



Founders AI

founders-ai.dev

PRACTICAL AI FIELD GUIDE

AI for Everyday Work

How to Use AI at Work Without Looking Lazy, Risky, or Overwhelmed

A practical work guide for founders, business owners, creators, employees, and everyday people who want AI to make normal work clearer, faster, and safer.

- Use AI safely
- Draft better emails
- Summarize meetings
- Create SOPs
- Plan projects
- Run a 7-day challenge

Start here

Most people are asking the wrong question about AI at work.

They ask:

“What tool should I use?”

The better question is:

“What part of my work repeats, slows me down, or requires me to start from a blank page?”

AI is useful when it helps you move faster through normal work. It is risky when you treat it like a magic employee, a lawyer, a doctor, a final editor, or a decision-maker.

This guide gives you the simple version:

- What AI is actually good for at work.
- What tasks to try first.
- What tasks to avoid.
- How to use AI without looking lazy, careless, or risky.
- A 7-day challenge to make AI part of your workflow.

The goal is not to become an “AI person.” The goal is to become better at your work because you know when to use AI and when not to.

The Founders AI rule

Use AI where it lowers friction.

Do not use AI where it removes responsibility.

AI can help you

- Draft the first version.
- Summarize messy information.
- Turn notes into structure.
- Compare options.
- Prepare for meetings.
- Rewrite for tone.
- Find blind spots.
- Create checklists.
- Practice hard conversations.
- Learn faster.

You still own

- The facts.
- The judgment.
- The customer promise.
- The legal or financial risk.
- The final decision.
- The words you send.
- The work people judge you by.

Microsoft's 2026 Work Trend Index found that 86% of surveyed AI users treat AI output as a starting point rather than a final answer ([Microsoft WorkLab](#)). That is the right mindset. AI is a workbench, not a boss.

The 10 best starter use cases

Start with low-risk tasks that happen often. These are the best places to learn because they save time without asking AI to make final decisions.

Use case	What AI should do	What you still do
Email drafts	Turn rough bullets into a clear message	Check facts, tone, and promise
Meeting notes	Summarize notes into decisions, owners, and next steps	Confirm accuracy and missing context
SOPs	Turn a process into step-by-step instructions	Test the process in real life
Research summaries	Compare articles, tools, vendors, or options	Verify sources and decide
Customer replies	Draft a calm, helpful response	Own the relationship and policy
Content drafts	Create outlines, hooks, or first drafts	Add experience, examples, and taste
Spreadsheet help	Explain formulas, clean categories, suggest analysis	Check formulas and numbers
Planning	Break a project into milestones and tasks	Set priorities and deadlines
Decision prep	List pros, cons, risks, and assumptions	Make the call
Learning	Explain a topic at your level and quiz you	Practice and apply it

If a task is repetitive, language-heavy, messy, or annoying to start, AI can probably help. If a task requires judgment, permission, confidential data, regulated advice, or customer trust, AI should assist only under human review.

Use case 1: emails

Email is usually the easiest place to start because the risk is low if you review before sending.

Use AI when you need to:

- Turn messy notes into a polished email.
- Make a message shorter.
- Make a message warmer.
- Make a message firmer without sounding rude.
- Create follow-up options.

Prompt

Rewrite this email so it is clear, concise, and professional.

Audience:

[Who is receiving it]

Goal:

[What I need them to understand or do]

Tone:

[Friendly / direct / apologetic / firm / executive]

Draft:

[Paste rough draft]

Rules:

- Do not add facts I did not provide.
- Keep it under [number] words.
- End with one clear next step.

Do not use AI to send sensitive customer information into a public tool. Do not let AI make promises about pricing, refunds, legal terms, timelines, or outcomes unless those promises are already approved.

Use case 2: meeting notes

Most meeting notes fail because they are too long or too vague. AI can turn raw notes into decisions and actions.

Prompt

Turn these meeting notes into a clean action summary.

Output format:

1. Key decisions
2. Open questions
3. Action items with owner and due date
4. Risks or blockers
5. Follow-up message I can send to the group

Rules:

- If an owner or due date is missing, write "missing."
- Do not invent decisions.
- Keep the summary skimmable.

Notes:

[Paste notes]

The key is to ask AI to mark missing information instead of guessing. That turns AI into a cleanup tool instead of a hallucination machine.

Use case 3: SOPs

An SOP is a standard operating procedure. In normal words, it is a repeatable instruction sheet.

If you do a task more than twice, document it. If someone else may need to do it later, document it better.

Prompt

Create a simple SOP from this rough process.

Task:

[Name of task]

Who does it:

[Role or person]

Trigger:

[When this task starts]

Rough steps:

[Paste steps]

Output:

- Purpose
- Tools needed
- Step-by-step process
- Quality checklist
- Common mistakes
- When to escalate to a human

Rules:

- Write for a beginner.
- Use plain English.
- Do not assume tools I did not mention.

This is valuable for founders, business owners, and employees because it turns personal knowledge into reusable business knowledge.

Use case 4: research summaries

AI is useful for research when it helps you understand and compare information. It is dangerous when it replaces verification.

Use AI to:

- Summarize long articles.
- Compare tools.
- Identify arguments for and against a decision.
- Pull out assumptions.
- Create a question list before a purchase.

Prompt

Summarize this information for a practical business decision.

Decision:

[What I am deciding]

Context:

[Who I am / what business or role this is for]

Sources or notes:

[Paste source text, notes, or links if the tool can browse]

Output:

- Short summary
- What matters most
- Benefits
- Risks
- Assumptions
- Questions I should answer before deciding

Rules:

- Separate facts from opinions.
- Flag anything that needs verification.
- Do not make the decision for me.

If money, reputation, health, legal issues, hiring, customer promises, or compliance are involved, verify before acting.

Use case 5: customer replies

Customer communication is a good AI use case only if a human owns the final message.

Use AI to make a response:

- Clearer.
- Calmer.
- More empathetic.
- Better structured.
- Less defensive.

Prompt

Draft a customer reply.

Customer issue:

[What happened]

Our policy or position:

[What we can and cannot do]

Goal:

[Resolve / clarify / apologize / ask for more info / set boundary]

Tone:

Calm, respectful, and helpful.

Rules:

- Do not admit fault unless I explicitly say to.
- Do not promise refunds, discounts, legal outcomes, or timelines unless provided.
- Include one clear next step.

The FTC's AI enforcement page highlights risks around deceptive claims, false reviews or testimonials, unsupported accuracy claims, and data handling practices ([Federal Trade Commission](#)). For everyday work, that means never use AI to fabricate reviews, exaggerate results, or make claims you cannot support.

Use case 6: content drafts

AI can help you create faster, but it should not replace your point of view.

Use AI for:

- Outlines.
- Hooks.
- Titles.
- Drafts.
- Examples.
- Repurposing one idea into multiple formats.

Prompt

Help me turn this idea into content.

Audience:
[Who this is for]

Platform:
[YouTube / LinkedIn / email / blog / short-form video]

Point of view:
[What I believe]

Raw idea:
[Paste idea]

Output:
- 5 hooks
- 1 outline
- 1 draft
- 3 stronger angles
- 3 things that would make this more useful

Rules:
- Do not use hype.
- Make it practical.
- Include examples a real person would recognize.

The value still comes from your experience, taste, examples, and judgment. AI gives you material. You give it meaning.

Use case 7: spreadsheet help

AI can help with spreadsheets even if you are not a spreadsheet person.

Use AI to:

- Explain formulas.
- Suggest formulas.
- Clean categories.
- Create column logic.
- Explain what a table means.
- Turn messy rows into a summary.

Prompt

Help me work with this spreadsheet.

Goal:

[What I am trying to figure out]

Columns:

[List column names]

Sample rows:

[Paste 5 to 20 sample rows, with private data removed]

Output:

- What this data can answer
- Suggested cleanup steps
- Useful formulas
- Possible charts
- Mistakes to watch for

Do not paste payroll, customer personal information, health data, financial account details, or other sensitive data unless you are using an approved tool and you know the data rules.

Use case 8: planning

AI is excellent at turning a vague project into a starting plan.

Prompt

Turn this project into a practical plan.

Project:
[What I want to accomplish]

Deadline:
[Date or timeframe]

Constraints:
[Budget, time, team, tools, risks]

Output:

- Milestones
- Tasks
- Dependencies
- What to do first
- Risks
- What I should not waste time on

Rules:

- Make the plan realistic.
- Assume I am busy.
- Prioritize the highest-leverage steps.

The best plan is not the most detailed plan. The best plan tells you what to do next and what to ignore.

Use case 9: decision prep

AI should not decide for you. It should make your decision clearer.

Prompt

Help me prepare for a decision.

Decision:
[What I am deciding]

Options:
[Option A / Option B / Option C]

Context:
[Relevant background]

Output:

- Pros and cons
- Risks
- Hidden assumptions
- What information is missing
- Worst-case scenario
- Best-case scenario
- Recommendation, clearly labeled as a recommendation

Rules:

- Do not pretend uncertainty is certainty

Use case 10: learning

AI is one of the best learning tools if you ask it to teach interactively.

Prompt

```
Teach me [topic] for my role.

My level:
[Beginner / intermediate / advanced]

Why I need it:
[work goal]

Teach me in this format:
1. Plain-English explanation
2. Real-world example
3. Common mistakes
4. Practice exercise
5. Quiz me with 5 questions

Rules:
- Do not move on until I answer the questions.
- Correct me directly.
- Give examples from my work context.
```

Do not just ask AI for an explanation. Ask it to test you. Learning improves when you have to retrieve, apply, and correct.

The safe-use line

Here is the simple line:

Use AI to help with the work. Do not use AI to escape accountability for the work.

NIST's AI Risk Management Framework is designed to help organizations manage AI risks and incorporate trustworthiness considerations into AI use and evaluation ([NIST](#)). You do not need to memorize a governance framework to use AI responsibly. You do need a few simple rules.

Do not paste:

- Customer personal information.
- Employee records.
- Payroll data.
- Health information.
- Financial account data.
- Legal documents you are not allowed to share.
- Trade secrets.
- Passwords, tokens, or API keys.
- Private strategy documents.

Do not publish:

- AI-generated facts you have not checked.
- Fake reviews.
- Fake testimonials.
- Fake case studies.
- Legal, health, or financial advice you are not qualified to give.
- Claims about results that you cannot prove.

Do not delegate final judgment on:

- Hiring.
- Firing.
- Promotions.
- Legal matters.
- Medical decisions.
- Financial decisions.
- Compliance.
- Safety.
- Customer refunds or disputes.
- Anything that could seriously affect another person.

The everyday AI workflow

Use this five-step workflow for almost anything.

Step 1: define the job

Tell AI what you are trying to accomplish.

Bad:

Help me with this.

Step 2: provide context

AI performs better when it knows the audience, goal, constraints, and tone.

Use this context block:

```
Role:  
[Who I am]  
  
Audience:  
[Who this is for]  
  
Goal:  
[What needs to happen]  
  
Context:  
[Important background]  
  
Constraints:  
[Length, tone, tools, deadline, policy]
```

Step 3: ask for a specific output

Do not just ask for help. Ask for the shape of the answer.

Examples

- "Give me a bullet-point summary."
- "Create a table."
- "Draft three versions."
- "Write a checklist."
- "Create a step-by-step plan."
- "Find risks and missing assumptions."

Step 4: review like an owner

Check

- Is it true?
- Is it complete?
- Is the tone right?
- Did it add facts I did not provide?
- Does this create risk?
- Would I stand behind this if someone questioned it?

Step 5: improve the prompt

When the output is wrong, do not start over immediately. Tell AI what to fix.

Use

```
This is close, but fix these issues:
1. [Issue]
2. [Issue]
3. [Issue]

Keep:
[what worked]

Change:
[what needs to improve]
```

This is how your prompt format improves as you work.

What to use AI for first

If you are new, start here:

Day	Task	Why it works
1	Rewrite one email	Low risk, immediate value
2	Summarize meeting notes	Turns messy info into action
3	Create one SOP	Builds reusable knowledge
4	Compare two tools or options	Teaches research judgment
5	Draft one customer or internal reply	Improves tone and clarity
6	Build a project plan	Turns vague work into steps
7	Audit what saved time	Helps you keep only what works

Microsoft found in 2026 that Frontier Professionals are more likely than others to pause before starting work to decide what should be done by AI versus a human, at 53% versus 33% ([Microsoft WorkLab](#)). That pause is the habit you are building.

What to avoid at first

Avoid these until you have more experience or approved tools:

- Fully automated customer replies.
- AI-generated legal documents.
- AI-generated financial advice.
- AI-generated medical guidance.
- Automated hiring decisions.
- AI tools connected to sensitive systems.
- Public claims about results.
- Auto-posted content with no review.
- Uploading private company data to random tools.
- Buying five subscriptions before one workflow proves useful.

ActivTrak found that the average organization uses seven AI tools and that 83% use six or more, which creates oversight and consistency problems ([ActivTrak](#)). For beginners, more tools are usually not the answer. Better use of one tool is the answer.

The 7-day workplace AI challenge

Use this challenge to build confidence without creating risk.

Day 1: one email

Pick one email you would normally overthink. Ask AI to make it clearer and shorter. Review every word before sending.

Day 2: one summary

Take notes from a meeting, call, article, or video. Ask AI to summarize decisions, action items, and missing questions.

Day 3: one process

Pick a task you repeat. Ask AI to turn it into an SOP. Then actually follow the SOP and fix what is wrong.

Day 4: one research decision

Compare two tools, vendors, ideas, or options. Ask AI to make a comparison table and list what still needs verification.

Day 5: one customer or internal message

Draft a response to a real situation. Ask AI to make it calmer, clearer, and more useful. Make sure it does not invent promises.

Day 6: one project plan

Pick a project you have been avoiding. Ask AI to break it into milestones, tasks, risks, and the first step.

Day 7: one audit

Ask yourself:

- What saved time?
- What improved quality?
- What felt risky?
- What should become a repeatable prompt?
- What should I never use AI for again?

The point is not to use AI every day forever. The point is to find the few places where it reliably improves your work.

Saveable tool: the everyday AI prompt format

Use this as your default prompt skeleton.

```
Task:
[What I need done]

Role:
[Who I am]

Audience:
[Who this is for]

Goal:
[What outcome I want]

Context:
[Relevant background]

Input:
[Paste rough notes, draft, data, or details]

Output format:
[Email / table / checklist / plan / summary / script]

Tone:
[Clear / friendly / direct / executive / beginner-friendly]

Rules:
- Do not add facts I did not provide.
- Flag anything uncertain.
- Ask questions if important context is missing.
- Keep it practical.
```

Saveable tool: the AI risk check

Before using AI, run this checklist.

Question	If yes, what to do
Does this include private customer, employee, financial, legal, or health data?	Do not paste it into an unapproved tool
Could this affect someone's money, job, health, rights, or safety?	Keep a human in control
Would I be embarrassed if someone saw the prompt?	Rewrite or do not use AI
Am I asking AI to invent facts, reviews, or proof?	Stop
Will this be published or sent externally?	Verify and edit manually
Did AI add claims I did not provide?	Remove or verify them
Do I understand the output well enough to defend it?	If not, do more review

Saveable tool: the weekly AI audit

Use this once a week.

Task	AI helped with	Time saved	Quality impact	Risk level	Keep using?
Example: weekly email report	Draft and formatting	20 minutes	Better structure	Low	Yes

If you cannot name the time saved, quality improved, or decision made easier, the AI use may not be worth keeping.

Final reminder

AI at work is not about looking advanced.

It is about becoming harder to overwhelm.

Use AI to start faster, think clearer, prepare better, and make repeat work easier. Do not use it to fake expertise, skip verification, or avoid responsibility.

Start with one email. Then one meeting summary. Then one SOP. Then one project plan.

That is how everyday AI use becomes a real work advantage.