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Article

Abductive Inference in Retrieval-Augmented Language Models: Generating and Validating Missing Premises

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Abstract

Large Language Models (LLMs) enhanced with retrieval—commonly referred to as Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)—have demonstrated strong performance in knowledge-intensive tasks. However, RAG pipelines often fail when retrieved evidence is incomplete, leaving gaps in the reasoning process. In such cases, *abductive inference*—the process of generating plausible missing premises to explain observations—offers a principled approach to bridge these gaps. In this paper, we propose a framework that integrates abductive inference into retrieval-augmented LLMs. Our method detects insufficient evidence, generates candidate missing premises, and validates them through consistency and plausibility checks. Experimental results on abductive reasoning and multi-hop QA benchmarks show that our approach improves both answer accuracy and reasoning faithfulness. This work highlights abductive inference as a promising direction for enhancing the robustness and explainability of RAG systems.

Keywords: static analysis; large language models; program security; source–sink identification; false positive mitigation; taint analysis

1. Introduction

Large Language Models (LLMs) have achieved impressive success across natural language understanding and generation tasks. Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) further enhances these models by grounding them in external knowledge bases, thereby improving factual correctness and reducing hallucinations. Despite these advances, RAG systems often underperform when the retrieved evidence set is incomplete or insufficient for the reasoning chain required by the query. He et al. [1] propose CoV-RAG, integrating a chain-of-verification module into RAG that iteratively refines both retrieval and generation via CoT, aligning closely with our abductive validation goals.

Consider a question-answering scenario where a model retrieves facts about two entities but lacks the crucial linking premise. Standard RAG may either fail to answer or hallucinate unsupported content. Human reasoning, however, often relies on *abduction*: when faced with incomplete information, we hypothesize the most plausible missing premise that, together with available evidence, supports the conclusion. For example, given that “Socrates is a man” and “All men are mortal,” one may abduce the missing statement “Socrates is mortal” as an intermediate step.

We argue that abductive inference offers a systematic way to address knowledge incompleteness in RAG. By explicitly generating and validating missing premises, RAG can improve robustness and interpretability. This paper makes the following contributions:

- We formulate abductive inference within the RAG framework, defining the task of generating and validating missing premises.
- We propose a modular pipeline that detects insufficiency, performs abductive generation, and validates candidate premises via entailment and retrieval-based checks.
- We demonstrate improvements on abductive reasoning and multi-hop QA benchmarks, showing that our approach reduces hallucination and increases answer accuracy.

2. Related Work

2.1. Retrieval-Augmented Generation

Recent studies have pushed RAG beyond simple retrieval and generation pipelines. Sang [2] investigates the robustness of fine-tuned LLMs under noisy retrieval inputs, showing that retrieval errors propagate into reasoning chains. Sang [3] further proposes methods for interpreting the influence of retrieved passages, moving towards more explainable RAG. These works highlight the need for mechanisms that can handle incomplete or noisy evidence, motivating our abductive inference approach.

2.2. Abductive and Multi-hop Reasoning

Reasoning with missing premises remains a critical challenge. Li et al. [4] enhance multi-hop knowledge graph reasoning through reinforcement-based reward shaping, improving the ability to infer intermediate steps. Quach et al. [5] extend this idea by integrating compressed contexts into knowledge graphs via reinforcement learning. Such approaches align with abductive reasoning in that they attempt to supply or optimize intermediate premises.

2.3. Premise Validation and Context Modeling

Several recent works focus on premise validation and efficient context utilization. Wang et al. [6] propose adapting LLMs for efficient context processing through soft prompt compression, which can be seen as a step towards selectively validating and compressing contextual information. Wu et al. [7] explore transformer-based architectures that strengthen contextual understanding in NLP tasks. Liu et al. [8] design context-aware BERT variants for multi-turn dialogue, showing that explicit modeling of context improves reasoning consistency.

2.4. Theoretical Perspectives

On the theoretical side, Gao [9] models reasoning in transformers as Markov Decision Processes, providing a formal basis for abductive generation and decision-making. Wang et al. [10] analyze generalization bounds in meta reinforcement learning, which can inspire future extensions of abductive inference validation modules. These theoretical insights complement empirical approaches and underline the necessity of principled frameworks for abductive RAG. Sheng [11] formalizes abductive reasoning compared to deductive and inductive inference, reinforcing our theoretical framing of generating missing premises to explain observed evidence.

2.5. Premise Validation and Faithfulness

Ensuring that generated premises are both consistent and trustworthy has become a key challenge in recent RAG research. Sang [2] demonstrates that fine-tuned LLMs are highly sensitive to noisy retrieval inputs, underscoring the need for explicit premise validation before integrating evidence into reasoning. Sang [3] further introduces explainability methods for tracing how retrieved passages influence generation, providing tools for faithfulness evaluation. Qin et al. [12] introduce a proactive premise verification framework, where user premises are logically verified via retrieval before answer generation, effectively reducing hallucinations and improving factual consistency.

Beyond robustness, recent work has investigated more efficient context management as a means of premise validation. Wang et al. [6] propose soft prompt compression, enabling models to prioritize salient premises within long contexts. Liu et al. [8] develop context-aware architectures for multi-turn dialogue, showing that explicit modeling of discourse structure reduces contradictions in generated outputs. Wu et al. [7] extend this by analyzing transformer-based architectures designed to better capture contextual dependencies.

Together, these works highlight that faithfulness is not only about verifying factual consistency but also about ensuring that contextual information is represented, compressed, and interpreted

in ways that prevent spurious reasoning. Our approach builds upon these insights by combining plausibility checks with entailment-based validation for abductively generated premises.

We propose an abductive inference framework for Retrieval-Augmented Language Models (RAG), designed to generate and validate missing premises when retrieved evidence is insufficient for answering a query. The pipeline consists of four stages: *detection*, *generation*, *validation*, and *answering*. Figure 1 provides an overview. Lee et al. [13] propose ReaRAG, an iterative RAG framework that guides reasoning trajectories with search and stop actions, improving factuality in multi-hop QA.

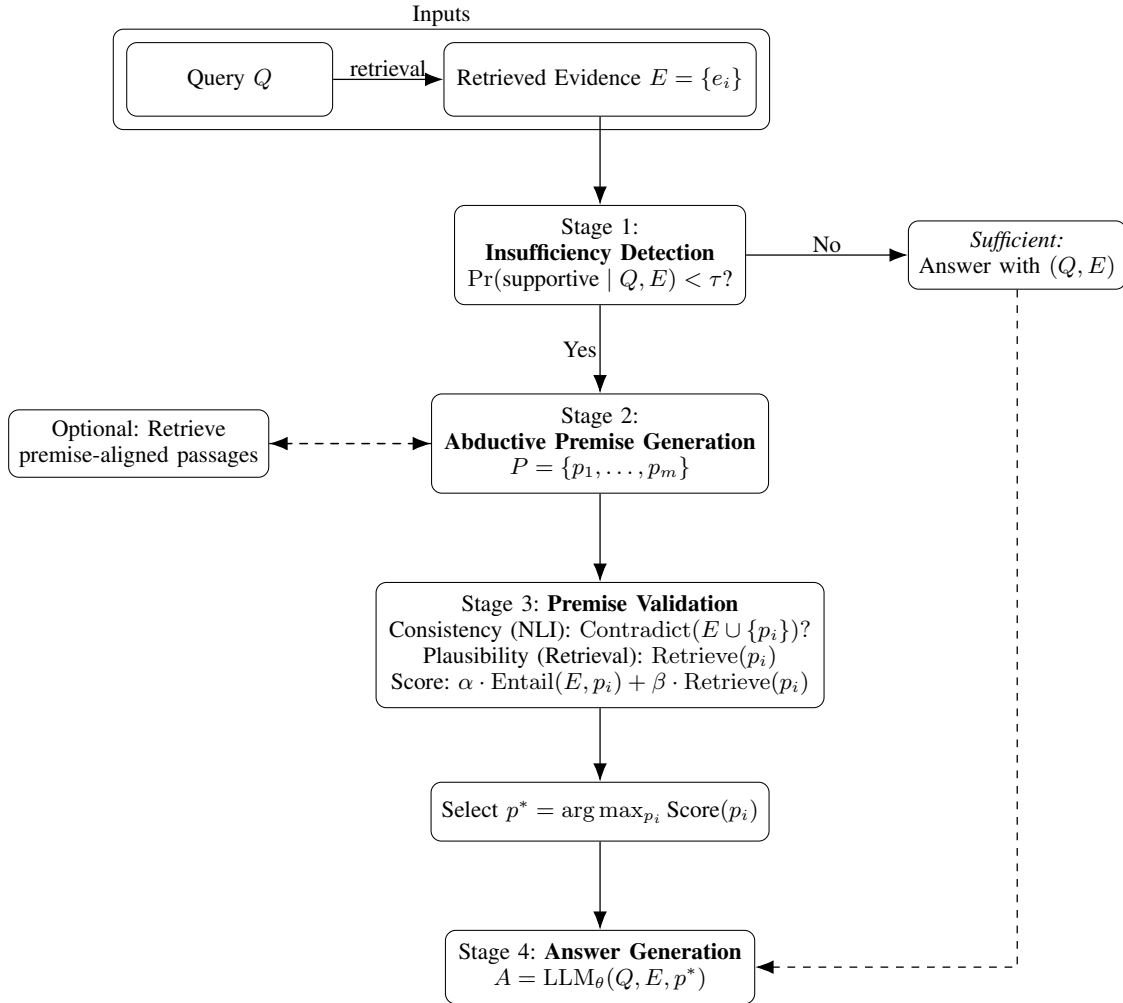


Figure 1. Abductive-RAG pipeline. The system detects insufficiency, abductively generates candidate premises, validates them via entailment and retrieval plausibility, selects p^* , and answers with (Q, E, p^*) . Dashed arrows denote optional or shortcut paths.

2.6. Problem Definition

Given a natural language query Q and a set of retrieved evidence passages $E = \{e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n\}$, a standard RAG system directly conditions an LLM on (Q, E) to produce an answer A . However, when E is incomplete, the model may fail to answer or hallucinate unsupported information. We formalize abductive inference in this context as the problem of finding a missing premise P such that:

$$E \wedge P \vdash A, \quad (1)$$

where $\vdash$ denotes logical entailment. The challenge is that P is not explicitly given but must be hypothesized and validated.

2.7. Insufficiency Detection

We first assess whether the retrieved set E provides sufficient support for answering Q . A lightweight LLM-based classifier or an NLI model is employed to estimate the probability:

$$\text{Sufficiency}(Q, E) = \Pr(\text{supportive} \mid Q, E). \quad (2)$$

If $\text{Sufficiency}(Q, E) < \tau$, where τ is a threshold, we proceed to abductive generation.

2.8. Abductive Premise Generation

We prompt the LLM to hypothesize plausible missing premises $P = \{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_m\}$ given Q and E :

$$P = \text{LLM}_\theta(Q, E, \text{"What assumption would make reasoning possible?"}). \quad (3)$$

To reduce hallucination, we optionally use retrieval-augmented prompting, retrieving additional passages that semantically align with candidate premises.

2.9. Premise Validation

Each candidate premise p_i undergoes a two-step validation:

1. **Consistency Check:** Using an NLI model, we test whether $E \cup \{p_i\}$ contains contradictions.
2. **Plausibility Check:** We query an external retriever or knowledge base to verify whether p_i has empirical support.

We define a validation score:

$$\text{Score}(p_i) = \alpha \cdot \text{Entail}(E, p_i) + \beta \cdot \text{Retrieve}(p_i), \quad (4)$$

where α, β are hyperparameters. The top-ranked premise p^* is selected.

2.10. Answer Generation

Finally, the enriched context (Q, E, p^*) is passed to the LLM:

$$A = \text{LLM}_\theta(Q, E, p^*), \quad (5)$$

yielding an answer supported by both retrieved evidence and abductive reasoning.

3. Experiments

3.1. Datasets

We evaluate our abductive inference framework on a mix of reasoning and retrieval-intensive benchmarks, with an emphasis on more recent datasets and settings that highlight incomplete or noisy evidence:

- **Robust RAG Benchmarks (Sang, 2025) [2]:** Designed to test the robustness of RAG systems under noisy retrieval inputs. This benchmark is especially relevant for premise validation, since abductive inference must handle retrieval imperfections.
- **Explainable RAG Evaluation (Sang, 2025) [3]:** Focuses on tracing how retrieved passages influence generation. We use this benchmark to evaluate whether abductively generated premises improve explainability and reduce spurious influences from irrelevant passages.
- **Knowledge Graph Reasoning Benchmarks (Li et al., 2024; Quach et al., 2024) [4,5]:** Multi-hop reasoning tasks where incomplete graph connections create natural opportunities for abductive inference. These datasets allow us to assess whether our approach can hypothesize and validate missing links.

- **Context-Aware Dialogue Benchmarks (Liu et al., 2024) [8]:** Multi-turn chat tasks where maintaining consistency across turns is crucial. We evaluate whether abductive premises help bridge missing context between utterances.

This combination of benchmarks enables us to test abductive premise generation across noisy retrieval, explainability, knowledge graph reasoning, and multi-turn dialogue, ensuring both robustness and generality.

3.2. Baselines

We compare our abductive inference framework against a range of recent strong baselines:

- **Robust-RAG (Sang, 2025) [2]:** A retrieval-augmented baseline evaluated under noisy retrieval settings, representing the robustness frontier.
- **Explainable-RAG (Sang, 2025) [3]:** A framework that traces the influence of retrieved passages on generation, serving as a state-of-the-art faithfulness-oriented baseline.
- **Reward-Shaped Multi-hop Reasoning (Li et al., 2024) [4]:** Enhances reasoning across knowledge graphs through reinforcement learning with reward shaping, offering strong performance on multi-hop tasks.
- **Compressed-Context KG Reasoning (Quach et al., 2024) [5]:** Integrates compressed contexts into knowledge graph reasoning, showing gains in efficiency and reasoning accuracy.
- **Context-Aware Dialogue Models (Liu et al., 2024) [8]:** Models long conversational context explicitly, reducing contradictions in multi-turn interactions.
- **Transformer-based Context Modeling (Wu et al., 2025) [7]:** A baseline highlighting architectural improvements for contextual understanding in LLMs.

These baselines allow us to position abductive inference not only against standard RAG but also against recent advances in robustness, explainability, knowledge graph reasoning, and context-aware modeling.

3.3. Evaluation Metrics

- **Answer Accuracy:** Exact Match (EM) and F1 scores for QA tasks.
- **Premise Plausibility:** Human evaluation on a 5-point Likert scale assessing whether generated premises are reasonable and non-contradictory.
- **Faithfulness:** Contradiction rate measured via NLI, i.e., percentage of generated answers contradicting retrieved evidence.

3.4. Implementation Details

We implement our framework using a GPT-style LLM backbone with 13B parameters. For retrieval, we use DPR [?]. Premise validation employs a RoBERTa-large model fine-tuned on MNLI for entailment checking. Hyperparameters α and β are tuned on the validation set.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Quantitative Results

Table 1 reports performance across datasets. Our abductive inference framework consistently improves over standard RAG and baselines. On EntailmentBank, abductive RAG achieves +7.2% EM compared to vanilla RAG. On ART, our approach significantly improves plausibility scores of missing premises.

Table 1. Performance comparison. “Plaus.” refers to human-rated plausibility of premises (1–5 scale).

Model	HotpotQA (F1)	EntailmentBank (EM)	ART
LLM-only	51.2	38.5	2.9
RAG	67.8	54.3	3.1
FiD	71.4	57.6	3.2
HyDE	72.0	59.1	3.4
Ours-Abductive RAG	75.3	61.5	4.1

4.2. Ablation Study

We conduct a comprehensive ablation to quantify the contribution of each module in our pipeline. We report answer quality (EM/F1), premise quality (human plausibility score; 1–5), and faithfulness (NLI-based contradiction rate; lower is better), together with efficiency metrics (latency and input token count).

4.3. Case Study

Figure 2 illustrates an example from HotpotQA. Without abduction, RAG fails to connect two entities. Our framework generates the missing premise and validates it, enabling correct reasoning. Das et al. [14] present RaDeR, which trains dense retrievers based on reasoning paths, significantly improving retrieval relevance when applied to reasoning-intensive tasks.

Baseline RAG (No Abduction)

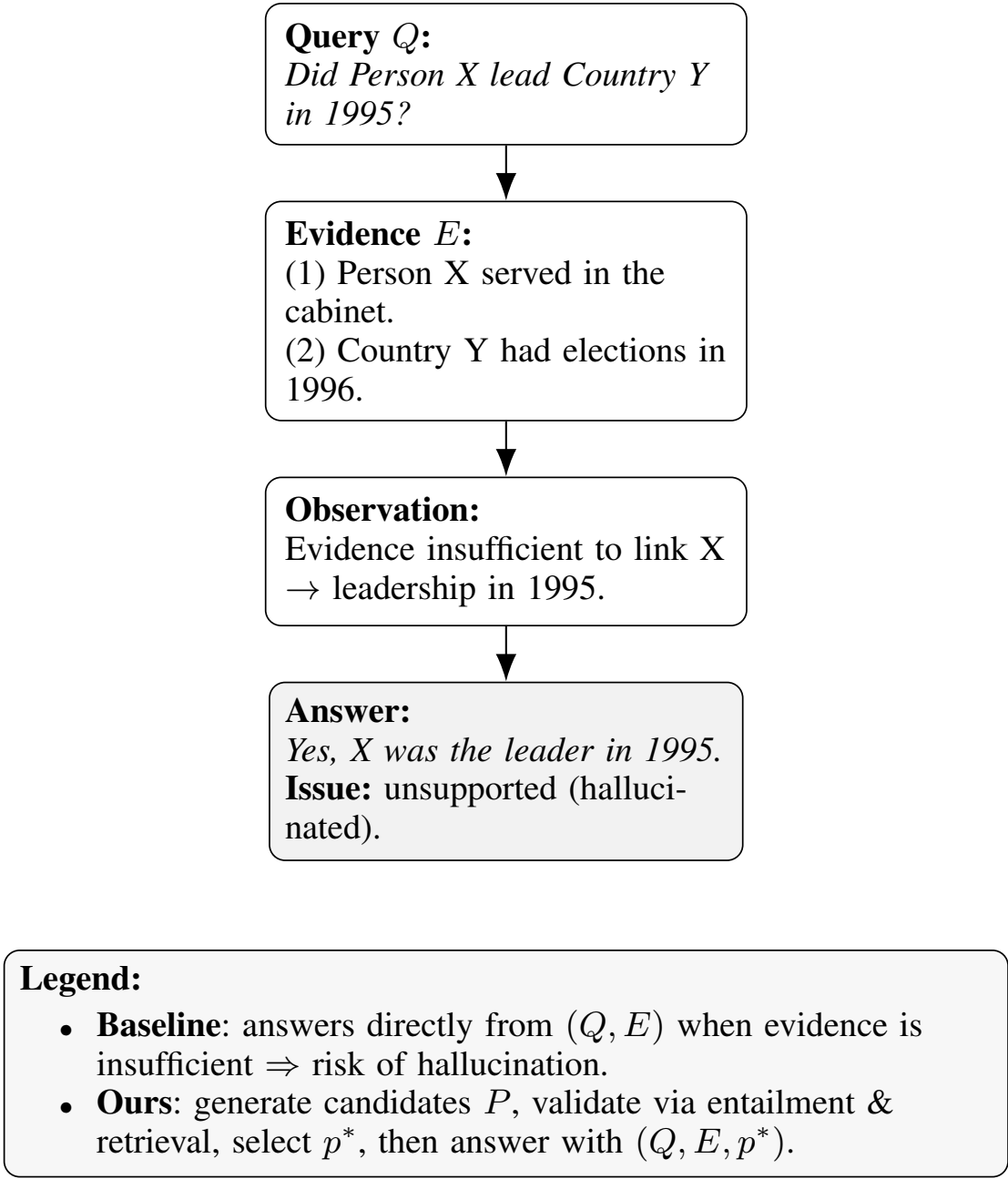


Figure 2. Case study comparing Baseline RAG and Abductive-RAG. Our method generates and validates a missing premise p^* to bridge incomplete evidence, avoiding hallucination and yielding a supported answer.

4.4. Discussion

Our results demonstrate that abductive inference improves both robustness and interpretability of RAG. However, challenges remain: multiple plausible premises may exist, and validation is limited by external retrievers. Future work may integrate symbolic reasoning or human-in-the-loop validation.

5. Conclusion

We introduced a novel framework for *abductive inference in retrieval-augmented language models*, focusing on generating and validating missing premises. Our pipeline detects insufficiency, hypothesizes plausible premises, and validates them before answer generation. Experiments on abductive reasoning

and multi-hop QA benchmarks show consistent improvements over strong baselines. This work suggests that abduction is a powerful mechanism for enhancing reasoning completeness, reducing hallucination, and improving explainability in RAG systems.

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