

STAFF EXPLAINER • OCTOBER 2026

AI at work: what your team needs to know

Fifteen minutes of reading that will save you hours

THE SHORT ANSWER

AI is a very fast, very keen assistant that is often wrong and never says so. Use it for the first draft. You do the checking. Keep the private stuff out.

Written for people who have jobs to do, not for people who like technology.

No jargon, no hype. Each section starts with a one-line summary, so you can skim it in five minutes. Read the lot once, then keep the prompts handy.

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1. What AI actually is

Not a brain. A very well-read autocomplete.

IN SHORT

AI predicts the words that should come next, based on a huge amount of text it has read. It does not know things. It produces answers that sound right.

Think of a keen new graduate who has read every book, never done a day of real work, and cannot say "I don't know". Fast, confident and polite. Occasionally dead wrong.

That is why AI is so useful for drafts and so risky for facts. The same trick that writes a good email also invents a convincing reference that does not exist.

AI is like your uncle at Christmas. Confident, fluent, and wrong about half of it. You still invite him because he is good company.

2. What it is good at

Getting you from a blank page to a rough draft.

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Use it for drafting, summarising, rewriting, brainstorming and explaining. Do not use it as the final word.

Job	Example
Draft	A first version of an email, a proposal, a job ad or a procedure.
Summarise	A long email thread, a report or a meeting into five bullet points.
Rewrite	Shorter, friendlier, firmer, clearer, or without the waffle.
Pull out actions	Turn messy meeting notes into decisions, actions and owners.
Brainstorm	Ten ideas for a campaign name. Nine will be rubbish. One won't.
Explain	Tell me what this contract clause means in plain English.
Spreadsheets	Write me a formula, or explain the one somebody left behind in 2017.

3. What it gets wrong

Quite a lot, with great confidence.

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Facts, numbers, dates, quotes, sources, and anything legal, medical or recent. Made-up answers have a fancy name: hallucinations.

- **Invented facts.** Names, statistics, prices and dates that look right and are not.
- **Invented sources.** Links and references that go nowhere. Open them.
- **Maths.** It can get sums wrong, and then explain the wrong answer beautifully.
- **Recent news.** Some tools can search the web, some cannot. Check which one you are using.
- **Your business.** It does not know your clients, prices or procedures unless you give it that information or it is connected to your files.
- **Agreeing with you.** Tell it your idea is brilliant and it will usually agree. Ask it to find the holes instead.

4. Work AI vs free AI

Same name on the box. Different engine underneath.

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Use the tool [Company name] has approved, with your work login. Free and personal accounts are for your own time.

- Free versions run lighter, weaker engines. That is why people try free AI and decide it is rubbish.
- Work versions have rules about where data goes. Free versions are not built around your company's rules.
- If the company pays for it, the company can check what happened if something goes wrong. That protects you as well.
- Not sure whether your tool is the approved one? Ask before you paste anything in.

5. What never goes in

The red list.

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If you would not put it on a postcard, do not put it in a free AI tool. Some things should not go into any AI tool at all.

Level	What it covers	The rule
GREEN	Public information. General questions. Your own drafts with no client or personal details.	Any approved tool.
AMBER	Client names and work. Internal financials. Contracts. Staff information.	Approved business tools only. Only what you need.
RED	Passwords and keys. Card and bank details. Tax file numbers and ID. Health information. Anything we promised not to share.	Never. Not in any AI tool.

Not sure which colour? Treat it as one level higher, then ask.

6. How to ask

Rubbish in, rubbish out. Same as asking a person.

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Tell it who you are, what you want, what it needs to know, what the result should look like, and what to avoid.

	Weak	Better
Ask	Write an email to a client about a late job.	I manage projects at a small accounting firm. Write an email to a client whose tax return will be three days late because we are waiting on their bank statements. Keep it under 120 words. Polite but clear that the delay is on their side. No jargon. No apologies for things that are not our fault.
Result	Three paragraphs of corporate waffle, a lot of "sincerely apologise" and no mention of the statements.	Short, direct, tells them what we need and by when.

- **Give it a role and an audience.** "I'm a site manager writing to a worried customer."
- **Set a length.** Without one you will get an essay.
- **Say what to avoid.** "No jargon. No exclamation marks."
- **Push back.** "Shorter." "Less formal." "That is wrong, check it again." It does not mind.

7. Six prompts to steal

Copy, paste, change the square brackets.

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Good prompts are specific. Use these as a starting point and adjust them for your own job.

SUMMARISE A LONG EMAIL THREAD

Summarise this email thread in five bullet points. Then list any decisions that were made and anything I need to do, with who owns it. [paste thread]

SAY IT SHORTER

Rewrite this email so it is under 120 words. Keep it polite but firm. Plain English, no corporate jargon, no exclamation marks. [paste email]

TURN NOTES INTO ACTIONS

Here are my meeting notes. Pull out the decisions, the actions (with owner and due date if mentioned) and the questions still open. Put them in a table. If something is unclear, say so instead of guessing. [paste notes]

BE THE SCEPTICAL CLIENT

Read this proposal as a sceptical client who has been burnt before. What is unclear, what is missing, and what would make you say no? Be blunt. [paste proposal]

EXPLAIN IT PROPERLY

Explain [topic] to me like I am smart but new to it. Use a real example from [my industry]. Then tell me three questions I should ask an expert.

FIX MY SPREADSHEET

I have a spreadsheet with [describe columns]. I want [what you want to work out]. Write me an Excel formula for it and explain each part in one line. Tell me what could go wrong with it.

8. How to check its work

Two minutes. Do it every time.

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Check the facts, the numbers, the names, the sources and the tone, in that order. Read it out loud. If it sounds like a LinkedIn post, rewrite it.

1

Facts

Does each claim match what you know, or what you can look up?

2

Numbers

Do the figures add up? Check the sums yourself.

3

Names and dates

Right client, right spelling, right date, right amount.

4

Sources

If it gives a link or reference, open it. Does it say what the AI claims?

5

Tone

Does it sound like you? Delete "Certainly!", "I hope this email finds you well" and anything that sounds like a motivational poster.

9. Good uses, bad uses

And four things people believe that are not true.

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Use AI to help you do the work. Do not use it to avoid the thinking.

Good use	Bad use
Draft a reply, then edit it so it sounds like you.	Send the first draft without reading it.
Summarise a long document, then check the key points.	Quote the summary as if you had read the document.
Ask it to find holes in your proposal.	Ask it to agree with you.
Write a formula, then test it on a few rows.	Paste it into the finance spreadsheet and hope.
Brainstorm ten ideas, pick the best one, improve it.	Publish the first idea it gave you.
Use the approved tool with your work login.	Paste a client's file into a free tool because it was quicker.

The myth	The reality
"It is just Google."	Google finds pages that exist. AI writes new text, and sometimes makes it up.
"It is always right."	It is often right and always confident. Those are different things.
"It is private."	Depends on the account. Free and personal accounts are not built for company data.
"It will take my job."	Probably not this week. People who use it well will do more than people who do not.

10. Who to ask

There are no stupid questions. There are some very expensive ones.

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If you are unsure, ask first. If you have already stuffed up, say so the same day.

I want to...	Ask
Use a new AI tool	[Name / role]
Know if something is safe to paste in	[Name / role]
Get help with prompts for my job	[Name / role]
Report a mistake or something that looks wrong	[Name / role]. Same day. You will not be in trouble for telling us.

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