

The AI Starter Action Guide

Your first week with AI, one small step at a time. No jargon, no hype, nothing to install.

If you have never really used AI, this is the whole plan: open one assistant, give it one piece of work you already understand, check what comes back, and keep the version that saved you time. That's it. Everything else can wait.

The one rule that keeps beginners out of trouble: start with work you know well enough to spot a mistake. The tool decides what's possible. You decide what's true.

Step 1 — Open one assistant (5 minutes)

Pick one. All three have a free version and work in your browser. Don't compare them yet.

Assistant	Where	Good first feel
ChatGPT	chatgpt.com	The most common starting point
Google Gemini	gemini.google.com	Handy if you live in Gmail and Docs
Claude	claude.ai	Pleasant for writing and long documents

Create a free account. Type a question the way you'd say it out loud. You don't need special wording — you need a clear request.

Step 2 — Choose your first task (5 minutes)

Good first tasks are boring, repeated, and low-stakes: a weekly update, a summary of notes you wrote, a first draft of an email you send often, a checklist you rebuild every month.

Skip anything where a confident wrong answer would cost you: legal, medical, tax, client promises, or anything you couldn't check.

Write it down

My first task:

Step 3 — Decide what "good" means before you look

This is the step almost everyone skips, and it's the one that protects you. Fill this in *before* the AI shows you anything.

The source of truth I'll check against (your notes, a document, real numbers):

Three things a good result must include:

Two mistakes I would recognize immediately:

Decisions that stay with me, not the AI:

If you can't fill this in, you picked the wrong first task. Choose something you know better and come back.

Step 4 — Give it one bounded job

Don't ask for everything. Give it your material, tell it the shape you want, and tell it what not to invent.

```
Using only the notes below, draft a [weekly update / summary / email]
with sections for [progress, decisions, risks, next steps].
```

Rules:

- Use only what's in the notes.
- Do not invent names, dates, numbers, causes, or approvals.
- If something is unclear or missing, list it as an open question instead of guessing.
- Keep uncertain things uncertain.

NOTES:

[paste your notes here]

Paste your real material underneath. The quality of what you get back is mostly the quality of what you hand over.

Step 5 — Check it like an editor, not a fan

AI writes smoothly even when it's wrong, and the smooth sentence is the dangerous one. Nobody double-checks the line that sounds like something a colleague would have said.

Keep your source open next to the answer and walk this list:

- Is every name, date, and number actually in my source?
- Did anything uncertain quietly turn into a fact?
- Did a risk get promoted into a decision or a promise?
- Is anything important missing?
- Would I sign my name to this?

Two lines to watch for: "We're still on schedule" and "That will be finished by Friday." If your notes never said it, the AI made it up — politely, and in your voice.

Step 6 — Do the honest math

Fast isn't the same as helpful. Count the whole loop: preparing the material, writing the request, reading the result, fixing it, and moving it where the work lives.

Time doing it myself: _____ **Time with AI, start to finish:** _____

If the AI version costs more, you haven't lost anything. You learned where the line is. Narrow the job, improve the material you hand over, or pick a different task.

Step 7 — Keep what works

Run the same handoff two or three times. If it holds up, save the prompt in a note titled "my prompts" and use it again. That saved prompt is the actual win — not the chat you had once and forgot.

Watch your own corrections, too. Fixing the same thing every time means you found a rule worth adding to the prompt.

Your first week

Day	Do this
1	Create your free account. Ask it three questions about your own work.
2	Pick your first task. Fill in the "what good means" page.
3	Run the bounded prompt. Check it against your source.
4	Run it again with your corrections built into the prompt.
5	Do the honest math. Keep it, narrow it, or drop it.
6	Save the prompt that worked. Name it plainly.
7	Choose task number two. Same loop, nothing fancier.

Five things not to do yet

1. Don't paste confidential client, medical, or employee information into a free assistant.
2. Don't use it for anything you can't check, especially legal, tax, or medical questions.
3. Don't let it send, post, or publish anything on its own.
4. Don't chase automation in week one. Learn the handoff first.
5. Don't collect ten tools. One assistant, used well, beats a tab full of trials.

If it goes sideways

- **Generic, fluffy answer?** You gave it too little. Hand over the real notes.
- **Made things up?** Add "use only what's below, list anything missing as a question."
- **Wrong tone?** Paste two examples of your own writing and say "match this."
- **Too long?** Ask for a specific length and structure. Vague requests get padding.

Where you're headed: AI prepares. You judge. You stay accountable. Keep that order and you can hand it more work every month without ever handing over the decisions.