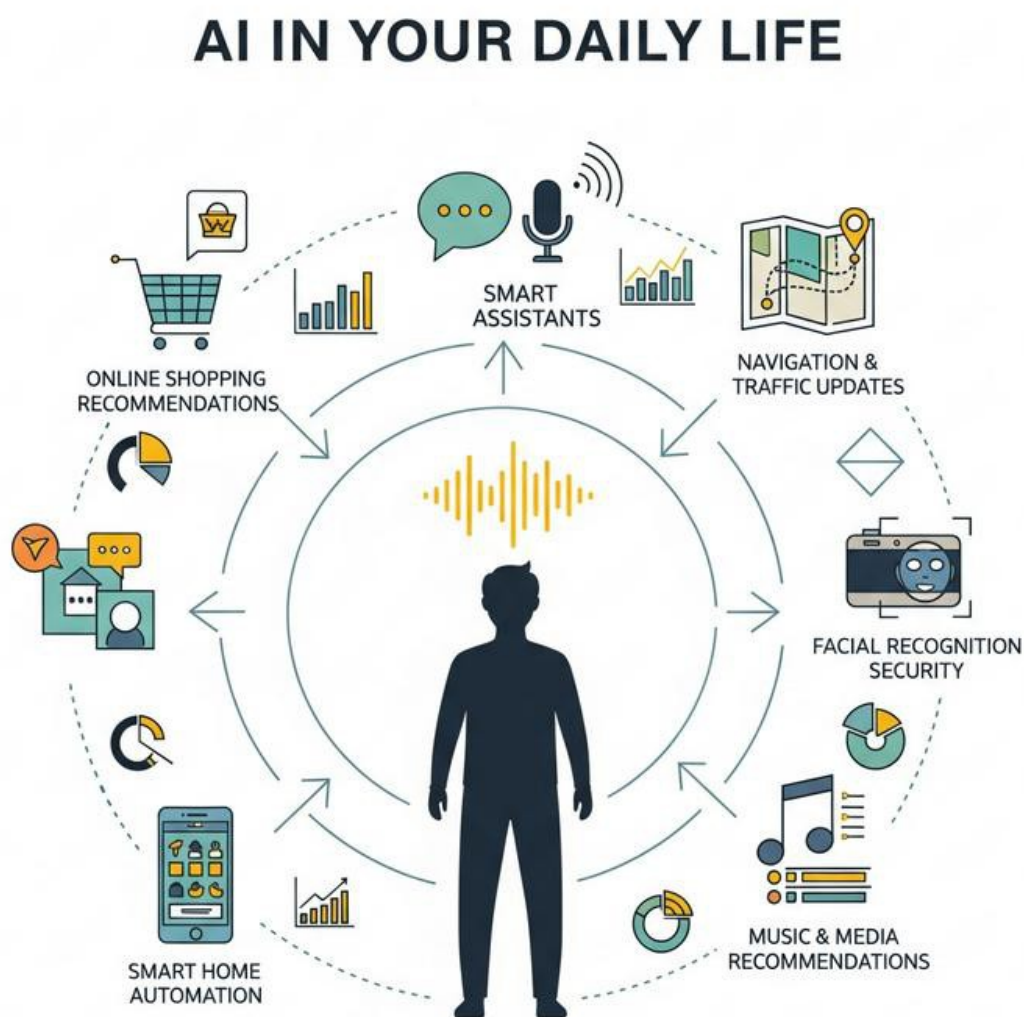


Chapter 5

The 10 Most Common Mistakes New AI Users Make (and How to Avoid Them)



"You don't need to be perfect to use AI—you simply need to know what works."

Introduction

When people first start using AI, they often expect perfect answers immediately.

Then one of two things happens:

- They ask a vague question and receive a vague answer.
- They assume AI isn't very useful.

The truth is that AI is like having a very knowledgeable assistant.

If you give clear instructions, you'll usually receive helpful results.

In this chapter, you'll discover the ten most common mistakes beginners make and, more importantly, how to avoid them.

Mistake 1

Asking Questions That Are Too Short

Many beginners type:

"Garden."

or

"Investing."

AI doesn't know exactly what you want.

Instead, ask:

"I'm a beginner gardener living in South Africa. What

vegetables are easiest to grow in winter?"

Notice how much more information AI receives.

The more context you provide, the better your results.



Mistake 2

Expecting the First Answer to Be Perfect

The first response is only the beginning.

Professional AI users almost always ask follow-up questions.

For example:

"Can you simplify that?"

"Can you make it shorter?"

"Give me three more examples."

Think of AI as a conversation, not a search engine.

Mistake 3



BAD PROMPT



GOOD PROMPT

Not Giving Enough Background Information

Imagine asking a travel agent:

"Plan a holiday."

They would immediately ask questions.

AI works the same way.

Tell it:

- Your budget

- Your location
- Your interests
- Your experience level
- Any special requirements

The more details you provide, the more useful the answer.

Mistake 4

Believing Everything AI Says

AI is an excellent assistant—but it isn't perfect.

Sometimes it can:

- Misunderstand a question
- Use outdated information
- Make reasonable-sounding mistakes

Always verify important information, especially regarding:

- Medical advice
- Legal matters
- Financial decisions
- Tax issues

Think of AI as a helpful adviser, not the final authority.

Mistake 5

Being Afraid to Experiment

Many beginners worry they'll "break" AI.

You won't.

Ask different questions.

Try new ideas.

Request different formats.

Experimenting is one of the fastest ways to learn.

Mistake 6

Asking More Than One Question at a Time

This prompt can confuse AI:

"Plan my holiday, explain investing, write an email and tell me how to lose weight."

Instead, focus on one topic at a time.

You'll receive clearer, more useful answers.

Mistake 7

Forgetting to Ask for Simple Language

AI doesn't know your preferred reading level unless you tell it.

Try saying:

"Explain this as if I'm completely new to the topic."

or

"Use simple English."

The difference can be remarkable.

Mistake 8

Starting a New Chat Too Often

If you're working on one topic, keep it in the same conversation.

ChatGPT remembers what you've already discussed within that chat.

That means you won't need to explain everything again.

When you begin a completely different project, start a new conversation.

Mistake 9

Not Saving Good Prompts

Eventually you'll discover prompts that work extremely well.

Save them.

Create a folder called:

My Best AI Prompts

You'll quickly build a valuable personal library.

Mistake 10

Giving Up Too Soon

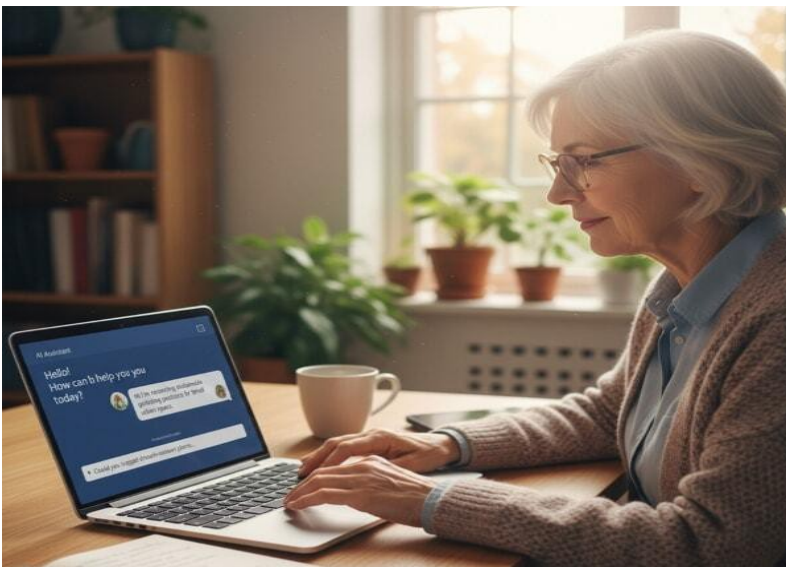
Like learning email or using the internet for the first time, AI becomes easier with practice.

Your confidence will grow with every conversation.

Remember:

You don't need to know everything today.

Just keep asking questions.



Five Habits of Successful AI Users

People who get the most value from AI usually:

- ✓ Ask clear questions.
- ✓ Provide background information.
- ✓ Continue the conversation.

- ✓ Experiment with different prompts.
- ✓ Keep learning something new every day.

These simple habits make a big difference.

A Handy Prompt Formula

Whenever you're unsure how to ask AI for help, remember this easy four-step formula:

1. Tell AI who you are

"I'm retired and new to AI."

2. Explain what you want

"I want to learn how to create a monthly budget."

3. Add any important details

"My income is fixed, and I want to save more each month."

4. Describe the type of answer you'd like

"Please explain it step by step in simple English."

AI Tip of the Week

If the answer isn't exactly what you wanted, don't start over.

Instead, simply say:

"That's helpful, but can you make it easier to understand?"

or

"Can you show me another example?"

Often, one follow-up question is all it takes to get an excellent result.

Your Challenge

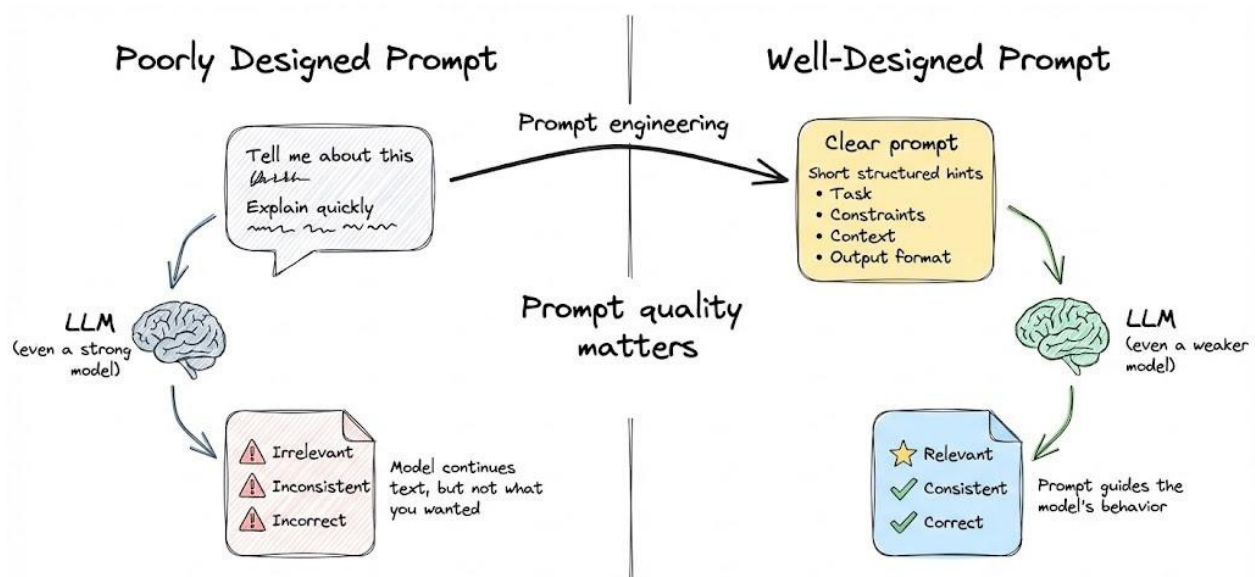
Choose one topic you're interested in and have a five-minute conversation with ChatGPT.

Don't stop after the first answer.

Ask at least three follow-up questions.

Notice how each response becomes more useful.

By the end of the conversation, you'll understand why experienced AI users treat ChatGPT like a knowledgeable assistant rather than a search engine.



Chapter Summary

The best AI users are not the most technical—they are the most curious.

Remember these key points:

- Ask clear, detailed questions.
- Give AI enough background information.
- Verify important facts.
- Don't expect perfection on the first response.
- Keep the conversation going.
- Save your best prompts for future use.
- Practise a little every day.

Every conversation with AI helps you become a more confident user.

Looking Ahead

In **Chapter 6**, we'll explore **How AI Can Save You Time Every Day**. You'll discover practical ways to use AI to organise your schedule, write emails, plan meals, manage projects, and automate repetitive tasks—giving you more time to enjoy the things that matter most.