

BranchED AI Compass

Domain-to-Practice Guide

Domain 2

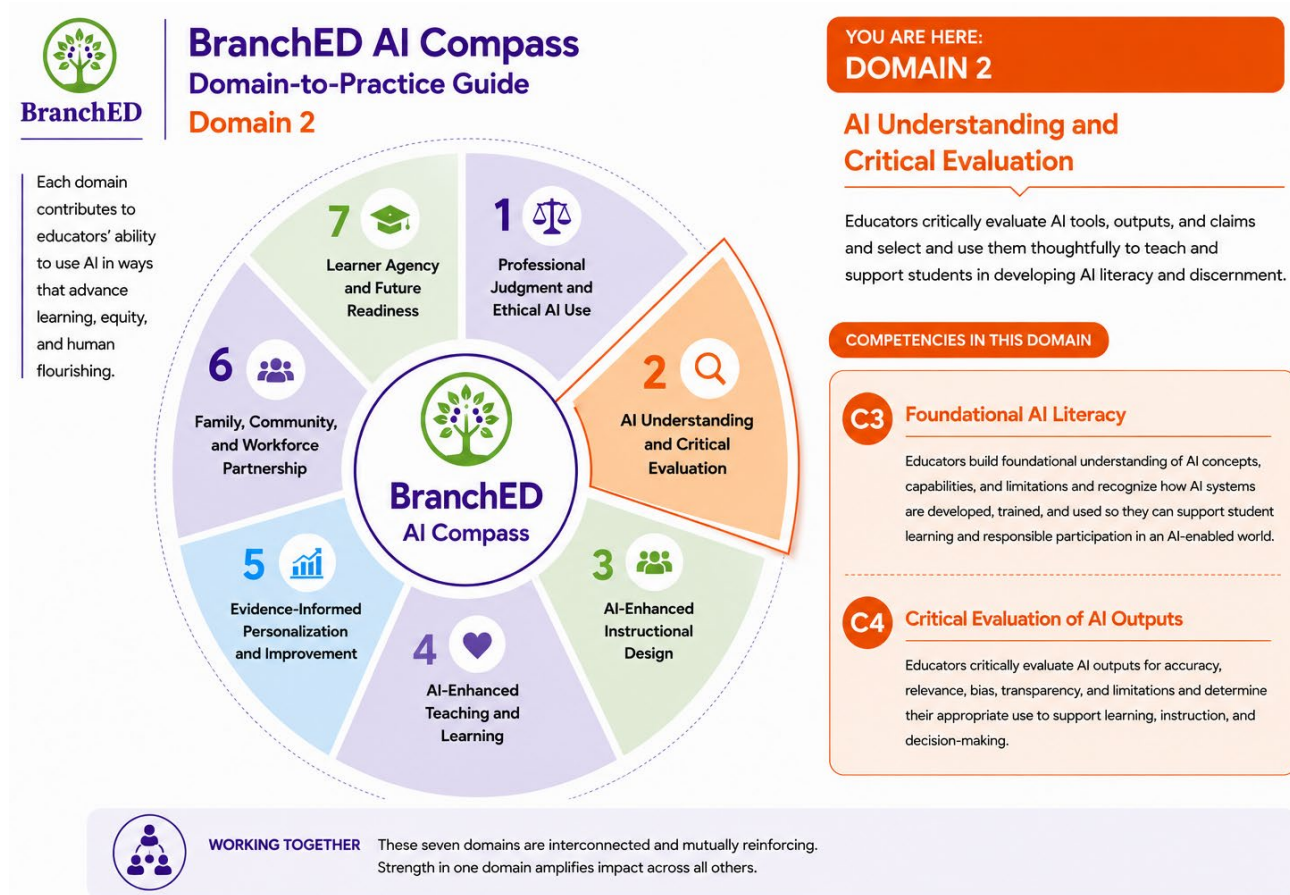
This guide¹ helps teacher educators support teacher candidates' (TCs) readiness for an AI-enabled world. It translates the BranchED AI Compass domain and competency language into concrete learning experiences, evidence sources, and course- and clinical-design decisions that teacher educators can incorporate into existing preparation experiences. The sections below show how the domain's competencies work together and provide practical guidance to help TCs develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and professional judgment reflected in the AI Compass.

How the Competencies Work Together

The competencies within this domain are distinct but interdependent. Foundational AI Literacy helps TCs understand, at an appropriate professional level, how AI systems are developed, trained, and used and why their outputs have limitations. Critical Evaluation of AI Outputs applies that understanding to the work of checking accuracy, bias, quality, developmental appropriateness, and relevance. Together, they prepare TCs to understand enough about AI to question it well and to recognize when additional evidence or expertise is needed.

A Note on Policy and Context

AI use takes place within institutional, professional, and educational contexts. Teacher educators and teacher candidates should be familiar with and adhere to applicable program, institutional, school, district, state, and other relevant policies and guidance related to AI use, data privacy, approved tools, academic integrity, and professional practice. The AI Compass and accompanying resources are intended to support the development of AI readiness and informed professional judgment within these contexts; they do not establish or supersede institutional or district policy.



¹ The development and design of this guide was assisted by ChatGPT.

Domain 2: AI Understanding and Critical Evaluation

Educators understand how AI works, recognize its strengths and limitations, examine the human and systemic factors that shape AI systems, and critically evaluate AI-generated content and recommendations.

This domain brings together competencies that help TCs understand how AI systems work and critically evaluate what those systems produce. Read the competencies as connected parts of informed professional practice: build enough foundational understanding to recognize how AI systems and their outputs are shaped, then apply critical judgment to evaluate AI-generated content, recommendations, and insights before using them to inform educational decisions.

Each competency section below explains the distinct contribution of that competency. The later domain-level sections consolidate development activities, readiness indicators, evidence sources, and Compass connections, so teacher educators can see how the competencies work together in practice.

Competency 3 | Foundational AI Literacy

AI Compass Competency

Foundational AI Literacy: Educators understand core concepts related to AI, machine learning, and generative AI, including how AI systems are developed, trained, and deployed. They recognize that AI systems are sociotechnical: their design and outputs are shaped by human choices, training data, embedded assumptions, institutional priorities, and commercial or organizational interests.

What This Means for Teacher Candidate Development

For TCs development, this means building enough foundational understanding of AI to make informed professional decisions without requiring technical expertise. TCs should understand, at an appropriate professional level, how AI systems learn from data and generate outputs; recognize that outputs may be incomplete, biased, or wrong; and understand that AI systems reflect human choices, assumptions, and priorities. They should also be able to explain core AI concepts accurately and accessibly to different audiences.

***Design Principle:** Understand enough about how AI works to question its outputs, explain its limits, and make informed educational decisions.*

In Practice

For TCs, this competency means having enough conceptual understanding of AI to use it thoughtfully and explain its capabilities and limitations without treating it as either magic or a simple search engine. TCs should understand, at an appropriate professional level, how AI systems learn from data, generate outputs, and why their responses can vary, even when given similar prompts, and may be incomplete, biased, or wrong.

Why This Matters

Educators cannot make sound decisions about AI if they do not understand what the technology is doing well enough to recognize its limits. Foundational literacy helps TCs ask better questions, avoid overconfidence in outputs, explain AI appropriately to students and others, and know when additional expertise is needed.

What Teacher Candidates Need to Know & Understand

- AI is a broad category of systems designed to perform tasks associated with human cognition; machine learning and generative AI are related but distinct concepts within that landscape.
- AI systems are developed and trained using data, patterns, models, and design choices that influence what they can produce.
- Generative AI predicts and generates outputs based on learned patterns; fluent or confident language is not evidence that an output is accurate.
- AI capabilities, limitations, training data, interfaces, and deployment contexts vary across systems and change over time.

What Teacher Candidates Need to Practice

- Explaining core AI concepts accurately and in accessible language for different audiences, such as students, families, and colleagues.
- Distinguishing among AI capabilities, limitations, and common misconceptions in educational contexts.
- Connecting how an AI system is developed or trained to potential limitations in its outputs.

- Recognizing when their own understanding is insufficient and identifying what information or expertise they need before making a decision.

Competency 4 | Critical Evaluation of AI Outputs

AI Compass Competency

Critical Evaluation of AI Outputs: Educators critically analyze AI-generated content, recommendations, and insights for accuracy, bias, quality, developmental appropriateness, and instructional relevance.

What This Means for Teacher Candidate Development

For TCs development, this means learning not to accept AI-generated content, recommendations, or insights at face value. TCs need repeated opportunities to examine AI outputs for accuracy, bias, quality, developmental appropriateness, and instructional relevance; verify claims against credible and authoritative sources; and consider relevant evidence and their professional knowledge of students and context. They should also learn to recognize when they do not have sufficient expertise to evaluate an output and identify appropriate sources of additional information or expertise.

Design Principle: *Treat AI output as a claim to be examined, not an answer to be accepted.*

In Practice

For TCs, this competency means treating AI-generated output as something to interrogate rather than accept. TCs should be able to evaluate what an AI system produces against credible evidence, disciplinary knowledge, student context, and educational purpose, and recognize when they lack the expertise to make that judgment independently.

Why This Matters

AI-generated content can sound authoritative even when it is inaccurate, biased, incomplete, developmentally inappropriate, or poorly matched to a student or context. TCs need disciplined evaluation habits so that AI supports rather than distorts professional reasoning.

What Teacher Candidates Need to Know & Understand

- Fluent, detailed, or confident AI output may still contain factual errors, unsupported claims, omissions, stereotypes, or misleading recommendations.
- Evaluation should consider accuracy, bias, quality, developmental appropriateness, instructional relevance, and fit with the specific student and context.
- Credible evaluation often requires triangulating AI output with other evidence, sources, professional standards, or disciplinary expertise.
- Professional judgment includes recognizing the limits of one's own knowledge and seeking additional evidence or expertise when needed.

What Teacher Candidates Need to Practice

- Checking AI-generated claims, recommendations, or materials against credible sources and relevant evidence.
- Identifying bias, missing perspectives, assumptions, and developmental or contextual mismatches in AI outputs.
- Accepting, rejecting, or revising AI-generated content and explaining the evidence and reasoning behind the decision.
- Recognizing when they are not qualified to evaluate an output and identifying an appropriate source of additional expertise.
- Evaluating AI-generated instructional content against credible and authoritative sources, including relevant standards, high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), and content-area expertise.

Ways to Develop the Domain

Teacher educators can develop this domain by giving TCs repeated opportunities to apply the connected competency practices. The experiences below show how each contributes to the domain as a whole.

Learning Experience	Primary Focus	How It Builds the Competency
Explain It Without the Jargon	C3	Ask TCs to explain generative AI to a student, family member, or colleague using accurate but accessible language and address common misconceptions.
From Data to Output	C3	Use a simple conceptual model to trace how training data, pattern learning, inputs, and system design contribute to an AI-generated output.
Capability/Limit Check	C3	Give TCs an educational task and an AI system description. Then have them identify what the system may do well, where it may fail, and what should be verified before use.

Learning Experience	Primary Focus	How It Builds the Competency
Find the Flaw	C4	Provide an AI-generated lesson, explanation, recommendation, or communication containing strong and problematic elements. TCs substantiate what should be retained, revised, or rejected.
Triangulate It	C4	TCs evaluate an AI-generated recommendation by comparing it with evidence of student learning, relevant authoritative sources or guidance, and their own professional knowledge of the student and instructional context before deciding whether or how to use the recommendation.
Expert Enough?	C4	Give TCs outputs from familiar and unfamiliar areas. They identify what they can responsibly evaluate themselves and when additional expertise is needed.

Indicators of Developing Readiness

These indicators describe how readiness across the domain may develop over time. They should be interpreted across multiple forms of evidence rather than as a rubric for scoring a single learning activity. Teacher educators can use evidence gathered across coursework, clinical experiences, simulations, reflections, and authentic performances to identify where TCs are developing and where additional practice opportunities may be needed.

Developmental Level	Observable Indicators
Emerging	Uses AI terminology loosely or treats AI as a single type of tool. Recognizes that AI can be wrong or biased but tends to evaluate outputs based on surface plausibility or general cautions.
Developing	Explains basic AI concepts and identifies specific strengths or limitations in outputs, but may inconsistently connect how systems work to accuracy, bias, evidence, context, or the limits of personal expertise.
Ready	Accurately explains core AI concepts in accessible language and systematically evaluates AI outputs using credible evidence, disciplinary knowledge, student context, and educational purpose. Seeks additional evidence or expertise when needed.
Extending	Applies foundational understanding to unfamiliar or changing AI systems, triangulates complex evidence, anticipates less visible limitations or bias, calibrates confidence to expertise, and helps others strengthen AI literacy and critical evaluation.

Possible Sources of Evidence

Teacher educators may draw on multiple sources to understand how a TC is developing this domain, including:

- Plain-language AI explanations or concept maps
- AI-system capability and limitation analyses
- Annotated AI outputs and source-verification records
- Comparison analyses and revised artifacts with rationales
- Scenario responses and oral defenses
- Reflections identifying limits of expertise and needed evidence

Try It in Your Course

Use these prompts to identify one practical opportunity to strengthen this domain in an existing course or clinical experience.

Where do these connected competencies already show up in my course or clinical experience?

My idea:

Where could TCs more explicitly connect how AI works with why its outputs require critical evaluation?

My idea:

What existing assignment, learning experience, or assessment could be adapted so candidates practice both AI literacy and evaluation?

My idea:

What evidence could I collect to understand whether TCs can explain AI accurately and critically evaluate its outputs?

My idea:



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