AI FLUENCY

The Business Owner's Guide to AI Fluency

How to see the whole map, so you can make your own calls about AI, without becoming a technologist to do it.

A free guide by **Christopher Grant**, GORGES
More than 20 years building software for businesses

FREE

START HERE

You are standing on the floor of a valley

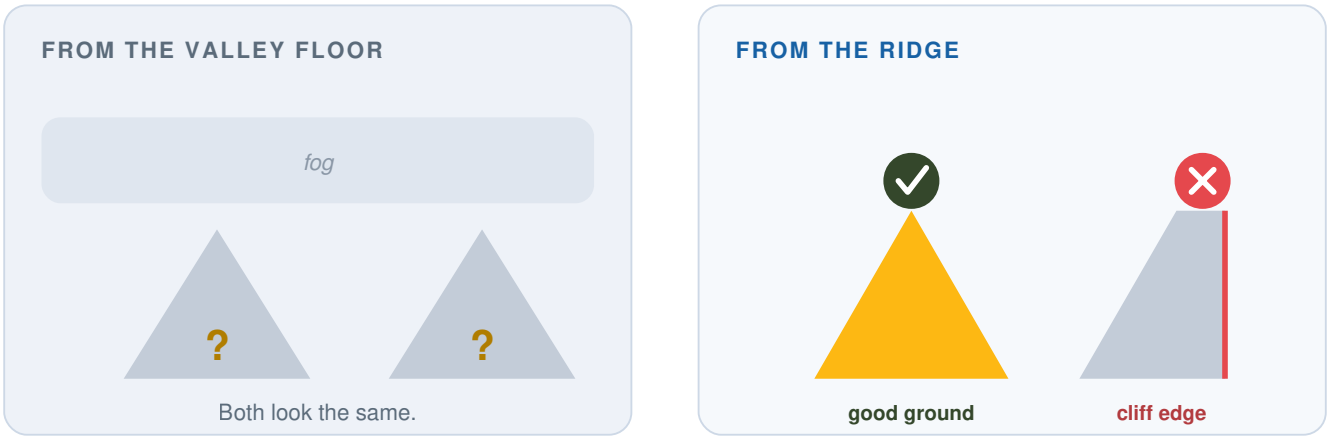
And from down there, most of the country is hidden from you.

If you run a business, AI is somewhere in the back of your mind, most of the time. Everyone keeps telling you to move fast so you do not get left behind. And if you are honest with yourself, you do not yet know the whole shape of this thing, and the last place you want to work that out is in front of your own team.

Here is the good news. The thing standing between you and a confident decision about AI is not a computer science degree. It is a handful of words and a couple of simple tests. Once those stop sounding like a foreign language, the whole conversation opens up.

That is what this short guide gives you. By the last page you will be able to follow any AI conversation, tell the good ground where AI genuinely helps your business from the cliff edge where it quietly puts you at risk, and judge anyone who tries to sell you something, including me. It is the walk up out of the valley and onto the ridge, where you can read the map for yourself.

> **The one idea to hold.** From the valley floor, the fertile ground where AI would carry your business forward and the cliff edge waiting in the fog look exactly the same. You cannot tell one from the other until you have taken the step. Fluency is simply being able to see the difference from above, before you move.



Fluency is the vantage: from the ridge, the good ground and the cliff stop looking alike.

1. THE LANGUAGE

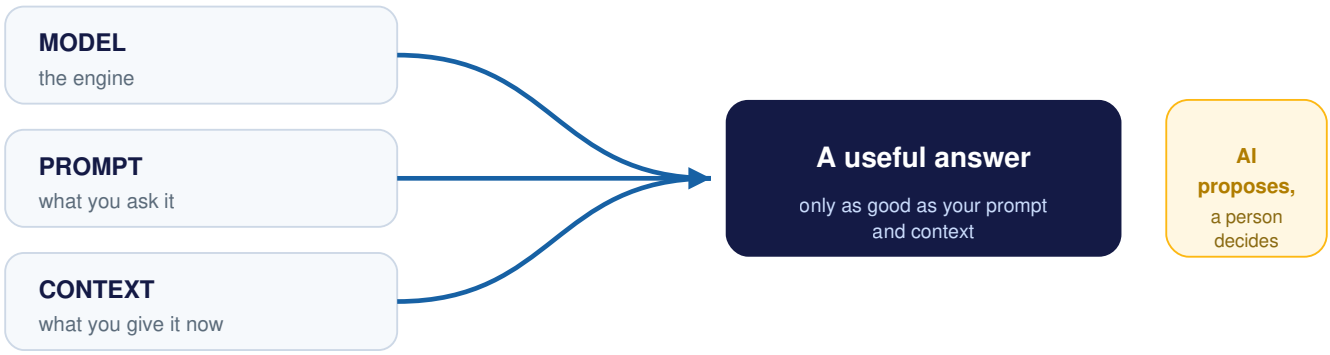
The few words you actually need

Strip away the jargon and a modern AI tool is a system that has read an enormous amount of writing and learned to predict what should come next. That is the engine underneath ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini. Three words carry most of the rest.

The model is the engine, the thing that was trained on all that writing. **The prompt** is simply what you ask it. **The context** is what you hand it to work with right now, your document, your email, your numbers. Same engine every time, and the answer is only ever as good as the prompt and the context you give it. Ask a general question and you get a general answer. Hand it your real material and it becomes far more useful, because you gave it something real to stand on.

There is one honest limit to build a habit around. Because the tool predicts plausible writing rather than looking up truth, it can be confidently wrong. It can hand you a made-up number inside a perfectly worded sentence. So use it freely for language work, drafting, summarizing, and reworking, and keep a person on anything that is a fact, a figure, or something going out the door with your name on it.

> **The whole habit, in one line.** AI proposes, and a person decides. Hold that, and most of the fear goes quiet.



One engine, every time. You steer it with the prompt and the context you provide.

2. THE JUDGMENT

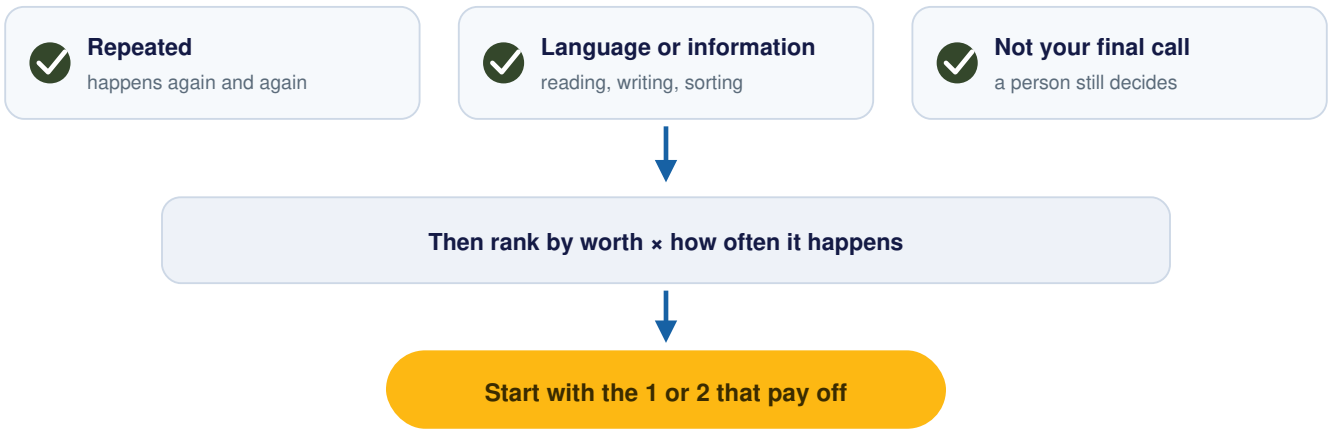
A simple test for where AI actually helps

You do not need a list of tools. You need a lens you can carry into any part of your business. Here it is.

AI tends to earn its place wherever the work is **repeated**, is heavy on **language or information**, and does not turn on your **final human judgment**. Walk that test across your operation, department by department, and you will feel the good opportunities light up. The reply you write forty times a week. The long document someone has to read and summarize. The first draft of the proposal. The quote that follows the same shape every time.

Then sort what lights up by two more questions: what would it be worth to you in time or money, and how often does it actually happen. Start with the one or two things that pay off, and do them well, rather than trying to do everything at once. One thing finished beats five things half-built.

> **A test you can keep.** Before you point AI at any task, ask yourself: could I tell within thirty seconds if the answer were wrong? If yes, it is a wonderful assistant. If no, you still need a person who can.



Three quick gates, then rank what is left. Finish one thing before starting the next.

3. THE RISKS

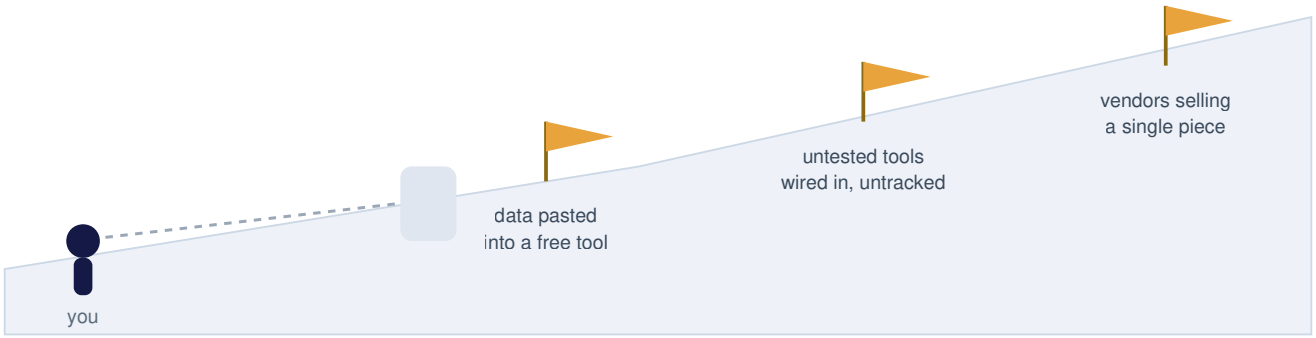
What you cannot see from the valley floor

While you have been running the day to day, things have been happening on the slopes above you that are hard to see from where you stand. None of them are reasons to fear AI. They are reasons to be the one steering it.

Somewhere in your company, someone trying to help may have taken sensitive information, a client list, a contract, and pasted it into a free AI tool to save an afternoon. Once it goes in, that tool can keep it. So the first rule to give your team is simple: know which tools keep your data private and which may not, and never paste passwords, client contracts, or account numbers into a free one.

It is rarely one person. Good people quietly bring in little tools nobody checked and wire them into your systems in ways no one is really tracking. Each feels like a small fix in the moment, and the trouble shows up later, downstream, where it is expensive. Meanwhile the agencies keep calling, and every one of them is selling you a single piece, a chatbot here, an automation there, none of them looking at your whole business.

> **Be careful with the free hour on the phone.** More often than not, that hour is someone listening for the place to sell you their big program. You want to hang up with a map, not a pitch. The fix for all of this does not start with a tool. It starts with you being able to see the whole picture.



Hard to see from the floor. Clear once you are up on the ridge.

None of these are reasons to fear AI. They are reasons to be the one steering it.

4. THE VENDORS

How to judge anyone selling you AI, including me

Once you can read the map, no vendor can rush you. You do not need to understand the technology to hold any tool, any proposal, or any consultant to a real standard. A handful of questions does the work.

→ Does it solve a real problem you actually have, or a clever one someone invented to sell the tool?

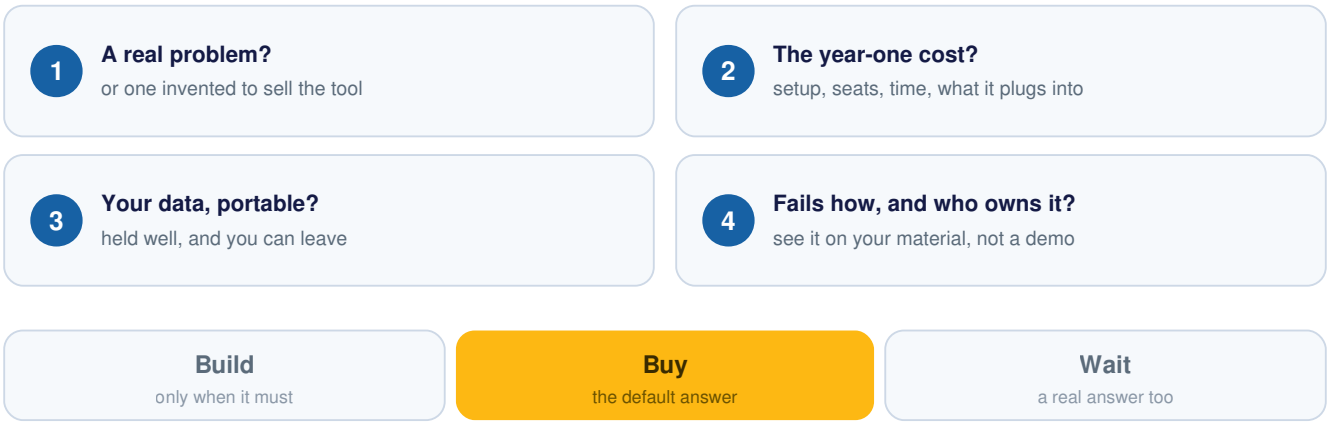
→ What does it cost over a full year, not just the sticker price? Add the setup, the seats, the time your people spend, and the thing it plugs into.

→ Does it hold your data well, and can you leave it later without losing everything?

→ What does it do when it fails, and who is accountable when it does? Ask to see it work on your own material, not a polished demo.

And on build versus buy: buy an existing tool unless it genuinely does not fit what you need, because a good custom build is scoped tight to one job and is worth it only when the off-the-shelf option truly falls short. Sometimes the right answer is simply to wait, because the thing is not ready, or not worth it yet. That is a real decision too, and it is yours to make.

> **The point of all of this.** You leave able to weigh any AI idea, from anyone, on the merits. That skill is worth more than any single tool, and it does not expire.



Four questions to hold any pitch to. Then build, buy, or wait, and buy is usually right.

YOUR NEXT STEP

From here, you can read the map

You now know the words, you have a test for where AI helps, you can see the risks that hide on the slopes, and you can judge anyone who tries to sell you something. That is the edge of AI fluency. The rest is walking your own business across the whole map, one real decision at a time.

If you want to keep going, I put the whole education on my channel, AI Fluency HQ, and it is free. Watch as much of it as you like, and judge me before we ever speak.

Want to become genuinely fluent, for your own business?

That is what I do, one on one. Six private sessions over about six weeks, built entirely around your company, your industry, and your real work, until you can read the whole map and make your own calls with a steady hand. You leave with a written plan made for your business, a one-page policy for your team, and the judgment to make every AI decision after this one on your own.

This is one business owner to another. If it is on your mind, let's talk.

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Christopher Grant has been building software for businesses for more than 20 years, from local companies around Ithaca to Cornell and eBay. He co-founded GORGES in 2003, and this year taught 71 non-technical owners to run AI in their own businesses. He works one on one with owners who would rather understand AI than be sold it. More at **gorges.us**.