

SAY NO TO AI

INDEPENDENT THINKING. PRACTICAL WORK.

FREE SAMPLE

Think First, Use AI Second.

A practical workbook for working and learning without
outsourcing your judgment

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Introduction + Chapter 1

FREE SAMPLE

A useful place to begin

This free sample contains the introduction and complete first chapter of **Think First, Use AI Second**. It includes an exercise and answer guidance you can use immediately.

The complete workbook continues with source checking, writing, learning, workplace decisions, information boundaries, a seven-day plan, and reusable working pages. This sample does not contain the full paid workbook.

You can complete these exercises without a paid AI subscription. Using an AI tool is optional.

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INTRODUCTION

Before you begin

You may be tired of hearing that you must reinvent yourself every time a new AI tool appears. You may use AI daily and still dislike what it is doing to your work. Perhaps your employer expects faster output, while checking that output has quietly become another job.

Those are reasonable things to question.

This workbook offers a practical way to decide where assistance helps, where it creates extra work, and what you want to remain able to do yourself. You do not need a paid AI subscription. You can complete every exercise with the information in these pages, a notebook, and a calculator. Using an AI tool is optional.

There is no promise here that a routine will protect your job, eliminate mistakes, or make you permanently competitive. Workplaces and economic conditions are larger than individual habits. What you can build is a clearer relationship with your own work: the ability to explain a decision, trace an important claim, recognize a weak answer, and choose when to ask for help.

You will practice a short sequence:

Try > ask for specific help > check > practice again.

“Try” can mean five rough bullet points. “Check” can mean one calculation and one original document. “Practice again” can be a brief explanation in your own words. The sequence should fit ordinary working days, including the tired ones.

Eight chapters take you from choosing a task to building a sustainable routine. Three fictional cases include all the source material you need to check their answers. These cases are teaching examples, not real companies, customer stories, testimonials, or measured outcomes. Their draft AI responses are deliberately constructed examples, not evidence about a particular model.

Read straight through once, or work through one chapter at a time. Write your answers before reading the guidance when you can. The guidance explains the reasoning; it does not require identical wording.

If you prefer avoiding generative AI, use the same exercises with a colleague, reference book, search engine, spreadsheet, or checklist. Choosing a different tool is a legitimate outcome.

CHAPTER 01

Decide what you want to keep

The first useful question is about the task. What must happen, and what will you need to understand when it is done?

Suppose you need to prepare a project update. You might delegate formatting, ask for possible headings, write the recommendation yourself, and verify every status against your notes. That is already several decisions about assistance. Treating the whole project as one thing to “give to AI” hides them.

A useful division is between **producing an output**, **making a judgment**, and **developing a skill**. They often happen together, but their needs differ. An output may be a readable email. A judgment may be whether the delay warrants escalating. A skill may be learning to explain difficult news clearly. Assistance that produces a polished email can still leave the other two needs unresolved.

Before opening any tool, finish this sentence: “After this task, I need to be able to explain _____. ” For an update, perhaps it is why the deadline changed. For research, it may be why one source deserves more weight. For a spreadsheet, it may be how the total was calculated.

Keep that part visible while you work.

A workable decision about delegation

Ask three questions about the part you plan to delegate:

1. **Can I describe a good result?** If you cannot, spend a little time finding a reliable example or asking someone who understands the work.
2. **Can I check the result with resources I actually have?** A response that requires expertise you cannot obtain may be unsuitable to use.
3. **Do I need to practice this part?** If the skill matters to you, retain a meaningful attempt or an independent repeat.

These questions do not produce a universal score. They reveal what is missing. You may discover that a calculator is enough, that a colleague should review the decision, or that the task should wait for a source you do not yet have.

Tasks with low consequences and easy checks are often good places to experiment. Turning an approved outline into several title options is easier to review than drafting an unfamiliar legal agreement. In a sensitive or consequential task, follow the relevant professional process and use qualified review. A polished response is not a substitute for that process.

Time matters too. Estimate the full cost: preparation, tool interaction, checking, correction, and final explanation. A ten-second draft that takes twenty minutes to repair may be a poor choice for a five-minute task. You do not need to defend doing it yourself.

Decide what staying capable means

Independence does not mean memorizing every fact or refusing useful equipment. Many jobs depend on shared systems, reference materials, and other people. Your target is the level of understanding needed to notice a problem, recover when assistance is unavailable, and explain what you have approved.

Choose two or three skills to protect this month. Be concrete. “Critical thinking” is difficult to practice on a calendar. “Calculate the percentage change in a monthly report and explain the denominator” gives you something observable. Other examples include outlining a proposal, asking a useful follow-up question, and reading an original source before summarizing it.

You may have accessibility needs that make particular tools essential. Adapt the routine around them. Dictating your own reasoning, using text-to-speech, or working with a trusted reader can all support independent judgment. The question is whether you can follow and evaluate the work with your normal supports.

Exercise: choose the boundary

Consider these tasks. For each, write what you would keep, what assistance you would allow, and how you would check the result.

- Reformatting a meeting agenda from approved notes.
- Writing an explanation of a performance problem involving a colleague.
- Learning a spreadsheet formula you expect to use every week.
- Summarizing an unfamiliar research paper for a decision tomorrow.

Answer guidance: Formatting an agenda may be easy to check line by line. An explanation about a colleague requires careful handling of information, evidence, tone, and your workplace process; generic suggestions using fictional details may be safer than submitting the actual record. For a recurring formula, retain an initial attempt and test it on a small example with known answers. For research, inspect the paper yourself, identify its limits, and get suitable expertise if the decision exceeds your understanding. A summary alone cannot establish reliability.

Your working decision: “For the next task, I will delegate _____. I will personally explain _____. I will check _____ using _____.”

YOUR NEXT STEP

Make one deliberate choice

Choose one task this week. Decide what assistance you will allow, what you want to remain able to explain, and how you will check the result.

The task I will try

What I want to remain able to explain

How I will check the result

Explore the free challenge and further guides at [Say No to AI](https://saynoai.net). You can be skeptical, curious, irritated, or undecided and still take part.

FREE SAMPLE / INTRODUCTION + CHAPTER 1