

A BEGINNER'S COURSE

AI for Absolute Beginners

What this book is about.

BY **DANG THAI**

A companion you can talk to

*The Star Trek computer.
JARVIS. KITT. Samantha.
Now sitting in your pocket.*



How to actually get the best out of it

*Ask clearly. Give context.
Refine the answer.
Double-check what matters.*

Complete digital course book

About this book

A complete beginner course in using AI well, written in plain English, with no assumed technical background. The goal isn't to turn you into a technical expert. It's to help you become confident enough to ask AI for help, improve the answer, verify what matters, and use it as a partner in your everyday life and work.

How we got here

Think back to before Google. If you needed to know something, you went to a library, asked a librarian, or pulled a book off a shelf. It worked, but it was slow, and you had to physically go somewhere.

Then Google changed the world. Suddenly the world's knowledge was in your pocket. A massive library at your fingertips, free, instant. It was a leap forward most people never thought possible.

But Google has its limits. It hands you ten blue links and says "*good luck*." You still have to click through pages, dodge ads, piece information together yourself, and decide who to trust. It's a phenomenal index, not a tutor, not a writer, not a thinking partner.

AI is the next wave. It's similar to a search engine in one way (both help you find answers) but very different in another. AI is conversational. It doesn't just hand you links; it talks with you, asks clarifying questions, summarizes, drafts, explains, and adapts to *you*. It's less like a search box and more like a very knowledgeable friend who is always available.

You've already imagined this

For decades, movies and TV shows have hinted at exactly this kind of helper. The talking computer in *Star Trek* ("Computer, what's the status of...?"). KITT, the conversational car in *Knight Rider*. JARVIS, the calm assistant who runs Tony Stark's life in *Iron Man*. Samantha, the AI partner in *Her*. Even Siri and Alexa, small early steps toward the same idea.

What used to be science fiction is now sitting in your browser, your phone, and your pocket. The thing those characters had (a knowledgeable companion you can simply talk to) is what modern AI is becoming. This book is about learning to use that companion well.

Why a manual matters

AI is a tool. Like any tool (a chef's knife, a car, a power drill), getting value from it depends on three things: **knowing what it is, knowing what it can and can't do, and knowing how to use it.** That's the entire purpose of this manual.

And here's the bigger picture: AI is becoming part of work, school, healthcare, government, banking, and daily life. People who know how to use it well will get more done, learn faster, and feel less stuck. People who don't will fall behind, not because they lack ability, but because they never learned the basics. This book is the basics.

How to use the chapters

1

Understand, then revisit.

Read each chapter once for understanding, then come back to it whenever you hit something similar in real life. The repetition is how it sticks.

2

Try every "Try these prompts" box.

A *prompt* is just what you type to AI. Each box gives you ready-made ones to try. Under two minutes each. The course works through your hands, not just your eyes.

3

Build your library as you go.

When a prompt works, save it. By the end you'll have your own personal toolkit.

IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE

AI is useful, but it is not automatically correct. Verify important information, especially anything involving health, money, law, safety, employment, or major life decisions. We'll come back to this in Chapter 14.

What ties the chapters together. The book teaches one simple way to ask AI clearly, introduced in Chapter 7, and then keeps applying it to different situations. Combine it with two habits that come up again and again, *iterating* (which means going back and forth with AI until the answer is right, covered in Chapter 11) and *verifying* (which means double-checking anything important before you trust it, covered in Chapters 13 and 14), and you have the spine of everything else.

A NOTE TO COME BACK TO: USE THIS MANUAL WITH AI

If you have this book as a PDF, you can upload it into your AI chat once you've signed in (Chapter 2 walks you through that). Most AI tools can read uploaded files. Once you can, ask things like:

- *"I've uploaded a beginner AI course book. Summarize Chapter 7 for me."*
- *"Quiz me on what I just read in Chapters 5 and 6."*
- *"Find every prompt in this book related to writing emails and put them in one list."*
- *"I'm stuck on the idea of context. Explain it again using a different example."*

Your AI tutor, the manual it's tutoring you with, and you, all in one place. Bookmark this page and come back once you're set up.

One thing that matters more than any technique: going back and forth

Beginners think AI is a vending machine. You put in a question, you get an answer, and that's the result. If the answer is bad, AI must not be very good.

That's the wrong way to look at it. **The first answer is rarely the final answer.** The real skill is the back-and-forth: you ask, AI replies, you read what it gave you, you tell AI what's off, it tries again, you ask for one more change, and a few rounds in you have something useful. Two or three rounds is normal. Five rounds isn't unusual on harder problems. (You'll also hear this called *iterating*, that's just the technical word for the same thing.)

Once you accept that AI is a conversation and not a search box, everything in this book gets easier. We come back to this loop explicitly in Chapter 11.

And one more thing: how you ask shapes what you get

The way you set up a question shapes the answer you get. Ask *"why is this idea great?"* and AI will list reasons it's great. Ask *"what could go wrong with this idea?"* and AI will list problems. Same topic, two completely different answers, just because you set it up differently.

This is one of the quietest superpowers in the whole course. We come back to it properly in Chapter 6, where you'll learn the technical word for it (*framing*) and how to use it on purpose.

A note from the author

Full disclosure: I had AI help me structure and organize this book. (Of course I did, it would be weird if I didn't.) But everything inside it, every framework, every prompt, every "watch out for this," every "here's what beginners get wrong", comes from *my own* experience and learning. I've spent a lot of time using AI for real work, helping other people get past their first awkward sessions, hearing where they get stuck, and watching the same pain points show up over and over. This book is the distilled version of all of that, written so the next person doesn't have to figure it out the hard way.

If something here saves you time or makes AI click for you, that's the goal.

Dang Thai

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PART 1

Confidence and Foundations

Four chapters to name what AI actually is, get logged in, take the fear out, and shift your mindset from intimidated to curious. Get the foundations right and the rest of the book lands easily.

Understanding AI and the Tools to Use

A plain-English starting definition, plus a tour of the main AI tools you'll see in the wild, so you can pick one and get going.

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is software that can perform tasks that normally require human thinking, like writing, explaining, summarizing, organizing, and making suggestions.

For this course, just think of AI as *a digital assistant you can talk to in normal language*.

What is generative AI?

Generative AI is AI that creates useful content from your instructions. It can write, explain, summarize, organize, brainstorm, draft, translate, code, and convert messy ideas into clear ones.

The simple version: *generative AI makes things*.

IMPORTANT CAUTION

Generative AI is very good at producing language. That doesn't always mean it's producing truth.

Fluent does not always mean factual. You'll see this idea repeated throughout the course because it's the single most important thing to remember.

What is "natural language"?

Natural language just means normal human language, the way you'd actually speak, write, ask, or explain. With AI, your words become the interface. You don't need code, special syntax, or jargon.

But "natural" doesn't mean "vague." AI works best when normal language is paired with clear context. You don't need to speak like a computer. You need to speak *clearly* like a human.

The main AI tools you'll see

You'll hear several names. The good news: they all work the *same way* at the surface. If you can use one, you can use any of them. The skill you build in this course transfers across all of them.

Here's what they all have in common

Every modern AI chat tool follows the same basic layout. Once you've seen one, the others stop feeling intimidating.

- **A message box at the bottom**, where you type, paste, or speak your question.
- **A response area above it**, where the conversation appears, your messages on one side, AI's replies on the other.
- **A left-hand sidebar with chat history**, a running list of every past conversation. Click any one to jump back in. Most tools let you rename, pin, search, or delete chats from this sidebar.
- **A "new chat" button**, usually a "+" symbol or "New chat" link at the top of the sidebar, to start fresh.
- **An attach button inside the message box**, a paperclip or "+" to upload files, photos, screenshots, PDFs, and (in many tools) spreadsheets.
- **A microphone button**, for voice instead of typing (more on this in Chapter 2).
- **A "stop generating" button**, appears while AI is replying, lets you stop a bad answer mid-stream so you don't waste time waiting.
- **An "edit" or "regenerate" option**, hover over a message and you'll often see icons to edit your last question, regenerate the answer, or copy the AI's reply with one click.
- **A settings or profile menu**, usually a circle with your initial in the corner, for account, theme (light/dark mode), and preferences.
- **A search box for past chats**, in newer tools, lets you find that one conversation from three weeks ago about your tax letter.

That's it. There are decorative differences (colors, button shapes, where the sidebar lives, the same tool on your phone versus on a computer) but the bones are the same. If you can text someone, you can use any of these.

PRO TIP: AI SPEAKS YOUR LANGUAGE

Every major AI chat tool (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity, Microsoft Copilot) understands and responds in dozens of languages. You can write to it in Spanish, Vietnamese, French, Mandarin, Arabic, Portuguese, Tagalog, almost any language you can think of, and it will reply in the same one. You can also mix: write in English, ask AI to reply in your first language, or vice versa. Useful for translating an email, helping a parent understand a letter, or just learning more comfortably.

Quality is best in widely-used languages and gets weaker for languages with less online text, but for the most common 30 to 50 languages, the experience is genuinely strong. Try it: ask AI a question in your most comfortable language and see how it feels.

The most common ones you'll hear about

One sentence each, just so the names are familiar:

- **ChatGPT** (made by OpenAI). The most widely used; many people say "ChatGPT" when they mean "AI" in general.
- **Claude** (made by Anthropic). Another major chat assistant, known for thoughtful long-form writing.
- **Gemini** (made by Google). Lives inside Google products like Gmail, Docs, and Search.
- **Perplexity**. Built around showing sources for every answer; useful when you want to verify what AI tells you.
- **Microsoft Copilot**. Lives inside Windows and Microsoft Office apps like Word, Excel, and Outlook.

These are the names. Don't worry about choosing the "best" one. Pick whichever you can sign up for in two minutes. You can always try another later. Features, prices, and limits change all the time, so the smart move is to learn the fundamentals (which is what this course is for) and let the tools come and go.

Which one should I pick? If you're stuck: ChatGPT is the easiest place to start because most beginner content online is written about it. But honestly, the skill you build here works on any of them. Pick the one you can log into right now.

KEY TAKEAWAY

All AI chat tools look and work nearly the same. Pick one, learn the fundamentals, and the skill transfers. The tool is not the skill. *Asking well* is the skill.

Basic Tool Setup and Navigation

The practical interface skills most AI courses skip. How to log in, where the message box is, when to upgrade, and how to handle voice and copy-paste.

Your first five minutes

If you've never opened an AI tool before, this is the on-ramp. The names you read about in Chapter 1 (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and others) all live online. You don't install anything. You just visit a website and sign in. Here's how to get there without panicking.

1. **Open your web browser.** Chrome, Safari, Edge, Firefox, anything you already use. If you can read email or check the news, you have what you need.
2. **Search for the AI by name.** Type the name into Google (or whichever search engine you use). For example, search for "ChatGPT" or "Claude AI" or "Gemini AI". The first result is almost always the official site. If you're not sure which one to start with, try "ChatGPT", it's the most widely used and the most beginner-friendly.
3. **Click the official link.** The website will usually have the company's name in the address bar (for example, *openai.com* for ChatGPT, *anthropic.com* or *claude.ai* for Claude, *google.com* for Gemini). If the address looks unrelated, go back and try the next result.
4. **Look for a "Sign up" or "Get started" button.** It'll be near the top of the page or in the middle. The exact wording changes from tool to tool and from year to year, but one of those phrases is almost always there.
5. **Sign in with an account you already have.** Most AI tools let you sign in with your Google, Apple, or Microsoft account, no new password needed. That's the easiest path. If you'd rather use email and a password, that option is usually there too.
6. **You're in.** You'll see a big empty space and a box at the bottom that says something like "Send a message" or "Ask anything". That's where you type. Try: "Hi! I'm brand new to AI. Can you give me a friendly tour of what you can help me with?" Press Enter or click the send arrow. You're now using AI.

Why we used search instead of giving you a direct link. Tools change. Sites get redesigned. URLs change. Companies launch new products and retire old ones. The official sign-up button might be in a different place by next year. But searching for the tool by name and clicking the top result is a skill that'll keep working forever. When in doubt, search.

KEEP YOURSELF SAFE

Stick to the official sites of the tools mentioned in Chapter 1. There are lookalike sites that copy real AI brands to steal logins or money. The official sites rank at the top of search results and have the company name in the address bar. If something looks off (weird domain, broken English, asks for payment up front for a "free" tool), close the tab and search again.

Creating an account and starting a chat

Every AI tool works the same way at the surface: you create an account, log in, find the message box, and type. After your first message, you're in a conversation. Most tools let you start a new chat, see your old chats in a sidebar, and rename them so you can find them later.

What to look for the first time you log in

- Where to sign up or log in.
- Where the message box is (usually at the bottom).
- How to start a new chat (usually a "+" or "New chat" button).
- How to find previous chats (usually a sidebar or history menu).
- How to rename or organize chats if the tool allows it.
- How to sign out safely on a shared device, so the next person who uses it doesn't see your conversations.

TRY THESE PROMPTS AFTER YOU'VE LOGGED IN FOR THE FIRST TIME

- *"I'm brand new to AI and just signed up. Give me a friendly tour of what you can help me with. Use real-life examples I might actually need."*
- *"What kinds of tasks are you best at? Give me five examples I could try today, with one sample prompt for each. Keep it beginner-friendly."*

Free vs. paid versions

Simple rule: start free. Only upgrade when AI is saving you enough time, money, or stress to justify the cost.

Paid plans usually add: higher usage limits, stronger models (a "model" is the AI engine doing the thinking; paid plans usually give you access to a smarter or more recent one), file uploads, image generation, voice features, deeper research, memory, and workspace tools. The exact details depend on the provider and change often.

TRY THIS PROMPT

- *"Compare free vs paid plans for [tool name, e.g. ChatGPT] in simple language. Use the web to find current pricing if you can. Tell me what features the paid plan adds and when it's worth upgrading for someone just starting out."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

Don't pay for everything at once. Start with one tool and one real use case.

Voice input for slow typers

Most AI tools let you press a microphone icon and just talk. This is a game-changer if you type slowly, misspell often, or have trouble organizing thoughts on a keyboard. Speak naturally. Ramble. Then ask AI to clean up what you said.

TRY THESE VOICE PROMPTS (PRESS THE MIC ICON, SPEAK THE WORDS AFTER THE COLON)

- *"I'm going to ramble for a minute about [topic, e.g. my plan for the kitchen reno]. Just listen, don't interrupt. When I'm done, organize what I said into clear notes with headings."*
- *"I'm going to dictate a rough idea for an email to [person, e.g. my landlord about the leaking sink]. Listen, then turn it into a clear, polite email I can send."*
- *"I just talked through [problem or decision]. Pull out the main points and turn them into a short to-do list I can actually act on this week."*

PRO TIP: LEARN BY TALKING, NOT TYPING

Voice mode unlocks the most underrated way to use AI: **treat it like a conversation with a knowledgeable friend.** Take your phone for a walk and discuss a topic out loud. Talk to AI while you're doing dishes, folding laundry, driving, or commuting. Hands busy, mind free, and you're learning faster than you ever could by typing.

This is how you turn dead time into *thinking time*. Half an hour of voice conversation about a topic teaches you more than an hour of reading about it. Once you try it, it's hard to go back to typing for everything.

KEY TAKEAWAY

You don't need to type well to use AI. You can talk to it. The conversations are often better than the typed ones.

Copy, paste, upload, save

Information moves *into* AI and *out of* AI. The basic skills:

- Copy text from an email, message, or document.
- Paste it into AI as part of your prompt.
- Upload a file or image if the tool supports it.
- Copy the AI's answer back into wherever you'll actually use it.
- Save useful answers to Notes, Docs, Word, Notion, or a folder.

SAFETY RULE

AI can draft. You still review before sending or using the output. We'll come back to this in Chapters 13 and 14.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The workflow is: copy in → ask → review → edit → copy out → save.

Getting Started Without Feeling Lost

Get past the part where you feel hesitant or unsure before you've even started. Confidence is a skill, not a personality trait, and this is where it starts.

Why confidence comes before everything else

You've now seen what AI is (Chapter 1) and you've logged into a tool (Chapter 2). You have the technology. The next thing in the way isn't technical, it's psychological. Most beginners aren't failing because they're incapable. They're afraid of asking a simple question, afraid of typing the wrong thing, or afraid of looking foolish. So they freeze. This chapter exists to get you past the freeze.

What you should know before you type anything

- You do not need perfect spelling.
- You do not need to know any computer code.
- You can ask very basic questions; AI doesn't judge.
- You can use your voice instead of typing.
- You can ask AI to slow down, simplify, or explain it again.
- You can ask the same question five different ways until it makes sense.

That's the whole skill on day one. Open any AI chat tool, find the message box, and try one of the prompts below. None of them require any prep or background.

How to read the prompt boxes in this book. When you see square brackets like **[topic]** or **[paste your draft]**, those are the parts *you* fill in. Delete the brackets and the example text and type your own words in their place. So *"Explain [topic, e.g. how email works] slowly..."* becomes something like *"Explain how a credit score works slowly..."* when you actually use it. Everything else in the prompt stays the same.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (COPY, PASTE, REPLACE THE BRACKETED BITS)

- *"I am brand new to AI. I want to learn about [topic, e.g. how email works]. Explain it slowly, like you would to a curious friend who's never heard of it."*
- *"I want to use AI to help me with [task, e.g. writing a thank-you note], but I don't know how to start. Ask me simple questions one at a time and guide me step by step."*
- *"I'm new to AI. Show me 5 things I could ask you to help with today, with one example prompt for each. Keep it beginner-friendly."*

The no-shame rule

There are no bad AI questions. A beginner can ask the same thing in five different ways until it lands, and AI will keep explaining without ever rolling its eyes. When you feel hesitant, that's exactly the moment to ask AI to teach more slowly and use everyday examples.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (USE THESE AFTER AI GIVES YOU AN ANSWER THAT DIDN'T CLICK)

- *"I still don't understand. Explain that again in even simpler language, as if I were 10 years old."*
- *"Give me a real-world example using something from everyday life, like cooking, driving, or going to the grocery store."*
- *"Pretend I know absolutely nothing about [topic]. Start from the very beginning."*

Practice (under 5 minutes). Open any AI tool. Ask it to explain something simple, like "What is a web browser?" Then ask it to explain the same thing using a real-life example. That's it. You've started.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The first win is not a perfect answer. The first win is asking without freezing.

The AI Mindset Shift

AI isn't an intimidating piece of technology. It's accessible support, if you treat it as a partner instead of a vending machine.

AI as your personal tutor

Instead of thinking *"I don't know this,"* try thinking *"I can ask AI to teach me."*

You can ask for beginner explanations, examples, analogies, quizzes, and corrections. You can repeat the lesson five times in five different ways and AI never gets impatient. Ask for the level you actually want, not the level you think you should want.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (REPLACE [TOPIC] WITH ANYTHING YOU WANT TO LEARN)

- *"Teach me [topic, e.g. how interest rates work] like I'm brand new. Use plain language, no jargon."*
- *"Give me a simple explanation of [topic], then a real-world example, then quiz me with three questions and tell me how I did."*
- *"I got this wrong: [paste the question and your answer]. Explain why I got it wrong in simple language, then give me a similar practice question to try."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI can patiently explain something again and again without judging the learner.

AI as a thinking partner

The bigger shift: AI is a way to *organize* thought, not *replace* it.

WHAT THIS MEANS

AI can help you compare options, find missing details, brainstorm ideas, and prepare questions. It widens what you see.

WHAT THIS DOESN'T MEAN

AI shouldn't replace your judgment, your values, or your responsibility. The decisions stay with you.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (REPLACE THE BRACKETS WITH YOUR REAL SITUATION)

- "I'm thinking about [decision, e.g. switching jobs / moving / buying a car]. Help me think it through. Don't decide for me. Ask me questions first to understand my situation."
- "Here's my plan: [paste plan]. What am I missing? What might go wrong?"
- "For this decision, [paste decision], give me the pros, cons, risks, and the assumptions I'm making. Don't tell me what to do, just help me see it more clearly."

KEY TAKEAWAY

Use AI to clarify your thinking, not surrender your judgment.

AI as a personal knowledge companion

AI can help you organize notes, ideas, goals, and project summaries. But it isn't automatically a permanent filing cabinet; only some tools support memory or saved files. The safe pattern: use AI to organize messy thinking, ask for a clean summary, then save that summary somewhere *you* control. Reuse it in future chats by pasting it back in.

TRY THESE PROMPTS

- "Here are my messy notes from [meeting / class / brainstorm]: [paste]. Organize them into clear categories with short headings."
- "Summarize this conversation we just had so I can save the important points and come back to them later."
- "Turn this information into a checklist I can actually use: [paste]."

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI can help turn scattered information into usable knowledge, but you own the file cabinet.

PART 2

Asking AI Well

The central skill of the whole course. What to ask. How to ask. When to ask. By the end of these three chapters you'll have the CRAFT formula, and you'll see it everywhere for the rest of the book.

What to Ask, How to Ask, and When to Ask

The single chapter that expands what you think AI can do, gives you a starter question structure, and trains the habit of reaching for AI before frustration becomes avoidance.

What to ask: the 11 jobs

Most beginners struggle to think of things to ask. Get familiar with this list. You don't need to memorize it, just recognize the patterns. Whenever a task fits one of these jobs, AI is worth a try.

Explain

Rewrite

Summarize

Organize

Compare

Plan

Draft

Learn

Practice

Research

Troubleshoot

TRY THESE PROMPTS (EACH ONE MATCHES ONE OF THE 11 JOBS ABOVE)

- "Explain [topic, e.g. how a mortgage works] in simple language with a real-life example."
- "Here are some messy notes from a meeting: [paste]. Turn them into a clear checklist with the action items at the top."
- "I'm trying to decide [decision]. Give me three options to consider, with pros and cons for each."
- "Something isn't working: [describe the problem]. Help me troubleshoot it step by step. Ask me questions if you need more info."

How to ask: the four-part structure

Before we get to CRAFT in Chapter 7, here's a beginner-friendly version with just four questions:

1. What do I need?
2. What is the situation?
3. Who is this for?

4. What kind of answer do I want?

Example: *"Help me write a short, polite email to my manager asking to leave 30 minutes early Friday because I have an appointment."*

That one sentence answers all four questions: what (an email), the situation (early leave Friday), who (the manager), what kind (short, polite).

TRY THIS TEMPLATE (FILL IN ALL FOUR BRACKETS, THEN SEND)

→ *"Help me write a [format, e.g. short email / text message / 3-bullet summary] for [audience, e.g. my boss / a teacher / my mother] about [situation, e.g. needing to reschedule Friday's meeting]. Make it [tone, e.g. polite and brief / warm / firm but kind]."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

Good asking is clear communication, not technical magic.

When to ask: the avoidance signal

The best skill is recognizing the moment to reach for AI *before* you give up or procrastinate. Train yourself to ask AI when you feel any of these:

If you feel...	Try this prompt
Confused	"I don't understand [topic]. Explain it in simple language with a real-life example."
Stuck	"I'm stuck on [task, e.g. starting my cover letter]. Ask me three questions to get me unstuck."
Overwhelmed	"I'm overwhelmed by [situation]. Give me the first three small steps I can actually take today."
Starting something	"I'm about to start [project / task]. Help me think it through. What am I missing?"
Writing something	"I need to write [type of message] but I don't know how to say it. Ask me what you need to know first."
Making a decision	"I'm deciding between [options]. Help me list pros, cons, risks, and alternatives. Don't decide for me."
Learning something	"Teach me [topic] like I'm brand new. Use a real example and quiz me at the end."
Preparing for a conversation	"I have a [type of] conversation coming up about [topic]. Help me prepare. Anticipate likely responses from the other person."
Reviewing your work	"Read this draft: [paste]. Tell me what's unclear, weak, or missing."

KEY TAKEAWAY

Before giving up, ask: *Can AI help me with this?* The answer is almost always yes.

Context Fundamentals

The most important skill behind better AI answers. Master this one idea and 80% of your AI problems disappear.

What context means

Context is the background information AI needs to give a useful answer. AI is not reading your mind. It responds based on the information, framing, and instructions you provide.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (USE THEM BEFORE YOU ASK THE REAL QUESTION, WHEN YOU'RE NOT SURE WHAT CONTEXT TO GIVE)

- "I want help with [task, e.g. writing a complaint letter / planning a birthday party / studying for a test]. Before you start, ask me any questions you need so you can give me a useful answer."
- "I want to ask about [topic] but I'm not sure what details matter. Ask me 3 to 5 short questions first, then I'll answer them and you can help me from there."

KEY TAKEAWAY

Better context creates better answers.

The seven kinds of context

Context type	Question to answer	Example
Goal	What am I trying to do?	I need to ask for a refund.
Audience	Who is this for?	This is for a customer service rep.
Situation	What happened?	The order arrived a week late.
Constraints	What limits matter?	Keep it under 100 words.
Tone	How should it sound?	Polite but firm.
Format	What shape should it take?	Short email.
Level	How advanced should it be?	Explain for a beginner.

Framing shapes the answer

The way you frame a question is one of the quietest, most powerful things you'll learn in this course. Same topic, different framing: you get a different answer. We mentioned framing briefly in the introduction; this is the chapter where it earns its weight.

If you ask *"Why is this idea great?"*, AI will likely continue that framing and tell you why it's great. Ask *"What could go wrong with this idea?"* and AI will list problems. Ask *"What would a thoughtful skeptic say?"* and AI will play that role. The question contains the frame. The frame contains the answer.

LEADING FRAME

Why is starting a YouTube channel a great idea for me?

AI will list reasons it's great.

BALANCED FRAME

Evaluate starting a YouTube channel objectively. Give me strengths, weaknesses, risks, assumptions, alternatives, and evidence I'd need.

AI will challenge and balance.

Try this experiment. Ask AI the same question twice with two different framings. "Why is X a good idea?" and then "Why is X a bad idea?" Watch how confidently AI answers both. Same AI, same model, two completely opposite answers, because *you* set the frame each time. This is the single best way to internalize why framing matters.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (USE THEM WHEN YOU WANT A BALANCED ANSWER INSTEAD OF AN AGREEABLE ONE)

- "Don't just agree with me. Here's my idea: [paste]. Challenge my assumptions, point out what I might be missing, and give me a balanced answer with strengths and weaknesses."
- "Evaluate this idea objectively: [paste]. Give me strengths, weaknesses, risks, assumptions, alternatives, and what evidence I'd need to make a good decision."
- "Reframe my question. I asked: [paste your original question]. What's a more balanced way I could have asked it?"

KEY TAKEAWAY

Every prompt frames the answer. AI will follow your framing unless you ask it to challenge the framing. We'll see this idea come up again in Chapters 11, 13, and 20.

AI is not a mind reader

VAGUE

Write an email.

USEFUL

Write a short, polite email to my manager asking if I can leave 30 minutes early Friday because I have a medical appointment. Keep it professional and not too detailed.

Practice. Take three vague prompts you might naturally type, and rewrite each by adding goal, audience, context, tone, and format.

How AI actually thinks (the basics)

You don't need a computer science degree to use AI well. But three small ideas will make every chapter that follows make more sense. Think of this as the "how the engine works" section of the manual, just enough to be a smarter driver. (*A more advanced course covers the deeper version of all of this.*)

1. AI predicts the next word

This is the strangest and most important thing to understand. **AI doesn't "know" answers the way you do.** It guesses the next word, over and over, based on patterns it learned from millions of books, articles, and conversations.

Imagine the text-message autocomplete on your phone, where it suggests the next word as you type. Now imagine an autocomplete that has read more than any human ever could, entire libraries, the whole internet, decades of writing. That's roughly what AI is doing. It's predicting the next word, then the next, then the next, until it has built an answer that sounds like what a knowledgeable person would say.

That's why AI is so good at *writing*. And it's also why it sometimes sounds confident even when it's wrong, it's predicting plausible language, not retrieving verified facts. We come back to this in Chapter 13 when we talk about hallucinations. *"Fluent does not mean factual."*

2. Tokens: the Lego blocks of AI

Before AI reads what you wrote, it chops your message into tiny pieces called **tokens**. A token is roughly a chunk of a word.

- A short word like "cat" is usually one token.
- A longer word like "unbelievable" might be three tokens (*un · believ · able*).
- Spaces and punctuation count too.

Picture them as Lego blocks. Every sentence you type becomes a stack of blocks. Every answer AI gives back is also a stack of blocks. The whole conversation, your messages, AI's replies, every back-and-forth, sits in one big pile of blocks.

Here's the catch: AI can only hold so many blocks at a time. That's the limit we'll talk about in Chapter 12 (the "context window"). When the pile gets too big, the oldest blocks fall off the bottom and AI starts to forget what was said earlier.

3. Compacting: making the pile smaller

If a conversation is getting long and you don't want to lose what you've worked on, you can ask AI to **compact** it: replace dozens of messages with one clean summary, then start a fresh chat with that summary pasted in. You're trading a tall, messy pile of blocks for one small, organized stack that says the same thing.

This is a habit worth keeping. We cover it properly in Chapter 12 under "handoff summaries."

TRY THIS PROMPT RIGHT NOW

→ *"Explain to me, like I'm 10 years old, what tokens are and why an AI conversation has limits. Use a real-world example."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI predicts words, works in token-sized blocks, and has a limited memory per conversation. You don't need more than that to use it well, but knowing this much explains 80% of the strange behavior you'll see.

Prompting and the CRAFT Formula

A prompt is just clear communication. CRAFT is the five-letter checklist that turns a vague thought into a usable AI request, and the spine of the rest of this course.

What is a prompt?

A **prompt** is what you type, say, paste, or upload to AI to tell it what you want. That's it. Prompting isn't typing perfectly, it's learning how to ask clearly enough that AI can help you. (Chapter 6 covered the seven kinds of context that should go into a prompt. CRAFT, in this chapter, is the way you remember to include them.)

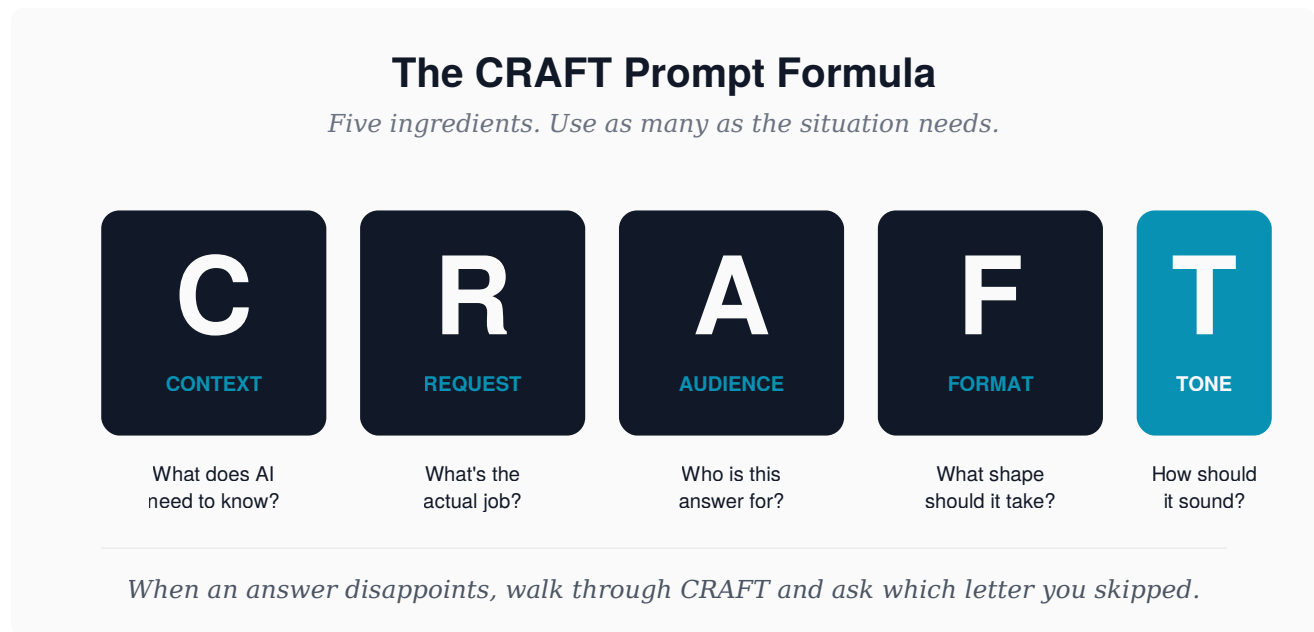
EXAMPLES OF THE SIMPLEST PROMPTS (EACH ONE PAIRED WITH WHAT TO ATTACH OR PASTE)

- "Explain [topic, e.g. how compound interest works] simply, like I'm new to it."
- "Help me write a polite email to [person] about [situation, e.g. asking for a refund on a late delivery]."
- "Here are my rough notes from [meeting / class / brainstorm]: [paste]. Turn them into a clear checklist."
- "[Attach a screenshot.] Look at this and explain what it's showing me, like I've never seen it before."

KEY TAKEAWAY

Prompting is structured communication with AI.

The CRAFT formula



CRAFT stands for **Context, Request, Audience, Format, Tone**. You don't have to label the parts. You just have to include them.

CRAFT in action

Context: I need Friday afternoon off for a medical appointment.

Request: Write an email asking for the time off.

Audience: My direct manager.

Format: Short email, four to five sentences.

Tone: Polite, professional, not over-explaining.

Combined into one prompt:

"I need Friday afternoon off for a medical appointment. Help me write a short, polite email to my manager. Keep it professional and not too detailed."

Practice. Pick one real message you need to write today: an email, a request, an explanation. Fill in the five blanks below, then combine them into one prompt the way the example above does:

Context: _____

Request: _____

Audience: _____

Format: _____

Tone: _____

Send the combined prompt to AI. Compare the result to what you'd have written cold. (A blank version of this worksheet is also in Appendix A if you want to print it.)

Prompt best practices

- **Start with the job.** What's actually being asked of AI?
- **Give context.** Background, situation, constraints.
- **State the audience.** Who's the answer for?
- **Ask for the format.** Email, list, table, short answer.
- **Set the tone.** Friendly, professional, firm, casual.
- **Give examples** when you have them.
- **Tell AI what *not* to do.** "Don't be salesy." "Don't add a closing."
- **Ask AI to ask first.** "Ask me five questions before answering."
- **Break big requests** into smaller steps.
- **Refine** with follow-up prompts. The first answer is rarely the final answer.

Pro move: give AI a role

Here's a technique that quietly changes everything: **tell AI who to be.** Start your prompt with something like "*Act as a...*" or "*You are a...*" and watch how the answer changes. This is another form of framing (Chapter 6); you're framing AI itself.

- **"Act as a patient elementary-school teacher."** AI explains gently, with examples, and checks for understanding.
- **"Act as a sharp newspaper editor."** AI cuts your draft, points out weak sentences, and tells you why.
- **"Act as a skeptical small-business advisor."** AI pushes back instead of cheerleading.
- **"Act as a friendly tax accountant explaining to a beginner."** AI translates jargon into plain English.
- **"Act as a job interviewer for a [role] position."** AI runs a practice interview with you.

Same AI. Same model. Five completely different conversations. We come back to roles in Chapter 15 with a wider menu of postures (teacher, coach, researcher, critic, evaluator). For now, just remember: telling AI *who to be* is one of the highest-leverage moves you can make.

TRY THESE PROMPTS

- "Ask me up to five questions about [topic / task] before you answer, so your response is actually useful."
- "Don't give me advice yet. First, organize the information I'm about to share into clear categories: [paste your messy info]."
- "Use simple language and avoid jargon. Pretend I'm explaining this back to a friend over coffee."
- "Give me three versions of [draft, e.g. this email]: friendly, professional, and firm. Label each one clearly so I can pick."
- "Act as a [role, e.g. patient teacher / skeptical editor / startup mentor] and help me with [task]."

KEY TAKEAWAY

The first prompt doesn't have to be perfect. You can improve the answer through follow-up prompts.

Bad prompts vs. better prompts

Resume example

WEAK

Help me with my resume.

BETTER

Help me rewrite my resume summary for a customer service job. I have five years of retail experience and want it to sound professional, reliable, and friendly.

Learning example

WEAK

What is inflation?

BETTER

Explain inflation in simple language for someone new to economics. Use a grocery store example and keep it under 200 words.

Business example

WEAK

Give me marketing ideas.

BETTER

Give me 10 low-cost marketing ideas for a beginner-friendly martial arts academy in downtown Toronto. The audience is adults who are nervous about trying martial arts. Keep ideas free or under \$200 each.

Practice. Take five vague prompts you might naturally write. Rewrite each one using CRAFT.

KEY TAKEAWAY

CRAFT is the spine of this course. The chapters that follow build on it, layer on it, and apply it to real situations.

PART 3

Modalities and Everyday Tool Use

AI is not just a typing box. You can paste, upload, photograph, dictate, search, and work with tables. These different ways of giving AI information are called modalities. These three chapters teach you how information actually moves in and out.

Modalities and Common AI Tools

A "modality" is just the kind of thing AI can work with. The more modalities you use, the more useful AI becomes, meet the INPUTS framework.

What is a modality?

A **modality** is the kind of thing AI can work with. You can type, talk, upload a picture, upload a document, use search, or work with tables. Modern AI tools can usually handle text, voice, images, documents, search, and structured information.

KEY TAKEAWAY

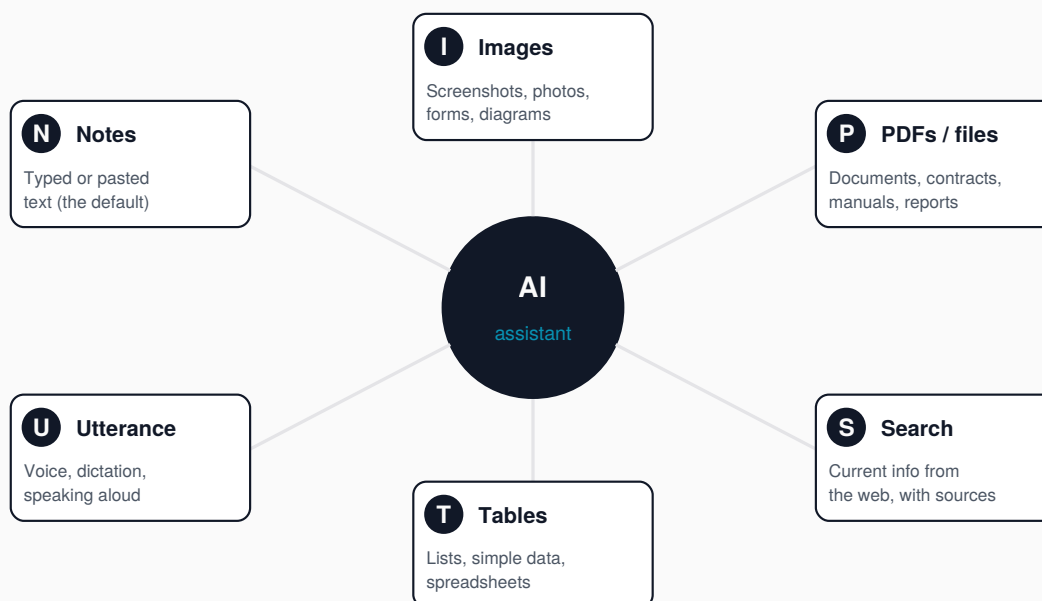
AI is not just a chatbot. It can read, write, listen, see, organize, research, and create.

The INPUTS framework

To make this memorable, group all the modalities under one acronym: **INPUTS**.

The INPUTS Framework

Six kinds of input. Pick the right one for the situation.



When to use each one

I: Images and screenshots

Use when describing it would take longer than showing it. Examples: explaining a screenshot, reading an error message, understanding a chart, or summarizing a diagram.

CAUTION

AI can misread small text, numbers, or dates in images. Important details should be checked against the original.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (ATTACH THE IMAGE FIRST USING THE PAPERCLIP ICON, THEN SEND THE PROMPT)

- *"Look at this screenshot and explain what's happening in plain language. What is this app or page asking me to do?"*
- *"Here's an error message I got: [attach screenshot]. Explain what it means and what I should try next, step by step."*
- *"This is a form I need to fill out: [attach screenshot or photo]. Walk me through which sections I need to complete and what each one is asking for."*

N: Notes (typed or pasted)

The default. Pasting messy notes, draft emails, or rough ideas, and asking AI to organize, polish, or rewrite them. Most of your AI life happens here.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (PASTE YOUR TEXT WHERE IT SAYS [PASTE])

- *"Rewrite this message so it sounds polite and professional. Keep my main point but soften the tone: [paste your draft]."*
- *"Here are my messy notes from [meeting / class / brainstorm]. Organize them into clear categories with short headings: [paste notes]."*
- *"Give me three different versions of this email, friendly, professional, and firm. Label each version clearly: [paste your draft]."*

P: PDFs and files

Use for: long documents you don't want to read end-to-end, contracts where you need to spot deadlines and risks, manuals you need a summary of, reports you need action items from.

CAUTION

For legal, medical, or financial documents, AI can summarize but should not replace qualified advice. Always verify key details against the original.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (ATTACH THE FILE FIRST, THEN SEND)

- *"I've attached a [type of document, e.g. lease / contract / manual / report]. Summarize it in plain English. Keep it under one page."*
- *"Read the attached document and pull out only: deadlines, payment terms, risks or warnings, and any actions I need to take. Skip the rest."*
- *"Answer my questions using only the document I attached. If the answer isn't in the document, say so, don't guess. My first question: [your question]."*

U: Utterance (voice)

Use voice when typing is the bottleneck. Speak naturally, ramble if you have to, then ask AI to organize what you said. This is a game-changer for people who type slowly or think faster than they type.

T: Tables and simple data (including spreadsheets)

Use to compare options, categorize expenses, spot patterns in small datasets, or turn an unstructured list into something you can scan.

About spreadsheets specifically: most AI tools now let you upload Excel files (.xlsx) or CSV exports from Google Sheets directly. You can ask AI to summarize what's in the file, clean up messy formatting, suggest formulas, explain a formula you don't understand, find patterns or outliers, or turn raw rows into a written summary. It's a beginner-friendly way to get more out of spreadsheets without learning advanced Excel.

For light, everyday spreadsheet help (budgets, expense tracking, simple reports, formula explanations), this is a huge time-saver. For heavier data analysis, custom dashboards, or anything where the numbers really need to be exact, you'll want a more advanced course or a real analyst. Save the deep stuff for later. The basics will already change how much you get out of a spreadsheet.

CAUTION

AI can miscount, misread, or guess at data. Important calculations should always be checked against the original spreadsheet.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (PASTE YOUR LIST OR ATTACH YOUR SPREADSHEET FIRST)

- *"Here's a messy list: [paste]. Turn it into a clean table with columns for item, category, price, and notes."*
- *"Here are my expenses for the month: [paste or attach]. Organize them by category and give me the total for each category."*
- *"I've attached a spreadsheet. Look it over and tell me anything unusual, surprising, or worth a closer look. Don't change the data, just point things out."*
- *"Explain what this Excel formula does in plain English, like I've never used spreadsheets before: =VLOOKUP(A2, Sheet2!A:C, 3, FALSE)"*
- *"In my spreadsheet, I want to [describe the calculation, e.g. add up all rows in column B where column A says 'Groceries']. Suggest a formula and explain how it works."*

S: Search (current information)

Use whenever the answer could have changed recently: prices, news, schedules, laws, current product details. Ask AI to include sources so you can verify.

Beginner rule: if the answer could have changed in the last six months, ask for current sources, or use a search-focused tool like Perplexity.

TRY THESE PROMPTS

- *"Search the web for current information about [topic, e.g. the best winter tires under \$200 in Canada]. Include 2-3 sources I can click."*
- *"What's the latest on [news topic / company / event]? Tell me what's confirmed, what's uncertain, and what I should double-check before relying on it."*
- *"Compare [product A] vs [product B] using current online reviews. Cite your sources and tell me if anything seems out of date."*

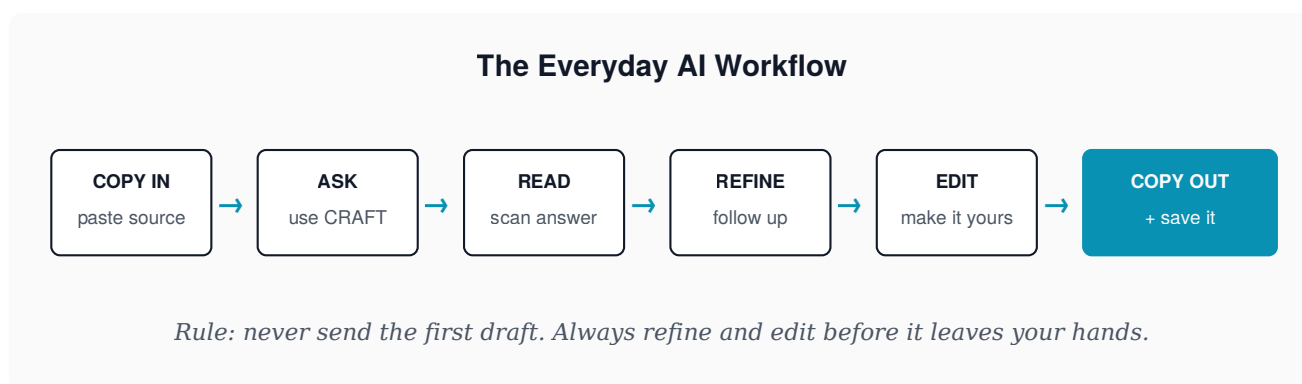
KEY TAKEAWAY

If you're only typing, you're using a fraction of what AI can do. Match the input to the situation.

Moving Information In and Out of AI

The practical workflow that turns AI from "something you tried once" into "something you use every day." Seven steps. Build the habit.

The everyday AI workflow



The seven steps

1. **Copy in.** Paste the source, an email you got, messy notes, a draft you're stuck on, a document.
2. **Ask.** Tell AI the job, using CRAFT.
3. **Read.** Don't react yet. Read the whole answer.
4. **Refine.** Follow-ups: "Make it shorter." "Less formal." "Focus only on the customer's main issue."
5. **Edit.** Make it sound like *you*. AI gets you 80% of the way; the last 20% is yours.
6. **Copy out.** Paste the final version where it needs to go.
7. **Save it.** If it was useful, save the prompt and the result somewhere outside the chat (we'll cover this in Chapter 21).

Copy and paste, the keyboard shortcuts. If "copy in" and "copy out" feel mysterious, here's the universal recipe. To **copy**: highlight the text by clicking and dragging across it, then press **Ctrl+C** on Windows or **Cmd+C** on Mac. To **paste**: click into the box where you want the text, then press **Ctrl+V** on Windows or **Cmd+V** on Mac. On a phone, tap and hold the text until it highlights, drag the markers to select what you want, tap "Copy," then tap and hold in the target box and tap "Paste." That's the entire skill. Once it's in muscle memory, the seven-step workflow above flows in a couple of minutes.

The rule: never send the first draft.

The first draft from AI exists to give you something to react to. It is not the final product. Treating it as the final product is the single most common beginner mistake.

DUE DILIGENCE IS YOUR JOB

AI doesn't know your situation, your relationships, or your reputation. **Never copy-paste an AI answer straight into an email, document, or message without reading it carefully first.** Check the facts. Check the tone. Check the names, dates, and numbers. Check that it actually makes sense for your situation. This step is non-negotiable. The rest of this course assumes you'll do it; we go deeper on it in Chapter 13 (when AI sounds confident but is wrong) and Chapter 14 (privacy and safety).

TRY THESE AS FOLLOW-UPS BEFORE YOU SEND ANYTHING AI HELPED YOU WRITE

- *"Read your draft above. Tell me if it sounds clear, respectful, and appropriate for [audience, e.g. my boss / a customer / my parent]. Flag anything that feels off."*
- *"Make your last draft shorter, ideally half the length, without losing the main point."*
- *"Give me three versions of your last draft: shorter, simpler, and more direct. Label each one so I can pick."*

Saving useful answers

The chat window is not a filing cabinet. Chats can be lost, deleted, or buried. If you want to keep a useful answer, copy it into something *you* control:

- Notes app (iPhone, Android, or desktop).
- Google Docs.
- Microsoft Word.
- Notion.
- A folder called "AI Prompts" and another called "AI Results."

What to save: useful prompts, final answers, summaries, learning notes, and project handoffs.

TRY THIS PROMPT AT THE END OF A USEFUL CHAT

→ *"Summarize the most useful parts of this conversation into a short note I can save for later. Include: my goal, the prompt that worked best, and the final answer. Format it so I can paste it into my notes."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

Copy in, ask, read, refine, edit, copy out, save. The same seven steps work for almost everything.

Making AI Sound More Human

The most common beginner complaint is "this sounds robotic." Here's how to fix it, with three small changes.

Why AI writing can sound generic

AI often defaults to safe, polished, slightly formal wording. It overuses words like "delve," "leverage," "moreover," and "in conclusion." It pads with exaggerated praise. It loves a thesaurus. The result: language that's grammatically correct but sounds like a corporate email no one would actually write.

How to fix it

Three small changes do most of the work:

1. Tell AI *who* the audience is.
2. Tell AI *how* you want it to sound.
3. Give AI an example of the style you want, if you have one.

TRY THESE AS FOLLOW-UPS AFTER AI HAS GIVEN YOU A DRAFT THAT SOUNDS ROBOTIC

- *"Rewrite that in more natural, human language. Use the kind of words a normal person would actually say out loud."*
- *"Use simple everyday language. No corporate words like 'leverage,' 'utilize,' or 'moreover.'"*
- *"Remove the formal or exaggerated wording. Keep it warm but not too polished."*
- *"Read your draft like you're sending it to a friend. Rewrite anything that sounds stiff."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

The more real context you give, the less generic the answer becomes.

Don't send the first draft: the review checklist

Before you send anything from AI, check:

- ☐ Is it accurate?
- ☐ Does it sound like me?
- ☐ Is the tone appropriate for the audience?
- ☐ Is anything too strong, too soft, or too apologetic?
- ☐ Are names, dates, prices, and facts correct?
- ☐ Would I be comfortable sending this exactly as written?

TRY THESE AS FOLLOW-UPS

- *"Make this sound more like me, clear, direct, and friendly. I'm sending this to [audience, e.g. my landlord, a coworker, my kid's teacher]."*
- *"Give me a less formal version of this. Same content, more casual."*
- *"Give me three versions of this in different tones: friendly, professional, and firm. Label each one."*

Practice. Generate a first draft. Then ask AI to make it shorter, more natural, and more specific to your situation. Compare the four versions side by side. You'll see how big a difference small instructions make.

PART 4

Problems, Limits, and Reliability

*AI gets things wrong. Long chats wander.
Confident answers can be made up. These four
chapters teach you how to spot it, fix it, and
stay safe.*

Common AI Problems and How to Fix Them

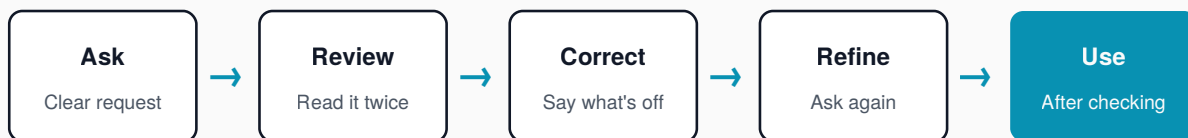
First answers are rarely final answers. Beginners give up. People who get value from AI keep talking. Here's the loop, and the diagnostic table that fixes almost any bad answer.

Where we are so far. You've now seen the foundations: AI as a partner (Chapter 4), the 11 jobs and the four-question structure (Chapter 5), the seven kinds of context and how framing shapes answers (Chapter 6), CRAFT and giving AI a role (Chapter 7), the six modalities of INPUTS (Chapter 8), and the seven-step workflow (Chapter 9). This chapter is about what to do when, despite all of that, the answer still isn't right. Spoiler: that's not a sign AI failed. It's a sign you're now in the iterative part, which is where most of the value is.

The AI conversation loop

The AI Conversation Loop

The first answer is rarely the final answer.



Useful follow-ups: "Make it simpler." "Ask me questions first." "What should I verify?"

The loop is: **Ask** — **Review** — **Correct** — **Refine** — **Use**. This is what people mean when they say AI is **iterative**. The first answer is a starting point, not the answer. You read it, you tell AI what's off, AI tries again, and a few rounds in you have something genuinely useful. Beginners stop at "Review": they read the answer, decide it's not great, and conclude AI isn't useful. People who get value from AI keep going around the loop. Two or three rounds is normal. Five rounds isn't unusual on harder problems.

TRY THESE AS FOLLOW-UPS (USE WHICHEVER ONE FIXES WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE ANSWER YOU JUST GOT)

- *"That answer was too general. Ask me 3 to 5 questions about my situation, then try again."*
- *"Make your last answer half as long. Keep only the most important parts."*
- *"Explain that again, but as if I'm a complete beginner. Use a real-life example."*
- *"Focus only on [the specific thing you actually care about, e.g. the customer's main complaint]. Ignore the rest."*
- *"In your last answer, what parts should I double-check or verify before I rely on them?"*

KEY TAKEAWAY

If AI gives a bad answer, do not give up. Tell it what's wrong and ask again.

The diagnostic table

When an answer disappoints, this table tells you what to ask next. The right column is the most useful thing in this book after CRAFT.

The bad result	Why it happened	What to ask next
Too long	You didn't set a length	"Cut this in half. Keep the most important parts."
Too vague	Not enough context	"Ask me 5 questions before answering."
Too formal	No tone given	"Make it sound like a normal person wrote it."
Too advanced	Level not specified	"Explain like I'm a beginner. Use a real example."
Wrong focus	Job unclear	"Focus only on [the specific thing]. Ignore the rest."
Too many options	No constraint	"Give me your top 3, ranked."
Sounds confident, might be wrong	Possible hallucination (Ch. 13)	"What's confirmed, what's assumed, what should I verify?"
Just agreeing with you	You led the answer	"Don't just agree. Challenge my assumptions."

Treat AI like a conversation, not a vending machine

A vending machine gives the same product for the same input. A conversation gets better with back-and-forth. AI works like the second one. Beginners treat it like the first: one prompt, one verdict.

Useful follow-ups in plain language:

- Make it simpler.
- Give me an example.
- Explain it another way.
- Ask me questions first.
- Give me a step-by-step version.
- What do you need from me to do this better?

Practice. Ask any question. Then refine the answer with three follow-ups. Notice how the third version is almost always more useful than the first.

Context Window, Overload, and Drift

Why long AI chats become messy, and the three one-line fixes that pull them back on track. Builds on the token idea from Chapter 6.

The memory metaphor

Remember the Lego-block idea from Chapter 6? AI's working memory is just like yours: **limited**. It can only hold so much at one time. Three things can go wrong inside that limit, and each one has a one-line fix.

Context window = working memory

This is just AI's short-term memory. Think of holding a phone number in your head while you walk to a piece of paper to write it down. You can hold it for a minute, but if someone interrupts you with another phone number, the first one fades. AI is the same way, only it measures memory in tokens (Chapter 6), not seconds.

Context overload = the firehose

Imagine your friend says: *"Hey, can you remember Mom's birthday is next Tuesday, also pick up milk, the dog has a vet appointment Thursday at 2, my flight lands at 9:15, oh and what do you think we should do for dinner?"*, all in one breath.

You'd lose track. Not because you're not smart, because nobody can hold that much new information at once. AI does the same thing. When you dump everything on it in one big paragraph, the answer comes back confused or unfocused. The fix isn't to give less information, it's to give it in pieces.

Context drift = the conversation that wandered

You've had this experience with a friend: you started talking about planning a vacation, twenty minutes later you're somehow debating airline meals. Conversations naturally drift. AI conversations do too. After many back-and-forths, AI may slowly lose track of your original goal because the newer messages crowd out the older ones in its memory.

Three things to know about long AI chats

Context window

AI's working memory.
How much it can
hold at one time.

*Like holding a phone
number in your head.*

Fix: summarize, then start fresh

Context overload

Too much information
at once. AI gets
confused or unfocused.

*Like a friend listing
10 things in one breath.*

Fix: organize first, solve second

Context drift

The chat slowly
moves away from
your original goal.

*Started with vacation,
ended on airline meals.*

Fix: reset the goal explicitly

Long chats are great for brainstorming. Fresh chats are better for clean final outputs.

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI does not remember a long conversation the same way a human does.

Fix #1: overload, organize before solving

If you have a lot to give AI, don't ask for an answer immediately. Ask for organization first.

USE THIS TWO-STEP PATTERN (PASTE BOTH, ONE AT A TIME)

- "I'm going to give you a lot of information about [situation]. First, organize it into clear categories with short headings. Don't give advice or solutions yet. Just structure it. Here's the info: [paste everything]."
- "Now focus only on the top three issues from your categories. For each one, tell me why it matters and what I should think about first."

Fix #2: drift, reset the context

If a long chat has wandered, don't try to nudge it back gradually. Reset it explicitly.

USE THIS PROMPT WHEN THE CHAT HAS GONE OFF TRACK

- *"Let's reset. My original goal is [what you actually want]. The audience is [who the output is for]. The output I need is [what shape: email, list, plan, etc.]. Before you answer, repeat back what you think I want, in your own words. Then we'll continue."*
- *"You drifted into [whatever it drifted into]. That's not what I need. Return to the original goal, keep it [simple / practical / focused on X]."*

Fix #3: the handoff summary (compacting in action)

This is the technique we previewed in Chapter 6 under "compacting." When a chat is getting too long but you don't want to lose the work in it, ask AI to summarize everything, then start a fresh chat with that summary pasted in. You're trading a tall, messy stack of Lego blocks for one neat stack that says the same thing.

"Summarize this conversation so I can start a new chat. Include: my original goal, important context, decisions we've made, things we've ruled out, next steps, and any wording I should reuse."

KEY TAKEAWAY

When AI seems to be getting worse, the fix is structural: organize, reset, or restart with a summary. Long chats are not always better.

Hallucinations and How to Reduce Them

AI sometimes sounds confident even when it's wrong. This chapter teaches you to spot it, reduce it, and check what matters. The single most important sentence in this book lives here: fluent does not mean factual.

Don't let the word scare you. "Hallucination" sounds dramatic, but the underlying idea is simple, and the fix is even simpler: *when something matters, double-check it.* This chapter teaches you which moments matter, why hallucinations happen, and a few small habits that catch the worst of them in seconds. You don't need to memorize anything. You just need to know when to slow down.

What is a hallucination?

An **AI hallucination** happens when AI gives an answer that sounds confident but is wrong, made up, unsupported, outdated, or not actually based on real information.

The simple version: *a hallucination is when AI sounds right but is wrong.*

What hallucinations look like

- Inventing a fake source or citation.
- Giving the wrong date, year, or number.
- Making up a quote.
- Claiming a policy says something it doesn't.
- Mixing two real facts into one false statement.
- Misreading a document or screenshot.
- Inventing a feature, law, or product that doesn't exist.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Fluent does not always mean factual.

Why hallucinations happen

Remember from Chapter 6: AI generates answers by predicting the next word. It's a very smart autocomplete. It is not automatically checking reality unless it has access to current information and you've asked it to verify. When it doesn't have the information, it sometimes fills the gap with something that *sounds plausible* instead of saying "I don't know." That's a hallucination. Not the AI lying, but predicting language without checking facts.

Common causes

- Missing context (Chapter 6).
- Vague questions.
- Leading framing that pushes AI toward a false conclusion (also Chapter 6, "framing shapes the answer").
- No live search available.
- Overconfidence in the model.
- Context overload or drift (Chapter 12).
- Weak source material.
- Creative tasks blurring into factual-sounding invention.

Hallucination Safety Check

If two or more of these are true, slow down and verify.

? **Sounds confident**
No "maybe" or "I'm not sure"

? **No source given**
Where did this fact come from?

? **Could have changed recently**
Prices, laws, news, schedules

? **High stakes**
Health, money, law, safety

Ask instead:

- "Separate facts from assumptions."
- "If you're unsure, say so."
- "Give me sources for any factual claim."
- "What should I double-check?"
- For documents: "Use only the file I gave" "you. If the answer isn't there, say so."

The five habits that reduce hallucinations

1. **Tell AI not to guess.** "If you're not sure, say so. Don't make anything up."
2. **Ask for the seam.** "Separate what's confirmed from what you're assuming."
3. **Demand sources for facts.** "Give me sources for any factual claim. If you don't have one, say 'no source.'"

4. **For documents, lock the source.** "Use only the document I uploaded. If the answer isn't in it, say so. Don't guess."
5. **For high stakes, verify outside AI.** Health, law, money, safety, employment, AI prepares you to ask better questions to a human, not replace them.

The pre-trust question

Before you act on any AI answer involving facts, ask yourself:

"What part of this answer might be wrong, outdated, or made up?"

Then ask AI the same question. It's surprisingly honest when you ask directly.

Hallucination prevention checklist

Before trusting an answer, ask:

- ☐ Is this about facts, dates, prices, rules, health, law, or money?
- ☐ Did AI provide sources?
- ☐ Are the sources current and reliable?
- ☐ Did AI separate facts from assumptions?
- ☐ Could the answer be outdated?
- ☐ Is AI guessing because I gave too little context?
- ☐ Should I verify this somewhere else?

TRY THIS TWO-STEP EXERCISE (DO IT ONCE, YOU'LL NEVER FORGET THE LESSON)

- **Step 1.** Ask AI any specific factual question, e.g. "What year did the Toronto Raptors win the NBA championship and who scored the most points in the final game?"
- **Step 2.** After it answers, paste this: "Look back at your last answer. What parts are you most confident about, and what parts might be wrong, outdated, or invented? Tell me exactly what I should verify before I trust this."

KEY TAKEAWAY

You can't eliminate hallucinations. You can dramatically reduce risk by asking for sources, telling AI not to guess, and verifying anything that matters.

Verification, Safety, and Privacy

Responsible AI use comes down to three habits: verify what matters, protect what's private, and use AI as a guide instead of an authority.

What to verify (always)

For these categories, AI is your prep tool, not your final answer. Verify before acting:

- Medical advice or symptoms.
- Legal advice or contract terms.
- Financial advice or tax decisions.
- News and current events.
- Prices, schedules, deadlines.
- Government rules and forms.
- Safety procedures or product warnings.
- Product claims and reviews.
- Anything involving money, health, law, employment, or major risk.

TRY THESE AS FOLLOW-UPS WHENEVER AI GIVES YOU FACTS, ADVICE, OR RECOMMENDATIONS

- "What parts of your last answer should I double-check before I rely on them?"
- "Give me sources for any factual claims in your last answer. If you don't have a real source for a claim, say so honestly instead of making one up."
- "For your last answer, separate it into three lists: what's confirmed and reliable, what's uncertain, and what I should verify with a human or other source."

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI is your fastest path toward understanding, not the final authority for everything.

Privacy basics: what not to paste

AVOID PASTING THESE INTO ANY AI TOOL

Passwords. Banking information. Credit card numbers. Social Insurance Number, SSN, or national ID. Private medical records. Confidential work documents. Customer data. Other people's private information.

The safer habit

Before pasting anything sensitive, remove names, account numbers, addresses, and identifying details. Use placeholders like "[Customer A]" or "[Account #]." AI doesn't need real identifiers to help you with the situation.

TRY THIS PROMPT BEFORE YOU PASTE ANYTHING THAT INCLUDES PRIVATE DETAILS

→ "I want to ask you about a private situation, but I need to remove the sensitive details first. Here's what I have: [paste]. Show me a version with names, addresses, account numbers, and other identifying info replaced with placeholders like [Person A], [Account #], [City]. Then I'll use the cleaned-up version to ask my actual question."

KEY TAKEAWAY

When in doubt, anonymize first.

High-risk topics: how to ask safely

AI can help you prepare questions, summarize information, and explain concepts. It should not replace a doctor, lawyer, accountant, safety expert, or qualified professional.

DON'T ASK

Is this supplement safe for me?

ASK INSTEAD

Give me a general overview of possible benefits, risks, and interactions of [supplement], and a list of questions I should ask a healthcare professional.

TRY THIS PROMPT FOR ANY HEALTH, LEGAL, OR FINANCIAL TOPIC

→ "I want to understand [topic, e.g. how a TFSA works / what to ask before signing a lease / what blood pressure numbers mean]. Give me a general overview in plain language. Then give me a list of questions I should ask a qualified professional, like a [doctor / lawyer / accountant], before making any decisions. Do not give me personal advice, just help me prepare."

KEY TAKEAWAY

Use AI to prepare. Don't use it to blindly decide.

Why this matters more every year

AI is going to keep showing up in more places, school, work, banking, healthcare, government forms, customer service, even the way you book a hotel. The people who use it well will get more done with less stress. The people who use it carelessly will paste private information into the wrong place, send messages they shouldn't have sent, or trust answers they shouldn't have trusted.

That's why the four habits in this chapter aren't optional. They're the foundation. Verify what matters. Anonymize what's private. Use AI to prepare instead of blindly decide. And keep coming back to the simple question: "Would I be comfortable if a careful person checked my work here?" If yes, you're using AI well. If not, slow down.

The bigger picture. Like any tool (a chef's knife, a car, a power drill), getting value from AI depends on knowing what it is, what it can and can't do, and how to use it. That's the whole point of this manual. Keep coming back to it as you go.

PART 5

Using AI in Real Life

*Six chapters of where AI actually pays off:
learning, daily life, work, hard conversations,
and decisions. Each one is a different shape of
CRAFT in disguise.*

Personalizing AI

You can shape how AI helps you. Two simple moves, tell AI your preferences, and tell AI what posture to take, transform every conversation that follows.

Connecting the dots. This chapter brings together a few earlier threads. *Framing* from Chapter 6 (how the question shapes the answer). *Giving AI a role* from Chapter 7 (telling AI who to be). *Personal preferences* from Chapter 4 (treating AI as a partner). All of it lands here as one habit: spend the first 30 seconds of a chat shaping how AI shows up.

Tell AI your preferences

The first 30 seconds of a chat is your chance to set the conditions. The same question gets a totally different answer depending on what AI knows about you and how you want to be helped.

Useful preference statements

- I am a beginner at [topic].
- Use simple language. Avoid jargon.
- Give me one step at a time.
- Use real-life examples.
- Ask me questions if I seem confused.
- Keep answers short unless I ask for detail.
- Don't pad with disclaimers.

TRY THIS STARTER PROMPT

→ *"When helping me, please use simple language, short steps, and real examples. Explain things clearly and avoid jargon. If I ask something vague, ask me a clarifying question first."*

Practice. Write your own personal AI starter prompt, the one you'd paste at the start of any chat. Save it. We'll come back to it in Chapter 21 when you build your prompt library.

Choose the AI posture

This is an expansion of the role technique we introduced in Chapter 7 ("Pro move: give AI a role"). Same idea, wider menu. The same question produces very different answers depending on whether AI is acting as a supporter, critic, teacher, researcher, or balanced evaluator. Pick the role you actually need, this is just framing (Chapter 6) applied to the assistant itself.

Posture	What to ask for it
Supportive helper	"Be encouraging. Help me get unstuck."
Patient teacher	"Act as a patient teacher. Explain step by step."
Editor	"Be a sharp editor. Cut what's weak. Tell me why."
Researcher	"Act as a researcher. Find sources, compare them, flag uncertainty."
Coach	"Coach me. Ask me questions instead of giving answers."
Skeptical critic	"Be skeptical. Challenge my assumptions and find the holes."
Objective evaluator	"Give me strengths, weaknesses, risks, and what's needed to verify."

TRY THESE PROMPTS

- "Act as a patient teacher. I'm trying to learn [topic]. Explain it gently and step by step, then ask me a question to check I understood."
- "Act as a skeptical business advisor. Here's my idea: [paste]. Don't just encourage me, help me find the risks and what could go wrong."
- "Act as a sharp editor. Cut what's weak in this draft and tell me why each cut makes it better: [paste draft]."

KEY TAKEAWAY

Tell AI whether you want support, critique, teaching, research, or balance. Default mode is "polite assistant", usually not what you actually need.

AI for Learning Anything

AI is the best private tutor most people will ever have access to. Patient, infinitely available, and never judgmental.

Tutor mode: the learning loop

The pattern: **Explain** → **Example** → **Practice** → **Feedback** → **Repeat**.

Ask AI to teach you, give you examples, quiz you, correct your mistakes, and build a learning plan. Repeat the cycle until the topic feels familiar.

Pair this with the voice pro tip from Chapter 2. The fastest way to learn anything new is to *talk through it* with AI, on a walk, while doing dishes, in the car. Hands busy, mind free, conversation rolling. Half an hour of voice tutoring beats an hour of typing every time.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (REPLACE [TOPIC] WITH WHATEVER YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO LEARN)

- "Teach me [topic, e.g. how investing in index funds works] like I'm brand new. Use plain language and a real-life example."
- "Give me a simple explanation of [topic], then a real example, then quiz me with three questions one at a time. Tell me if I got each one right and why."
- "Create a 7-day beginner learning plan for [topic]. Each day should take about 20 minutes and include one short reading and one practice exercise."
- "I got this wrong: [paste the question and your answer]. Explain why my answer is wrong in plain language, then give me a similar practice question to try."

Practice. Choose one topic you've been meaning to learn. Ask AI to create a 3-day beginner plan. Do day 1 today.

Learning without shame

One of the underrated benefits of AI: you can ask basic questions privately. No one's watching. You can ask the same thing five different ways. You can admit you've forgotten something you "should" know. AI doesn't care. It just keeps explaining.

For best results, tell AI your level upfront and ask it to avoid jargon.

TRY THESE PROMPTS WHEN YOU'RE EMBARRASSED TO ASK BUT REALLY WANT TO LEARN

- *"This is going to sound basic, but explain [topic, e.g. what a mortgage actually is / how my pay stub works / what RAM means in a computer] in really simple language. Pretend I've never heard the word before."*
- *"Give me a real-world example of [concept], using something from everyday life like cooking, driving, or shopping."*
- *"After you explain [topic], ask me one question to check if I actually understood it. Then tell me if my answer is right and what I missed."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI can make learning feel less intimidating. The patient tutor never tires, never judges.

AI for Everyday Life

The small daily wins that prove AI is worth keeping in your pocket. Letters, lists, appointments, errands, plain-English explanations.

Common everyday tasks

- Writing or rewriting emails.
- Cleaning up text messages before you send them.
- Making grocery and meal lists.
- Planning appointments and to-do lists.
- Preparing questions for doctors, mechanics, or other professionals.
- Understanding confusing letters from banks, schools, or government.
- Creating checklists for trips, projects, or routines.
- Organizing tasks when you feel overwhelmed.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (REPLACE THE BRACKETS WITH YOUR REAL SITUATION)

- "I have a doctor's appointment next week about [issue, e.g. ongoing back pain / a new prescription / yearly checkup]. Help me prepare 8 to 10 clear questions to bring with me. Group them by topic."
- "Here are the errands I need to do this week: [list them]. Turn them into a checklist ordered by location, so I can do them in one trip."
- "Here's a letter I got that I don't fully understand: [paste or attach]. Explain it in plain English. Tell me what it's actually asking, what I need to do, and by when."
- "Make me a grocery list for three simple weeknight dinners for [number of people]. Keep ingredients short and overlap them where possible so I'm not buying a dozen things I'll only use once."

Practice. Use AI to create one useful checklist for your week. Trip prep, weekly cleaning, kid stuff, errands, pick one.

Understanding confusing information

Letters, forms, instructions, policies, labels, notices, and emails can all be pasted or uploaded for explanation. The translation from "official-speak" into plain English is one of AI's most underrated skills.

CAUTION

For documents with legal, medical, financial, or deadline consequences, ask AI what to verify, and check the original yourself.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (PASTE OR ATTACH THE DOCUMENT FIRST)

- *"Here's a [type of document, e.g. lease / utility bill / insurance policy / school notice]: [paste or attach]. Explain it to me in plain English, like I'm not familiar with this kind of paperwork."*
- *"Read the document I shared. Tell me what specific actions I need to take, and by when. Put deadlines in bold."*
- *"In the document I shared, what parts should I double-check, get a second opinion on, or verify with the sender? Especially any numbers, dates, or fine print."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI can reduce confusion dramatically, but important details still need checking.

AI for Work and Small Business

The professional value of AI shows up fastest in writing, meetings, customer communication, and the messy operational tasks no one trained you for.

Common work tasks

- Professional emails (drafts, replies, tone fixes).
- Customer service replies.
- Meeting notes → action items.
- Simple SOPs (standard operating procedures).
- Training checklists.
- Job descriptions.
- Resume help.
- Interview practice.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (REPLACE THE BRACKETS WITH YOUR REAL SITUATION)

- "Write a polite customer service reply for this situation: [paste customer's message, e.g. complaint that order is late]. Tone: professional, helpful, and apologetic without overpromising. Sign off as [your name / company]."
- "Here are my rough notes from training a new hire: [paste notes]. Turn them into a step-by-step training checklist a new person could follow on their first week."
- "Here are my meeting notes: [paste]. Pull out action items with the owner and due date for each (use 'TBD' if not mentioned). Format as a clean list I can paste into Slack or email."
- "I'm interviewing for [role, e.g. junior project manager] next week. Act as the hiring manager and ask me five common interview questions for that role, one at a time. After each answer, give me direct feedback on what was strong and what to improve."

Practice. Take a messy work note from this week, meeting scribbles, a Slack thread, a draft, and turn it into a clean SOP, checklist, or summary. Pick the format that would actually be useful.

Common small business tasks

- Social media captions and post ideas.
- Service descriptions for your website.
- Google review responses (warm replies to good reviews; calm replies to bad ones).
- FAQ pages.
- Promotional copy and ad ideas.
- Website copy.
- Basic business planning.
- Customer scripts for phone or in-person.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (REPLACE THE BRACKETS WITH YOUR REAL BUSINESS)

- "Give me 10 social media post ideas for [describe your business, e.g. a small nail salon in North York that serves walk-ins and groups]. Mix promotional posts, behind-the-scenes, customer stories, and educational tips. Keep captions short and friendly."
- "Write a warm reply to this positive Google review: [paste review]. Mention specifically what they said about [the thing they praised, e.g. our staff / our prices / how clean our space is]. Sign off as [name / business]."
- "Create a simple FAQ section for this service: [paste your service description]. Include 6 to 8 questions a real customer would actually ask, with short, friendly answers."

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI helps a small business create drafts faster, but the owner still adds judgment and real details. The voice has to be yours.

AI for Difficult Conversations

Hard messages, calm replies, and seeing the other side. AI is unusually good at lowering the temperature without losing the point.

Calm, firm, respectful communication

Use AI when you have to:

- Ask for something difficult (a raise, a refund, a favor, time off).
- Respond to conflict without escalating it.
- Say no without burning the relationship.
- Set a boundary clearly.
- Prepare for a meeting you're nervous about.
- Understand how a message you wrote might land for the other person.

CAUTION

AI can help draft a calmer message, but you still need to make sure it's truthful and appropriate to your real situation. Don't paste private details about other people without their consent.

TRY THESE PROMPTS (REPLACE THE BRACKETS WITH YOUR REAL SITUATION)

- *"Help me say this calmly and respectfully. Here's my draft: [paste]. Keep my main point but soften the tone. Make sure it doesn't sound passive-aggressive."*
- *"Rewrite this message so it's firm but not aggressive. I'm trying to [your goal, e.g. set a boundary / decline a request / push back on a decision]: [paste your draft]."*
- *"Here's a message I'm about to send: [paste]. Show me how the other person might interpret it, including the worst-case interpretation. Then suggest a clearer rewrite."*
- *"Help me prepare for a difficult conversation with [person, e.g. my manager / my landlord / my sibling] about [topic]. Ask me 4 to 5 questions first to understand the situation, then help me plan what to say."*

Practice. Take a message you wrote in frustration but didn't send. Paste it. Ask AI to rewrite it as a calm, professional version. Compare them, the gap between the two is data about your reaction style.

Seeing the other side

One of AI's most underrated uses: it can model how the other person might receive your message, what assumptions you may be carrying, and where unnecessary conflict could be avoided.

TRY THIS PROMPT BEFORE REACTING TO A TENSE SITUATION

- *"Help me analyze this conflict objectively: [describe the situation in 2 to 4 sentences, including what was said or done]. Walk through: my perspective, the other person's likely perspective, the actual facts vs. the assumptions on each side, the emotional triggers in play, and the most reasonable next step. Don't take my side automatically."*

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI can lower the emotional intensity before a message gets sent. Use that.

Decision-Making With AI: The BALANCE Method

Use AI to clarify, not decide. Seven angles, spelled BALANCE, turn any fuzzy choice into a structured one.

Use AI to clarify, not decide

AI is at its best when you're *thinking through* a decision: listing options, weighing pros and cons, surfacing assumptions, identifying risks, finding alternatives, and writing down the questions you still need to answer. It's not at its best when you ask it to decide *for* you, especially on anything personal.

Two earlier ideas come together here. From Chapter 6, framing matters more than ever during a decision: ask AI "*why is this a good idea?*" and you'll get cheerleading; ask "*what would I regret about this?*" and you'll get clarity. From Chapter 7 and Chapter 15, giving AI a role (skeptical advisor, balanced evaluator) shapes the kind of decision support you get.

BE EXTRA CAREFUL WITH

Decisions involving money, health, law, safety, relationships, or employment. AI helps you think clearly about these. It doesn't replace human professionals or your own judgment.

The BALANCE method

Seven angles. Use them as a checklist for any decision you'd otherwise rush.

Letter	Element	Question to ask
B	Benefits	What's good about this option?
A	Assumptions	What am I assuming that might not be true?
L	Limits	What are the limits, weaknesses, or constraints?
A	Alternatives	What else could I do instead?
N	Negatives	What could go wrong? What's the worst case?
C	Counterargument	What would a thoughtful critic say?
E	Evidence	What would prove or disprove this?

TRY THESE PROMPTS

- "Act as a thoughtful, balanced advisor. I'm thinking about [decision and context]. Walk me through the BALANCE method: benefits, assumptions, limits, alternatives, negatives, counterargument, and what evidence I'd need. Don't decide for me, just help me see it clearly."
- "Use the BALANCE method on this decision: [paste your decision]. After you go through all seven, ask me which two letters I should think hardest about."
- "Act as a thoughtful skeptic. Here's my plan: [paste]. What would you push back on? What am I likely missing?"

Practice. Pick one low-stakes decision you've been turning over, what to buy, where to go, which option to pick. Run it through BALANCE. Notice how much clearer the decision feels even before you've decided.

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI can list pros, cons, risks, and alternatives. It should not replace your judgment. Use it to see more, then choose.

PART 6

Practice and Long-Term Use

Three chapters to turn this course from "something I read" into "something I use." A prompt library you'll keep, a hundred starter ideas, and a final project that proves you can do this independently.

Building a Personal Prompt Library

A prompt library turns AI from "something you tried" into "something you use." Save the prompts that worked. Reuse them. That's the whole skill.

What is a prompt library?

A **prompt library** is a saved collection of prompts that have worked for you. When a new task comes up, you don't start from scratch. You copy, paste, and adapt.

It removes the pressure of remembering what to type. Over time, your library becomes more valuable than any AI tool, because it's tuned to your life, your work, and your voice.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A prompt library turns AI from something you try once into something you use every day.

Where to keep it

Anywhere you control: a Notes app, Google Docs, Word, Notion, or a folder of text files. The format doesn't matter. What matters is that it's yours, it's organized, and you actually open it.

Inside that file or app, group your saved prompts into **categories** so you can find them when you need them. Think of these like folders in a filing cabinet, but they can just be headings in one document if that's easier. The whole point is that when you're about to write a difficult email at 9pm on a Tuesday, you can find the email-writing prompt that worked last time without scrolling through your entire chat history.

Categories that work well for most people

You don't need all of these. Pick the ones that match the parts of your life where you actually use AI. Add or remove as you go.

- **Emails and messages.** Prompts for writing, rewriting, or polishing emails, texts, and Slack messages. (Covered in Chapters 10 and 19.)
- **Learning.** Prompts for studying, getting things explained, building learning plans, and quizzing yourself. (Chapter 16.)

- **Documents.** Prompts for summarizing PDFs, extracting deadlines from contracts, explaining confusing letters. (Chapter 8 under "PDFs and files.")
- **Work.** Customer replies, meeting summaries, training checklists, interview practice. (Chapter 18.)
- **Personal life.** Doctor visits, errand checklists, grocery lists, family stuff. (Chapter 17.)
- **Research.** Prompts that ask AI to search the web, compare options, or pull current information with sources. (Chapter 8 under "Search.")
- **Decisions.** The BALANCE prompt and other "help me think this through" prompts. (Chapter 20.)
- **Tone fixes.** "Make this calmer," "make this firmer," "make this sound less robotic." (Chapter 10.)
- **Difficult conversations.** Prompts for hard messages, conflict, and seeing the other side. (Chapter 19.)
- **Verification.** "What should I double-check?" "Give me sources." "What might be wrong?" (Chapters 13 and 14.)

What a saved prompt should include

1. **The prompt itself**, copy-paste ready.
2. **What it does**, one short note on when to use it.
3. **What to fill in**, mark the bits you swap out, like [topic] or [audience].

Sample saved prompt (this is what one entry in your library looks like):

Category: Difficult conversations

What it does: Helps me rewrite a frustrated message into a calm, professional one before I send it.

The prompt: *"Help me say this calmly and respectfully. Here's my draft: [paste]. Keep my main point but soften the tone. Make sure it doesn't sound passive-aggressive."*

To fill in: Replace [paste] with your draft.

A STARTER PROMPT FOR YOUR LIBRARY

→ *"Explain [topic] like I am brand new. Use simple language. Give me an example. Then ask me one question to check my understanding."*

Practice. Open Notes, Docs, or a new file. Title it "My AI Prompt Library." Add three or four category headings from the list above (just the ones you'd actually use). Copy in five prompts from this book that look useful, sorted into the right categories. You've started.

Real-Life Use Case Library

The "I don't know what to ask" problem, solved. Scan the categories, pick one task that would actually help today, and try it.

How to use this chapter

Don't try to use everything. Pick *one* task in *one* category that genuinely fits today. The skill being trained is noticing when AI could help, and reaching for it.

Home

- Create a cleaning checklist for your space.
- Plan simple meals for the week.
- Make a grocery list from a planned set of meals.
- Explain a confusing utility bill.
- Organize a home repair plan with a sequence and budget.
- Compare two household products on price, durability, and reviews.

Work

- Draft a professional email.
- Summarize meeting notes into action items.
- Create a task list from a long thread.
- Write a customer reply with the right tone.
- Prepare for an interview with role-play questions.
- Create a training checklist for a new hire.

Learning

- Explain a confusing topic in plain language.
- Quiz me on what I just read.
- Create flashcards I can use later.
- Build a 7-day study plan for a topic.
- Explain my mistake when I get something wrong.
- Give me real-world examples for an abstract idea.

Small business

- Write service descriptions for a website.
- Create social media post ideas for the week.
- Draft FAQs for a product or service.
- Respond warmly to a positive review.

- Plan a low-cost promotion.

- Compare yourself to two competitors.

Documents

- Summarize a long document.
- Find the deadlines and dates.
- Explain confusing legal or technical language.
- List the actions I need to take.
- Identify risks or red flags.
- Generate questions I should ask a professional.

Decisions

- List pros and cons.
- Identify what I'm assuming.
- Compare options on a structured set of criteria.
- List risks and worst-case outcomes.
- Suggest alternatives I haven't considered.
- Tell me what I'd need to verify before deciding.

Communication

- Rewrite something politely.
- Make a message firm but not aggressive.
- Prepare for a difficult conversation.
- Show how a message might be interpreted.
- Create three tone variations of the same message.
- Shorten a message without losing the point.

Research

- Find current information on a topic.
- Give sources for any factual claim.
- Compare products with citations.
- Summarize different viewpoints fairly.
- Identify what's uncertain or contested.
- Create a fact-checking checklist.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The skill is noticing the moment AI could help. The list above is a memory aid until that habit is automatic.

Practice Projects and Final Assignment

Confidence comes from doing, not reading. These projects prove the course worked, and the final assignment proves you can use AI on your own.

Practice projects

Pick at least five and do them. For each, save: the prompt you used, the result, and one follow-up question that improved the answer.

1. Write a real email you've been putting off.
2. Rewrite a difficult message into a calmer version.
3. Summarize a document you actually have.
4. Use voice instead of typing for one full conversation.
5. Upload a screenshot of something confusing, a form, an error, a label.
6. Research a current topic with sources.
7. Turn rough notes into a structured checklist.
8. Ask AI to challenge an idea you've been excited about.
9. Reset a chat that has drifted off topic.
10. Create a personal AI cheat sheet with your favorite five prompts.
11. Build the first version of your prompt library (Chapter 21).
12. Use AI to learn one new concept end-to-end (Chapter 16).

Final assignment

Choose one real problem from your life or work. Use AI to solve or improve it. This is your chance to put together everything in this book in one go.

Final assignment submission

- ☐ The problem, one or two sentences.
- ☐ The tool you used (Chapter 1).
- ☐ Any role or posture you gave AI (Chapters 7 and 15).
- ☐ Your first prompt, copy-paste it.
- ☐ The context you provided using CRAFT (Chapter 7).
- ☐ The framing you chose, and how you might have framed it differently (Chapter 6).
- ☐ The first answer, copy-paste it.
- ☐ The follow-up prompts you used in the iteration loop (Chapter 11).
- ☐ What you verified outside AI (Chapters 13 and 14).
- ☐ The final result.
- ☐ One thing you'd do differently next time.

Bringing it all together. This single assignment touches almost every chapter of the course. You're choosing a tool (Ch.1), shifting into partnership mode (Ch.4), recognizing the moment to ask (Ch.5), giving context (Ch.6), using CRAFT and a role (Ch.7), picking the right input modality (Ch.8), running the seven-step workflow (Ch.9), iterating through the conversation loop (Ch.11), watching for hallucinations (Ch.13), and verifying what matters (Ch.14). If you can do all of that on one real problem, you've got it.

You're done.

The goal was never to memorize every prompt. It was to build a habit: ask clearly, give context, frame the question well, refine the answer, and verify what matters. Once you have that pattern, you can adapt to any AI tool as it changes, and they will keep changing. The fundamentals don't.

Now go use it. And if this manual helped, pass it on.

A P P E N D I C E S

Worksheets, Prompts, Glossary, and Sources

*Reference material for after the course. Print,
save, copy, paste, or whatever you need.*

Worksheets

Reusable templates. Use them on screen, or print and fill in by hand.

Worksheet 1, Before you ask AI

- ☐ What do I want?
- ☐ Who is this for?
- ☐ What context matters?
- ☐ What format do I want? (email, list, table, plain answer)
- ☐ What tone do I want? (friendly, professional, firm, casual)
- ☐ What should AI avoid?
- ☐ Does this need verification afterward?

Worksheet 2, After AI answers

- ☐ Did it answer the real question?
- ☐ Is anything important missing?
- ☐ Is the tone right for the audience?
- ☐ Is the format useful?
- ☐ What needs to be checked or verified?
- ☐ What follow-up should I ask?

Worksheet 3, CRAFT builder

CRAFT part	Your answer
C, Context	_____
R, Request	_____
A, Audience	_____
F, Format	_____
T, Tone	_____

Worksheet 4, Context reset

Paste this into a chat that has drifted:

"Let's reset the context.

Goal: _____

Audience: _____

Important context: _____

Do not focus on: _____

Output format: _____

Before answering, summarize what you think I want."

Worksheet 5, Handoff summary

When a chat is too long but valuable, paste this:

"Summarize this conversation so I can start a new chat. Include:

- 1. My original goal*
- 2. Important context*
- 3. Decisions we made*
- 4. Things we ruled out*
- 5. Next steps*
- 6. Any wording or examples I should reuse."*

Worksheet 6, BALANCE decision sheet

For decisions you don't want to rush:

Element	Your answer
Benefits	
Assumptions	
Limits	
Alternatives	
Negatives	
Counterargument	
Evidence needed	

Prompt Library

Copy-paste prompts, organized by category. Start your own library by saving the ones that work for you.

Getting started

- I am brand new to this. Explain it slowly.
- I do not know what to ask. Help me get started.
- Ask me simple questions and guide me step by step.
- Give me a tour of what I can ask you to do.
- What kinds of tasks are you best at? Give me five examples I could try today.

Context and clarification

- Before answering, ask me any questions you need so you can give me a better answer.
- I am not sure what information you need. Ask me questions first.
- Before answering, summarize what you think my goal is and what context you are using.
- Ask me up to five questions before answering.

Writing and rewriting

- Help me write a short, polite message about [situation].
- Rewrite this so it sounds calm, respectful, and clear.
- Give me three versions: friendly, professional, and firm.
- Make this sound more like a normal person wrote it.
- Remove overly formal or exaggerated wording.
- Make this shorter without losing the main point.

Learning

- Teach me this topic like I am brand new.
- Give me a simple explanation, then an example, then quiz me.
- I got this wrong. Explain why in simple language.
- Use an example from everyday life.
- Pretend I know nothing about this topic.
- Create a 7-day beginner learning plan for [topic].

Documents and files

- Summarize this document in plain English.
- Focus only on deadlines, risks, payment terms, and actions I need to take.
- Use only the document I uploaded. If the answer is not there, say you cannot find it.
- Tell me what actions I need to take and by when.
- What parts should I double-check?

Research and verification

- Search for current information and include sources.
- Tell me what is confirmed, uncertain, and what I should verify.
- What parts of your answer might be wrong, outdated, or based on assumptions?
- Separate facts from assumptions.
- If you are not sure, say so. Do not guess.

Balancing and critique

- Do not just agree with me. Challenge my assumptions.
- Give me pros, cons, risks, assumptions, alternatives, and evidence needed.
- Act as a thoughtful critic and tell me what I may be missing.
- Use the BALANCE method: benefits, assumptions, limits, alternatives, negatives, counterarguments, and evidence needed.
- What would a thoughtful critic say about this plan?

Refinement (when an answer disappoints)

- Make it simpler.
- Make it shorter.
- Make it more natural.
- Give me an example.
- Ask me questions before revising.
- Focus only on [the specific thing]. Ignore the rest.
- Give me your top three, ranked.

Difficult conversations

- Help me say this calmly and respectfully.
- Rewrite this so it is firm but not aggressive.
- Show me how the other person might interpret this message.
- Help me prepare for a difficult conversation. Ask me questions first.

- Analyze this conflict objectively. Consider my perspective, their possible perspective, the facts, the assumptions, and the most professional next step.

Resetting and handoff

- Let's reset the context. Goal: [X]. Audience: [Y].
Output: [Z]. Before answering, summarize what you think I want.
- Summarize this conversation so I can start a new chat. Include my original goal, important context, decisions we made, things we ruled out, next steps, and wording I should reuse.
- I am going to give you a lot of information. First, organize it into categories. Do not give advice yet.

Glossary

Plain-English definitions for every key term in this course.

AI	Software that can help with tasks that normally require human thinking: writing, explaining, summarizing, organizing, and suggesting.
Generative AI	AI that creates useful content from your instructions: text, images, summaries, ideas, drafts.
Natural language	Normal human language: the way you'd actually speak, write, ask, or explain to another person.
Prompt	What you type, say, paste, or upload to AI to tell it what you want.
Context	Background information AI needs to give a useful answer: goal, audience, situation, constraints, tone, format, level.
CRAFT	A five-letter prompt formula: Context, Request, Audience, Format, Tone. The spine of this course.
Framing	The way a question is set up. Same topic asked differently produces different answers. Ask "why is X great?" and AI lists strengths; ask "what could go wrong?" and AI lists problems. Every prompt frames the answer.
Role / Posture	Telling AI <i>who to be</i> at the start of a prompt: "Act as a patient teacher," "Act as a skeptical advisor," "Act as a sharp editor." Same AI, completely different conversation. Covered in Chapters 7 and 15.
Modality	The type of input or output AI works with: text, voice, images, files, tables, or live search.
INPUTS	A memory aid for the six common modalities: Images, Notes, PDFs/files, Utterance (voice), Tables, Search.
Context window	How much information AI can pay attention to at one time. Like a working desk, limited surface area.

Context overload	When too much information at once makes the answer confused or unfocused. Fix: ask AI to organize first, solve second.
Context drift	When a long conversation slowly moves away from the original goal. Fix: reset the goal explicitly.
Conversation loop	The pattern Ask → Review → Correct → Refine → Use. The first answer is rarely the final answer.
Handoff summary	A summary of a long chat that you paste into a fresh chat to keep the work without the mess.
Hallucination	When AI sounds confident but gives information that is wrong, made up, unsupported, or outdated. <i>Fluent does not always mean factual.</i>
Verification	Checking important information against reliable sources before relying on it. Especially required for health, money, law, employment, or safety.
BALANCE	A seven-part decision checklist: Benefits, Assumptions, Limits, Alternatives, Negatives, Counterargument, Evidence.
Agentic AI	AI that can take steps, use tools, and act toward a goal. This course mentions it only briefly; deeper learning is for later.

Sources and Further Reading

Official sources used to describe current tool capabilities. Tools and features change, check the live pages for up-to-date details.

OpenAI ChatGPT

Overview: <https://chatgpt.com/overview/>

Describes ChatGPT as a tool for typing, voice, and web search.

Introducing ChatGPT: <https://openai.com/index/chatgpt/>

Explains the conversational format and follow-up questions.

Anthropic Claude

Web search help: <https://support.anthropic.com/en/articles/10684626-enabling-and-using-web-search>

Explains Claude web search and current information use.

Claude for Work: <https://www.anthropic.com/learn/claude-for-work>

References Claude features such as Artifacts and Projects.

Google Gemini

Gemini Apps Help: <https://support.google.com/gemini/?hl=en>

Official help center listing Gemini app features and tutorials.

Gemini file uploads: <https://support.google.com/gemini/answer/14903178?hl=en>

Explains uploading and analyzing files in Gemini Apps.

Perplexity

How Perplexity works: <https://www.perplexity.ai/help-center/en/articles/10352895-how-does-perplexity-work>

Explains real-time internet search and summarization from sources.

Perplexity API Platform: <https://www.perplexity.ai/api-platform>

Describes web-grounded answers with citations and retrieval.

Microsoft Copilot

Microsoft Copilot help: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-copilot>

Official help center covering Copilot's modes (Quick Response, Think Deeper, Smart mode), file uploads, image creation, and voice features.

Microsoft 365 Copilot help and learning: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365-copilot>

Documentation for Copilot inside Word, Excel, Outlook, and other Microsoft 365 apps, including prompt examples and tips.

A final note for students

Tools change. URLs change. Companies launch new features and retire old ones. By the time you read this, the official help pages above will have moved or expanded, and there will be at least one more major AI assistant on the market. That's normal. Don't let it slow you down. Stay curious, stay skeptical, and stay practical. The fundamentals of this manual, asking well, framing carefully, iterating, and verifying, will outlast any specific tool you happen to be using today.

Good luck out there.