



Beginner's Guide to AI

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Beginner's Guide to AI

A plain-language map of what AI can do, who makes it, and how to start using it well

Introduction

“AI” used to mean something narrow and technical. Today it mostly refers to a specific wave of tools — chatbots and generators built on large language models — that can hold a conversation, write, analyze, and create in ways that feel genuinely new. If you haven’t used any of it yet, or you’ve only poked at ChatGPT once, this guide is meant to catch you up quickly: what these tools can actually do, who makes the major ones, how to talk to them effectively, and the habits worth building from the start.

This guide is deliberately broad rather than deep. If you later want to automate repetitive tasks or connect AI to your other apps and workflows, that’s a distinct, more advanced topic covered in a separate companion guide — this one is about understanding the landscape and using AI well as an individual, one conversation at a time.

Part 1: What AI can actually do today

Modern AI tools are generalists — the same underlying system can do most of the following, usually inside one chat window.

Answer questions and hold a conversation. This is the most familiar use: ask something, get a conversational answer, ask a follow-up. Unlike a search engine, it can maintain context across a whole conversation and tailor its answer to what you've already said.

Write and edit. Drafting emails, essays, social posts, cover letters, and reports; rewriting something in a different tone; shortening or expanding text; fixing grammar. This is consistently one of the highest-value, lowest-risk uses for a beginner.

Read and understand documents and images. Upload a PDF, spreadsheet, photo, or screenshot and ask questions about it — summarize a contract, extract numbers from a receipt, describe what's in a photo, or explain a chart.

Research and summarize. Many tools can now search the live web and cite sources, rather than relying only on what they learned during training — useful for anything time-sensitive or current.

Write and debug code. Even without a programming background, you can describe what you want in plain language and get working code, an explanation of an error message, or a walkthrough of what a piece of code does.

Create images. Describe a picture in words and get one back — useful for illustrations, mockups, social graphics, or just experimentation. Quality and style vary a lot between tools.

Create video and audio. Text-to-video and text-to-speech tools can generate short video clips or realistic narration from a written script. This space is younger and changes fast — tools that are best-in-class today are sometimes discontinued or replaced within a year.

Translate and adapt language. Beyond literal translation, AI can adjust reading level, formality, or regional phrasing while preserving meaning.

Analyze data and spot patterns. Point a tool at a spreadsheet or dataset and ask it to find trends, outliers, or summaries — a lighter-weight alternative to writing your own analysis formulas.

Take multi-step actions on your behalf. The newest and least mature category: instead of just answering, an “agent” can carry out a goal across several steps — browsing the web, filling out forms, or operating other software — with only occasional check-ins. This is powerful but the least predictable category, and it's the subject of the companion automation guide rather than this one.

What it's still bad at: anything requiring true understanding of stakes and consequences, up-to-the-second facts it hasn't been given access to search for, and perfect accuracy on

niche or obscure topics. Treat it as a fast, capable collaborator that still needs a human checking its work — not an infallible authority.

Part 2: Who makes the major tools

You don't need to track every company in this space, but recognizing the biggest names will help you make sense of the news and comparisons you'll run into.

Company	Assistant	Known for
OpenAI	ChatGPT	The most widely used chatbot; strong all-rounder for writing, research, and coding
Anthropic	Claude	Known for careful, precise writing and strong coding ability
Google	Gemini	Deep integration with Google Search, Docs, Gmail, and very large documents
Microsoft	Copilot	Built directly into Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook
xAI	Grok	Built into X (Twitter), with real-time access to posts on the platform
Meta	Meta AI	Built into WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook Messenger
Perplexity	Perplexity	Positioned as an “answer engine” that emphasizes cited web sources
Mistral AI	Le Chat	A European alternative with a strong focus on coding and open-weight models
Amazon	Amazon Q	Aimed mainly at developers and AWS customers
DeepSeek	DeepSeek	A lower-cost entrant known for openly published, downloadable models

Nearly all of these offer a free tier that's more than enough to learn on. There's no single “best” one — they trade blows on different strengths, and the practical answer for a beginner is to try two or three free tiers side by side on the same real task and see which one you personally prefer.

Part 3: Choosing a tool without overthinking it

A few rules of thumb, rather than an exhaustive comparison:

- **Want one general-purpose tool to start with?** ChatGPT or Claude are both reasonable defaults — broadly capable, widely documented, and easy to find help for when you're stuck.
- **Already live inside Google Docs, Gmail, or Sheets?** Gemini is worth trying first since it's already built in.
- **Already live inside Word, Outlook, or Excel at work?** Copilot is worth trying first for the same reason.
- **Care most about verified, cited sources?** Perplexity leans into citations more than most chat-first tools.
- **Want to generate images or video?** Start with whatever image/video tool is bundled into the chat assistant you already use before signing up for a separate specialized service.

Whatever you pick, start on the free tier. The free versions of these tools are capable enough to learn the basics, and switching later costs you nothing but a little muscle memory.

Part 4: How to talk to AI well

The single most transferable skill in this whole guide is writing a good prompt — it works the same way across every tool above.

1. **Be specific.** “Write a birthday message” gets a generic result. “Write a short, funny birthday message for my brother who just turned 30 and loves fishing” gets something usable.
 2. **Give context.** Tell it who the audience is, what you already know, or what you've tried. The more relevant background you provide, the less generic the answer.
 3. **Say what format you want.** Ask for a table, a bulleted list, three options, a specific word count, or a particular tone — don't make it guess.
 4. **Assign a role when it helps.** “Act as a patient tutor explaining this to a complete beginner” or “Act as an editor reviewing this for clarity” tends to shift the style of the answer usefully.
 5. **Iterate rather than starting over.** If the first answer is close but not right, say what's wrong and ask it to adjust — it remembers the conversation, so refining beats retyping from scratch.
 6. **Ask it to simplify when you're lost.** Adding “explain this like I'm a complete beginner” to a confusing answer is one of the most useful phrases you can learn.
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Part 5: Terms worth knowing

Term	Plain-language meaning
Model	The underlying AI system answering you (e.g., a specific version of GPT, Claude, or Gemini). Newer, larger models are generally more capable but not always necessary for simple tasks.
Prompt	What you type to the AI. Quality in, quality out — this is the main lever you control.
Hallucination	When an AI states something confidently that turns out to be false. It happens because the system predicts plausible text rather than checking a verified source, unless it's explicitly searching or reading a document you gave it.
Multimodal	A model that can handle more than just text — images, audio, or documents in the same conversation.
Context window	How much of the current conversation or document the AI can “remember” at once. Very long conversations or large files can eventually push earlier details out of view.
Training data	The material a model learned from before you ever talked to it. It's also why models have a knowledge cutoff and may not know about very recent events unless they search the web.
Free tier / usage limits	Most tools offer a capped amount of free use per day or month, with paid plans removing or raising that cap.

Part 6: Misconceptions worth dropping early

- **“AI understands and thinks like a person.”** It doesn't have consciousness, feelings, or genuine understanding — it's predicting likely text based on patterns, which can look remarkably similar to reasoning without actually being it.
- **“Whichever one I tried first must be the best.”** Most people's first AI tool is whichever one they heard about first, not necessarily the strongest for their use case. The landscape changes every few months; it's worth periodically re-checking.
- **“It's always right if it sounds confident.”** Confidence and accuracy are not connected in these systems. Verify anything important, especially facts, numbers, and citations.
- **“They all handle my data the same way.”** Data retention, training use, and opt-out options vary by company and by plan. If privacy matters for a particular use, check the specific tool's policy rather than assuming.
- **“You need to be technical to get value from this.”** You don't. Every tool in this guide is designed for plain-language use with no setup beyond creating an account.
- **“It learns and improves on its own as you use it.”** Within a single conversation it adapts to context, but the underlying model doesn't retrain itself from your chats in real time — improvements come from the company releasing new model versions.

Part 7: Safety and privacy basics

- **Don't share what you wouldn't hand to a stranger.** Passwords, ID numbers, medical details, financial information, and confidential work material can be retained or reviewed depending on the provider's policies — treat the chat box with the same caution as a public forum unless you've confirmed otherwise.
 - **Verify before you rely on it.** Especially for facts, statistics, legal or medical information, and anything you plan to act on — a quick second check costs little and catches real errors.
 - **Read outputs before you send or publish them.** AI drafts are a starting point, not a finished product; tone, accuracy, and context often need a human pass.
 - **Know how to turn off training on your conversations,** if that matters to you — most major providers offer this as a setting, though the exact name and location varies.
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Part 8: Getting started this week

1. Pick one free tool from Part 2 and create an account.
 2. Give it a real task you already need done — a draft email, a summary of an article, an explanation of something you're confused about — rather than a throwaway test question.
 3. Apply one prompting technique from Part 4 (adding specificity, format, or a role) and compare the result to your first, plainer attempt.
 4. Try uploading a document or image and asking a question about it, if the tool supports it.
 5. Once you're comfortable, try the same task in a second tool from Part 2 and see whether you prefer the result — this is the fastest way to develop a real opinion instead of going on reputation alone.
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Let us find the right AI for you!

This guide should get you started and give you some advice about the basic AI companies and services, but this is only the beginning of the AI journey and it is changing fast. If you are ready to transform your personal capabilities or your company with focused AI tools that can help you become more effective and efficient then we are here to help.

Contact us today through email or on our website to schedule your free 30-Minute Introduction Call to see what AI can do for you!

Email: Sales@IntelliTechDynamics.com

Website: www.IntelliTechDynamics.com

