

The Practical AI Playbook

Get your week back. A working guide for busy professionals.

Most people try an AI assistant twice, get something generic both times, and quietly stop. The tool was not the problem. Handing work to an assistant is a skill, and nobody taught it to you. This guide is the short version: what to hand over, how to ask, and what to do when the answer comes back wrong.

Any of the main assistants will do everything here, and the free version is enough to start. If your workplace has an approved one, use that and follow its rules. Switching tools is not what improves your results. The next three pages are.

What to hand over, and what stays yours

Hand over anything that produces a starting point. Keep anything that produces a commitment.

It is rarely a whole task. The line usually runs straight through the middle of one.

The task	Hand over	You decide and sign off
A letter to a patient about their results	The structure, the plain language version, the reassuring paragraph	Every clinical statement in it
A quarterly update to a client	The first draft from your notes, three subject lines	Which number you lead with, and how you frame the bad one
A staffing proposal for the owner	The outline, the cost table, the objections to pre answer	The recommendation itself
A contract you did not write	A plain English summary and the clauses worth a closer look	What those clauses actually mean for you
A hard email to a supplier	Softer, neutral, and firmer versions	Which one you send

The last column is not work you do alone. Ask the assistant about any of it, and it may well be right. But you are the one who signs it, so read it, understand why it says what it says, and be able to explain it without mentioning the tool. If you cannot explain it, do not send it.

One test before you delegate anything: if this came back wrong and I did not notice, what would it cost me? High cost, stay close. Low cost, hand it over and move on.

The brief that fixes most bad output

- "Write a summary of this report" gets you something bland, because you asked for something bland. The fix is not clever wording. It is context. Five things cover almost every task.
- Who it should be. A clinician writing for patients. An accountant writing to a nervous client. You, writing to your team.
 - What it is for. Who reads it, when, and what they already know.
 - The task. One sentence, specific.
 - The limits. Length, reading level, tone, what to leave out.
 - The shape. Bullets, a table, an email, a slide outline, three options to pick from.

BEFORE

Write a summary of this report.

AFTER

You are helping me brief a board who have not read this report.
Summarize it in 200 words, plain language, no jargon.
Lead with the three decisions they need to make.
Flag anything in the report that is uncertain or contested.

Same tool, same report, different result. The second one took twenty seconds longer to type.

TRY THIS NOW Open the email you have been putting off since Monday. Use prompt 3 on the next page. Two minutes, and it is off your list.

The prompt library

Change the bracketed parts. Keep the structure.

1. ROUGH NOTES INTO A FIRST DRAFT

Here are my rough notes for [document type].
Turn them into a clean first draft for [who reads it].
Keep every point I made. Do not add new claims, numbers, or names.
Plain language, around [X] words.
Mark anything that looks like a gap I still need to fill.

2. A LONG DOCUMENT YOU DO NOT HAVE TIME TO READ

Read the attached document. I need it because [your real reason].
Give me the main argument in three sentences, the five points that matter for my purpose, anything uncertain, and the questions I should ask before acting on it.
Quote the exact line for anything important so I can find it.

3. THE EMAIL YOU HAVE BEEN AVOIDING

Draft an email to [who] about [what].
What they already know: [context]. What I want: [one clear ask].
Under 150 words, direct and warm, no filler opener.
Give me three versions: softer, neutral, firmer.

4. MEETING OR CALL NOTES INTO ACTIONS

Here are my notes from [meeting]. Pull out decisions made, actions with an owner and a date, open questions, and anything raised but never resolved.
Say clearly if an owner or a date was never actually agreed.

5. A SLIDE OUTLINE

Build a [X] slide outline on [topic] for [who, and how long I have].
One idea per slide, a title and three bullets each.
Add a short speaker note under each in a conversational voice.
Open with why it matters to them, close with what I want them to do.

6. PRESSURE TEST YOUR OWN THINKING

I am considering [your plan]. Do not tell me whether you agree.
Argue the strongest case against it.
Then tell me what would have to be true for it to be a bad idea,
and what I should check before I commit.

Number six matters more than it looks. Ask "is this a good plan" and you will almost always hear yes, because these tools lean toward whatever you seem to want. Ask for the case against instead, and ask before you say which side you are on.

7. BUILD SOMETHING YOU REUSE EVERY WEEK

I do this task every week: [describe it].
Here is a good one I wrote before: [paste it].
Write me a reusable prompt I can save and paste each week,
with clear blanks for the parts that change.

Number seven is the compounding one. Every recurring task you turn into a saved prompt is time you stop spending forever.

When the answer comes back wrong

This is the part most people never learn. They read a weak first answer and decide the tool is useless. The second and third pass is where the value is. Say what is wrong in plain words.

What is wrong	What to type
Generic. Says nothing you could act on	Too general to use. Give me the specific recommendation, and tell me what you would do if you had to choose
It states a fact and you need the source	Quote the exact line you took this from. If it came from outside what I gave you, search and give me a link I can open
It cited something that does not exist	Remove anything you cannot point to or link to. List what you removed and why
Sounds nothing like me	Here is something I wrote. Match this voice. Shorter sentences, no corporate phrasing
Too long and padded	Cut this by half. Keep every fact, lose the warm up sentences and the summary at the end
Missed the point of the task	That is not what I asked for. The goal is [restate it]. Ask me anything unclear before trying again
Confidently wrong about my field	That is not accurate in [your field] because [reason]. Correct it and flag anything else you are unsure about

Asking for sources needs care. A made up citation looks exactly like a real one: real journal, plausible authors, believable year. The only check that works is opening the link or finding the quoted line yourself.

Three things that will catch you out

- It agrees with you. These tools drift toward whatever your question implies you want. If you need a real opinion, ask for the case against, cold, before you reveal your own view.

- Its knowledge has a date on it. Rates, rules, guidelines, prices, standards. It will answer confidently from an old snapshot and not mention that. Anything time sensitive gets checked against a live source, every time.
- It fills gaps instead of asking. Give it half the context and it invents a plausible other half. Add this line to any important request: if anything is missing, ask me, do not fill it in.

Making a free plan go further

Free plans give you a set amount of use inside a window, usually a few hours, and then they pause you until it resets. Two things burn through it faster than people expect, and neither one is obvious.

Every message you send makes the assistant read the whole conversation again from the beginning. Message forty costs far more than message four, even when you only typed one line. Anything you attached counts again too, every single time.

Eight habits that stretch a free plan a long way:

- One task, one chat. Finish the letter, then open a new chat for the invoice question. Long threads get more expensive with every message you add.
- Say how long you want it. Without a limit you get eight hundred words when two hundred would have done, and the long answer spends your allowance.
- Ask for the part you need. Draft section three, not draft the whole report.
- Put all your questions in one message. Five separate questions cost about five times what one message asking all five costs.
- When you attach a document, ask everything about it in that same chat. Uploading it again somewhere else starts the cost over.
- Ask for a fix, not a rewrite. Change the second paragraph beats give me the whole thing again.
- Turn the extras off for simple work. Web search, image generation, and the deeper thinking or research modes all use more. Worth it when you need them, wasteful for a short email.
- Write your prompt in your notes app first. Half finished messages waste a turn, and the good ones are worth keeping.

When you do run out, it usually resets within a few hours. Do the work that matters at the start of a session, not the end. Keep a free account on a second assistant as a backup so a pause never stops your day. And keep your saved prompts in a document on your own device, never only inside a chat.

Get more out of it in week two

- Attach the document instead of describing it. Reports, contracts, spreadsheets, slides, a photo of a whiteboard. Most of the value in report writing comes from this and most people never try it.
- Keep a style sample. One thing you wrote that sounds like you. Paste it at the start of any writing task.
- Save your setup. The main tools let you store standing instructions so you stop re explaining your role every time.
- Start a fresh chat when it drifts. Long threads pick up bad turns. A clean brief beats arguing.

Three rules that keep you out of trouble

Whatever you send goes out under your name. The tool holds no license, no registration, and no liability.

- Nothing identifying goes in. Names, dates of birth, file or client numbers, anything that points to a real person. Strip it or generalize it. Check your settings too, since some tools use your conversations to

improve their models unless you turn that off, and a work account often has different rules from a personal one.

- Verify every fact, figure, and citation before it leaves your desk. If you cannot verify it, cut it.
- Know the disclosure rules where you work. Some employers, journals, regulators, and courts have them. Find out before you need to.

Thirty days to fluent

- Week 1. Run one prompt from the library on a task you already did by hand. Compare the two. That comparison teaches more than any course.
- Week 2. Use the fix it table every time the first answer disappoints you. Stop accepting first drafts.
- Week 3. Attach a real document. Summarize it, rewrite it, argue with it.
- Week 4. Turn your most repeated task into a saved prompt.

START HERE Pick the one task you dread most this week. Run it through prompt 1 or 3 before you close this document.

The four ideas underneath this guide (choose the right work, brief it properly, judge the output, own what you send) follow the AI Fluency framework by Anthropic with Prof. Rick Dakan and Prof. Joseph Feller. The examples and prompts here are ours.

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