

The Complete Beginner's Guide to ChatGPT

Free sample: chapters 1–6

From “what even is this?” to ChatGPT helping with your life and business, in plain English, one small step at a time.

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Chapter 1: Who's who: the companies, the tools and the names

What AI actually is, who makes ChatGPT, and how it fits alongside all the other names you keep hearing.

If the world of AI feels like a jumble of strange names, you're not alone. Let's sort it out, calmly and in plain English, before you touch a single button.

AI in one sentence

The kind of AI this guide is about is **a very clever assistant you talk to by typing or speaking, in ordinary language**. You ask it something. It writes back. That's it.

You don't need to learn any special commands. If you can write a text message or an email, you can use it.

Jargon buster: You'll hear these tools called *AI assistants*, *chatbots*, or sometimes *large language models* (LLMs for short). For everyday purposes, they all mean the same thing: an assistant you chat with.

The tool this guide is about: ChatGPT

ChatGPT is an AI assistant made by a company called **OpenAI**.

- **OpenAI** is an American AI company, founded in 2015. It launched ChatGPT in November 2022, and it quickly became one of the fastest-growing apps in history.
- **ChatGPT** is the assistant it makes. You use it on a website (**chatgpt.com**) or in the free **ChatGPT app** on your phone, tablet or computer.
- It's the best-known AI assistant in the world, and it has a very wide range of features, including creating pictures and having spoken conversations.

Think of it like this: **OpenAI is the company, ChatGPT is the product**. It's just like how Apple is the company and the iPhone is the product.

The other names you'll hear

You don't need any of these to follow this guide, but it helps to know who's who:

Name	Made by	Where you'll find it
ChatGPT	OpenAI	chatgpt.com and its own app
Claude	Anthropic	claude.ai and its own app
Gemini	Google	Built into many Google products and Android phones
Copilot	Microsoft	Built into Windows, Word, Outlook and Edge
Siri	Apple	On iPhones. Newer iPhones now have a much cleverer, AI-powered Siri
Meta AI	Meta (Facebook's owner)	Inside WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram

The good news: they all work in broadly the same way. Once you've learned ChatGPT with this guide, you'll find the others easy too. The skills carry over.

Why this guide focuses on ChatGPT

ChatGPT is the most widely used AI assistant, so it's the one your friends and family are most likely to be using, which makes swapping tips easy. Its free version is genuinely useful. If you ever want to try Claude too, there's a Claude edition of this guide.

A reassuring word

It's completely normal to feel a bit behind with AI. Most people are. It has arrived fast, and much of what's written about it is aimed at technical people. This guide is not. We'll go one step at a time, explain every word, and you can't break anything.

Next: what ChatGPT is brilliant at, and what it isn't.

Chapter 2: What ChatGPT is brilliant at (and what it isn't)

A clear, honest picture of what to use it for, where to be careful, and a handy way to think about it.

The best way to picture it

Imagine a **brilliant new assistant on their very first day**.

- They've read more than any person ever could
- They write beautifully, and they're incredibly fast
- They never get tired, never get grumpy, and never mind silly questions
- **But** they know nothing about *you* unless you tell them
- **And** now and then, they're confidently wrong

Keep that picture in mind. It explains almost everything about using ChatGPT well.

What it's brilliant at

 **Writing and rewriting.** Emails, letters, cards, speeches, complaints, social media posts. It's especially good at *"make this sound friendlier"* or *"make this shorter"*.

 **Explaining things.** *"Explain my energy bill in plain English."* *"What does 'probate' mean?"* You can ask follow-up questions for as long as you like.

 **Making sense of documents.** Show it a letter, form or leaflet (by typing it in or taking a photo) and ask what it means and what you need to do.

 **Planning and organising.** Holidays, days out, meal plans, to-do lists, a family party, a garden project.

 **Thinking things through.** *"Help me decide whether to..."* It's a patient sounding board, available at 3 in the morning.

 **Learning something new.** A language, a hobby, a bit of history, how your new gadget works.

 **Business admin.** Customer emails, quotes, price lists, social posts, policies and more. (Chapter 9 is all about this.)

Where to be careful

 **It can be wrong, and sound sure.** Occasionally it makes things up: a date, a fact, a phone number, a website. This is sometimes called a *"hallucination"*. For anything important, check it. (Chapter 11 shows you how.)

 **It isn't a doctor, solicitor or financial adviser.** It's great for understanding things and preparing questions. Big decisions need a real professional.

 **It's not the place for secrets.** Never type in passwords, bank details or other private information. (Chapter 5 covers exactly what's safe.)

 **It may not know very recent news** unless it searches the web. You can ask it to check online.

A quick reality check

People often think...	The truth is...
"It's only for young people and techies."	It's designed to be used in plain English. Plenty of people start in their 70s and 80s.
"I'll break something."	You can't. If something goes wrong, you just start a new chat.
"It's spying on me."	It only sees what you type into it. Chapter 5 shows you the privacy settings.
"It's going to be complicated."	If you can send an email, you can do this.
"It knows everything."	It knows a lot, but it can be wrong, so double-check important things.

Next: getting in. Free or paid, signing up, and getting the app on your phone.

Chapter 3: Getting in: free or paid, signing up, and the app

Step-by-step sign-up on a computer, phone or tablet, how to avoid fake apps, and whether you ever need to pay.

Do I need to pay?

No. Start with the free version. It's genuinely useful, and everything in this guide works on it.

There are paid plans: a cheaper one called **Go** (around £5–£6 a month in the UK) and **Plus** (about £20 a month). They mainly give you *more use* and extra features. On the free version you may occasionally see a message saying you've reached your limit for now, and you may see some adverts.

A simple rule: only think about paying if you keep hitting the limit on days you actually need it. Many people never do.

 **Never pay anyone else for access.** The only place to pay is inside the official app or website. Anyone selling "ChatGPT accounts" or "lifetime access" is a scam.

What you'll need

- An **email address** you can check (or a Google, Microsoft or Apple account)
- A **computer, tablet or smartphone** with internet access
- About **10 minutes**

Signing up on a computer (or laptop)

1. Open your web browser (Chrome, Safari, Edge or similar).
2. At the top, where web addresses go, type **chatgpt.com** and press **Enter**.
3. Click **Sign up** (not "Log in", since you don't have an account yet).
4. Choose **Continue with Google / Microsoft / Apple**, or type your **email address** and create a password.
5. If you used an email address, ChatGPT sends you an **email to confirm it**. Open your email, find the message from OpenAI, and click the button in it. (Check your spam folder if it isn't there within a minute or two.)
6. Type in your **name** and **date of birth**.
7. You'll see a box that says something like *"Ask anything"*. **You're in!**

 **Write it down:** make a note of which email address you used, and keep it with your other important logins.

Getting the app on your phone or tablet

The app makes ChatGPT as easy as sending a text.

1. Open the **App Store** (iPhone/iPad) or **Google Play Store** (Android).
2. Search for **ChatGPT**.
3. **Check the maker before you install.** Under the app's name it should say **OpenAI**. There are copycat apps with similar names and logos. Don't use those.
4. Tap **Get** or **Install**.
5. Open the app and **sign in with the same email or account** you used on the computer.

Your conversations now appear on all your devices automatically.

Your first "hello"

Type this into the message box and press **Enter** (or tap the ↑ arrow):

Hello! I'm completely new to this. In two short sentences, what are three simple things you could help me with this week?

Read the reply. That's your first AI conversation. 🎉

Next: a guided tour of the screen, so every button makes sense.

Chapter 4: A gentle tour of the screen

What every part of the ChatGPT screen does, on a computer and on a phone, so nothing feels mysterious.

Apps change their look from time to time, so your screen may not match this description exactly. Don't worry. The main parts stay the same, and they're usually in roughly the same places.

On a computer

- ① **The message box** (*bottom middle*) This is where you type. Press **Enter** to send. To start a new line without sending, hold **Shift** and press **Enter**.
- ② **The + or  button** (*inside or next to the message box*) Lets you **add a file or photo**: a letter you've scanned, a PDF, a picture from your computer. ChatGPT can read it and help you with it.
- ③ **The microphone**  (*in or near the message box*) Lets you **speak instead of type**. Very handy if typing is slow or tiring.
- ④ **New chat** (*top left, often a  pencil or "+ New chat"*) Starts a **fresh conversation**. Use it whenever you change topic, just like starting a new page in a notebook.
- ⑤ **Your past chats** (*down the left-hand side*) Every conversation is saved here so you can go back to it. (On a small screen you may need to click the **≡ menu** icon to see them.)
- ⑥ **Projects** (*in the left-hand menu*) Folders where ChatGPT keeps background information for a topic, like "My Business" or "House Move". We'll use these in Chapter 10.
- ⑦ **Your profile picture or name** (*bottom left or top right*) Click here for **Settings**, where you'll find privacy, personalisation and more. We'll visit this in the next chapter.
- ⑧ **The model choice** (*sometimes at the top*) You may see a model name or a drop-down. These are different versions of ChatGPT. **You can ignore this**. The standard choice is fine for everything in this guide.

On a phone or tablet

It's the same idea, just arranged to fit a smaller screen:

- **Message box** at the bottom, with the + (add a photo or file) and  **microphone** beside it
- **≡ Menu** (three lines, top left) opens your **past chats**, **Projects** and **Settings**
-  **New chat** icon (usually top right)
- A **voice conversation** button (it often looks like a sound wave or headphones) lets you have a spoken, back-and-forth chat, just like a phone call

The answer itself

When ChatGPT replies, you'll often see small icons underneath the answer:

- **Copy**  : copies the answer so you can paste it into an email or document
- **Try again**  : asks for a different version of the same answer
-  /  : tells the company whether the answer was good (optional)

 **Tip:** You don't have to use any of these. Simply typing *"try again"* or *"make it shorter"* works just as well.

Try it: a little treasure hunt

Tick each one as you find it:

- ☐ The message box
- ☐ The + (add file or photo) button
- ☐ The microphone
- ☐ New chat
- ☐ Your list of past chats
- ☐ Settings

Found them all? You now know your way around better than most people. **Next:** the important bit, your safety settings.

Chapter 5: Safety first: settings to check and the traffic-light rule

Ten minutes that give you peace of mind: the privacy settings to check, what never to share, and how to spot scams.

Using ChatGPT is about as safe as using email or online shopping, **as long as you follow a few simple rules**. Here they are.

The traffic-light rule

Before you type anything, think of traffic lights:

● GO: fine to share

- Everyday questions ("What can I cook with leeks?")
- Letters and emails, with private numbers removed
- General information about you ("I'm retired and live in Devon")

● THINK FIRST

- **Other people's personal details.** Use "my neighbour" instead of their full name.
- **Health questions.** General questions are fine. Think about how much detail you really need to give.
- **Work documents.** Check your employer's rules first.

● NEVER share

- **Passwords, PINs or security codes** (including codes your bank texts you)
- **Bank card or account numbers**
- **National Insurance, passport or driving licence numbers**
- Anything you'd be upset to see made public

Golden rule: ChatGPT will **never** need your passwords or bank details. If anything ever asks for them, even something that looks like ChatGPT, **stop**.

Four settings to check today

Go to **Settings**. On a computer, click your **profile picture or name**, then **Settings**. In the app, tap the ≡ **menu**, then your name, then **Settings**.

1. Improve the model for everyone (under **Data controls**) This controls whether your conversations may be used to help train future versions of ChatGPT. Many people prefer to switch it **off**. ChatGPT works just as well either way. It's your choice.

2. Memory (under **Personalization**) ChatGPT can remember helpful things you've told it, across different chats. **On** makes it more personal; **off** is more private. You can see and delete

what it remembers any time. (More in Chapter 10.)

3. Multi-factor authentication (under **Security**) Turn this **on**. It means you'll need a code from your phone as well as your password to log in, so even if someone guessed your password, they couldn't get in.

4. Temporary chat When you start a new chat, look for **Temporary chat** (often at the top). It starts a private chat that **isn't saved** to your history or memory. It's perfect for one-off private questions.

Spotting AI-powered scams

Sadly, scammers use AI too. Their messages now look **perfectly written**, so don't judge by the spelling. Judge by **what they're asking for**:

► **Urgency**: "Act now or your account will be closed" ► **Money or codes**: paying, transferring, or reading out a code ► **Secrecy**: "Don't tell your bank / your family" ► **Odd payment**: gift cards, cryptocurrency, a "safe account" ► **Too good to be true**: guaranteed profits, surprise prizes

Fake voices: criminals can now copy a person's voice from a short video clip. If you get a call from a "grandchild" or "child" in trouble needing money, **hang up and call them back on the number you know**. Many families now agree a secret **code word** for emergencies. It's a lovely, simple idea.

Report it: forward scam texts to **7726** (free) and scam emails to report@phishing.gov.uk.

Try it

- ☐ I've checked the training setting
- ☐ I've decided about memory
- ☐ My login is protected with two-step verification
- ☐ I know where the private chat option is
- ☐ I know the traffic-light rule

Next: the fun part. Your first ten minutes, and three real wins.

Chapter 6: Your first ten minutes: three real wins

Three small, genuinely useful things to do right now, step by step, so you see what all the fuss is about.

Reading about ChatGPT only gets you so far. The moment it "clicks" is when it does something genuinely useful **for you**. Let's make that happen, three times, in ten minutes.

Remember: you can't break it. If an answer isn't what you wanted, just say so, or start a new chat.

Win 1: the message you've been putting off

We all have one: a thank-you note, a tricky email, a reply to the council. Type something like this, changing the words in [brackets]:

```
Help me write a short, friendly [email / text / card] to [who]
about [what]. The main thing I want to say is [your point].
Keep it under 100 words.
```

Example:

```
Help me write a short, friendly email to my neighbour Jean,
thanking her for taking in my parcel while I was away.
I'd like to offer to return the favour. Keep it under 80 words.
```

Read the answer. Now **ask for a change:** type *"make it a bit warmer"* or *"shorter please"*. Watch it rewrite in seconds.

When you're happy, click the **copy**  icon under the answer and paste it into your email.

 **Win 1 done!**

Win 2: make sense of a confusing letter

Find a letter, form or leaflet that confused you. It could be from the council, the bank, the energy company or the GP surgery.

On a phone: tap +, choose **Camera** or **Photos**, and take or pick a photo of the letter. **On a computer:** click + or  and choose the scanned letter, or simply type out the confusing part.

 **Before you share a photo, cover or cut out account numbers and reference numbers.**
A thumb or a piece of paper works fine.

Then type:

Please explain this letter in plain English. What is it asking me to do, by when, and is there anything I should worry about?

Want more? Ask *"What does [word] mean?"* or *"What should I say if I phone them?"*

✅ Win 2 done!

Win 3: plan something nice 📅

Let's finish with something enjoyable. Pick one:

Plan a relaxed day out in [town/area] for [who]. We like [things].
[Anything to consider, e.g. "Mum uses a walking stick"].
Keep it gentle, with a nice lunch stop.

I've got [ingredients in your fridge]. Suggest two easy dinners
for [number] people that take under 30 minutes.

Help me plan a small [birthday / anniversary] get-together for
[number] people at home. Budget about £[amount].
Give me a simple checklist.

✅ Win 3 done!

Look what you just did

In ten minutes you:

- ✉ wrote a message, and improved it with a follow-up
- 📄 understood a confusing letter
- 📅 planned something nice

That's genuinely useful AI, used safely, by you. **Well done.**

🎁 That's the end of your free taster

You've got the basics: who's who, getting in, finding your way around, staying safe, and your first wins.

The complete guide goes much further:

- **Chapter 7:** the simple W.H.A.T. formula that turns "meh" answers into brilliant ones
- **Chapter 8:** 12 worked examples for everyday life: health appointments, bills, family, hobbies, travel and more
- **Chapter 9:** 12 worked examples for running a business
- **Chapter 10:** Projects, memory, photos, files and voice: making ChatGPT truly *yours*

- **Chapter 11:** when things go wrong, and how to fix them
- **Chapter 12:** the jargon buster, cheat sheets and what to do next

It's all in **The Dead Easy New Start Pack**, along with large-print editions, printable cheat-sheet cards, and an AI tutor that walks you through every chapter.

