Cochise College Center for Lifelong Learning

AI for Everyday Life

Practical Help with the Tasks You Already Do

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Introduction

Welcome to **AI for Everyday Life.**[1] Most people have heard about artificial intelligence, but many are not sure what it can actually do for them. This class answers that question by starting where you already are: the bills, messages, health questions, meals, and trips that fill an ordinary week.

Some of you have used an AI tool many times, and some of you are trying one for the first time today. Either way is a good place to begin. No prior experience is required, and you do not need to know anything about computers beyond using a web browser.

We will work through seven everyday scenarios. In each one, you will try the task yourself, and each one teaches one habit that makes AI more useful. You do not need to finish every activity today. If the clock runs short, choose the scenarios that matter most to you and return to the rest at home.

What You Need

Everything we do today runs in a web browser. Our tool is **Google Gemini**, at `https://gemini.google.com`. You will need to sign in with your Gmail account, because signing in lets Gemini read the pictures and documents we attach. Gemini is free, but a free account has a daily limit on how much you can ask and upload, so work through the activities at a steady pace rather than repeating the same question many times.

The Student Files folder holds the sample documents and a file named **prompts.txt**. It contains every prompt in this handout, so you can copy and paste instead of typing.

Learning Goals

By the end of this session, you will:

- Understand in plain terms what an AI assistant is and how it produces its answers
- Attach documents and photos and ask Gemini to explain them
- Use seven simple habits that make AI answers more useful and more trustworthy
- Spot the places in your own life where AI could save you time or reduce stress

[1] Written by George Self with assistance from Claude. It was formatted with LaTeX.

Big Idea

AI is a helpful assistant, not an authority. It can explain, organize, and draft, but *you* decide what is true and what to do.

Getting Started: AI in Plain English

What Is an AI Assistant?

An AI assistant, also called a chatbot, is a computer program you talk to by typing. You write a message, called a **prompt**, and the assistant writes a reply. Gemini, ChatGPT, Claude, and Copilot are all assistants of this kind. They are built on large language models, which are programs that learned the patterns of human writing by studying an enormous amount of text.

How It Gives Its Answers

An AI assistant does not look things up in a single book of facts, and it does not understand your question the way a friend does. It predicts, one small piece at a time, which words are most likely to come next, based on everything it learned in training and everything you have told it in the conversation. This is why it can write a fluent letter in seconds, and it is also why it sometimes says something that sounds confident and is simply wrong. Experts call these mistakes *hallucinations*.

What It Does Well, and What It Does Badly

AI is strong at explaining a confusing topic in plain language, summarizing a long document, drafting a letter or an email, brainstorming ideas, and organizing information into a list or a plan. It is weak at current facts it has not been given, exact figures such as prices and opening hours, the details of your own personal situation, and knowing when it does not know something. A good rule is to let AI do the *first draft* and let yourself do the *final check*.

Three Ground Rules

1. **A prompt is just a conversation.** You can follow up, correct it, or ask it to try again. You will rarely get the best answer on the first try, and that is normal.
2. **Protect your private information.** Do not type or attach Social Security numbers, bank or credit card numbers, passwords, or your Medicare number. Google may keep your conversations, and some may be reviewed by people. In Gemini's settings you can turn off the saved activity. Today we use fictional documents, so there is nothing private to protect.

3. **Check anything that matters.** For health, money, legal, and safety decisions, treat AI as a starting point, and confirm with the real source or a professional.

Writing a Good Prompt

A prompt does not need special wording, but a good one usually answers four questions: *Who am I, and what is the situation? What exactly do I want? What limits apply?* And *what form should the answer take?* Compare these two requests:

Weak: `Tell me about cholesterol.`

Stronger: `I am a 70-year-old retiree and my doctor said my LDL cholesterol is high. Explain in plain language what that means, in about 150 words, and list three questions I should ask at my next visit.`

The second prompt is no harder to write, but it gives the AI the situation, the goal, and the format, so the answer fits *you*. Each module in this handout practices one habit that builds on this idea.

Open Gemini Now

Go to `https://gemini.google.com` and sign in with your Gmail account. Find the message box at the bottom of the page. That is where you type. The **+** button beside it adds files and photos, and your conversation appears above. Type a first message to be sure everything works, such as:

`Hello! Please explain in two sentences what you can help me with.`

Module 1: A Bill That Does Not Add Up

Habit: give the AI the full context.

Medical bills are some of the most confusing papers most of us receive. The bill comes from the doctor's office, a separate paper called an **Explanation of Benefits**, or EOB, comes from your insurance company, and the two do not always agree. An EOB says it is not a bill. It reports what the doctor charged, what the insurance plan allowed and paid, and what you owe.

AI cannot answer well about a document it cannot see. The more you give it, the better it can help. Gemini can read an attached PDF, so you do not need to retype anything. In this module, you will give Gemini *both* papers at once.

Activity 1.1: Compare a Bill with Its Explanation of Benefits

The Student Files folder contains a fictional bill and a fictional EOB for the same doctor visit by a fictional patient, Margaret Ellison.

1. In Gemini, start a new chat. Click the **+** button and attach both **Sample Medical Bill.pdf** and **Sample Insurance Statement (EOB).pdf**.
2. Ask:
   I am attaching a bill from my doctor's office and the Explanation of Benefits from my insurance company for the same visit. Explain each document in plain language. Then compare them and tell me whether I owe the full amount on the bill.
3. Read the answer slowly. Does Gemini say how much the EOB says the patient owes? Does it point out any lines on the bill that look wrong?
4. Follow up:
   Check the bill line by line against the EOB. List every charge that appears wrong, and explain why.

Activity 1.2: Write the Letter

Once you know what looks wrong, AI can draft the letter. Keep the same chat, so Gemini still has both documents.

1. Ask:
   Write a polite, firm letter from Margaret Ellison to the billing office at Bluebird Canyon Family Medicine, asking them to correct the bill. Include the account number and the specific charges in question, and ask for a corrected statement.
2. Read the letter. Are the account number, dates, and amounts right? Check them against the bill yourself.
3. Ask Gemini to make a change, such as:
   Make it shorter and a little friendlier.

Check Its Work

Do your own math. Find the bill's balance, then the amount the EOB says is the patient's share. A letter that quotes the wrong number can do more harm than no letter at all. Also notice what the EOB says about appeal deadlines. Those dates are important, and AI can miss them.

Module 1 Checklist

1. Attached two documents to the same chat
2. Asked Gemini to explain and compare them
3. Found at least one charge that did not match the EOB
4. Had Gemini draft a letter and checked every number in it

Module 2: Scam or Not?

Habit: ask for the reasoning, not only the answer.

Almost everyone now receives fake emails, text messages, and phone calls. Some are easy to spot, and others are cleverly written. AI can be a quick second opinion when a message feels off, because it knows the patterns that scammers use. But a plain "yes, it is a scam" is not very useful. What helps you is *why*, because then you can recognize the next one yourself.

Activity 2.1: Sort the Messages

The Student Files folder contains **Scam or Not - Sample Messages.txt**. It holds five messages. Some are scams and some are real. Double-click the file to open it, select one message, and copy it.

1. Paste one message into Gemini after this instruction:
   `Is the following message a scam or legitimate? Give me your confidence level, list the specific clues that support your answer, and tell me what I should do next:`
2. Read the clues, not only the verdict. Do they make sense to you?
3. Repeat with the other four messages, one at a time.
4. Before you ask about the last two, decide for yourself: scam or real?

Activity 2.2: Push Back

AI can be wrong in both directions. It sometimes calls a real message a scam, and it sometimes trusts a clever fake.

1. Choose the message you were least sure about and ask:
   `What would change your mind about this message? What could I check to be sure?`
2. Ask:
   `Which of these five messages are you least certain about, and why?`
3. Compare your own guesses with Gemini's. Where did you disagree?

The Safe Rule

Never click a link or call a number in a message you did not expect. Instead, go to the company's real website by typing the address yourself, or call the number printed on your card or statement. That works no matter what an AI, or anyone else, tells you about the message.

Module 2 Checklist

1. Asked Gemini to explain its reasoning, not only its verdict
2. Noticed at least two clues that point to a scam
3. Found a case where you and Gemini disagreed, or where it was unsure
4. Can state the safe rule from memory

Module 3: Getting Ready for the Doctor

Habit: let the AI interview you.

Lab results usually arrive as a page of numbers, abbreviations, and flags, often before you have a chance to talk with your doctor. AI can translate the page into plain language and help you prepare for the appointment. It cannot diagnose you, and it does not know your full history, so what it offers is preparation, not treatment advice.

So far, you have told the AI what you want. In this module, you will let it do something more helpful: ask *you* questions. Good doctor visits depend on good answers to good questions, and AI is surprisingly good at asking them.

Activity 3.1: Understand the Results

1. Start a new chat and attach **Sample Lab Report.pdf**.
2. Ask:
   Explain this lab report in plain language. Which results are outside the normal range, and what does each one generally mean? Do not diagnose me. Tell me what I should ask my doctor about.
3. Notice how Gemini treats the flagged results. A good answer explains what each test measures and suggests questions, but does not tell you that you have a disease.

Activity 3.2: Let Gemini Interview You

You can play yourself, or play the fictional patient, a 72-year-old retiree. Make up answers as you go.

1. Ask:
   Please interview me to prepare for my doctor's appointment. Ask me one question at a time about my symptoms, my medications, my diet, and my daily activity. Wait for my answer before asking the next question. Stop after eight questions.
2. Answer each question honestly, or make up answers, in a sentence or two.
3. When the interview ends, ask:
   Based on this lab report and my answers, write a one-page list of questions and notes to bring to my doctor.

What This Is, and Is Not

The final list is a tool for starting a conversation with your doctor. Gemini does not know your medical history, so it can miss things that matter, and it is not a replacement for your doctor's judgment. If a result worries you, call the doctor's office rather than relying on an AI answer.

Module 3 Checklist

1. Had AI explain a lab report in plain language
2. Noticed that a good answer does not claim to diagnose

3. Let Gemini ask the questions, one at a time
4. Ended with a written list of questions for a doctor

Module 4: What Is for Dinner?

Habit: start with a photo, then refine.

Gemini can look at a picture and describe what is in it. That makes it useful for an old question: *what can I make with what I already have?* Your first request rarely gives the final answer. The real skill is the second and third message, where you add details and make changes.

Activity 4.1: Photograph the Refrigerator

The Student Files folder contains **refrigerator.jpg**, a photo of a real refrigerator. (At home, you can take a photo of your own.)

1. Start a new chat. Click the **+** button and attach **refrigerator.jpg**.
2. Ask first for the inventory, before any recipes:
   List everything you can see in this refrigerator, grouped by shelf and door. Tell me when you are not sure what something is.
3. Check the list against the photo. Did Gemini miss anything? Did it mistake one thing for another? Look closely at the bag on the top shelf marked "Small Dog." Gemini sees a photograph, so it can misread labels, and it can mistake a pet's food for ours.

Activity 4.2: Refine the Plan

1. Ask:
   Suggest three dinners for two people using mostly what is in this photo. For each one, tell me what I would need to buy.
2. The photo is missing things, as every photo is. Add what you know:
   There is a container with chicken thighs on the second shelf. I also have a bag of rice and some onions in the pantry. Revise the three dinners.
3. Now add limits:
   I want something ready in 30 minutes, using only one pan, with no dairy. Choose the best of the three and give me

the recipe.

4. Ask one more thing, to see how the AI handles uncertainty:
   How can I tell if any of these ingredients are too old to use?

Food Safety

A photo cannot show how old food is, how long it was open, or whether it has spoiled. Gemini cannot smell, taste, or read a date it cannot see. Use your own judgment and the dates printed on the packages.

Module 4 Checklist

1. Attached a photo and asked for an inventory first
2. Found at least one thing Gemini missed or misidentified
3. Added details and limits in follow-up messages
4. Noticed that AI cannot judge freshness or safety

Module 5: Making a Picture

Habit: describe it, then change one thing at a time.

This module is a break from paperwork. Many people in my classes want to try making an image with AI, and it is also useful in real life: a flyer for a church bake sale, a card for a grandchild, or a simple picture for a small business's sign, menu, or social media page. Gemini can create images from a written description, usually in under a minute.

A good image description names the **subject**, the **setting**, the **style** (a photograph, a watercolor, a cartoon, a vintage poster), and any details that matter, such as colors or the mood. Then you look at the result and adjust. Plan on two or three tries, because the first picture is rarely the last.

Activity 5.1: Create Your First Image

1. Start a new chat and type a request that begins with the words "Create an image." You can click the ***Create Image*** button near the message box first, but starting your request with those words also works:
   Create an image of a friendly roadrunner standing on a desert highway at sunrise, with saguaro cacti in the background, in the style of a vintage travel poster.

2. Look at the picture closely. Is the style what you asked for? Is anything odd, such as an extra leg, a strange shadow, or a blurry corner?
3. Change *one* thing at a time:
   Make the same scene a watercolor painting instead.
4. Then change one more thing:
   Keep the watercolor style, but make it a rainy evening.

Notice that each request changes only one detail. If you change everything at once, you will not know which change caused the problem.

Activity 5.2: A Picture for a Small Business

Imagine you run a small shop, or help a friend who does. Here we will use a fictional bakery.

1. Start a new chat and ask:
   Create an image for a flyer for a small bakery called Desert Rose Bakery. Show a plate of fresh cinnamon rolls on a wooden table with a prickly pear cactus flower beside it, in warm, bright colors. Add the words "Fresh Baked Daily" at the top.
2. Read every word in the picture. AI image tools often misspell words, change letters, or add text nobody requested. This is the most common mistake in AI images.
3. If the words are wrong, ask Gemini to fix them:
   The text is spelled wrong. It should read exactly: Fresh Baked Daily. Please correct it.
4. If it still does not work, try a different approach. Ask for the picture *without* any words, and add the text yourself later in a program such as Canva, Word, or Google Docs. This is often the best method for anything that must be spelled correctly.
5. Try one more variation:
   Create a simple logo for Desert Rose Bakery, using only two colors, with no words.

Before You Use an Image

Check the whole picture, not only the main subject: hands, faces, signs, and background details. Free accounts have a daily limit on images, so create a few good ones rather than many quick ones. Images made with Gemini are marked as AI-generated, so if you share one, it is good practice to say that AI made it. For a business logo that will be on a sign or a website, check the terms of use and consider having a designer review it.

Module 5 Checklist

1. Created an image from a written description
2. Changed one detail at a time and compared the results
3. Checked every word in a picture that contained text
4. Know a better way to add text to an image if the AI spells it wrong

Module 6: Planning a Trip

Habit: state your limits up front.

When you ask a vague question, you get a vague, generic answer that fits everyone and no one. The fix is to tell the AI the limits of your real life: who is going, how much you can spend, how far you want to drive, and what you cannot do. Limits do not restrict the AI, they *guide* it.

Activity 6.1: Vague, Then Specific

1. Start a new chat and ask the vague version:
   `Plan a weekend trip.`
2. Read the answer. Is it useful? It could be for anybody anywhere.
3. Now start another new chat and ask for the same trip with your limits stated:
   `Plan a three-day trip starting in Sierra Vista, Arizona, for two retired adults in March. Our budget is $600 for everything. We do not want to drive more than three hours in a day. One of us has trouble with stairs. We like history, quiet places, and good local food. Give me a day-by-day plan, and ask me any questions you need`

answered first.

4. Answer any questions Gemini asks, then compare the two plans side by side.

Activity 6.2: Check the Details

AI trip plans often look polished and contain small errors. Hours, prices, and even whether a place still exists can be wrong.

1. Choose two specific details from the plan, such as an opening time or a ticket price.
2. Look each one up on the official website for that place or business.
3. Ask Gemini:
   Which parts of this plan are you most likely to have gotten wrong, and what should I double-check before I go?

Your Budget Is a Promise

Always add up the costs yourself. A budget is easy for AI to forget or miscalculate, and a plan that looks $600 may be $900. If the total is off, tell Gemini what is wrong and ask for a revised plan.

Module 5 Checklist

1. Compared a vague request with one that stated limits
2. Answered a follow-up question from Gemini
3. Checked two details against an official source
4. Added up the costs yourself

Module 7: My Three Places

Habit: practice on your own life.

The scenarios today were examples, but the point of the class is your own week. Think about the moments that cost you time, create stress, or make you put something off: a letter you have been avoiding, a form that does not make sense, a decision with too many options, a topic you have been meaning to learn about. Some of those are good places to try AI.

Activity 7.1: Find Three Places

Think about your last two weeks. In the worksheet below, name three tasks where AI might help. Do not use real account numbers or private details.

Place	The task or problem	What I will ask Gemini
1		
2		
3		

Activity 7.2: Try One Now

1. Choose the place that seems easiest, and write the prompt. Include your context, your limits, and what you want back.
2. Send it, and read the answer critically.
3. Follow up at least once: ask for a change, ask for its reasoning, or add a detail it did not know.
4. Ask:
   `What did you assume in that answer that I should double-check?`

Keep Going

You will get the best results from AI when you use it regularly for small things, not only for big ones. Try one new task this week. When an answer is not right, do not give up: tell Gemini what is wrong and ask again, and apply the habits from this handout.

Module 6 Checklist

1. Named three places in my own life where AI could help
2. Tried one of them with a prompt that included context and limits
3. Followed up at least once

4. Chose one task to try this week

Appendix A: The Seven Habits

Each module taught one habit. Keep this page near your computer.

1. **Give the full context.** Attach the documents, paste the text, and say who you are and what you need. The AI can only work with what it can see.
2. **Ask for the reasoning.** A verdict is not enough. Ask for the clues, the confidence level, and what would change its mind.
3. **Let it interview you.** When you do not know where to begin, ask the AI to ask *you* questions, one at a time.
4. **Start with a photo, then refine.** Your first answer is a draft. Add details, add limits, and ask again.
5. **State your limits.** Budget, time, distance, health, and preferences turn a generic answer into a useful one.
6. **Describe it, then change one thing.** For pictures, name the subject, style, and details, then adjust one thing at a time and check every word in the image.
7. **Check what matters.** Verify numbers, dates, and anything involving your health, money, or safety against a real source.

Appendix B: When Something Goes Wrong

Gemini says it reached a limit. A free account has a daily limit. Wait until it resets, or continue at home tomorrow.

Gemini cannot read my file. Check that the file is a PDF or an image, and that it finished uploading before you pressed send. If a PDF fails, try a photo or screenshot of it, or paste the text directly.

The answer is wrong or off-topic. Say so plainly: **`That is not right. Please try again, and here is what I actually need:`** followed by the details.

The answer is too long. Ask: **`Give me a shorter version in plain language.`**

I want to start fresh. Click ***New chat***. Each chat starts without any memory of the others, so it is the quickest way to get out of a conversation that has gone sideways.

I am not sure the answer is true. Ask: **`Which sources support that?`** Then check them. If it cannot name a real source, treat the answer with suspicion.

Appendix C: Other AI Assistants

Today we use Gemini, but the habits in this handout work in any of the assistants below. Each is free to try, though most have daily limits, and some ask you to create an account.

ChatGPT (`https://chatgpt.com`): Built by OpenAI, this was the first assistant offered to the general public and is still the most widely used. You can use it without an account, but with tighter limits.

Claude (`https://claude.ai`): Built by Anthropic. It is known for careful answers and strong writing. An account is required.

Copilot (`https://copilot.microsoft.com`): Microsoft's assistant, built into Windows and Microsoft 365. The website works without signing in.

DuckDuckGo AI Chat (`https://duck.ai/chat`): A privacy-focused option that needs no account. It limits how much each person can use per day, so it works best for quick questions.

Perplexity (`https://perplexity.ai`): Designed for research. It shows the sources it used, so you can check them. Free use is tightly limited.

Appendix D: Words You Will Hear

AI (artificial intelligence): Computer programs that perform tasks that once required human thinking, such as writing, translating, and recognizing pictures.

Chatbot or assistant: A program you talk to by typing, such as Gemini or ChatGPT.

Prompt: The message you type to the assistant.

Large language model (LLM): The type of AI behind these assistants. It learned patterns in language by studying a very large amount of text.

Hallucination: A confident answer that is wrong or made up. The AI is not lying. It is predicting words that sound right.

Context: Everything the AI knows about your situation during a chat, including what you typed, what you attached, and its own earlier answers.

Phishing: A fake message that tries to trick you into giving up private information or money, often by pretending to be a bank, a government agency, or someone you know.