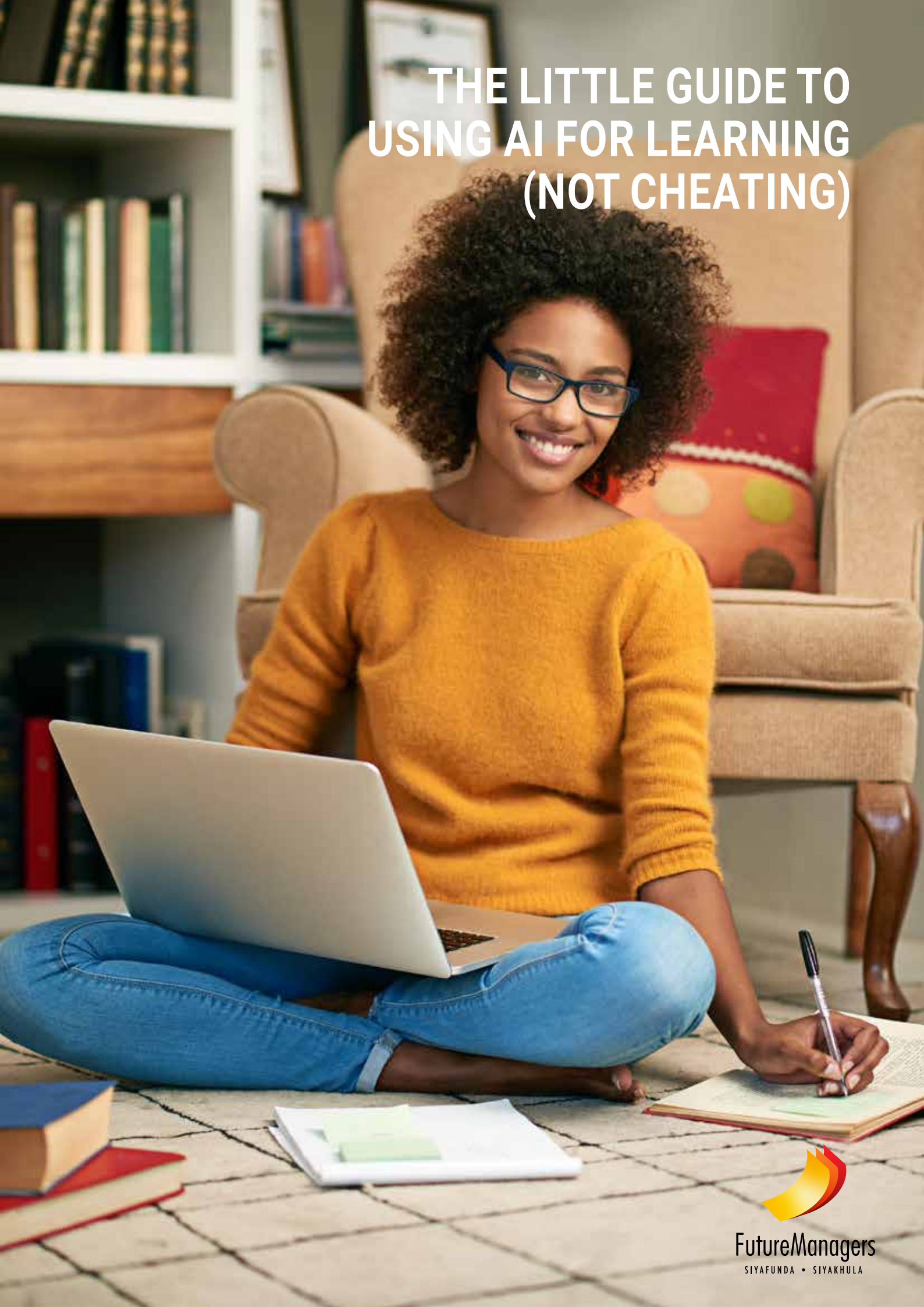
THE LITTLE GUIDE TO USING AI FOR LEARNING (NOT CHEATING)



FutureManagers
SIYAFUNDA • SIYAKHULA

Contents

This guide was written by a human who only used AI to check clarity and ideas. That's how you should use it too.

Introduction

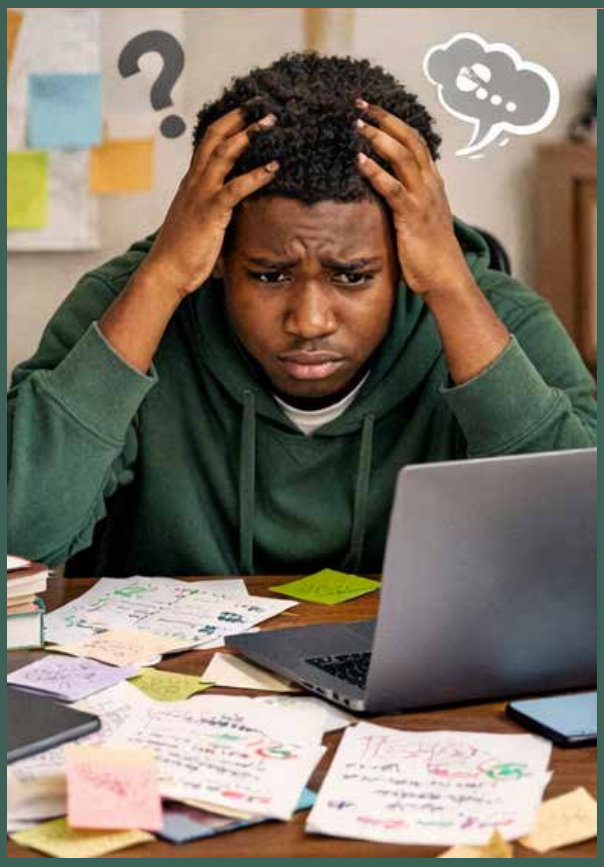
You have a project due tomorrow. You don't understand the topic. You open AI… now what?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming a powerful tool for students. It can help you understand difficult concepts, generate ideas and improve your work.

However, what we often tend to forget is that AI is not a shortcut to avoid learning. If you rely on it to do your work for you, you won't develop your own skills and learning.

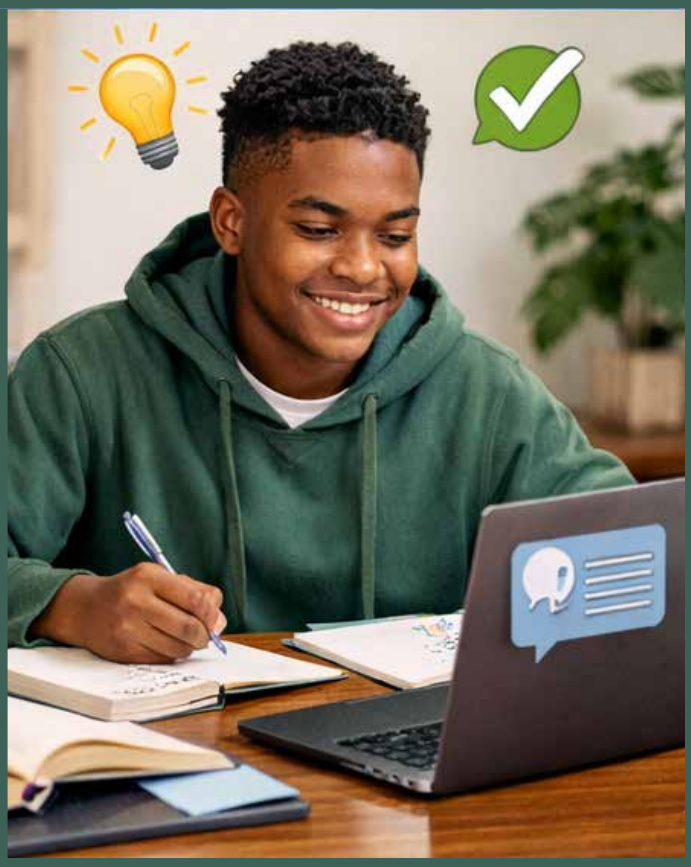
Same student. Same AI. Very different results.

Using AI *without thinking* …



… can leave you confused.

Using AI *properly* …



… can help you understand, improve and succeed.

The difference is **how** *you use it.*

AI helps you learn faster, but only if you still think for yourself.

This Little Guide will show you how to:

- use AI to support (not create) your learning
- create your own original work using AI as a tool
- be ethical and avoid plagiarism and academic dishonesty
- think critically about AI responses.

DID YOU KNOW

AI does not 'think' like a human. It is not sentient, either. AI is trained on large datasets (including but not limited to internet text). It doesn't search the live internet unless connected to tools. Many websites now block AI tools from accessing their data.

How AI supports your thinking

You think first

- Your ideas
- Your understanding

AI processes

- Gives explanations
- Suggests ideas
- May make mistakes

You think again

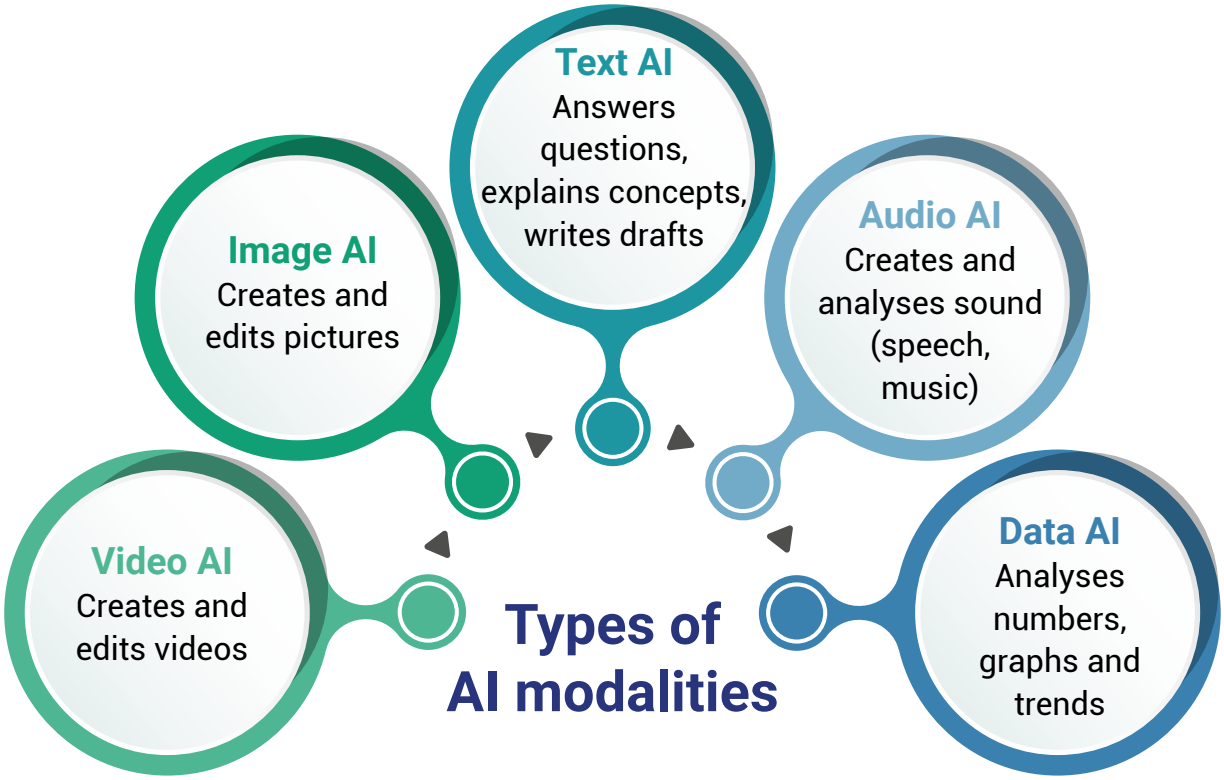
- Check accuracy
- Improve your work
- Decide what to use

Use AI as a helper for your brain, not a replacement.

What is AI?

AI comes in different modalities depending on what it works with.

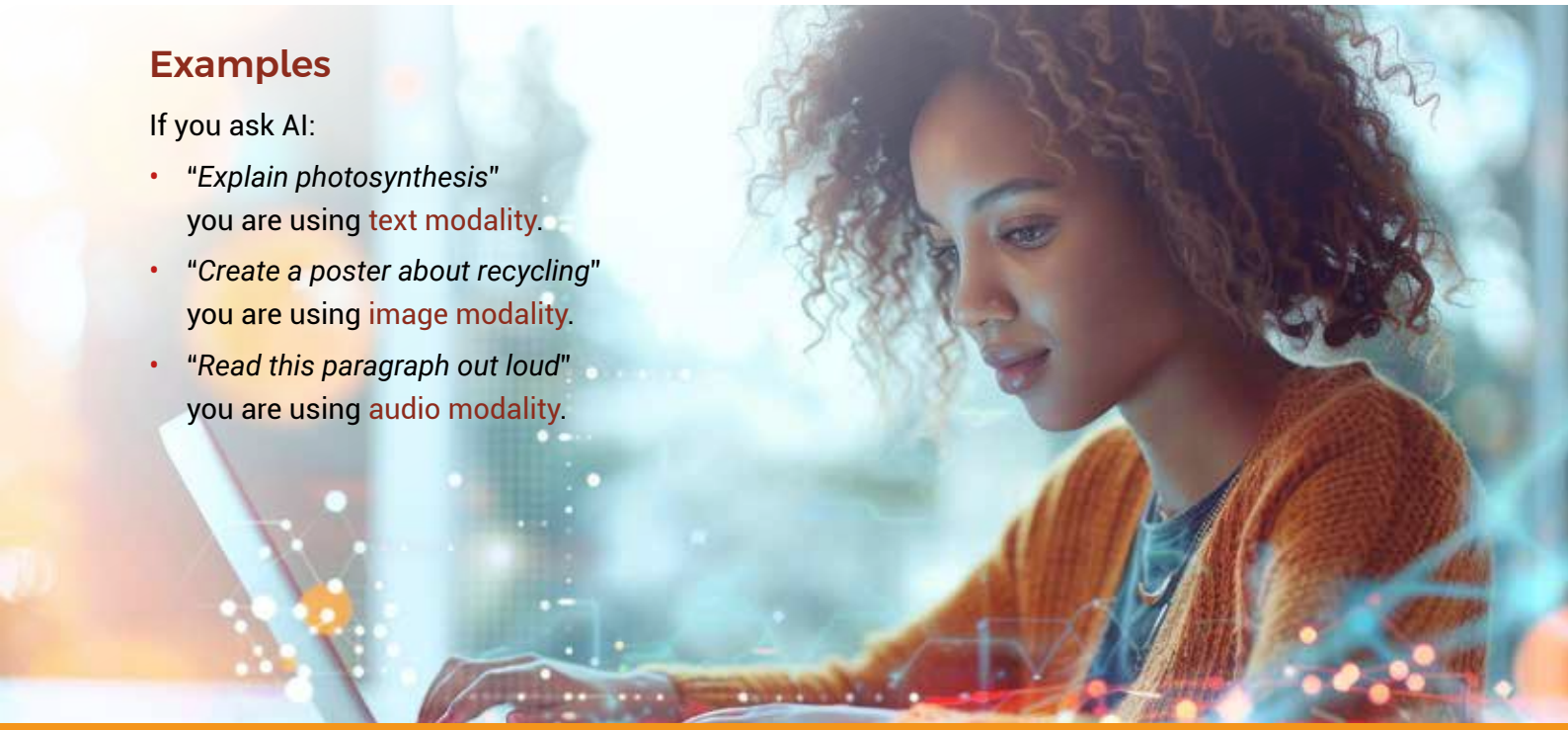
A modality is just the type of input or output that AI works with. In other words, it's the kind of information AI uses or creates, a specific language it understands.



Examples

If you ask AI:

- "*Explain photosynthesis*" you are using text modality.
- "*Create a poster about recycling*" you are using image modality.
- "*Read this paragraph out loud*" you are using audio modality.



Some AI tools use one modality, while others can use many, which is called multimodal AI.

Use this prompt.

Type of AI	What it does	What you can use it for	Limitations	Example of prompt
Text AI	Explains, writes, summarises	Essay planning, notes	Can give incorrect info or leave out relevant facts	"Explain the concept of customer service in a hospitality workplace for a TVET assignment. Use simple language and give 3 real workplace examples."
Image AI	Creates visuals	Posters, presentations	Distorted details especially in hands	"Create a poster showing safety rules in a workshop, with clear labels and bold colours suitable for a college presentation."
Audio AI	Speech, transcription	Study recordings	Mishears words	"Convert these class notes into a clear audio summary for revision, using a neutral South African English accent."
Video AI	Creates clips	Projects	Time-consuming, errors occur, takes long to correct	"Create a short 1-minute training video showing how to greet a customer professionally in a restaurant setting."
Data AI	Analyses numbers	Maths, graphs	Needs correct input, can make errors	"Analyse these monthly sales figures from a small business and present the results as a simple bar graph with a short explanation."

What can AI help you with?

Useful student tasks

AI can help you:

- understand difficult topics
- break down instructions
- create ideas
- summarise notes
- check grammar
- create study questions.

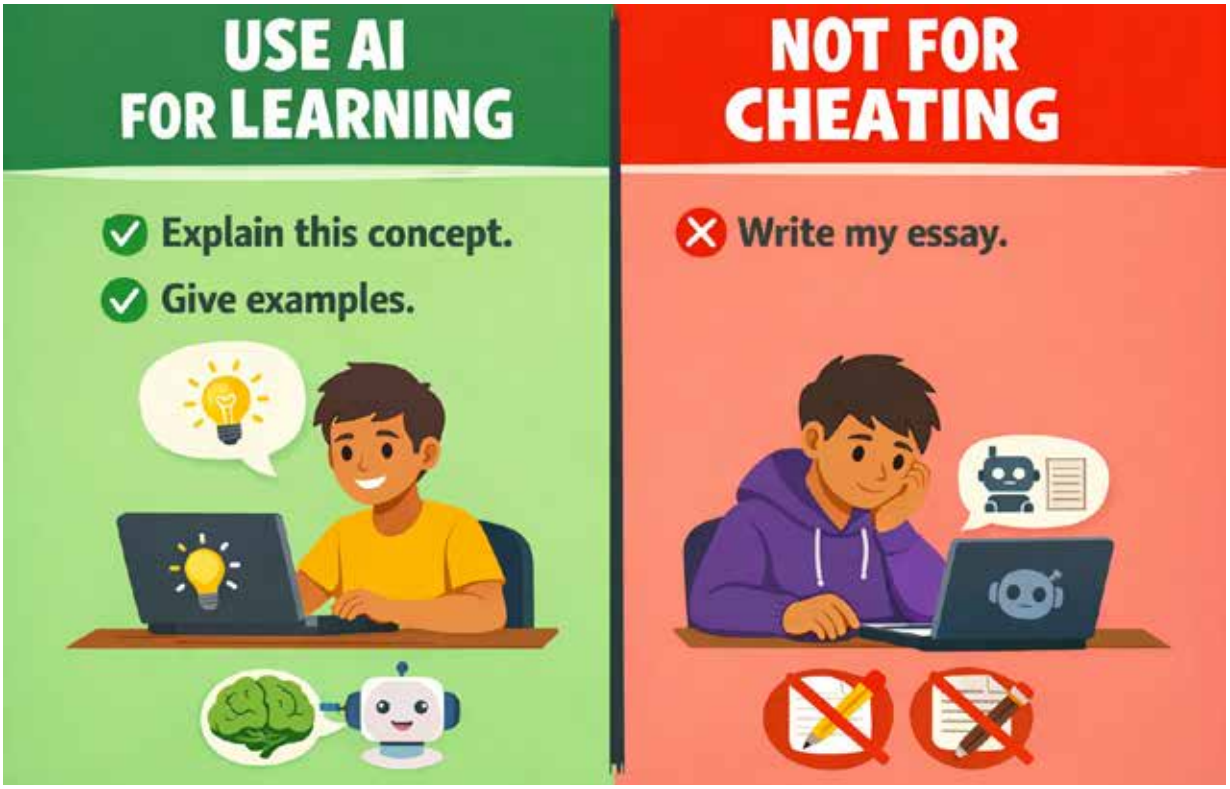
In other words, it can take your accurate inputs and expand on them.

DID YOU KNOW

Many colleges and universities use software to detect AI-generated work.

What AI should NOT do

Do not ask AI to:	Do not use AI:
• Write your final essay.	• during tests/exams
• Complete assignments for submission.	• when practising skills (e.g. maths steps, writing essays yourself)
• Replace your thinking.	• when the lecturer explicitly says “No AI”.



Writing good prompts

A prompt is the instruction you give to AI.
The better your prompt, the better your answer.

There are three elements to creating a good prompt:

Step 1: Activate

The first step is to provide as much information as possible to get AI 'thinking'.

There are three sub-steps:
Human brain → AI processing → Human brain

You provide the inputs, AI provides suggested content, and you use this to create your own content.

When you write a prompt, make sure your instructions are clean and clear:

- Use straightforward language.
- Specify the audience.
- Define a clear task.
- Apply constraints and limitations:
  - What is the role of the writer? "Act as a student who is creating a presentation for a product they want to sell."
  - What action do you need to take place? "Create a PowerPoint presentation that introduces the product using the information I provide. Keep sentences short, one idea per slide, start with a hook, sound human, light humour, no fluff, only facts."
  - What are the limitations? "The presentation must be 2–3 minutes. No more than 30 slides. Use ESL (second language English) and assume audience has never heard of product before."

Step 2: Spoonfeed

Over-explain everything to the AI. Create a master prompt that gives as much information as possible. Remember, AI cannot guess at the context, make assumptions or fill gaps. Your information must fill any gaps. When you over-explain, you help the AI 'think' like you.

Example

Role:	"Act as a TVET Business student presenting Product X to their peers. They have developed the product themselves."
Task:	"Create a PowerPoint presentation of between 20 and 30 slides."
Context:	"Create a PowerPoint presentation that introduces the product using the specifications I provide. The student needs to convince the panel that they must invest in their product."
Audience:	"The audience is a group of peers (TVET Business and Computer students). Some are second-language English speakers."
Content:	"Create a impactful cover that will be on screen when the panel walks into the room. It must not reveal the product, but pique their interest. Start with a hook on what they are lacking, introduce the product, convince why it is necessary in their lives, end with where to get the product."
Style:	"Keep sentences short, one idea per slide, suggest images, add notes for the speaker that are in full sentences. Sound human, light humour, no fluff, only facts, sound authentic. Relate to 18–24-year olds."
Constraints:	"Must appear budget friendly, no gimmicks, no slang, do not assume knowledge of the product."

Step 3: Tweak

Input your master prompt into AI and check the outputs received. Is it what you want?

Read through the slides and notes. Use the AI information as a basis to create your own content. It is meant to inspire you, not think for you.

Ask:

- "Is the work in the correct order?"
- "Is anything missing?"
- "Are there any sections that need to be simplified?"

REMEMBER

Human brain writes prompt. →
AI generates content. →
Human brain creates final work.

Now use the content to write your own presentation.
AI can provide facts, but it cannot speak like you do.

As a final step, you could upload your PPT presentation in AI and ask for an assessment. You decide what to action and what to keep original.

Improving your prompt

Strong prompts help you get clear, useful answers from AI. Vague prompts lead to vague responses that don't support your learning. By being specific about your task, level and format, you guide the AI effectively. The examples below show how to improve weak prompts into strong ones.

Examples per subject

SUBJECT	👎	👍 Use this prompt.
Hospitality	**Weak prompt**	**Strong prompt**
	"Explain customer service."	"Explain good customer service in a restaurant, using 4 practical examples from a real hospitality workplace."
ECD (Early Childhood Development)	**Weak prompt:**	**Strong prompt:**
	"Tell me about childhood development."	"Explain the stages of child development for ages 3–5, using simple language and give 3 classroom activity examples."
Business Studies / Management	**Weak prompt:**	**Strong prompt:**
	"Help with marketing reports."	"Give 3 simple marketing strategies for a small local business in South Africa, with examples of how each can be used."
Computer Studies / IT	**Weak prompt:**	**Strong prompt:**
	"Describe computers."	"Explain the basic parts of a computer system (input, process, output) using simple terms and give one example of each."

DID YOU KNOW

AI does not "think" – it follows your instructions. If your instructions are unclear, your answer will be unclear too.

Don't ask AI to do your work. Ask it to help you understand your work.

Shortfalls of AI

- AI may be wrong. It may give incorrect facts or made-up information.
- AI cannot think critically. It doesn't think like a human and cannot judge what's true or important.
- AI may be biased. It may favour certain cultures or viewpoints, or give outdated or one-sided views.
- AI does not understand context fully. It may misinterpret your question or give answers at the wrong level.

Checking for errors

Don't trust the first answer blindly. Always question AI content.

Use simple prompts to:

- check accuracy:
  "Check this answer for mistakes. List any incorrect or unclear parts."
- simplify and verify:
  "Explain this again in simple terms and show where the information comes from."
- check against level:
  "Is this suitable for a TVET college? If not, fix it."

Cross-checking information

Do not rely on AI only. Check other sources such as textbooks, lecturer notes, .edu or college websites and government websites.

Prompt to help cross-check:

"Give 2 reliable sources that support this information. Do not make up sources."

What if AI gives a wrong answer?

Do not just say "this is wrong". Be clear.

Use this prompt.

Prompt to correct errors:

"This answer is incorrect. The mistake is: [write the error]. Correct only this part and explain why."

This helps AI fix the exact mistake and not rewrite everything.

When to discard and start again

Sometimes the answer is too confused or incorrect. Start fresh if:

- The answer does not match your textbook.
- It keeps giving different answers.
- It is too complicated or unclear.
- You cannot explain it yourself.

Use this prompt.

Prompt to restart:

"Start again. Give a clear, correct explanation of [topic] as written by a NQF5 Hospitality student. Use simple steps and one example."

Other limitations and how to deal with them

- AI may sound sure even when wrong. Always verify.
- AI may be too general or vague and lack detail or examples. Ask: "Give a specific example."
- AI may be too detailed or complex. Ask: "Simplify this into 5 bullet points."
- AI may not include recent updates. Ask: "Is this the most recent information?"

Different AI tools work better for different tasks, e.g. use text AI for explanations and summaries, and use image AI for diagrams or visuals.

The best students are the ones who question, check and improve what AI gives them.

Creating references

AI can help you find sources, but you must still check every reference yourself. Sometimes AI gives incomplete, wrong or fake references. You should use AI as a starting tool, then confirm that the source is real and matches your topic. Always follow the citation guidelines at your school or college.

How to ask AI for references

Step 1: Finish your paragraph first.

Write your own answer first. Do not ask AI to invent sources before you know what your paragraph says.

Step 2: Paste only the section you want sources for.

Use a short section, not your whole assignment.

Step 3: Use this prompt.

"Give me 3 real sources for the information in this paragraph. Use simple, reliable sources only. Prefer textbooks, government websites, and .edu or university websites. Format the answer in Harvard style. Do not make up any sources. If you are not sure, say 'I am not sure'."

Step 4: Ask AI to show the link.

Use this follow-up prompt:

"For each source, give the full title, author, year, website or publisher, and a working link."

Step 5: Check each source yourself.

Open every link. Make sure:

- The page opens.
- The title matches.
- The author or organisation is real.
- The date is shown.
- The source actually supports your paragraph.

Best sources to use

Try to use:

- edu / university websites
- government websites
- our textbook
- trusted educational organisations

Be careful with random blogs, copied notes or websites with no author.

How to double-check references

Check the link	Is the link real and still active?
Check the author	Is it a person, university, government dept or known publisher?
Check the date	Does the source show a year or publication date?
Check the content	Does the source really say what your paragraph says?
Check the citation format	Does the reference follow the format of the given style?

Simple Harvard example

Harvard style usually needs these details for online sources:

- author/organisation
- year
- title
- publisher or site
- access details

In-text citation:
(South African Government, 2024)

Reference list:
South African Government (2024) *Title of webpage here.* Available at: full link here (Accessed: 31 March 2026).

How to acknowledge the use of AI

- If AI helped you understand or improve your work, say so simply and honestly.

  Example acknowledgement
  "I used AI to help explain this concept and then rewrote it in my own words."

- Some universities ask students to include an acknowledgement of which AI tool they used and how they used it.

  Example of Harvard-style for AI in a reference list
  OpenAI (2026) ChatGPT [Generative AI]. Available at: platform URL (Accessed: 31 March 2026).

Double-check the sources provided. Ensure the links are accurate and still active.

Using AI for Maths

AI can be useful in Maths, but it is not always reliable. It can make small mistakes that lead to the wrong final answer.

AI can help you to:

- show steps
- explain a method
- check an answer
- give another example
- explain a mistake in simple language
- break down a word problem.

AI limitations in calculations

What can go wrong

AI may:

- skip steps
- use the wrong method
- calculate incorrectly
- misunderstand the question
- round numbers wrongly
- mix up signs, units or symbols
- give an answer without showing enough working

What to look for

- Did it copy the numbers correctly?
- Did it answer the correct question?
- Are all the steps shown?
- Does the method match the one in your textbook, or the lecturer's method?
- Did it use the correct sign: +, -, ×, ÷?
- Are units correct?
- Does the final answer make sense?

Useful prompts to check AI errors

- "Show every step clearly."
- "Use the same method my textbook uses."
- "Check this answer for mistakes."

Never trust one answer – always check twice.

- "Where did the error happen?"
- "Explain this like I am a beginner."
- "Give one more example that looks similar."
- "Do not skip steps."
- "Check whether the final answer is reasonable."

How to check AI Maths answers

Step 1: Read the question yourself first.

Work out what the question is asking.

Step 2: Solve as much as you can on your own.

Even if you only know the first step, start there.

Step 3: Ask AI for help with the method, not just the final answer.

Example: "Explain how to solve this step by step. Do not skip steps."

Step 4: Compare the AI method with your class method.

If it is different, check with your notes or textbook.

Step 5: Redo the calculation yourself.

Write out the working neatly.

Step 6: Use a calculator only to check arithmetic.

Do not use it to replace understanding.

Step 7: Ask AI to explain any step you still do not understand.

Example: "Explain Step 3 again in easier words."

Hints and tips

- If the answer looks strange, trust your instinct and check again.
- In Maths, one small error can change everything.
- If AI gives two different answers, do not guess – start again.
- Always keep your textbook, class notes and calculator nearby.
- If you cannot explain the method, you do not know it yet.

REMEMBER

Use AI to understand the method.

Do not use it to avoid doing the Maths yourself.

Never trust one answer – always check twice.

Using AI to create images

AI can help you create visuals for school tasks, but AI images often contain mistakes. Some errors are easy to miss at first glance, so you must check every image carefully before using it.

AI can help you to create:

- posters
- diagrams
- illustrations
- title images for presentations
- simple concept visuals.

Common mistakes in AI images

AI may create:

- extra fingers or hands
- feet in the wrong shape
- strange eyes, teeth or ears
- incorrect labels
- spelling mistakes
- wrong numbers
- objects that melt into each other
- clothing, jewellery or tools that look broken
- background details that make no sense.

What to look for

Zoom into the picture and check:

- hands
- feet
- faces
- text and labels
- printed documents in the image (the text is often mirrored)
- numbers
- shapes and lines
- equipment
- maps, charts and diagrams
- background objects.

How many errors can you find in this AI-generated image?

Before I use this image:

- ☐ Does it fit my topic?
- ☐ Are the details correct?
- ☐ Are the labels readable?
- ☐ Are the numbers correct?
- ☐ Are the hands, feet and faces normal?
- ☐ Would I feel confident showing this to my lecturer or facilitator?

Enlarge and check every AI-created image.

Useful prompts to improve an image

- "Check this image for mistakes."
- "List any incorrect details in this image."
- "Are the labels spelled correctly?" (Provide a typed list of the labels.)
- "Does this diagram make sense?"
- "Fix the hands, text and background details." (Give specific information.)
- "Make this image simpler and more realistic." (Try to give actual images as examples.)
- "Create a clear poster with large readable headings." (Be specific about colours e.g. "Make the heading red." "Make the text in the box blue with a 10% green shade background.")
- "Use short, correct labels only."

How to check an AI image

Step 1

Look at the whole image first. Does it match your topic?

Step 2

Zoom in. Check small details like hands, labels, numbers and faces.

Step 3

Read every word in the image.

Step 4

Check equipment and layout for factual accuracy.

Step 5

Regenerate or edit as needed.

Step 6

Use the final image only after checking it properly.

Hints and tips

- Simple prompts often give cleaner images.
- If you need labels or text, keep them short.
- AI is better at decoration than accuracy.
- For school diagrams, always compare with a textbook diagram.
- A neat-looking image can still be wrong.
- If an image includes writing, you may need to type the labels yourself later.

It is often easier to start creating an image from scratch instead of trying to correct it.

Using AI safely

When you use AI tools, you must protect your own information and respect the privacy of others. Anything you type or upload may be stored, processed or used to improve the system. Think carefully before you share anything.

What NOT to upload to AI

DO NOT paste

- Personal information
- Full name, ID number, address, phone numbers, email, passwords
- Exam papers
- Tests that are not yet written
- Controlled assessments
- Assignment briefs
- Tasks you are told not to share
- Internal or secure instructions

DO NOT upload

- Other students' work
- Essays, projects, answers
- Group work without permission
- Confidential documents
- School or college documents
- Workplace files (if you are working)

What could happen if you ignore this

Academic misconduct

- You may be reported for cheating.
- You may lose marks or fail.

Legal problems

- Sharing confidential content may break rules or laws.

Privacy risks

- Your personal information could be exposed.
- Someone could misuse your data.

Trust issues

- Lecturers may not trust your work.
- You may be asked to redo tasks.

Before I used AI:

- ☐ I removed all personal details.
- ☐ This is my own work.
- ☐ I am allowed to use this content.
- ☐ Nothing here is confidential.

Using AI ethically

You already know how to use AI to learn and that you must acknowledge any help you get. Always create original work and do not submit AI work as your own.

Using AI to complete tasks won't help you in exams. You still need to study, but AI can help make this easier in the following ways:

Understand concepts

- Explain difficult topics in simple language.
- Break down steps in maths or science.

Create study tools

- Flashcards for key terms
- Short summary notes
- Mind maps or bullet-point lists

Test your knowledge

- Generate quizzes and practice questions.
- Create multiple-choice tests.
- Ask you questions and check your answers.

Improve your work

- Check if your explanation is clear.
- Suggest what is missing.
- Help you organise your ideas.

Support revision

- Turn notes into quick revision guides.
- Simplify long paragraphs.
- Create step-by-step revision plans.

Prepare for exams

- Give examples of exam-style questions.
- Help you practise answering under time pressure.
- Show common mistakes to avoid.

Examples

Situation	Good use	Bad use
Essay	Brainstorm ideas	Copy full essay
Maths	Ask for explanation	Ask for final answer only
Study	Generate quiz	Memorise AI answers

DID YOU KNOW

When you copy AI answers and present them as your own, you commit plagiarism.

If you wouldn't post it publicly, don't put it into AI.

AI-proofing your work

Your lecturer or facilitator will not only read your answer. They will also check how you wrote it and whether it sounds like you.

Signs your work may be AI-generated

Your lecturer or facilitator may look for these:

- Too perfect or too formal
- No personal voice (sounds like a textbook)
- No small mistakes at all
- Words that are too advanced for your level
- Answers that are very general, not specific
- You cannot explain your answer when asked.

Using an AI checker

You can use an AI checker to check that your work will pass the scrutiny. There have been several cases where the student submitted original work but the AI checker gave it a high AI rating. **AI checkers are not always correct.** Even your own original work can get a high AI score. These tools look for patterns (not the truth). They check things like sentence structure and word choice. So, do NOT panic if a score looks high.

eLINKS

You can check your work yourself using one of these free tools:

- QuillBot AI Detector (free version available): *https://quillbot.com/ai-content-detector*
- GPTZero (limited free use): *https://gptzero.me/students*

But use them carefully. They are only guides so do not rely on them 100%.

How your lecturer may check your work

- Ask you to explain ONE paragraph.
- Ask you to rewrite a part in class.
- Ask follow-up questions.
- Compare your writing to past work.
- Give short in-class tasks (no AI).

ASK YOURSELF: Are you ready to answer these successfully?

How to AI-proof your work

These steps are described in more detail in this guide, but you can use this as your checklist as well:

- Start with your own draft (always).
- Use simple words you understand.
- Add your own examples.
- Use your own voice (how YOU speak).
- Do not copy full AI answers.
- Break long sentences into shorter ones.
- Add small natural mistakes (don't try to sound perfect).
- Make sure you can explain everything you wrote.

REMEMBER

If you cannot explain your work, your lecturer will know you did not write it.

Refining your work (using AI the right way)

Think of this as a step-by-step flow you follow for any assignment.

Step 1: Start with your draft.

Write your assignment in your own words first, even if it's messy. Don't use AI to write it for you. Your ideas come first.

This shows your knowledge.

Step 2: Check if your writing makes sense.

Use AI to test clarity. Instead of saying "Rewrite this for me", ASK:

"Is this explanation clear for a [insert your target audience]? Which parts are confusing?"

This improves your writing, not replaces it.

Step 3: Find what's missing.

Use AI like a checker. ASK:

"What important points am I missing? What questions might my lecturer still have?"

This makes your answer more complete.

Step 4: Add strong examples.

Use AI for ideas, not final answers. ASK:

"Give me examples I can use in this topic." Then choose one and rewrite it in your own words.

This makes your work clearer and stronger.

Step 5: Simplify your language.

Make your work easy to understand. Ask yourself: Could a classmate explain this back to me? If not, shorten sentences, use simpler words and break into bullet points.

This creates clear communication.

Step 6: Make it sound real.

Add your own voice. Include real-life examples, personal experiences / opinions, and insights into possible solutions that are your own ideas.

This shows real understanding.

The best students are not those who avoid AI ... but those who use it wisely.

Step 7: Do a final check.

Test your assignment. ASK:

"Will my lecturer understand my answer? Have I answered the question fully? Did I rely too much on AI?"

This shows confidence in your work.

Step 8: Check your facts.

Use AI carefully. ASK:

"Is this information correct? Are there common mistakes in this topic?"

WITHOUT AI, also double-check important facts.

This ensures your work is accurate.

Step 9: Final polish (DON'T skip this step!)

Use this prompt.

Improve your work step by step. ASK AI things like:

"Shorten this paragraph" "Where am I repeating ideas?" "Where can I add an example?"

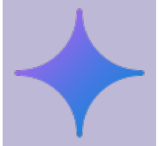
This creates a high-quality final submission.

I confirm that I did the following:

- ☐ I wrote my own draft.
- ☐ I used AI to help understand.
- ☐ I checked the facts.
- ☐ I rewrote in my own words.
- ☐ I did NOT copy.

Top AI tools for students

Do you know which is the correct AI tool to use? While ChatGPT is popular and remembers previous research topics, other AI tools do better tasks depending on the modality.

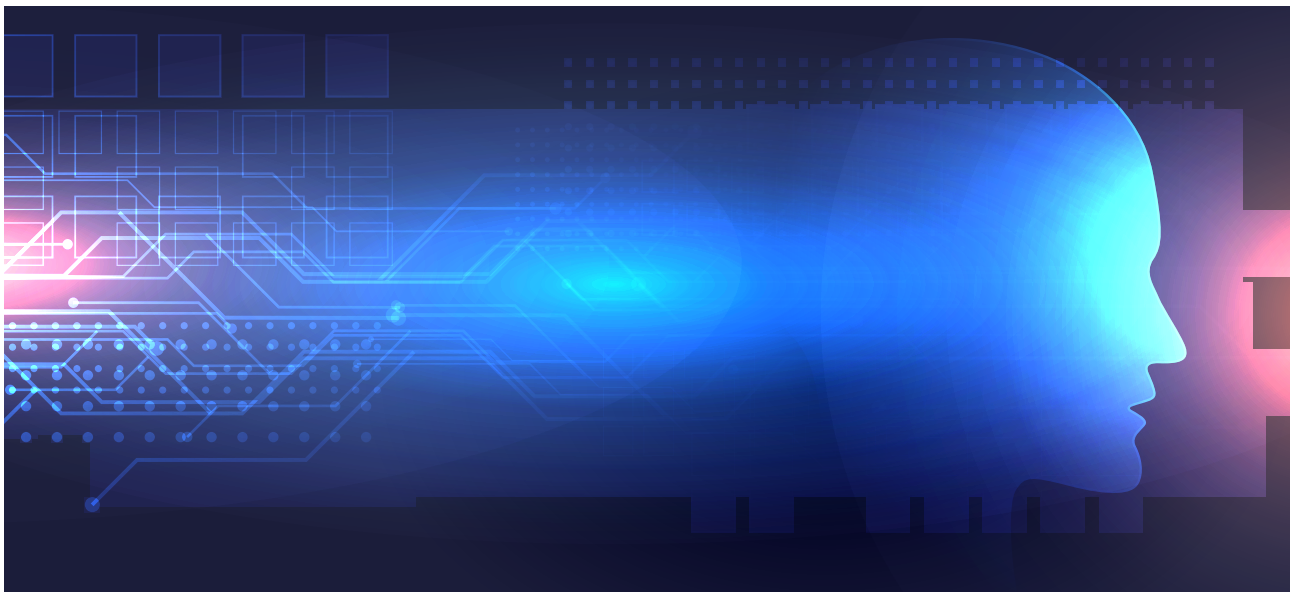
Writing and research		
ChatGPT: https://chatgpt.com/	Best for fast responses, creative idea generation and interactive explanations across a wide range of topics	
Claude: https://claude.ai/	Best for deeper reasoning, longer responses and more detailed analysis of complex texts and tasks	
Microsoft Copilot: https://copilot.microsoft.com/	Best for generating ideas, answering questions, summarising information and assisting with writing tasks across Microsoft applications	
Quillbot: https://quillbot.com/	Best for rephrasing, summarising and ensuring proper citation	
Google Gemini: https://gemini.google.com/	Best for answering questions, generating ideas, summarising information and explaining concepts in a clear and simple way	
Studying, note-taking and summarising		
NotebookLM: https://notebooklm.google/students	Great for creating study guides, quizzes and audio overviews from uploaded documents (PDFs, notes)	
Otter.ai: https://otter.ai/	Transcribes live lectures, allowing students to focus on listening rather than frantic note-taking	
Notion AI: https://www.notion.com/	An all-in-one workspace that organises notes, tasks and project management	

Golden Rule for your process: If AI writes it, don't use it. If AI helps you think better, use it.

STEM and homework help		
Wolfram|Alpha: https://www.wolframalpha.com/	A system that uses data and calculations to solve questions, specifically complex mathematics and science problems	
Socratic by Google: https://socratic.org	Uses AI to help with homework by breaking down problems into simple explanations. Download the app from your Play Store.	
Creativity and productivity		
Grammarly: https://www.grammarly.com/ai	Enhances writing by checking for grammar, tone and clarity	
Canva AI: https://www.canva.com/ai-assistant/	Great for generating visual aids, presentations and design projects	
Ideogram: https://ideogram.ai/t/explore	Used for creating high-quality images for school projects	
Slidesgo https://slidesgo.com/	Provides ready-made presentation templates that help students create professional and visually engaging slides quickly	

eLINK

Free AI tools for 2026: ***https://cloud.google.com/use-cases/free-ai-tools***



When you use these tools correctly, you can significantly improve the quality of your work.