Using AI as a Learning Partner[1]

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AI tools like CoPilot, Gemini, or ChatGPT offer powerful opportunities to take charge of your learning—understanding concepts, practicing skills, receiving feedback, and building career-ready habits. Approach AI as a learning partner that amplifies your thinking, not a shortcut.

When you use AI strategically, you can:

- Take ownership of learning with explanations tailored to your needs
- Practice and test yourself to strengthen retention
- Get feedback to improve work before it counts
- Build professional AI habits employers value

Eight Principles for Using AI as a Learning Partner

1. Start with the Guidelines

AI policies vary across courses—what works in one class may not be appropriate in another. Understanding boundaries lets you use AI confidently within them.

Try this: Check the syllabus, assignment instructions, and your university's academic integrity policy. When unclear, ask your instructor how AI can support your learning.

2. Use AI to Actively Learn, Not Passively Receive

Reading an AI explanation isn't learning. Active engagement—questioning, generating ideas, making connections—leads to deeper understanding. Be the driver, not a passenger.

Try this: Before asking AI to explain something, write what you know and what confuses you. After reading AI's response, summarize key points in your own words.

[1] Content developed with AI, based on the CAST UDL Guidelines™, scholarly sources, and web resources. Icons courtesy of *Flaticon.com* contributors.

3. Teach, Test, and Challenge Yourself

Research shows teaching others and self-testing promote deeper understanding and stronger retention than rereading. AI can supercharge these techniques.

Try this: "Teach" a concept to AI acting as a curious beginner. Generate practice quizzes and take them without AI help. Ask AI to create scenarios where you apply course concepts.

4. Get Feedback Before It Counts

AI can be a low-stakes practice partner, giving feedback on drafts before submission—mirroring how professionals improve work.

Try this: Ask AI to identify gaps, unclear passages, or areas needing evidence. Evaluate suggestions critically—not all will improve your work. Then get a fresh perspective from a peer, tutor, or writing center.

5. Verify and Think Critically

AI can sound confident even when it's wrong—inventing sources, misstating facts, or missing nuance. Evaluating AI output develops critical thinking that matters in every field.

Try this: Cross-check information against authoritative sources. Verify citations exist. When AI explains reasoning, identify assumptions and consider alternatives.

6. Be Transparent About Your Process

Documenting AI use builds ethical habits and supports reflection—just as professionals cite sources and document tools.

Try this: Record which tool you used, your prompts, how you modified output, and what you contributed. Share a link to your AI conversation when possible.

7. Develop Your Own Voice and Capabilities

Education builds capabilities for life. Over-reliance on AI undermines the skills you're developing. Your perspective, judgment, and synthesis make your work valuable.

Try this: Complete first drafts before seeking AI feedback. Use suggestions as starting points—not replacements. You don't have to accept every suggestion; your judgment matters.

8. Build Professional AI Habits Now

Workplaces expect responsible AI use—knowing when it helps, when it doesn't, and how to document it. These habits are professional skills employers value.

Try this: Approach AI professionally: enhance capabilities rather than replace judgment, document your process, verify outputs, and be ready to explain your work.

Key Takeaway

AI is most powerful when you use it to amplify your learning—not bypass it. Approach AI with curiosity and intention: explore ideas, test understanding, get feedback, and build skills. The goal isn't just completing assignments; it's becoming a capable learner and professional, with AI as one tool among many.

Resources

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