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Getting Started with AI

A friendly, plain-English guide to trying an AI chatbot for the first time, on a home computer or a phone. No experience needed, and you can't break anything by trying.

What is an AI chatbot?

An AI chatbot is a computer program you can talk with. You type or say a question in everyday words, and it writes back an answer, much like asking a helpful, well-read person. You don't need special words or commands.

- **App:** a program on your phone or computer.
- **Browser:** the program you use to visit websites, such as Chrome, Safari, or Edge.
- **Prompt:** the question or request you type or say to the AI.

Free tools you may already have

Features vary by device, country, and update, so yours may look a little different.

- **ChatGPT** (from OpenAI). Free at chatgpt.com, or in the ChatGPT app for iPhone and Android.
- **Google Gemini.** Free at gemini.google.com, or in the Gemini app. On many Android phones it is already built in as the phone's assistant.
- **Microsoft Copilot.** Free at copilot.microsoft.com. On new Windows 11 computers, the Copilot app is usually already on the taskbar or in the Start menu.
- **Siri with ChatGPT.** On newer iPhones (iPhone 15 Pro and later), turn it on in Settings > Apple Intelligence & Siri > ChatGPT. You don't need a ChatGPT account.
- **Muse from Meta.** Facebook is changing how its AI works, and the buttons keep moving. Meta's newest assistant, Muse, is a separate free app for adults 18 and over. Get "Muse from Meta" from the App Store or Google Play, and sign in using your Facebook account. Muse can take actions for you, like sending emails or buying things, so don't give it your card details. For a first try, ChatGPT or Gemini are simpler places to start.
- **Be My AI** (in the free Be My Eyes app) for people who are blind or have low vision. Take a picture, and it describes what it sees out loud.

Step by step on a home computer

1. **Open your browser** (Chrome, Edge, Safari, or Firefox).
2. **Go to the site.** Click the long bar at the top, type an address such as **chatgpt.com**, **gemini.google.com**, or **copilot.microsoft.com**, and press Enter.
3. **Sign in, or not.** Some let you try a few questions first. A free account saves your past conversations. Make up a new password just for this.
4. **Type your question** in the box near the bottom that says something like "Ask anything," then press Enter.

5. **Read the answer.** Scroll down if it's long.
6. **Ask a follow-up** in the same box, like "Make that shorter" or "Explain the second part again."

Step by step on a phone

1. **Get the app from the official store only:** the App Store on an iPhone, Google Play on Android. Check that the maker is OpenAI, Google, Microsoft, or Meta.
2. **Open the app and sign in** if it asks.
3. **Type or talk.** Tap the message box and type, or tap the **microphone** button and speak your question.
4. **Ask about a photo.** Tap the **camera** or **+** button, take a picture of a plant, a label, or a sign, and ask, "What is this?"
5. **Ask a follow-up** the same way.

Five first things to try

Change the words in [brackets] to fit you.

> ### 1. Cooking
> "I have [chicken, rice, and frozen peas]. Give me a simple dinner recipe for two, with large, easy steps."

> ### 2. A confusing letter
> "Explain this letter in plain English. What is it asking me to do, and by when?" Type the main part, or snap a photo. Cover any account numbers first.

> ### 3. A day trip
> "Plan an easy day trip from [your town] for someone who likes [gardens and history] and doesn't want much walking. Include a lunch stop."

> ### 4. A birthday note
> "Help me write a warm birthday card for my [granddaughter] turning [12]. She loves [horses]. Keep it short."

> ### 5. A suspicious text
> "I got this text: [paste it]. Does it look like a scam? What should I do?" Don't tap any links in the text while you check.

Staying safe

- **Never share** your Social Security number, Medicare number, bank or card numbers, or passwords with an AI.
- **AI can be wrong.** It can sound sure and still make mistakes. Double-check anything important, especially health, medicine, and legal matters. Ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- **No real AI company will call you,** text you out of the blue, or ask you to pay over the phone or with gift cards. If someone does, it is a scam. Hang up.
- **Get apps only** from the App Store or Google Play, and check that the maker is the real company.

It’s okay to be a beginner

There are no dumb questions. The AI won’t judge you, get impatient, or mind if you ask the same thing three times. If an answer is too long, say “Shorter, please.” If it’s too technical, say “Explain that like I’m new to this.” To start over, look for **New chat** (often a pencil icon or a **+**).

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