

Almost everything confusing about AI makes sense once you understand one thing about how it works. That one thing is on this page, and the rest of it follows on from there. **You do not need to be technical to read this, and there is no test at the end.**

1 It is a very good guesser, not a computer that knows things

When you type something in, it works out which words are most likely to come next, given everything in front of it. It does that extraordinarily well, over and over, until it has written you an answer. That is genuinely the whole trick.

This explains the thing that catches everyone out. **It can be completely fluent and completely wrong at the same time**, because sounding right is exactly what it was built to do. It is not lying to you and it is not broken. It is guessing, and a very likely sounding answer is not always a true one.

2 It only knows what is in front of it

It has read an enormous amount of the internet, but it has never seen your business. It does not know your prices, your customers, how you write, or what happened last week. If you want it to work with any of that, **you have to put it in front of it.**

THE SINGLE MOST COMMON MISTAKE

Not this: "Write my newsletter for this month."

This: "Here are my last three newsletters so you can see how I write. Here are the four things happening this month. Write the next one, same length, same tone."

The second one works. It is not a cleverer prompt, it simply contains the information the first one was missing.

It also does not remember yesterday. **Every new chat starts completely blank.** If something worked brilliantly last week, it is gone unless you saved it somewhere.

3 A chat is a workspace, not a conversation

Think of each chat as a desk you clear before starting. **Keep one chat per job.** If it drifts somewhere unhelpful and you cannot pull it back in a message or two, start a fresh one rather than fighting it. A long muddled chat rarely recovers, because all that muddle is still sitting in front of it, shaping the next guess.

The thing that turns this from a toy into a tool is saving the ones that worked, so you are not reinventing them every single time.

4 Ask it to think when it actually matters

A quick question gets a quick answer, which is usually fine. When something matters, say so. **"Work through it step by step before you answer"** and **"check that again and tell me what you got wrong"** both change the quality of what comes back, and neither one requires you to know anything technical.

You are also allowed to push back. Telling it "that is not right, our minimum order is twelve" almost always works better than starting over.

5 Which one should you use?

There are different models and they get renamed constantly. **Use whichever one it gives you by default.** The difference between them matters far less than the difference between a question with your information in it and one without. If you ever do need to pick, the slower ones are better at complicated problems. You can ignore all of this for a long time.

6 The check is the job

IF YOU REMEMBER ONE THING, MAKE IT THIS

It is confidently wrong in exactly the same tone that it is confidently right. There is no change in its voice, no hesitation, nothing at all to warn you. So the only real protection is that you read it before it goes anywhere.

Check the things that can actually be checked: **names, numbers, dates, prices, and anything it quotes.** That is where it goes wrong in ways that cost you something.

Checking is not a sign that you are bad at this. Everybody who uses it well does it every time. **Anyone who tells you their method removes the need to check is selling you something.**

7 There is no one right way to use it

How you use it depends entirely on your work. Someone writing quotes all day uses it nothing like someone writing a monthly newsletter, and both of them are doing it properly.

So be wary of anyone handing you **their** prompts as **the** prompts. Wording that fits one person's job rarely fits another's, and it stops working as soon as the tools change. **What transfers is the habit: give it enough to work with, ask it to think when it matters, and read what comes back.** That will still work in five years.

8 What it is genuinely bad at

- **Anything it cannot see.** Your inbox, your accounts, your bookings, today's news. It will guess, and the guess will look plausible.
- **Adding up long lists.** It can do it, but check the total, or ask it to work through the arithmetic slowly.
- **Knowing when it is wrong.** This is the big one. It has no sense of its own reliability.
- **Anything where being wrong is expensive** and nobody reads it before it goes out. That is a process problem, and it needs fixing first.

WHERE TO START

Pick the one job that eats the most of your week and has words in it. Not the most interesting one, the most repetitive one. Give it everything you would give a new employee doing that job for the first time, and see what comes back.

If the honest answer turns out to be that AI does not help with your job, that is a perfectly good outcome. Sometimes what you need is already switched off inside software you pay for.