



The Future Lawyer's Toolkit: Critical Thinking in the Age of AI

By Laina Chan

The legal profession is facing a profound shift. Where once hours of painstaking research defined the lawyer's craft, artificial intelligence is now capable of surfacing authorities, summarising reasoning and generating reports in seconds. The promise is compelling: more efficiency, greater reach, fewer barriers to justice. Yet amid this technological transformation, one skill remains as essential as ever — the ability to think critically.

1. Question everything

I learned the importance of questioning early. As a teenager at an international school in Malaysia, I had an English teacher who, despite being unremarkable by conventional measures, made a lasting impact. He asked us to rewrite entire plays, condensing casts of characters into just two. More importantly, he insisted: *"Question everything you read. Don't take anything as gospel."*

That lesson still applies. Law students — and indeed all lawyers — must approach AI outputs with the same sceptical eye. An AI research report, however well-crafted, must be checked against the original case, tested against first principles and weighed against one's own knowledge. Without that discipline, the lawyer risks outsourcing the very skill that makes them valuable.

2. Critical thinking as value-add

The question for the next generation of lawyers is simple: what do you bring beyond the machine? If your only contribution is to input prompts and accept outputs, you offer little more than what anyone else could do. Real value lies in reading the cases, understanding the reasoning, and identifying the ratio decidendi for yourself. Only then can you compare your interpretation with what the AI has produced, spotting errors, gaps or fresh lines of argument.

Summarisation is something AI does well — perhaps too well. But a superficial summary is no substitute for the deep, connected knowledge that comes from immersing yourself in case law over time. It is this deeper knowledge that enables lawyers to draw parallels across doctrines, to strategise effectively, and to persuade.



3. Literacy in two languages: law and AI

If legal literacy remains non-negotiable, AI literacy is quickly becoming its companion. Lawyers must understand not only the doctrines they argue but also the tools they deploy. That means knowing how to frame questions, recognising the limits of an AI system, and being alert to the risk of “hallucinations” — outputs that look authoritative but are fabricated.

Even with safeguards in place, language models have a “nature” that pushes them to answer, even where the data is absent. MiAI Law, the platform I founded, is engineered to minimise this risk. It relies only on legislation and judgments, analyses every case systematically, and structures reports in IRAC form (Issue, Rule, Application, Conclusion). Yet no constraint can ever be perfect. The responsibility to test and verify remains with the lawyer.

4. From grunt work to creativity

Properly used, AI is not a replacement but a relief. In large firms, junior lawyers have long spent years submerged in due diligence and discovery. These tasks are repetitive, time-consuming, and, at times, soul-destroying. Automating them allows junior lawyers to reach more substantive legal work sooner — the work of advising, strategising and advocating.

Ironically, by reducing the burden of mechanical tasks, AI may make law more human. Senior counsel who tested MiAI Law reported that it unearthed arguments they had not considered. The machine did not build the argument for them, but it revealed threads of reasoning they could then develop with creativity and judgment.

5. First principles still matter

The future lawyer’s toolkit will include powerful AI systems, no doubt. But those tools must be grounded in first principles. Chronologies, pleadings, submissions and advice still require human discernment: the ability to decide which facts are material, which arguments to press, and how to balance legal authority with ethical responsibility. AI can accelerate, but it cannot absolve.

For students, that means doing the hard work now: reading cases, building doctrinal fluency, and cultivating the habit of questioning. For practitioners, it means embracing



AI as an assistant while retaining ultimate accountability for every word and every judgment.

6. A partnership, not a replacement

The real future is not one where machines displace lawyers, but where they empower them. AI provides speed and breadth; lawyers provide judgment, empathy and advocacy. Together, they can create a profession that is not only more efficient but also more creative, humane and just.

The challenge is not whether to adopt AI, but how. The answer, I suggest, lies in balance: scepticism without fear, innovation without abdication, and a relentless commitment to the values that define the law.