THE LAYERED FUTURE · AI BASICS

AI Basics
The DIY Workbook

Your free AI Basics starter guide. Six short lessons. Six hands-on exercises. One made-up landscaping company to practice on. Work through it at your own pace.

CREDITS

Built on ideas from Sabrina Ramonov's 5 Stages of AI Mastery and her free Practical AI practice files.
CRIT prompting (Context, Role, Interview, Task) from Geoff Woods.

thelayeredfuture.com

How to use this workbook

This workbook is for one person, at their own desk, with an AI tool open. No class, no presenter. Read a short lesson, then try it right away.

You will practice on Ridgeline Landscape & Hardscape, a made-up company. Every name and number in its files is fictional, so it's safe to upload to any AI tool.

You need: one AI tool (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or Copilot, any of them works), the 5 practice files, and about 60 to 90 minutes. You can do it in one sitting or one lesson a day.

Your practice files

weekly-sales-orders.xlsx	Completed jobs, estimates and a revenue summary
customer-feedback-export.csv	Customer reviews, emails and calls
team-updates-week-40.docx	Notes from each crew and the office
review-instructions.docx	How the weekly review should be written
last-week-business-review.pdf	A finished example review to match

How each lesson works

1. Read the short lesson.
2. Copy the prompt into your AI tool and run it.
3. Write what happened in the boxes. Writing it down is how it sticks.

The files are in the **practice-files** folder of your kit. Nothing here is real customer data.

LESSON 1 OF 6

Ask well

Clear asks get clear answers.

AI does what you say, not what you mean. A vague ask gets a vague answer.

A good ask says what you want, who it's for, how long it should be, and what to leave out.

Exercise

Open customer-feedback-export.csv in your AI tool. First try the vague ask. Then try the clear one. Compare.

Summarize this feedback.

Read this customer feedback for Ridgeline Landscape. Give me the 3 things customers love and the 3 complaints that need a call this week. One line each. Plain words.

What changed between the two answers?

Write your own clear ask about the same file:

LESSON 2 OF 6

Use CRIT

Four parts of a good ask: Context, Role, Interview, Task.

Context: the background. Who you are, what's going on, what files it has.

Role: who it should act as, like an office manager or a sharp reviewer.

Interview: tell it to ask you questions first.

Task: exactly what you want back, and in what shape.

Exercise

Mrs. Hollis left a 1-star review (FB-7006). Use CRIT to write a reply and a callback plan.

Context: I run Ridgeline Landscape & Hardscape. A customer, Mrs. Hollis, left a 1-star review after our crew broke a sprinkler head and nobody called her back. The team notes are attached.
Role: Act as a calm, experienced customer service manager.
Interview: Ask me 3 questions first, one at a time.
Task: Then write a short public reply and a 3-step callback plan.

Write your CRIT prompt here:

What questions did it ask you?

LESSON 3 OF 6

Let it interview you

You're the expert. Let it pull what it needs out of your head.

Most bad answers come from missing details. Instead of guessing what to include, tell the AI to ask you.

Add one line to any prompt: *Ask me 3 to 5 questions first, one at a time.*

Exercise

Dana says Crew B needs a third person by mid-October. Let the AI interview you before it writes the job post.

> I need to hire a third person for a landscaping crew that does mulch, beds and fall cleanups. Before you write anything, ask me 3 to 5 questions, one at a time. Then write a short job post.

Which question surprised you?

What did the answer get right that a plain ask would have missed?

LESSON 4 OF 6

Brief it like a new hire

Give it what you'd give a new office manager on day one.

A new hire needs the files, the instructions and an example of good work. So does AI.

Upload all 5 Ridgeline files. The finished review (last-week-business-review.pdf) is the example it should match.

Exercise

Upload all 5 practice files and run the review prompt.

```
Use these 5 files to write last week's business review. Follow review-instructions. Match the format of last-week-business-review.
Show where every number came from.
Mark anything you're not sure of.
Don't change the files.
```

Paste or note one number it sourced (file and column):

What did it get wrong or leave out?

LESSON 5 OF 6

Check its work

Trust it, then check it.

AI can sound sure and still be wrong. Ask it to show sources, and check a few numbers yourself.

Good checks: does the total add up? Do two files disagree? Is anything counted twice?

Exercise

Ask the AI to double-check its own review. Then do the challenge on the next page yourself.

> Check your review against the files. List every number, where it came from, and anything that doesn't add up between files. Be honest about what you're not sure of.

What did it flag?

Did you agree? Why or why not?

LESSON 6 OF 6

Hand it off and schedule it

It runs. You review.

Once a task works, save it and put it on a schedule. Most tools now have scheduled tasks.

Keep a person in the loop: the AI drafts, you check before anything goes to a customer.

Exercise

Turn the weekly review into a scheduled task in your tool. Set the time zone. Pause or delete it when you're done practicing.

> Every Monday at 8:00 AM Eastern, write last week's business review from my files using my review instructions, and send me the draft. I'll review it before anything goes out.

Where does your tool keep scheduled tasks?

What weekly task in your business would you hand off first?

CHALLENGE

Find the 3 planted problems

We hid three problems in the Ridgeline files on purpose. A good weekly review should catch all three. Try to find them with your AI tool before you look at the answer key at the back.

Tip: the finished example PDF shows the format only. It doesn't list these problems.

Problem 1:

Problem 2:

Problem 3:

YOUR TURN

Now swap in your own business

You've done it on Ridgeline. Now do it on yours. Start small and keep private data out until you trust the setup.

Pick one weekly report you already make. Gather the files. Write the instructions. Find or write one good example.

The weekly task I'll hand off:

The files it needs:

My instructions (how it should be written):

My CRIT prompt:

KEEP GOING

Your 7-day plan

Day 1	Lessons 1 and 2. Rewrite 3 asks you made this week using CRIT.	☐
Day 2	Lesson 3. Let it interview you on one real decision.	☐
Day 3	Lesson 4. Run the Ridgeline review with all 5 files.	☐
Day 4	Lesson 5 and the challenge. Check the answer key.	☐
Day 5	Swap in your own business. Pick one weekly task.	☐
Day 6	Run your own version. Fix the instructions where it went wrong.	☐
Day 7	Lesson 6. Put it on a schedule, and review the first draft it sends.	☐

Fifteen minutes a day is enough. The goal is one real task handed off by the end of the week.

ANSWER KEY

The 3 planted problems

1. **Duplicate invoice.** INV-4105 (Kowalski, Mulch & bed refresh, $750) is in the Jobs sheet twice. Counted once, revenue is $22,700. With the duplicate, the raw total is $23,450.
2. **Summary total doesn't add up.** The Summary tab says $23,900, but its own rows add to $22,700. It's $1,200 too high. The office typed it by hand.
3. **Angry review.** FB-7006 is a 1-star from Mrs. Hollis: broken sprinkler head, debris, no callback. The team notes confirm it, and two voicemails weren't returned.

Bonus finds: a 2-star about skipped edges (FB-7015) and a 3-star about an invoice higher than the estimate (FB-7009).

Did your AI catch all three? If not, add a line to your prompt: *Check for duplicates, totals that don't match, and complaints that need a call.*

KEEP GOING

What's next

Learn the basics. Explore the possibilities.

You just did the first step on our path: **Understand**. Here's the whole path.

Understand	Learn AI fundamentals, remove intimidation, and build confidence. You just did this.
Apply	Use practical workflows, assessments, and Second Brains to save time and uncover value.
Explore	Follow AI in the Wild, our real-world lab in Jefferson, Ohio. We test AI on real projects and publish what worked and what failed on YouTube and Instagram.

Your next step

Book a free 20-minute call Talk it through with Curt, a real person. No pressure, no sales pitch.	thelayeredfuture.com/book
Take the 5-minute Quick Check See where AI could give you time back.	thelayeredfuture.com/quick-check
Get more free guides Tools and guides we use in our own shop.	thelayeredfuture.com/resources
Watch AI in the Wild YouTube @TLF_by_CloosEffects and Instagram @the_layered_future.	youtube.com/@TLF_by_CloosEffects

Time is your most valuable currency.