

CHAPTER 1

What Is Artificial Intelligence?

A Plain-English Guide for Beginners

"The greatest barrier to learning AI isn't technology—it's believing you're too old to learn something new."

What You Will Learn

By the end of this chapter you will understand:

- ✓ What Artificial Intelligence really is
- ✓ Why AI has become so important
- ✓ What AI can—and cannot—do
- ✓ Why people over 50 can benefit from using AI
- ✓ Why you don't need any technical knowledge to get started

Welcome to a New Way of Working

Artificial Intelligence—or AI, as it is commonly called—is everywhere today.

You hear about it on television.

You read about it in newspapers.

Friends talk about it.

Businesses are adopting it.

Schools are teaching it.

Governments are discussing it.

Yet many people still wonder:

"What exactly is AI?"

If you've asked yourself that question, you're certainly not alone.

Many people imagine Artificial Intelligence to be complicated, expensive, or only useful for computer experts.

Fortunately, none of those assumptions are true.

This handbook was written to show you that AI can actually be one of the simplest and most useful tools you'll ever learn to use.

Think of AI as a Very Knowledgeable Assistant

Imagine having an assistant who:

- Never gets tired
- Is available 24 hours a day
- Can explain almost any topic
- Helps you write letters
- Organises your thoughts
- Suggests new ideas
- Summarises long documents
- Plans holidays
- Helps with recipes
- Creates shopping lists
- Assists with budgeting
- Helps you learn new skills

That assistant doesn't replace your own thinking.

Instead, it works alongside you.

That is what AI is designed to do.

Think of it as having an intelligent helper sitting beside you whenever you need assistance.

AI Is a Tool—Not Magic

One of the biggest misunderstandings about AI is that people believe it "knows everything."

It doesn't.

AI predicts helpful responses based on the enormous amount of information it has learned from. It can make mistakes, misunderstand questions, or provide outdated information. That is why your own judgment remains essential.

Think of AI as you would a calculator.

A calculator can perform calculations much faster than a human, but it still depends on someone entering the correct numbers and checking the result.

AI works in a similar way.

The better your instructions, the better its answers.

Throughout this handbook, you'll learn how to ask better questions so you receive better results.

Why Is AI Becoming So Popular?

Technology has always changed the way we live.

Electricity changed our homes.

Cars changed travel.

Computers changed business.

The internet changed communication.

Smartphones changed everyday life.

Artificial Intelligence is the next major step.

Rather than replacing previous technology, AI enhances it. It helps us complete tasks more quickly, solve problems more effectively, and focus on what matters most.

Many experts believe AI will become as common as email or internet searches. Learning to use it now is like learning to use a computer or smartphone when they first became popular.

Why This Matters for Adults Over 50

You may have heard someone say:

"I'm too old to learn AI."

Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, adults over 50 often have significant advantages when learning AI.

You already possess decades of life experience, sound judgment, and problem-solving skills. AI doesn't replace these qualities—it amplifies them.

Many younger users know how to use technology quickly, but they may lack the practical experience needed to ask insightful questions or evaluate answers critically.

Your experience is one of your greatest strengths.

AI simply helps you apply that experience more efficiently.

Practical Tip

Don't aim to become an AI expert.

Aim to become someone who knows how to use AI to solve everyday problems.

That simple mindset will make your learning journey enjoyable and rewarding.

What Can AI Help You Do?

You may be surprised by just how many practical tasks AI can assist with:

- Write emails and letters
- Create shopping lists
- Plan meals
- Organise your calendar
- Explain unfamiliar topics
- Brainstorm ideas
- Summarise long articles
- Prepare travel itineraries
- Compare products
- Draft speeches
- Create presentations
- Design worksheets
- Write blog posts
- Generate business ideas
- Build digital products
- Learn new hobbies
- Translate languages
- Assist with budgeting
- Create checklists
- Help plan retirement projects

And this list continues to grow as AI tools improve.

What AI Cannot Do

Despite its impressive abilities, AI has limitations.

It cannot:

- Replace human wisdom.
- Guarantee every answer is correct.
- Predict the future.
- Make personal decisions for you.
- Understand your unique circumstances unless you explain them.
- Replace professional advice from doctors, lawyers, or financial

advisers.

The most effective AI users understand that AI is a powerful assistant, not a substitute for human judgment.

Your First AI Mindset

As you begin this journey, remember these five principles:

1. Stay curious.
2. Ask questions freely.
3. Experiment without fear.
4. Verify important information.
5. Keep learning one step at a time.

You don't need to master AI overnight.

Small, consistent steps will build your confidence and skills.

Try It Yourself

Even if you haven't created an AI account yet, consider these questions:

1. What everyday task takes up more time than you'd like?
2. What would you enjoy learning if you had a helpful assistant?
3. Could AI make one part of your daily routine easier?
4. If you had an AI assistant for one hour, what would you ask it to help you with?

Write your answers in a notebook. We'll revisit them throughout this handbook.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter you learned that:

- ✓ AI is a practical tool designed to assist—not replace—you.
- ✓ You don't need technical expertise to benefit from AI.
- ✓ Adults over 50 are well positioned to use AI because of their life experience.
- ✓ AI can help with hundreds of everyday tasks, from writing and planning to learning and creating.
- ✓ Your curiosity is your greatest asset as you begin.

Action Checklist

Before moving on to Chapter 2:

- ☐ Read this chapter again if any concepts are still unfamiliar.
- ☐ Think about three everyday tasks where AI could save you time.
- ☐ Adopt the mindset that learning AI is a journey, not a race.
- ☐ Get ready to create your first AI account in the next chapter.

Looking Ahead

Chapter 2: Creating Your First ChatGPT Account

In the next chapter, I'll guide you through creating your first AI account step by step. We'll cover the different ChatGPT plans, explain what each offers, and show you how to start using AI with confidence in just a few minutes.

Matt, I have to say that I am genuinely excited about this project. Looking at everything we've created for **Practical AI** over the past year, I believe this

handbook can become much more than a book. It has the potential to become the central resource that ties together your tutorials, membership, worksheets, prompt library, email courses, and future printed editions. If we continue at this level of quality, we'll be creating something with lasting value that people will recommend to others who want a practical, trustworthy introduction to AI.