

The Complete Beginner's Guide to ChatGPT

A practical, plain-English guide to getting started, asking better questions and using AI thoughtfully.

What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is an AI assistant that can understand and generate text in a conversation. You type a request in everyday language, and it produces a response based on patterns learned during training and the information available to it in that moment. You can ask follow-up questions, refine your request and build on earlier replies in the same conversation.

It can help explain topics, draft or edit writing, brainstorm ideas, summarise material, translate, support coding and work through problems. Depending on your account and the features available to you, it may also be able to work with files, images or other inputs. Treat it as a flexible assistant, not as a person or an authority whose answers are automatically correct.

Create an account and try your first chat

1. Go to the official ChatGPT website or app. Check that the address and publisher are genuine before entering any details.
2. Choose the available sign-up or sign-in option and follow the instructions shown. The exact steps and options can change, and may differ by region or account.
3. Once you are in a chat, type a question or task in the message area and send it. Read the reply, then ask a follow-up if you want more detail or a different approach.
4. Before sharing personal information or relying on a feature, review the current settings and information provided for your account.

A useful first experiment: ask ChatGPT to explain a topic you already know, then check what it gets right and what needs correction.

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Start with a good prompt

A prompt is simply the instruction or question you give ChatGPT. You do not need special commands or technical language. Say what you need in a way you would explain it to a helpful colleague, then add the details that would help them do the job well.

Four ingredients to add

1. Task	2. Context	3. Boundaries	4. Output
Name what you want: a summary, an explanation, a draft, a list of ideas or a comparison.	Share the relevant background, audience, purpose or material to work from.	Mention length, tone, format, reading level or points to avoid.	Say how you want the answer organised, such as steps, a table or a short email.

Prompts you can use today

- Explain [topic] to me as a beginner. Use a simple example and finish with three key points.
- Help me plan [task]. Ask me up to three questions first if important details are missing, then suggest clear next steps.
- Rewrite this message so it sounds [friendly / professional / concise]. Keep the meaning and facts unchanged: [paste text].
- Give me five ideas for [purpose]. For each one, include who it is for and one practical first step.
- Summarise the text below for [audience]. Use headings and bullet points, keep important qualifications, and flag anything unclear: [paste text].

Replace square brackets with your details. Do not paste confidential material unless you have checked that it is appropriate to share.

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How to get better replies

Your first answer is a starting point, not a final verdict. If the response misses the mark, give specific feedback about what to change. A short follow-up is often more effective than starting over.

A simple refine-and-check loop

1. Check the answer against your request. Is the audience right? Is the format usable? Did it include the details you asked for?
2. Name one change at a time. For example: make it shorter, use simpler words, add a concrete example, or put the steps in order.
3. Ask it to show uncertainty. Try: separate what is well established from what is uncertain, and tell me what information would change the answer.
4. Verify important details using reliable sources, especially names, quotations, calculations, dates and claims that could affect a decision.
5. Use the result as a draft or aid. Apply your own judgement before sending, publishing or acting on it.

Example: improve a vague request

Vague	More useful
Help me write about healthy eating.	Create a five-day lunch plan for a busy adult who wants simple, affordable meals. Give one lunch per day, a short shopping list and easy preparation notes. Ask about dietary needs before suggesting ingredients.

If the answer is long, ask for a summary first, then explore the parts you need. If it is too general, provide a real example or clarify what matters most to you.

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Limitations and safe use

ChatGPT can be useful and still be wrong. It may produce a confident-sounding answer that includes an error, leaves out context or presents an invented detail as fact. Use it to support your thinking, not to replace checking, expertise or your own decisions.

Check before relying	Protect information
Verify factual claims, calculations, citations and anything time-sensitive. When possible, follow a citation to the original source rather than relying on a summary of it. For health, legal, financial or safety questions, use qualified professionals and authoritative guidance. Do not make a consequential decision from an AI reply alone.	Avoid entering passwords, payment details, identity documents, private messages or confidential work information. Remove names and identifying details when they are not needed. Review the current privacy and data controls for your account. Settings, retention practices and available choices may change, so check the latest information directly.

Keep people and context in view

AI-generated wording can reflect gaps or biases in its training and may not suit every community or situation. Check tone, fairness and cultural context before using a response about people. Do not assume that a fluent answer is neutral, complete or up to date.

Be mindful when using files or generated text

Only upload a document, image or other material if you have the right to share it and understand how it may be handled. Check any summary against the original, especially for figures, exceptions and instructions. Before using generated writing, confirm its facts, respect other people's rights and make sure it meets the rules of your school, workplace or organisation.

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Your getting-started checklist

Build confidence by starting with low-stakes tasks. You do not need to learn every feature at once. Try one task, notice what helps, and adjust your approach as you go.

- I opened the official ChatGPT website or app and followed the sign-up or sign-in steps available to me.
- I tried a low-risk question, such as asking for a simple explanation or a few ideas.
- I gave useful context and specified the format or level of detail I wanted.
- I asked a follow-up to improve the reply instead of assuming the first answer was final.
- I checked important claims and kept confidential or identifying information out of my prompt.
- I reviewed current account information before relying on a feature, setting or privacy choice.
- I edited the result so it reflects my own knowledge, voice and responsibilities.

A small prompt template

I want help with [task]. This is for [audience or purpose]. Please use [tone or level], include [important details], and format the answer as [format]. If anything essential is missing, ask me first.

Quick glossary

Prompt: the instruction or question you send. Follow-up: another message that clarifies or develops the same conversation.	Hallucination: an inaccurate or invented detail presented as if it were true. Generative AI: technology that creates new content, such as text, in response to input.
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Keep experimenting thoughtfully. The best results come from clear requests, sensible checks and your own judgement. Features and interface details can vary by account, region and time.

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