

# AI for Students Playbook

How to use AI tools to write stronger applications, prepare for interviews and research opportunities, without losing your own voice.

[careerguide.network](https://careerguide.network) | Free resource | © CareerGuide 2026

## What's inside:

- 01 What AI actually is and what it isn't
- 02 Which tools to use: Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot
- 03 The golden rules: how to use AI properly
- 04 Prompt library — 32 prompts across 8 categories, ready to copy and adapt
- 05 How to get better results (weak vs strong prompts with examples)
- 06 What AI can't do for you: the honest section
- 07 Responsible use: when it's fine and when it crosses a line

## Before you start:

- All four AI tools in this guide are free to access. You don't need to pay for anything.
- You don't need any technical knowledge; if you can type a message, you can use AI.
- These prompts work with Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini or Copilot. Pick one and stick with it.
- This is a practical guide. Open it alongside an AI tool and use it.

# 01 What AI Actually Is

*A plain English explanation (no jargon, no hype).*

AI (Artificial Intelligence) has become one of the most talked-about technologies in the world. Most of what you've read about it is either exaggerated or misleading. Here is what it actually is and why it matters for your career.

## The simple version:

AI writing tools, such as Claude, ChatGPT and Gemini, are trained on enormous amounts of text. They learn patterns in language and can generate new text based on what you ask them. Think of them as a very well-read assistant that types fast, never gets tired, and has no ego about being edited.

## What makes them useful for students:

They can produce a first draft of almost anything in seconds. A personal statement, a cover letter, a list of interview questions; things that used to take hours can now take minutes. That doesn't mean you skip the work. It means the work shifts from staring at a blank page to editing, improving and making it sound genuinely like you.

### What AI is good at

- Generating first drafts quickly
- Giving you ideas and options to choose from
- Explaining things in plain, clear English
- Helping you rephrase or sharpen your writing
- Answering questions about sectors and companies
- Practising interview questions with you
- Formatting and structuring information clearly

### What AI is not good at

- Knowing your actual experience (you have to tell it)
- Sounding genuinely like you without your input
- Guaranteeing facts are correct — always verify
- Replacing real preparation for interviews
- Making you stand out if used without editing
- Understanding nuance in specific situations
- Anything requiring human judgement or emotion

## The most important thing to understand:

- AI is a starting point, not a finishing line.
- Students who use it well treat it like a capable first drafter, and then do the real work of making it specific, honest and genuinely theirs.
- Students who use it badly copy and paste without editing.

## 02 Which Tools to Use

*Four tools, all free, all useful. Pick one and get good at it.*

You don't need to pay for anything to use AI effectively. All four tools below have free tiers that are more than sufficient for everything in this playbook. They all work similarly: you type a message, they respond. Pick one, use it consistently, and you will get better at prompting over time.

### Claude

Free tier available  
[claude.ai](https://claude.ai)

**Best for:** Writing, editing and detailed feedback on your own work. Follows specific instructions well. Strong for cover letters, personal statements, and getting honest critique of your writing.

### ChatGPT

Free tier available  
[chat.openai.com](https://chat.openai.com)

**Best for:** General purpose (strong across all tasks). The most widely used AI tool. Free tier is capable for all tasks in this playbook. GPT-4 (paid) is more powerful but not necessary.

### Microsoft Copilot

Free  
[copilot.microsoft.com](https://copilot.microsoft.com)

**Best for:** Works well if you already use Microsoft 365 (Word, Outlook). Can draft emails and help with applications within apps you already use.

### Google Gemini

Free  
[gemini.google.com](https://gemini.google.com)

**Best for:** Integrates with Google Docs and Gmail. Good if you already use Google's ecosystem; draft directly in a document without switching tabs.

### Recommendation:

- Try Claude ([claude.ai](https://claude.ai)) for writing and editing tasks as it tends to follow detailed instructions well and gives specific, honest feedback.
- Whatever you choose, use it consistently. You will get better at prompting the more you practise with one tool.

## 03 The Golden Rules

*Six rules for using AI effectively and responsibly.*

AI tools are genuinely useful, but only if you use them properly. These six rules apply to everything in this playbook. Learn them before you start prompting.

1

### **Always edit the output**

AI gives you a starting point, never a finished product. Read every word it produces. Change anything that doesn't sound right, isn't accurate or doesn't reflect your actual experience. If you wouldn't say it in an interview, take it out.

2

### **Give it your real information**

AI can only work with what you give it. The more specific you are (your actual experience, the specific company, the exact job description), the better the output. Vague input produces generic output. Generic output gets ignored.

3

### **Never submit AI writing unchanged**

Employers and admissions teams can often tell when something is AI-generated. It's too smooth, too balanced, too generic. Always add your own voice, your own specific examples and your own personality on top of what AI drafts.

4

### **Don't put sensitive information in**

Don't type full personal details, passwords, financial information or sensitive data into AI tools. For cover letters, using your name, email and general experience is fine. Your full address, NI number or bank details are not.

5

### **Fact-check everything**

AI tools can confidently produce information that is wrong, including company details, facts about roles, statistics and dates. Always verify anything specific before you include it in an application. A wrong fact in a cover letter is worse than no fact at all.

6

### **Use it to practise, not to perform**

The best use of AI for interview prep is practising answers and getting feedback before the interview, not generating answers to read from during it. AI helps you prepare. You still have to do the real thing yourself.

## 04 Prompt Library

35 prompts across 8 categories. Copy, adapt, and replace the [brackets] with your own details.

The key principle: give the AI as much specific context as possible. The more real detail you include (your actual experience, the real company, the actual job description), the more useful the output.

### CV & PERSONAL STATEMENT

1

#### Write my CV personal statement

"I am a [Year 13 student / school leaver] applying for a [job title] at [company]. My experience includes [describe it]. My key skills are [list 3]. Write me a 3-sentence personal statement. Avoid cliches like hardworking or passionate unless backed by a specific example."

2

#### Turn my experience into CV bullet points

"I worked as a [job title] at [company] for [duration]. My responsibilities were [describe them]. Turn these into 3–4 strong CV bullet points that start with action verbs and focus on impact rather than duties."

3

#### Improve my existing CV section

"Here is my current work experience section: [paste it]. Make it stronger — more specific, more achievement-focused. Cut anything vague. Keep it to 4 bullet points maximum."

4

#### Make my personal statement sound more like me

"Here is my personal statement: [paste it]. It sounds too formal and generic. Here are some genuine things about me: [add 2–3 real things]. Rewrite it to sound more like a real person while staying professional."

5

#### Tailor my CV for a specific role

"Here is my current personal statement: [paste it]. Here is the job description: [paste it]. Rewrite my statement to better match what this employer is looking for, while keeping it honest and specific to my experience."

### COVER LETTERS

6

#### Write a job application cover letter

"Write a cover letter for a [job title] at [company]. I am [description]. My relevant experience is [describe it]. They want [2–3 key requirements from the ad]. Keep it to 3 paragraphs, under 300 words, professional but not stuffy."

7

#### Write an apprenticeship cover letter

*"Write a cover letter for a [Level 3 / Degree] Apprenticeship in [subject] at [company]. Explain why I have chosen an apprenticeship over university in a way that sounds positive and motivated, not like I am avoiding something."*

8

**Write a work experience request email**

*"Write a short, polite email requesting work experience at [company] in [sector]. I am a [Year X] student at [school]. I am interested because [genuine reason]. Keep it to 3 short paragraphs — warm, professional and easy to say yes to."*

9

**Write a speculative application**

*"Write a speculative email to [company] expressing interest in any [junior / entry-level] opportunities. I am interested in this company because [specific reason]. I have [brief summary of skills]. Make it confident but not pushy."*

10

**Improve my existing cover letter**

*"Here is my cover letter: [paste it]. Give me honest feedback on what is weak, vague or generic. Then give me a stronger version that is more specific, more confident and better tailored to the role."*

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION

11

**Generate interview questions for my role**

*"I have an interview for a [job title] at [company]. The company [brief description]. Generate 15 likely interview questions: competency, motivational and company-specific."*

12

**Give me tips on how to answer a specific question**

*"How should I answer the question [question] for a [job title] role? Tell me what the interviewer is really looking for and give me a strong answer structure."*

13

**Give feedback on my interview answer**

*"Here is my answer to [question]: [paste it]. Give me honest feedback: what works, what is weak, what I should add or remove. Then give me a stronger version."*

14

**Help me structure a STAR example**

*"Here is an experience I want to use in an interview: [describe it]. Help me structure it using the STAR framework (Situation, Task, Action, Result), keeping the answer to about 90 seconds when spoken aloud."*

15

**Run a mock interview with me**

*"I want to practise for an interview for a [job title] at [company]. Ask me one question at a time. After each answer, give me brief feedback on what was good and what could be stronger, then ask the next question. Start now."*

16

**Prepare me for a strengths-based interview**

*"I have a strengths-based interview for [company]. Generate 10 likely questions and for each one give me a brief tip on how to answer authentically."*

## COMPANY & SECTOR RESEARCH

17

### Summarise what a company does

*"Summarise what [company] does in under 150 words. Include: what sector they operate in, who their customers are, roughly how big they are, and anything notable worth mentioning in an interview."*

18

### Explain what a sector involves

*"Explain what a career in [sector] actually involves day-to-day. What types of roles exist at entry level? What skills do employers in this sector typically value most? Keep it practical."*

19

### Help me understand a job description

*"Here is a job description: [paste it]. Explain in plain English what this role involves day-to-day, what skills they are prioritising, and what I should address in my application."*

20

### Find current talking points about a company

*"I am preparing for an interview at [company]. Summarise 2–3 recent significant developments about this organisation that would be worth mentioning to show I have done my research."*

## PROFESSIONAL EMAILS

21

### Write a thank-you email after an interview

*"Write a brief thank-you email after an interview for a [job title] at [company]. My interviewer was [name]. We discussed [one specific thing]. Keep it under 100 words (warm and professional)."*

22

### Write a polite chaser email

*"I applied for a [job title] at [company] on [date] and haven't heard back. Write a polite follow-up email asking for an update. Keep it brief and warm, not pushy."*

23

### Write an email asking for feedback after rejection

*"I was unsuccessful in my application for [job title] at [company]. Write a brief email thanking them and politely asking for any feedback on my application."*

24

### Write a LinkedIn outreach message

*"Write a short message to send on LinkedIn to [a recruiter / someone at a company I want to join]. I want to [ask about opportunities / learn more about their career]. Under 80 words, genuine, not a template."*

## LINKEDIN PROFILE

25

### Write my LinkedIn headline

*"Write 5 options for a LinkedIn headline for a [Year 13 student / school leaver] interested in [sector]. Specific and professional; avoid cliches like aspiring professional or passionate about."*

26

### Write my LinkedIn About section

*"Write a LinkedIn About section for me. I am [description]. My experience includes [describe it]. I am looking for [type of opportunity]. 3–4 short paragraphs, first person, sounds like a real person."*

27

### Write a LinkedIn connection request

*"Write a LinkedIn connection request (under 300 characters) to someone at [company]. I am a student interested in [sector]. Specific, not generic."*

## FEEDBACK & IMPROVEMENT

28

### Give me honest feedback on my application

*"Here is my application for [job title] at [company]: [paste it]. Give me honest, specific feedback. Tell me what is strong, what is weak, what is vague and what is missing. Do not be kind; be useful."*

29

### Make my writing sound more confident

*"Here is something I wrote: [paste it]. It sounds too hesitant. Rewrite it to sound more confident and direct without becoming arrogant. Keep all the facts the same."*

30

### Make my writing shorter and sharper

*"Here is something I wrote: [paste it]. It is too long. Cut it by roughly a third, keeping only the strongest points. Make every sentence earn its place."*

31

### Check my writing for cliches and vague claims

*"Here is my personal statement / cover letter: [paste it]. Identify every cliché, overused phrase or vague claim. For each one, suggest a stronger alternative or explain why it should be cut."*

32

### Help me choose between two options

*"I am trying to decide between [option A] and [option B] after [sixth form / school]. My skills and interests are [describe]. My priorities are [describe]. What are the genuine pros and cons of each path for someone in my situation?"*

## UNDERSTANDING & LEARNING

33

### **Explain a term I don't understand**

*"Explain [term, e.g. commercial awareness / stakeholder management] in plain English. Give me a simple definition and one concrete example of what it looks like in a real workplace."*

34

### **Help me understand a career path**

*"What does a typical career progression look like for someone starting as a [job title] in [sector]? What are the roles at each stage and what skills do you need to develop?"*

35

### **Help me prepare for an assessment centre**

*"I have an assessment centre for [company] for a [job title / apprenticeship]. What exercises typically appear? What are assessors looking for? Give me 5 specific things I can do to prepare in [X days]."*

## 05 How to Get Better Results

*The difference between a weak prompt and a strong one.*

The quality of what AI gives you depends almost entirely on the quality of what you ask it. Most people type something vague, get a generic response, and assume AI isn't useful. The fix is simple: be specific.

### The four ingredients of a strong prompt:

<b>Context</b>	Tell it who you are, what you're applying for and what experience you have.
<b>Task</b>	Be specific: a first draft, feedback, a shorter version, or five different options.
<b>Constraints</b>	Tell it format, length and tone (e.g., 'under 200 words, professional but warm').
<b>Your information</b>	The more real detail you provide, such as actual experience, a real company, or a real job description, the more useful the output.

### Before and after (see the difference):

#### Writing a personal statement

##### X WEAK PROMPT

*"Write me a personal statement for a job."*

##### V STRONG PROMPT

*"I am a Year 12 student applying for a Customer Service Assistant role at Barclays. I volunteer at a food bank every Saturday and have done for 18 months. I study Business, English and Media at A Level. Write me a 3-sentence CV personal statement: confident and specific. Do not use the words passionate or hardworking."*

#### Preparing for an interview

##### X WEAK PROMPT

*"Give me interview tips."*

##### V STRONG PROMPT

*"I have a first-round interview for a Level 3 Business Apprenticeship at KPMG next Thursday. The role involves client work and data analysis. I am nervous about competency questions. Give me the 5 most likely competency questions they will ask and for each one give me a tip on how to structure my STAR answer."*

#### Getting feedback on your writing

##### X WEAK PROMPT

*"Is this good?"*

##### V STRONG PROMPT

*"Here is my cover letter for a graphic design apprenticeship at a London studio: [paste letter]. Tell*

*me specifically what is strong, what is weak and what is missing. Be direct: I want to improve it, not feel good about it. Then give me a rewritten version."*

### If the first response isn't right, ask again:

- **If the first response isn't right, here's how to push it further:** Rather than vague instructions like "make it better", give AI a specific diagnosis of what's wrong and exactly what to fix. The more precise your feedback, the better the next version.
- **If it sounds too generic:** *"This could have been written for anyone. I want you to rewrite it using only these specific details from my actual experience: [list 2–3 real specifics, such as a number, a company name, or a responsibility]. Remove anything that isn't directly grounded in what I've told you."*
- **If it sounds too formal or corporate:** *"This doesn't sound like a real person. Read it back and identify every phrase that sounds like it came from a template, then replace each one with something a confident 18-year-old would actually say in a professional context."*
- **If it's too long:** *"Cut this to [X] words without losing the three most important points, which are: [state them]. If you have to cut something, cut the weakest sentence first and tell me which one you removed and why."*
- **If it lacks impact:** *"The opening sentence is weak. Give me five alternative opening sentences; each one should start differently and immediately communicate something specific and compelling about my background."*
- **If it doesn't match the company:** *"Rewrite the second paragraph so it references [specific thing about the company, such as a programme, a value, or a recent project]. Here is what I know about them: [paste your research]. Make it clear this letter could only have been sent to this company."*
- **If you want to compare options:** *"Give me three versions of the personal statement: one that leads with my work experience, one that leads with my skills, and one that leads with why I want this specific role. Label them A, B and C."*

The difference: every one of these prompts tells AI exactly what the problem is, what to prioritise, and what the output should look like. That's what separates students who get useful AI output from those who don't.

## 06 What AI Can't Do For You

*The honest section. Read this before you rely on AI too much.*

AI tools are genuinely useful. But there are things they fundamentally cannot do, and understanding the limits will stop you making mistakes that cost you opportunities.

### 1 It doesn't know your real experience

1

AI can only work with what you tell it. If you give it vague information, it fills the gaps with generic content that could belong to anyone. Your specific experiences, specific results and specific details are what make an application strong, and only you have those.

### 2 It can't make you sound like you without your input

2

AI-generated writing has a recognisable quality: smooth, well-structured, slightly too balanced. Employers read hundreds of applications and they notice. The only way to avoid it is to edit aggressively and add your own voice, your own examples and your own personality.

### 3 It can get facts wrong — confidently

3

AI tools sometimes produce incorrect information about companies, people, salaries and dates, stated with the same confident tone as things that are correct. Always verify specific facts before including them in any application.

### 4 It can't prepare you for the real interview

4

AI can help you practise and generate questions. But the interview itself requires you: your composure, your presence, and your ability to think on your feet. Use AI to prepare. You still have to do the real thing yourself.

### 5 It can't make decisions for you

5

AI can give you information and perspectives. It cannot tell you which career is right for you, which company is the best fit, or whether to take a particular opportunity. Those judgements require self-knowledge that only you have.

### 6 It can't replace doing the work

6

The students who get the best opportunities don't use AI to avoid effort; they use it to spend their effort more effectively. Using AI to skip the research, the personalisation and the genuine preparation produces mediocre applications. No tool changes that.

## 07 Responsible Use

*When using AI is fine — and when it crosses a line.*

AI is a tool, like a spell checker or a calculator. Using it to work better is not cheating. But there are situations where using it inappropriately can damage your application, your reputation or your integrity. Here is how to tell the difference.

### V FINE TO USE AI FOR THIS

Getting a first draft of a cover letter that you then edit heavily and personalise

Using AI to generate interview questions to practise with

Asking AI to improve the clarity or conciseness of something you wrote

Using AI to research a company before an interview

Asking AI for feedback on your writing to help you improve it

Using AI to practise and sharpen your own thinking

### X WHERE IT CROSSES A LINE

Submitting an AI-generated cover letter word-for-word with only the name changed

Using AI to generate answers you read from during a video interview

Asking AI to write an entire personal statement and submitting it as your own

Presenting AI-generated facts about a company without verifying them first

Asking AI to complete a written application test or assessment on your behalf

Relying on AI so heavily that you couldn't explain your own application in an interview

### The test — one question to ask yourself:

- If an employer asked you to explain, expand on or defend anything in your application during the interview, could you?
- If yes: you've used AI as a tool to help you.
- If no: you've used AI as a substitute for doing the work.
- The first is smart. The second will catch up with you, usually in the interview room.

### A final note:

- AI tools are getting better every month. The students who learn to use them well now will have a real advantage, not because AI does the work, but because they can produce stronger applications and prepare more thoroughly.
- The goal is not to use AI as much as possible. The goal is to be as strong a candidate as possible.
- Use AI as one tool among many. Then do the work.

**AI gives you a head start.**

What you do with it is still up to you.

More free resources at [careerguide.network](https://careerguide.network)