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SMART AI · THE FOUNDATIONS

The Art of the *Conversation*

How to start a chat, ask well, and get genuinely useful results — plus the working habits that separate a quick reply from real help.

Plan with intention. Execute with precision.

A good chat starts *before* the chat

The single biggest difference between a frustrating AI session and a brilliant one isn't the tool — it's the thirty seconds of thinking before you type. The four habits give you a simple pre-flight. You don't need all four every time, but a moment on each turns a vague request into a clear one.

Delegate

What am I actually trying to do? Name the real goal, and decide what's the AI's job versus yours.

Describe

How will I ask? What you want, how to approach it, and the tone you'd like back.

Discern

How will I judge it? Decide up front what "good" looks like, so you'll know it when you see it.

Diligence

What will I check? Note anything that'll need verifying before you use or share it.

THE MINDSET SHIFT

Treat AI like a **capable new colleague**, not a search box. You wouldn't hand a colleague a three-word task and expect magic — you'd give them context, a goal, and a sense of what good looks like. AI responds to exactly the same courtesy.

All at once, or *step by step*?

There are two good ways to brief AI, and knowing which to use is half the skill. Both work — they suit different jobs.

The full brief. When you already know what you want, give it everything in one go — goal, context, format, tone, constraints. Like handing over a complete brief. Best for well-defined tasks where you can picture the finished result.

A FULL BRIEF IN ONE MESSAGE

"Write a warm but professional reminder email to a client whose invoice is two weeks overdue. Keep it under 120 words, assume it's an oversight, and end with an easy way to pay. Friendly, not stern."

The step-by-step build. When you're still figuring it out, build it up like a conversation — one layer at a time, refining as you go. Best for thinking something through, exploring options, or any task where the shape only becomes clear as you talk.

THE SMART WAY TO THINK ABOUT IT

Your own SMART habit applies here: **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound**. Whether you load it all at once or build it up, you're steadily making the request more specific. The full brief front-loads that clarity; the step-by-step discovers it. Same destination, different route.

The clearer you are, *the better it gets*

AI can't read your mind — it can only read your words. The quality of what comes back is almost always a mirror of the clarity that went in. The same request, asked two ways:

✗ VAGUE IN

"Help me with a social post about my planners."

✓ CLEAR IN

"Write three Instagram captions for my weekly planner, aimed at busy founders, warm and a little witty, each under 40 words with one question to spark replies."

The first gets you something generic you'll have to fix. The second gets you something usable, because you did the thinking that only you could do — who it's for, how it should sound, what shape it takes. **That thinking is the value you add.** AI supplies the words; you supply the judgement.

Vague in, vague out. Clear in, gold out.

What's *actually possible*

Most people use AI for two things: drafting a message, or looking something up. Useful — but the smallest corner of what it can do. Once you can brief it well, the ceiling lifts. A taste of what becomes possible:

Build

Make something real. A working document, a structured spreadsheet, a simple web page, a branded guide — built to your spec, then refined with you.

Plan

Turn fog into a plan. Break a big goal into steps, build a launch timeline, map a week, pressure-test an idea before you commit.

Decide

Think it through with you. Lay out trade-offs, argue both sides, surface what you've missed — a thinking partner, not just an answer machine.

Create

Go from blank page to first draft. A brand voice, a content series, a name list, a workshop outline — the hardest part, started.

Learn

Understand anything, at your level. Ask it to explain like you're new, then go deeper. A patient tutor that never sighs.

THE PATTERN

Notice the shift: from **"answer my question"** to **"help me make something."** That's where AI earns its place — not replacing your work, but giving you a faster, braver run at it.

One chat, *one subject*

It's tempting to keep one endless conversation for everything. Resist it. A focused chat gives you sharper results — and there's a simple reason why.

An AI pays attention to everything in the current conversation. That's a strength when it's all relevant — and a problem when it isn't. Pile your invoice email, your holiday plans, and your website copy into one thread, and the earlier topics become **noise** that can muddy later answers.

Start a fresh chat for each new subject. Think of it like a clean desk for a new piece of work: nothing from the last job cluttering this one. Your planner copy gets a chat; your client email gets another; your launch plan gets its own. Each stays sharp, focused, and easy to return to.

RULE OF THUMB

New subject? **New chat.** Still circling the same goal? Stay put and keep building. The test is simple: if what you're about to ask has little to do with what's above it, open a fresh one.

AI memory *isn't infinite*

This one surprises people, and saves a lot of frustration once you know it. An AI doesn't hold a conversation in mind the way you'd assume.

Every AI works within a **limited window of attention** — how much of the current conversation, plus anything you've shared, it can hold at once. It's roomy, but it isn't endless. In a very long chat, the earliest details can quietly slip out of view, and most tools have a limit on how much you can attach in one go.

Some tools also offer a longer-term *memory* across chats — but even that is selective, not a perfect record. The safe assumption with any tool: **it remembers this conversation well, the distant past loosely, and nothing you haven't told it.**

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

Don't rely on a months-old chat to "remember" a decision. If something matters, keep it somewhere you control — a note, a document, your planner — and bring it into the chat when it's needed. **You are the memory that lasts.**

Treat AI's memory like a whiteboard, not a filing cabinet.

The handover note

Here's the technique that ties it all together — the one that makes starting fresh painless instead of a chore. When a chat is getting long, or you've hit a limit, or you simply want to carry your progress into a clean thread: ask the chat to brief the next one.

Before you leave a conversation, ask it to write you a **handover note** — a short summary of what matters, ready to paste into a new chat. It carries the context forward without dragging all the old noise with it.

COPY-PASTE: THE HANDOVER PROMPT

"We're going to continue this in a fresh chat. Please write a short handover note I can paste in to bring the new chat up to speed — include the goal, the key decisions we've made, the tone we've agreed, and anything still open. Keep it tight."

Tailor what you ask it to carry: for a writing project, the **tone and decisions**; for a build, the **structure and any code**; for planning, the **goal and what's still open**. Paste the note into a new, clean chat and you're moving again — focused, current, and clutter-free.

WHY THIS WORKS SO WELL

You get the best of both: a **fresh, sharp workspace** and **continuity of context**. It's the single habit that makes long projects with AI feel effortless instead of messy.

Good conversations, *good results*

None of this is technical. It's just good working habits — the same ones that make any collaboration work: be clear, stay focused, keep what matters, and hand over well.

Start well

Take thirty seconds with the 4Ds before you type.

Ask clearly

Full brief or step-by-step — either way, get specific.

Aim higher

Go beyond answers: build, plan, decide, create, learn.

Stay tidy

One chat per subject; a fresh one for each new thing.

Hand over

Carry context with a handover note; you're the memory that lasts.

Put these together and AI stops being a clever novelty and becomes what it should be: a capable partner that helps you do your best work, faster. The next guide — your Practice & Reflection Companion — is where you take it for a drive.

This guide is original SMART content. Its framing around the four habits — Delegation, Description, Discernment, Diligence — draws on the AI Fluency Framework by Rick Dakan, Joseph Feller, and Anthropic, released under the Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence, used here with attribution and gratitude.

GO FURTHER

Where the fluency gets applied

These guides build the judgement — the 4Ds you can carry into any AI tool, on any task. The natural next step is applying that judgement to the work that carries a number.

The SMART Business range puts it to work: five practical planners for commercial leaders — Key Account Director, the SaaS Commercial Playbook, Managing Change, Continuous Improvement and Emotional Intelligence. Every one now includes a built-in "Working with AI" section: ready-made prompts, each constructed on the 4Ds you've just learned, with a note explaining why it's shaped that way.

So the loop closes both ways — the guides teach you to direct AI well, and the planners hand you the exact prompts for account risk, root-cause analysis, difficult conversations, change resistance and honest deal qualification.

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