind these nine, in full, are at morethananeditor.com/aifailures. Detector accuracy and what to do if you are wrongly accused: [/aidetection](#). Checking a bibliography you no longer trust: [/citationpurge](#). Where the line sits between assistance and substitution: [/humanintheloop](#). For people drafting policy: [/aipolicy](#).

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