

SAY NO TO AI

INDEPENDENT THINKING. PRACTICAL WORK.

FREE PRACTICE WORKBOOK

The 7-Day Think-First Challenge

Small experiments in learning and working on your own terms

OCTOBER 2026 / SAYNOTOAI.NET

Seven small tasks. Your own working agreement.

START HERE

A week on your own terms

You do not need to become an AI enthusiast to take part. You do not need a subscription, a new app, or a perfect productivity routine. You need a notebook or a plain document, a small work task, and about 15-20 minutes a day.

This challenge gives you seven opportunities to notice where assistance is useful and where you want more practice. It is an introductory workbook, not a test of intelligence, a diagnosis of dependence, or a promise to secure your career. There is no score and no streak to protect. Miss a day? Resume when you can.

If you use AI, choose a tool your workplace allows and use invented or public material. If you do not use AI, follow the alternative route each day. Asking a colleague, reading documentation, using a calculator, and choosing to work alone are all legitimate decisions. The point is to make those decisions deliberately.

Keep a single page called **My working notes**. At the end of the week it will contain seven small artifacts you can actually inspect. You may discover that a familiar tool works well, that an AI task costs more checking time than it saves, or that you want to practice a specific skill. Those are useful findings.

Choose your practice task: a short project update, a comparison of two options, an explanation of an unfamiliar concept, or a plan for a small piece of work. Avoid urgent decisions and confidential material. For the examples below, we use an imaginary community workshop.

YOUR SEVEN DAYS

Day 1 - Decide what a good result looks like

Day 2 - Make one useful first attempt

Day 3 - Check one claim all the way through

Day 4 - Ask for a question, then try again

Day 5 - Choose where assistance belongs

Day 6 - Finish one small piece of work

Day 7 - Write your own working agreement

DAY 01 / THE THINK-FIRST CHALLENGE

Decide what a good result looks like

Time: 15 minutes. Keep: a five-line task brief.

Before seeking help, define the work. A polished answer can feel useful before you have decided what you need it to do.

Spend three minutes choosing a modest task you can work on this week. Spend seven minutes completing these lines in your own words:

- The person who will use this is...
- They need to understand or decide...
- A useful result must include...
- I need to check...
- I will know I can stop when...

Here is a sample brief: “I need a 150-word workshop update for volunteers. They need the new date, venue, and next action. The update must explain what changed without blaming anyone. I need to check the room booking. I can stop when a volunteer can identify what to do next.”

Use the remaining five minutes to draft a rough opening or outline. Keep awkward sentences. They show what you already know and expose what is missing.

Optional AI route: after finishing the brief, ask, “What necessary information is missing from this brief? Ask up to three questions. Do not draft the result.” Answer only the useful questions. The system's suggestions do not automatically become requirements.

No-AI route: read your brief as the intended reader. Circle a phrase they could interpret in two ways, or ask a colleague to identify a missing detail.

Write down: What became clearer when I defined the result myself?

DAY 02 / THE THINK-FIRST CHALLENGE

Make one useful first attempt

Time: 20 minutes. Keep: an untouched first attempt and one revision.

Choose one part of yesterday's task. For eight minutes, work without opening a chat, search engine, template, or previous example. You can use the facts already in your brief. If information is missing, write a visible marker such as “[confirm venue]” rather than guessing.

Next, spend two minutes naming the precise difficulty. “I am bad at writing” is too broad to act on. “I cannot explain the date change in one sentence without sounding defensive” is a workable problem.

For five minutes, get help with that difficulty. Then use the final five minutes to revise the passage yourself. Save both versions. You are looking at a work process, not proving that your first attempt was good enough.

Optional AI route: share a fictionalized sentence and ask, “Identify the unclear part and explain why a reader might misunderstand it. Offer one question I should answer before revising.” You can request a wording option later, but first examine the reason for the edit.

No-AI route: read the sentence aloud, compare it with your brief, or ask someone which action they think it requests. Another person's misunderstanding is information, not a verdict on your ability.

In our workshop example, “The session has been pushed back due to complications” becomes “The workshop moves to 14 May because the room will be unavailable on the original date.” That revision still needs a verified booking. Clear wording cannot repair an invented fact.

Write down: Which part could I do independently? What kind of help moved the work forward?

DAY 03 / THE THINK-FIRST CHALLENGE

Check one claim all the way through

Time: 20 minutes. Keep: a claim and its evidence note.

Take a short answer, draft, or article relevant to your task. It can be AI-generated or written by a person. Pick one factual statement that could change what someone does. Choose something manageable, such as a price, date, feature, or numerical comparison.

Spend four minutes copying the exact claim and identifying what would support it. Spend ten minutes opening the original material: the actual price page, your booking confirmation, the published report, the official documentation, or the underlying spreadsheet. A search snippet is a starting point; inspect the source itself.

Use the final six minutes to record what you found:

Claim: "Venue B is cheaper for 20 attendees."

Evidence: fictional quote A is \$180 for the room; quote B is \$120 plus \$4 per attendee. At 20 attendees, B costs \$200. Quote dates and included equipment still need checking.

Decision: revise the comparison. Venue A has the lower listed total under these assumptions.

Label the claim **supported**, **needs revision**, or **unresolved**. These labels describe your evidence for this task; they are not universal truth ratings.

Optional AI route: ask a tool to list the individual claims in a paragraph. Choose one and check it outside the conversation. Asking "Are you sure?" is a request for another answer, not independent evidence.

No-AI route: use any claim you are about to pass to someone else. The checking method is identical.

If you cannot resolve the claim within the session, record the missing source or person to consult. Do not turn a time limit into permission to guess.

Write down: Did the source support the exact wording, or only part of it?

DAY 04 / THE THINK-FIRST CHALLENGE

Ask for a question, then try again

Time: 20 minutes. Keep: a short explanation and a fresh attempt.

Choose a concept you need for work: percentage change, a spreadsheet reference, a design principle, or the difference between a project risk and an issue. Use a reliable introductory source and spend five minutes reading one explanation.

Close the explanation. Spend three minutes explaining the concept in plain language. Mark the step you cannot explain. Get one targeted hint, then spend seven minutes solving a similar example. Use the final five minutes to check and correct your reasoning against the source.

For percentage change, a worked starting example might be a fictional cost rising from \$80 to \$100. The increase is \$20; \$20 divided by the starting \$80 is 0.25, or 25%. Your fresh attempt: what is the increase from \$120 to \$150? Explain why the starting amount is the denominator before checking the calculation.

Optional AI route: “I am practicing percentage change. Here is my attempt. Ask one question about the first unclear step. Wait for my answer and do not give the full solution.” If it reveals the solution anyway, close it and create a fresh example. The instruction is a request, not a guarantee of suitable tutoring.

No-AI route: use a textbook hint, an answer key you consult after trying, or a colleague who agrees to ask a question before explaining.

Research in high-school mathematics gives a reason to distinguish assisted performance from learning: one field experiment found weaker subsequent unaided performance with an unrestricted AI tutor; a tutor with teacher-designed safeguards mitigated that result. It does not establish what will happen in every adult learning task. [Read the study.](#)

Write down: What can I explain now, and what still needs practice?

DAY 05 / THE THINK-FIRST CHALLENGE

Choose where assistance belongs

Time: 15 minutes. Keep: one task with a deliberate assistance boundary.

Look at a task you repeat: preparing an agenda, comparing quotes, drafting an update, or organizing research notes. Spend five minutes separating it into three parts: deciding what matters, producing a draft or calculation, and checking the result.

For each part, ask: “What knowledge do I need to do this well? What could go wrong? Who will be accountable?” Decide which parts you want to perform yourself and where a tool or person could help.

For our imaginary workshop, you might decide the priorities yourself, use a spreadsheet to compare costs, ask AI for questions that the agenda misses, and personally confirm venue details. An equally reasonable choice is to draft the entire agenda without AI because the group is small and you already know the work.

Optional AI route: ask for three possible omissions in a sanitized agenda. Accept an omission only if you can explain why it matters to this group. Avoid asking the system to decide what your community values.

No-AI route: compare the agenda with the last meeting's unresolved actions, or ask an experienced organizer what usually gets forgotten.

Spend the final five minutes writing a boundary with a reason: “I may use assistance to organize my notes, but I will decide the recommendation and verify the underlying costs.” Treat this as a starting rule you may revise with experience.

Write down: Which boundary protects something I care about: accuracy, privacy, practice, voice, time, or responsibility?

DAY 06 / THE THINK-FIRST CHALLENGE

Finish one small piece of work

Time: 20 minutes. Keep: a usable result and a short process note.

Return to the brief from Day 1. Choose a result small enough to finish now: the 150-word update, the comparison table, or a one-page agenda. Spend twelve minutes producing it using the assistance boundaries you chose yesterday.

Spend five minutes checking it against the original brief. Can the reader find the action? Are unverified facts visibly marked? Are numbers traceable? Can you explain the recommendation without reading a generated paragraph aloud? Remove any statement you cannot responsibly support.

Spend the last three minutes recording the process. What did you do yourself? What assistance did you use? What did checking reveal? If the task remains unfinished, identify the missing input instead of claiming completion.

Optional AI route: use the system for one clearly bounded part, such as identifying a confusing sentence. Record the time spent giving instructions, checking, and fixing. A quick first response is only one part of the work.

No-AI route: complete the same task with your usual tools and record where they helped or slowed you down. You are allowed to conclude that your existing approach suits the task.

Your note might read: “I outlined the update and confirmed the date. A tool suggested shorter wording, but removed the booking condition. I restored it. Next time I will request edits that preserve every condition.” This is a concrete observation, not proof that all AI editing behaves that way.

Write down: What assistance was useful enough to repeat, including the effort of checking it?

DAY 07 / THE THINK-FIRST CHALLENGE

Write your own working agreement

Time: 20 minutes. Keep: a one-page personal agreement.

Read your six artifacts for five minutes. Look for one recurring strength, one difficulty, and one assumption that changed. You do not need a dramatic transformation to finish the week.

Spend ten minutes completing this agreement:

For the next two weeks, I will practice _____ for _____ minutes, _____ times a week.

Before asking for help, I will write _____.

I may use assistance for _____ because _____.

I will personally verify _____ using _____.

I will avoid sharing _____.

If I cannot explain an answer, my next step will be _____.

I will review this agreement on _____.

Make it realistic. “I will draft the main point of my weekly update before opening a tool” is easier to evaluate than “I will never depend on technology.” Your agreement can include a no-AI preference, occasional use, or frequent use with specific checks.

Spend the last five minutes choosing one artifact to revisit next week. Try a related task before looking at the earlier result. Notice what you can now do, what you need to look up, and whether your chosen assistance still fits. This is a personal observation, not a validated assessment of skill.

Optional AI route: ask a tool to identify one vague promise in your agreement. Decide whether its criticism helps, and rewrite the promise yourself.

No-AI route: underline every word that hides an action, such as “better,” “more,” or “carefully.” Replace one with something you can actually do.

Write down: What will I choose deliberately next week?

KEEP THE SEVEN SMALL ARTIFACTS

My working notes

Use this page as an index to your notes, or write a short observation for each day. A missed day is an invitation to resume when you can.

Day 1 - My five-line task brief

Day 2 - My first attempt and revision

Day 3 - A checked claim

Day 4 - What I could explain

Day 5 - My assistance boundary

Day 6 - What helped me finish

Day 7 - My next working agreement

AFTER THE CHALLENGE

Continue on your own terms

You have seven small records of your own work. Keep the ones that help. Change the exercises that do not fit your circumstances.

If you would like to share, bring one observation to the [Say No to AI community](#): “Here is the task, here is the help I used or declined, and here is what happened.” You can be skeptical, curious, irritated, or undecided. Please use fictional or public examples and avoid identifying clients, colleagues, or other people without their permission.

For a deeper next step, read [How to Check an AI Answer](#) or [What Should You Keep Practicing?](#). The purpose of this week is to help you notice your choices. What you do with those choices remains yours.

ANSWER CHECK: DAY 4

For the fresh percentage-change example, $\$150 - \$120 = \$30$. Dividing the increase by the starting $\$120$ gives 0.25, or 25%. Both examples in Day 4 have a 25% increase. The starting value is the reference point for the change.

RESEARCH NOTE

Day 4 refers to Bastani and colleagues (2025), *Generative AI without guardrails can harm learning: Evidence from high school mathematics*, PNAS, 122(26), e2422633122. [Read the original study](#). Its specific school context does not validate this challenge as a training program.

This is an introductory practice workbook. No score, employment guarantee, or measured learning outcome is claimed.