

FREE GUIDE

AI for Beginners

A practical guide to using AI for work, study, business and everyday life — no tech background needed.

Prompts

Tools

Work

Study

Content

Safety

7-day challenge

Thejas

Digital with Thejas

About this guide

You have heard of ChatGPT. Maybe you have opened it once, typed something, got a wall of text, and closed it. Meanwhile people around you seem to be using AI to write faster, study smarter, and run their businesses with less effort — and you are wondering what you are missing.

This guide assumes nothing. Not a tech background, not a fancy laptop, not a paid subscription. Everything here can be done free, on your phone, starting today. By the last page you will use AI every day — and, just as important, you will know when *not* to trust it.

How to use this guide

- **Read chapters 1–4 in order.** They take you from “what is AI?” to writing prompts that actually work. Everything after that builds on them.
- **Chapters 5–8 are pick-your-path.** Work, study, content, business — start with the one that matches your life; read the rest later.
- **Chapters 9–10 are non-negotiable.** Verifying AI output and staying safe are the two habits that separate smart users from burned ones.
- **Every chapter ends with a “Try this now” box.** Do the exercise before moving on — 15 minutes of doing beats an hour of reading.

Three promises

- ✓ **No jargon.** Every term that matters is explained in one plain line, the first time it appears.
- ✓ **No hype, no fear.** AI is a tool — like a calculator or a washing machine. This guide treats it that way.
- ✓ **No cost.** Every tool and exercise in this guide works on a free plan.

TIP

Keep your phone next to you as you read. The exercises take minutes, and the guide works best when you try things immediately.

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What is AI, really?

Forget robots and science fiction. The AI in this guide is software that has read enormous amounts of text — books, websites, articles — and learned the patterns in how people write and explain things. When you ask it something, it uses those patterns to predict, word by word, what a good answer looks like.

That is why the best mental model is not “a robot brain” but **a very well-read assistant**: fast, tireless, surprisingly capable — and occasionally confidently wrong, like any assistant who would rather guess than admit they do not know.

The five words you actually need

Term	In one line
AI	Software that performs tasks that normally need human thinking — writing, summarising, answering, translating.
Generative AI	AI that creates new things — text, images, audio, video — instead of just sorting or finding existing ones.
Chatbot	The chat window you talk to. ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini are chatbots built on generative AI.
Prompt	Whatever you type into the chat. The single biggest factor in how good the answer is (Chapter 4).
Model	The engine behind the chatbot. Different models have different strengths — you rarely need to think about this as a beginner.

The two-sentence explanation (for a friend)

“AI is software that learned from millions of examples of human writing, so it can draft, summarise, explain and answer like a capable assistant. It predicts good answers rather than looking them up — so it is brilliant for drafts and thinking, but you double-check facts.”

If you can say that, you understand AI better than most people who talk about it.

TRY THIS NOW

Open any AI chatbot and type: “Explain what AI is to me like I’m 10 years old, using a kitchen analogy.” Notice how it adapts to exactly what you asked — that is the whole trick you will learn to use.

What AI can and cannot do

AI is not smart or stupid — it is **uneven**. It performs like an expert on some tasks and fails embarrassingly on others. Knowing which is which is the real skill.

Five things AI is genuinely great at

1. **Drafting.** Emails, posts, letters, plans, outlines — a solid first version in seconds, which you then edit.
2. **Summarising.** Turning a long document, article or meeting transcript into the five points that matter.
3. **Explaining.** Any concept, at any level — “explain it simpler” works as many times as you need.
4. **Rewriting.** Same message, different tone: shorter, friendlier, more formal, in a different language.
5. **Brainstorming.** Twenty ideas in ten seconds — most average, two or three genuinely useful. That is the point.

Five things it reliably gets wrong

1. **Specific facts about small or local things.** Your street, your shop, a small company’s history — it often fills gaps with plausible fiction.
2. **Recent events.** Models learn from data up to a certain date; without web access they may not know what happened last month.
3. **Precise numbers.** Prices, statistics, dates and calculations should always be checked — it can state wrong ones with total confidence.
4. **Sources and citations.** Ask for references and it may invent convincing book titles and links that do not exist.
5. **Knowing what you meant.** It answers the question you typed, not the one in your head. Vague in, vague out.

Why it “makes things up”

When AI states something false as if it were true, that is called a **hallucination** — the one piece of jargon worth knowing. It happens because the AI is a prediction machine: it always produces the most *plausible-sounding* answer, and it has no built-in sense of “I do not actually know this.” It is not lying — it genuinely cannot tell the difference. That is your job, and Chapter 9 gives you the habit for it.

TRY THIS NOW

Deliberately break it: ask an AI to describe your own street or your family’s shop by name. Watch how confidently it invents details. Ten minutes of this teaches you more about AI’s limits than any article.

Your first 15 minutes

You do not need to research “the best AI tool” for a week. All the major ones are good, all have free plans, and the skills you learn in one transfer to the others. Pick one, start, switch later if you like.

The short list (all have free plans)

Tool	Best for	Cost to start
ChatGPT	All-round chat, everyday questions, the most familiar starting point	Free tier available
Claude	Natural writing, working with long documents, careful step-by-step explanations	Free tier available
Gemini	Anything connected to Google — Gmail, Docs, Search — and quick answers	Free tier available
Canva	Designs, posters, presentations and AI images — templates do the design work	Free tier available
CapCut	Editing short videos on your phone — auto-captions, cuts, effects	Free tier available

Details like limits and model names change often — what does not change: **every tool above lets you start free, today, with just an email address.**

Your first conversation (a guided script)

Sign up for one chatbot (two minutes), then have this three-question conversation. It is designed to show you the three moves you will use forever: ask, refine, apply.

Question 1 — ask

I'm completely new to AI. I work as a [your job / student / business owner]. Give me 5 specific ways someone like me could use AI this week.

Question 2 — refine

Number 3 sounds useful. Explain exactly how I'd do it, step by step, assuming I've never done it before.

Question 3 — apply

Great — now do it for me. Here's my situation: [describe it in 2–3 sentences].

Notice what happened in question 3: the AI stopped being a search engine and became an assistant working on *your* actual task. That is the difference between people who “tried ChatGPT once” and people who use AI daily.

TRY THIS NOW

Run the three-question script above right now, filling in your real job and situation. Total time: about 15 minutes, including signing up.

Prompting 101: the 4-part formula

The #1 beginner complaint — “AI gives me generic rubbish” — is almost always a prompt problem. AI answers the question you typed, not the one you meant. The fix is a simple formula:

ROLE (who it should act as) → **TASK** (what to do) → **CONTEXT** (your situation) → **FORMAT** (what the answer should look like)

See the difference

WEAK PROMPT

“Write something about my business.”

STRONG PROMPT

“You are a marketing copywriter. Write a short Instagram post for my home bakery in Mangalore — we make custom birthday cakes, mostly for young parents. Warm, friendly tone, under 80 words, end with ‘DM us to order’.”

Why it differs: The weak prompt forces the AI to guess everything — so it produces a generic paragraph. The strong one supplies role, task, context and format, so the answer arrives nearly ready to post.

WEAK PROMPT

“Help me study physics.”

STRONG PROMPT

“You are a patient physics tutor. I’m a 12th-standard student preparing for board exams. Explain Newton’s three laws with one everyday Indian example each, then give me 3 practice questions — easy, medium, hard.”

Why it differs: Same subject, but the strong prompt tells the AI the level, the goal and the shape of the answer — so it teaches instead of lecturing.

Three habits that multiply the formula

- **Treat it as a conversation, not a vending machine.** The first answer is a draft — say “shorter”, “warmer”, “give me 3 versions”. The follow-up replies are where the good stuff lives.
- **Show, don’t describe.** Paste an example of what you want (“write it in this style: [paste]”). One example beats ten adjectives.
- **Ask it to ask you.** End tricky prompts with: “Ask me up to 3 questions before you answer.” Its questions show you what context was missing.

TRY THIS NOW

Take the worst prompt you’ve ever typed and rebuild it with role + task + context + format. Compare the two answers side by side.

AI for work

This is where most people win back real time. You are not automating your job — you are handing over the blank-page work: first drafts, summaries, structures. You stay the editor and decision-maker.

The five highest-value work uses

Task	How AI helps
Emails	Draft replies, soften difficult messages, translate “angry” into “professional” before you hit send
Documents	Turn bullet points into reports and proposals — and long reports back into bullet points
Meetings	Paste your rough notes; get minutes, decisions and a to-do list with owners
Spreadsheets	Describe what you want in plain words; get the formula, plus what it means and where to paste it
Planning	“Here’s everything on my plate: [list]. Build me a realistic plan for the week with time estimates.”

Two prompts to steal

The email fixer

Rewrite this email so it’s polite but firm, keeps all the facts, and is under 120 words: [paste your draft]. Give me 3 versions: formal, friendly, and very short.

The meeting cleaner

Here are my rough meeting notes: [paste]. Turn them into: 1) a 5-line summary, 2) decisions made, 3) action items as a table with owner and deadline columns.

One rule for work use: AI drafts, you sign. Read every word before it goes out under your name — you are responsible for it, not the tool. (And check your company’s policy before pasting internal documents — more in Chapter 10.)

TRY THIS NOW

Find the last email that took you more than ten minutes to write. Paste it in and ask for 3 rewrites in different tones. Notice which one you’d actually send — that’s your writing style, described for free.

AI for study

Used badly, AI does your homework and you learn nothing. Used well, it is the closest thing to a personal tutor most students will ever have: endlessly patient, available at 2 a.m., and never annoyed that you asked the same question three times.

The golden rule: question-first, not answer-first

Answer-first studying — “write my assignment” — feels productive and teaches nothing (and your teacher can usually tell). Question-first studying flips it: **you** attempt, **AI** checks, explains and drills you. Same tool, opposite result.

Four tutor moves

1. **Explain it three ways.** “Explain photosynthesis simply, then with an analogy, then the exam-answer version.”
2. **Quiz me.** Have it test you — the single most effective way to use AI for exams (prompt below).
3. **Check my answer.** Solve the problem yourself first, then: “Here’s my answer: [paste]. Is it right? Where did I go wrong?”
4. **Summarise, then verify.** Paste a chapter, get key points — then skim the original to confirm the summary didn’t miss or invent anything.

The quiz prompt

You are my tutor for [subject]. Quiz me with one question at a time, starting easy and getting harder. Wait for my answer before revealing the correct one, then explain briefly and ask the next. Keep score.

On honesty: if your school or college has rules about AI, know them and follow them. Using AI to *understand* is studying; submitting AI output as your own work where that is not allowed is not — and it cheats you out of the learning you are there for.

TRY THIS NOW

Pick whatever you’re currently learning and run the quiz prompt above for 10 minutes. Answer before it reveals. You’ll find your weak spots faster than any revision session.

AI for content

Whether you post for a business, a personal brand, or just for fun, the hard part of content is not ideas — it is consistency. AI removes the blank page so you can publish every week without it eating your evenings.

One idea, three formats, one conversation

The efficient way to create content with AI is not “write me a post” ten times — it is taking **one idea** through a single conversation:

The one-idea pipeline

I create content about [topic] for [audience]. My idea: [one sentence]. From this one idea, give me: 1) an Instagram post under 100 words, 2) a caption with a hook first line, 3) a 30-second reel script with shot suggestions I can film on my phone.

Keeping your own voice (the part everyone skips)

Generic AI content is easy to spot and easy to scroll past. The fix takes two minutes:

- **Feed it your voice.** Paste 2–3 things you’ve written that sound like you: “Match this style — sentence length, humour, words I’d never use.”
- **Edit in the specifics.** Add the local detail, the real story, the photo only you have. AI supplies the skeleton; you supply the life.
- **Read it aloud.** If a line makes you cringe, you’d never say it — cut or rewrite it. Ten of your own words beat fifty perfect ones.

Images and video, briefly

For visuals, you do not need to master image generation. **Canva** (templates plus AI image tools) covers posts and posters; **CapCut** covers short-video editing with auto-captions — useful because many people watch with sound off. Both free tiers are more than enough to start.

TRY THIS NOW

Take one idea you know well and run the one-idea pipeline prompt. Then spend five minutes editing your voice back in. You now have a post, a caption and a reel script — from one conversation.

AI for your business

If you run a business — a shop, a clinic, a service, a one-person freelance operation — AI is not a futuristic upgrade. It is an extra pair of hands for the work that eats your evenings: replying, writing, planning, describing.

Where AI pays off first

Task	What AI does for you
Customer replies	Draft answers to common WhatsApp and email enquiries; keep a saved prompt with your tone and typical questions
Review responses	Paste any Google review — good or bad — and get a warm, professional two-line reply in seconds
Marketing drafts	Posts, offers, ad copy, festival greetings — a month of drafts in one sitting, edited in your voice
Descriptions	Product listings, service pages, your Google Business description — written around the words customers actually search
Back-office	Turn a voice note into a quotation; draft job ads, staff rotas, simple agreements to review with a professional

The one habit: a saved business brief

The trick that makes every business prompt better: keep one note on your phone with your business described once — what you do, for whom, your tone, your offers. Paste it at the start of any AI chat and every answer comes out sounding like *your* business, not a template.

The business brief

My business: [what you do]. Customers: [who they are]. Tone: [friendly / professional / local language mix]. Current offer: [offer]. Remember this for our whole conversation. First task: [task].

Start small: pick the **three** tasks from the table that cost you the most time, hand those to AI this month, and keep everything else as it is. The goal is not to automate your business — it is to get your evenings back.

TRY THIS NOW

Type: "Here's what my business does: [describe it]. List 10 tasks I could hand to AI this month, ordered by time saved." Circle three. That's your plan.

Trust, but verify

By now you know AI sometimes states false things confidently (Chapter 2). The answer is not to distrust everything — that wastes the tool. It is a quick habit that becomes automatic within a week: the **3-check habit**.

The 3-check habit

1. **The stakes check — “what happens if this is wrong?”** A caption idea being wrong costs nothing; a medicine dose, a legal claim, a price in a client quote costs plenty. Low stakes: use it. High stakes: verify first, always.
2. **The source check — “can I find this somewhere real?”** For any fact, name, number or date that matters, confirm it in an independent source — an official site, a news report, the original document. If the AI gave you a link or citation, open it: invented references look real until clicked.
3. **The sense check — “does this smell right?”** You know your field, your city, your customers. If an answer contradicts your own experience, trust your experience and dig deeper — confident wording is not evidence.

Two habits that make verification easy

- **Ask for confidence, not just answers:** “Which parts of this are you unsure about? What should I double-check?” — AI is often surprisingly honest when asked directly.
- **Never forward unverified AI facts.** The moment you send it to someone else — a customer, a class group, a client — it becomes *your* claim, not the AI’s.

TRY THIS NOW

Ask an AI a factual question in a subject you care about. Then check its answer against two real sources. Hunt until you find at least one thing that’s off — slightly wrong number, outdated detail, invented source. Finding your first error is what makes the habit stick.

Staying safe

AI chat feels private — just you and a text box. Treat it instead like a helpful stranger with an excellent memory: friendly, useful, and not someone you hand your house keys to. Two areas cover most of the risk: what you paste, and how your account is set.

The never-paste list

- **Passwords, OTPs and banking details** — no legitimate use ever requires them in a chat.
- **Full ID numbers** — Aadhaar, PAN, passport, licence numbers; yours or anyone else's.
- **Other people's private information** — a customer's medical details, a friend's problem with their name attached, employee records.
- **Confidential work material** — client contracts, unreleased figures, anything under an NDA or your company's data policy.
- **Anything you'd regret in a leak.** Simple test: would you email this to an outside consultant? If not, don't paste it.

The safe pattern: strip or swap the identifying details. "A customer named [X] with order [Y]" works exactly as well as the real name and order number — the AI never needed them.

Five-minute account hygiene

1. Open your AI tool's **settings** → **data controls** and see whether your chats are used to train future models. Most tools let you turn this off — decide deliberately instead of by default.
2. Use a **strong, unique password** and turn on two-factor login if offered — your chat history is only as private as your account.
3. **Delete conversations** you would not want lingering; know that deleting is available at all.
4. Be sceptical of **lookalike apps**: install AI apps only from official stores and the official developer — fake "ChatGPT" apps exist and some are scams.
5. Remember AI content cuts both ways: **scammers use it too**. Polished grammar no longer proves an email or message is genuine — verify requests for money or details through a channel you trust.

TRY THIS NOW

Audit yourself in five minutes: 1) anything from the never-paste list in your chat history? 2) training toggle checked? 3) unique password? 4) official app? 5) chats you should delete? Fix what you find.

Your first AI workflow

Everything so far has been single tasks. The final step — the one that makes AI a habit instead of a trick — is a **workflow**: a short chain of prompts you run the same way every time. Here is one worth stealing: the **Monday morning workflow**, 15 minutes that sets up your whole week.

Step 1 — Plan the week

Prompt 1 of 3

Here's everything on my plate this week: [brain-dump everything — messy is fine]. Organise it into: must do, should do, can wait. Then lay it out Monday to Friday, realistically, with mornings for hard work.

Step 2 — Draft the messages

Prompt 2 of 3

From that plan, draft the 3 messages I need to send today: [e.g. a follow-up to X, a reply to Y, a reminder to Z]. Keep my tone: [paste a message you've written]. Short and clear.

Step 3 — Prep the content (or the learning)

Prompt 3 of 3

Now the week's [content / study] plan: [my topic or subject]. Give me one idea for each day, each with a first line I can start from. Tuesday and Thursday are my posting days — make those the strongest.

Notice the design: **one conversation, three steps, each building on the last**. The plan feeds the messages; the messages feed the content. That chaining — not any single clever prompt — is what advanced users actually do.

Make it yours

- Swap step 3 for whatever repeats in *your* week: study prep, customer follow-ups, meal planning, lesson plans.
- Save the three prompts in a note. Same prompts every Monday — the routine is the point, polishing is not.
- After two weeks, ask the AI itself: "Here's my weekly workflow: [paste]. How would you improve it?"

TRY THIS NOW

Build your Monday morning workflow right now — even if it's Thursday. Run all three prompts with real details, save them in a note titled 'Monday AI', and set a repeating reminder.

BONUS

The 7-Day AI Challenge

Reading builds understanding; doing builds the habit. One task per day, 15 minutes each, in the order the book taught them. By Sunday, using AI will feel as normal as using search.

Day	Your 15-minute task	Done
Day 1	First conversation. Sign up for one tool and run the 3-question script from Chapter 3 (ask → refine → apply).	☐
Day 2	Prompt formula. Take one vague prompt and rebuild it with role + task + context + format. Compare the answers.	☐
Day 3	Work task. Hand over one real work item — an email, meeting notes, a plan. Edit and actually use the result.	☐
Day 4	Learning task. Run the quiz prompt from Chapter 6 on anything you're learning — answer before it reveals.	☐
Day 5	Content task. One idea through the one-idea pipeline (Chapter 7); edit your voice back in; publish or send it.	☐
Day 6	Verify and secure. Fact-check one AI answer against two sources, then run the 5-point privacy audit from Chapter 10.	☐
Day 7	Build your workflow. Set up your Monday morning workflow (Chapter 11), save the prompts, set the reminder.	☐

Miss a day? Don't restart — just do the next task. The challenge is a ramp, not an exam. What matters is that by the end of the week, AI has touched your real work, your real learning and your real content at least once.

START TODAY

Print or screenshot this page and tick the boxes as you go. Day 1 takes 15 minutes — start it today, not Monday.

What to do next

You now know more about using AI practically than most people who talk about it daily. The 7-day challenge will turn that knowledge into a habit.

And if you run a business, there is a bigger opportunity: combining AI with a website and marketing setup that actually converts. That is the work I do.

GET A FREE WEBSITE & MARKETING AUDIT

I will personally review your website, Google profile, and social presence — and send you a short, honest report with the **3 highest-impact fixes for your business**, including where practical AI (like the tools in this guide) can save you hours every week. No generic checklist. No obligation. If you can do the fixes yourself, great — the audit is yours to keep.

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