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2026 Student Guide to Artificial Intelligence

HUMAN WISDOM FOR THE AGE OF AI

A FIELD GUIDE TO CULTIVATING ESSENTIAL SKILLS

ELON UNIVERSITY | Imagining the Digital Future Center

AAC&U

The Princeton Review®

FOR STUDENTS OF: ENDICOTT COLLEGE

The AI-U Guide Series

This is the third publication in the AI-U Guide series published by Elon University and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), in partnership with The Princeton Review. This series is a response to the statement of principles, "Higher education's essential role in preparing humanity for the artificial intelligence revolution," released at the United Nations Internet Governance Forum in Kyoto, Japan, in October 2023.

This field guide provides hands-on tools to develop the uniquely human capabilities that allow us to work with, and direct powerful AI technologies. The guide grounds essential AI capabilities in both classical wisdom and contemporary educational research. See page 15 to learn more about the frameworks behind this approach.

Included with the guide are **teacher's guide learning modules** that can be adapted by faculty for use with courses in any discipline. See page 15 for more about using this publication as a teaching resource.

Previous publications

2024 Student Guide to Artificial Intelligence

An introduction to AI tools with a student perspective, with practical advice on using AI responsibly while in college and preparing for the AI future.

2025 Student Guide to Artificial Intelligence

A more advanced student resource with guidance on developing AI skills, academic integrity, ethics and career preparation.

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- American Library Association
- CAA Academic Alliance
- EDUCAUSE
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- NASPA
- Online Learning Consortium
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Contents

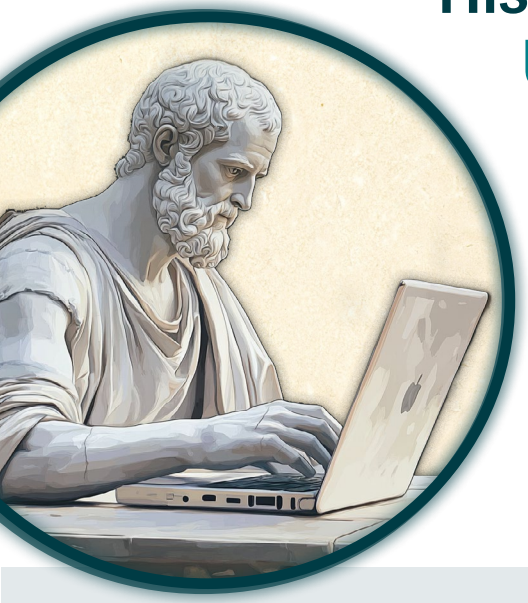
Start here

Do a self-assessment to reflect on how you use AI

Are you worried about becoming too dependent on AI? Or are you confidently in the "human-in-charge" zone? Take a few minutes to answer 10 questions based on the topics of this guide. Your results are anonymous and visible only to you. When you get your "human wisdom" score, return to this guide and get started on the exercises.

bit.ly/humanwisdom-selfassessment

History's greatest thinkers would be impressed with AI. Undoubtedly, they'd also be worried.



AI provides infinite information, but only humans possess wisdom. Machines can process data, but lack the judgment, ethics and lived experience required for true understanding.

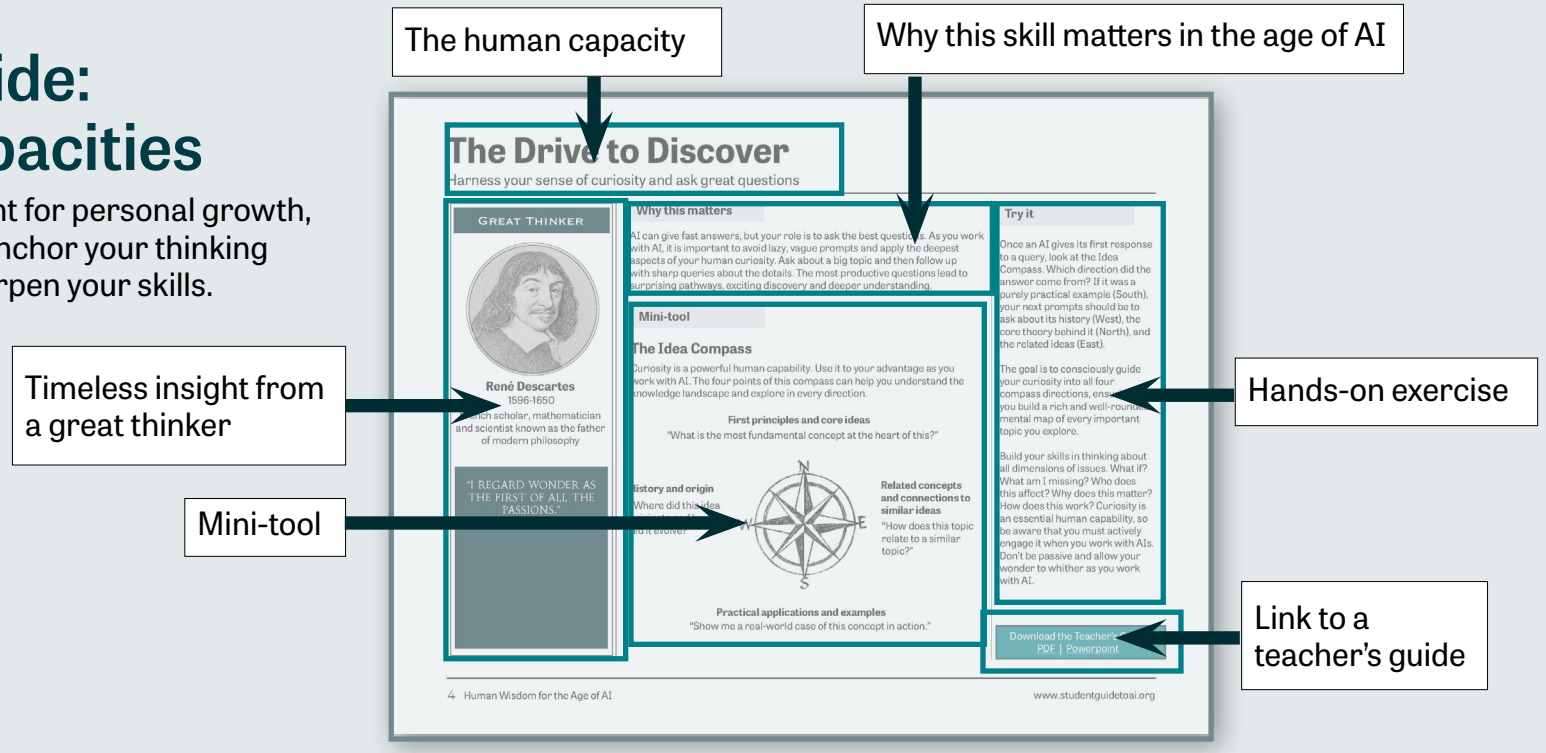
AI presents a profound paradox:

- AI can free us from repetitive tasks, accelerate discovery and empower us to solve complex problems at a scale never before possible.
- However, overreliance on AI can turn us into passive consumers, eroding our abilities to think, learn, create and exercise the wisdom needed to guide these tools.

This guide will help you develop the distinctly human capabilities you need to work with the powerful AI tools of today and the future.

Using this guide: 10 human capacities

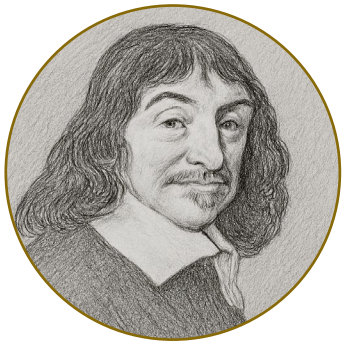
Each page offers a blueprint for personal growth, with a timeless insight to anchor your thinking and a hands-on tool to sharpen your skills.



The Drive to Discover

Engage your sense of curiosity and ask great questions

Great Thinker



René Descartes
1596-1650

French scholar, mathematician and scientist known as the father of modern philosophy

"I REGARD WONDER AS THE FIRST OF ALL THE PASSIONS."

Why this matters

AI can give fast answers, but your edge is choosing the questions worth asking. As you work with AI, avoid lazy, vague prompts and apply the deepest aspects of your human curiosity. Explore your topic from many different directions, with sharp queries and critical thinking about the details. This will lead to surprising pathways, exciting discoveries and deeper understanding.

Mini-tool

The Idea Compass

Curiosity is a powerful human capacity. Use it to your advantage as you work with AI. The four points of this compass can help you understand the knowledge landscape and explore in every direction.

First principles and core ideas
"What is the most fundamental concept at the heart of this?"

History and origin
"Where did this idea originate and how did it evolve?"

Related concepts and connections to similar ideas
"How does this topic relate to a similar topic?"

Practical applications and examples
"Show me a real-world case of this concept in action."

Try it

When using AI, provide high-quality context in your prompts and require the tools to explain reasoning steps. Then treat AI responses as a starting point, not the final word. Apply the Idea Compass to find the gaps. If the AI provided a practical example (South), explicitly prompt it to explain the history (West) or the core theory (North). Don't just consume the output; interrogate it and engage in a back-and-forth exchange.

Consciously guide your curiosity into all four compass directions, ensuring you build a rich and well-rounded mental map of every important topic you explore.

Ask about all dimensions of issues: What if? What am I missing? Who does this affect? Why does this matter? How does this work?

Curiosity is an essential human capacity, so actively engage it when you work with AIs. Don't be passive and allow your wonder to wither as you work with AI.

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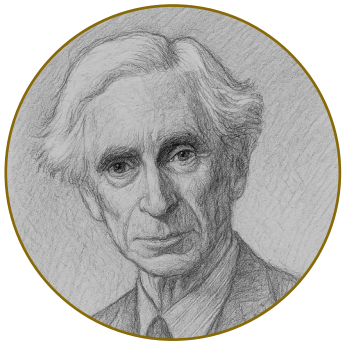
The Human Validator

Separate fact from fiction and shield against misinformation and deepfakes

Great Thinker



Bertrand Russell
1872-1970

British logician, mathematician and Nobel laureate, known for analytic philosophy

"IT IS UNDESIRABLE TO BELIEVE A PROPOSITION WHEN THERE IS NO GROUND WHATEVER FOR SUPPOSING IT TRUE."

Why this matters

Generative AI's output can have a confident tone that masks unfounded or outdated information and missing voices. It can include misinformation, deepfakes or complete hallucinations. Be a detective. Before you build on an AI answer, run a credibility check. With an attitude of skepticism, you'll catch errors and know when deeper verification is needed. This habit protects your work, your reputation and the people who act on or are impacted by your conclusions.

Mini-tool

The Evidence Protocol

Consider yourself a forensic investigator. Generative AI is a probability engine, not a truth engine. Treat every output like testimony from a confident but unreliable witness who is known to fabricate details to please the interrogator. Evidence must be bagged, tagged and verified before it can be admitted into the "court" of your work.

Follow the detective's process:

- **Track the source:** Where did this evidence come from?
- **Check the time stamp:** Is the information current or outdated?
- **Corroborate the story:** Does this match testimony from other, more reliable witnesses?
- **Scan for tampering:** Could this evidence have been manipulated? Is part of the story missing?
- **Verify the details:** Get the magnifying glass out.
- **Document every step** and disclose the role AI played in your work.

Try it

Create an investigator's log for your work with AI following these steps:

1. Determine the source. Track the chain of custody by clicking through links. No source? Tag it: "Origin unknown - unreliable."
2. Check the dates. Is this a fresh piece of evidence or is it possibly no longer relevant?
3. Cross-reference the claim with other known, reputable sources (e.g., academic journals, Google Scholar or established news organizations).
4. Search for what's not being said. Seek out opposing views to see if the "evidence" holds up under cross-examination. Look for signs of deepfakes or manipulation.
5. Recompute any numbers. Find the original source for any quotes. Tiny details often reveal big misinformation.
6. Create a detailed log of your work including the role of AI.

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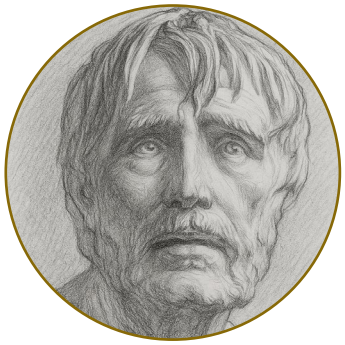
Deep Diving

Build your capacity for attention, memory and deep work

Great Thinker



Seneca the Younger
4 BC-65 AD

Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman and playwright, influential in moral philosophy

"YOU DO NOT RUN HITHER AND THITHER AND DISTRACT YOURSELF BY CHANGING YOUR ABODE: FOR SUCH RESTLESSNESS IS THE SIGN OF A DISORDERED SPIRIT. ... TO BE EVERYWHERE IS TO BE NOWHERE."

Why this matters

The ease and speed of using AI can lead to shallow thinking and off-track multitasking. By consciously taking deeper dives we can build our mental muscles and develop our capabilities for critical thinking, exploration and discovery. Know when to put AI aside and swim on your own so you build the mental strength that makes learning and judgment possible.

Mini-tool

The Depth Gauge

AI makes it effortless to skim the surface of any topic. But value isn't found only atop the waves; it is also found in the depths. Deep thinking, in which you disconnect from the machine to synthesize complex ideas, can seem difficult, but it is truly rewarding.

The surface zone (Human + AI)
Skimming, gathering and summarizing information. This is the low-pressure zone with lots of sunlight, distracting reflections and irrelevant objects floating around.

The transition zone (Human + AI)
Put on the snorkel and look below the surface, seeing what is not obvious from above. Challenge the AI output, ask lots of questions and explore many ideas and approaches.

The deep zone (Human-only: AI OFF)
This is serious scuba territory. The oxygen in your tank is a lifetime of learning and your ability to do serious research with credible sources. Put the AI away, do deep thinking and engage with original sources. Pressure here is high, but the struggle will help you learn at the deepest levels.

Try it

A timed challenge that forces the transition from skimming to deeper thinking.

Surface swim (5 Minutes): Ask an AI to summarize a complex topic you are studying. Read it quickly. Reflect on your level of understanding. How well did the surface swim work?

Shallow dive (5 Minutes): Pick one claim from the summary. Ask the AI four hard questions about it: "What is the primary source of this information?", "What is the counter-argument?", "What other outside evidence supports these details?", and "Who disagrees and why?"

Scuba zone (20 Minutes): Disconnect from AI and draw a concept map of the idea using only your own brain and what you can find doing serious academic research. If you get stuck, don't immediately turn to AI for an answer. Just work in the pressure until your ideas come together.

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The Creative Kitchen

Ignite your imagination and drive for innovation

Great Thinker

Phillis Wheatley

1753-1784

Pioneering African American author whose renowned poetry challenged racial prejudices and advocated moral equality and freedom

"IMAGINATION! WHO CAN SING THY FORCE? / OR WHO DESCRIBE THE SWIFTNESS OF THY COURSE? / WE ON THY PINIONS CAN SURPASS THE WIND, / AND LEAVE THE ROLLING UNIVERSE BEHIND."

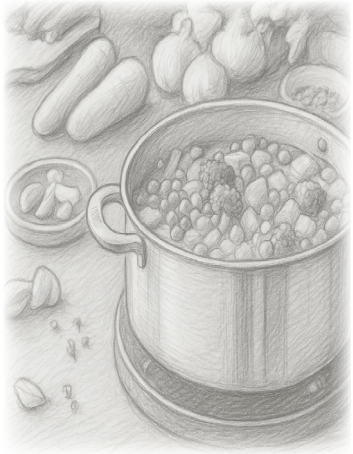
Why this matters

AI is a powerful engine for generating ideas, remixing patterns and overcoming creative blocks. But ideas alone are just ingredients. True innovation requires the uniquely human act of synthesis—forging surprising connections between disparate concepts and infusing them with emotion and meaning to create something entirely new that resonates with others.

Mini-tool

Top Chef

An AI can generate a technically perfect but bland and forgettable meal. A true artist, writer or creator intentionally balances fundamental "flavors" to create work that is rich and deeply satisfying. Give your work time to slow cook and simmer and ensure it is appealing to others.



INGREDIENTS

Intellect (salty/sharp)
The core idea, the structure, the logic. This is the sharp, savory foundation that makes your audience think.

Emotion (sweet/rich)
The heart of the work: empathy, joy, pathos. This element makes your audience feel, so use your authentic lived experience and empathy.

Aesthetic (sour/bright)
The style, the beauty, the sensory details, the unique voice. This is the element that delights the senses and makes the work feel fresh and vibrant.

Surprise (bitter/spicy)
The element of novelty, risk and originality. This is what makes the work memorable and prevents it from being bland or predictable. It adds a complex "kick."

Try it

Assess your AI-assisted creative project, list the ingredients and think about how they fit into each category.

List the strongest and weakest aspects. How do the flavors blend? Is your work all sweetness and no spice? Does it have an "AI bland" taste that needs more interesting and healthy ingredients? Is it fast food or a slow-cooked meal?

Example:

You've created a presentation for a conference or class. Now review your script and slide deck thinking about the ingredients:

Intellect: Have you included all the most important points and context? Is it clear and understandable?

Emotion: Do you help the audience understand why this matters and what it means for them?

Aesthetic: Are your slides bright and compelling? Have you made it truly memorable and engaging?

Surprise: Does your presentation move beyond the mundane and expected? Have you incorporated at least one "aha" moment?

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EI and SI

Enhance your emotional intelligence (EI) and social intelligence (SI) - essential assets in working with AI and others

Great Thinker

Mary Parker Follett
1868-1933
American social theorist and management pioneer, influential in organizational theory and democratic leadership

"THE INDIVIDUAL IS CREATED BY THE SOCIAL PROCESS AND IS DAILY NOURISHED BY THAT PROCESS. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SELF-MADE MAN. WHAT WE THINK WE POSSESS AS INDIVIDUALS IS WHAT IS STORED UP FROM SOCIETY, IS THE SUBSOIL OF SOCIAL LIFE."

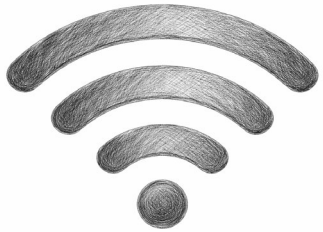
Why this matters

Working with AI in isolation can create an echo chamber. Algorithms tend to agree with your prompts and smooth over complexities, which can lead to tunnel vision. To build robust solutions, you need the "social friction" of other human minds. Social intelligence isn't just about being nice; it is the essential error-correction layer that challenges assumptions, spots ethical gaps and ensures your work connects with real people.

Mini-tool

The Signal Bars

Working alone with AI creates a "low signal" environment—it generates content quickly, but lacks the "bandwidth" of human critique, context and reality-checking. To get high-quality results, you must boost the signal by adding the advantage of human relationships to the equation.



One bar: The echo chamber (you + AI)
What you get: Speed, volume, agreement

The risk: Blind spots and a closed loop, in which AI reflects your own biases back to you

Two bars: The sanity check (you, AI + a peer)
What you get: Challenge, friction, different perspectives and ideas

The benefit: Your peer spots flaws or dimensions that you and AI did not see

Three bars: The collective thought (you, AI + a group)
What you get: A robust, vetted strategy that accounts for blind spots and human context

The benefit: By incorporating human debate, you create a solution that is ethical and aligned with the team's values

Try it

Boost the signal:

Start at 1 Bar: Identify a problem and use AI to draft a solution.

Move to 2 Bars: Share the solution with one other person and ask for their feedback and ideas.

Move to 3 Bars: Bring that person's critique to a small group. Discuss how to build upon it and improve the original AI-generated solution.

Reflection: Evaluate how the 1-bar and 3-bars versions are different and which is better.

Example:

You are designing an experiment to measure water quality in a local pond.

1-Bar: Ask an AI tool for ideas on which tests to run and how to do the measurement.

2-Bars: Ask an upper-level environmental studies major about the AI's suggestions and what approach they would recommend.

3-Bars: Ask a local water quality group about their biggest concerns and which results would be most helpful to the community.

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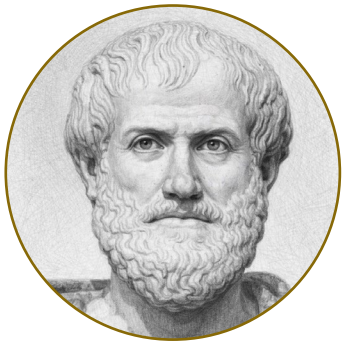
The Storyteller

Develop your unique human capability to influence others and inspire positive action

Great Thinker



Aristotle

384-322 BC

Greek philosopher and polymath, student of Plato, tutor to Alexander the Great, foundational to Western thought

"THE PROOFS FURNISHED BY THE SPEECH ARE OF THREE KINDS. THE FIRST DEPENDS UPON THE MORAL CHARACTER OF THE SPEAKER, THE SECOND UPON PUTTING THE HEARER INTO A CERTAIN FRAME OF MIND, THE THIRD UPON THE SPEECH ITSELF, IN SO FAR AS IT PROVES OR SEEMS TO PROVE."

Why this matters

AI can generate fluent text on demand. Humans are storytellers shaped by lived experience. In a world filled with machine-made content, effective communication is critical. Your advantage is building trust – with judgment, transparency and care – so others feel understood and follow you willingly.

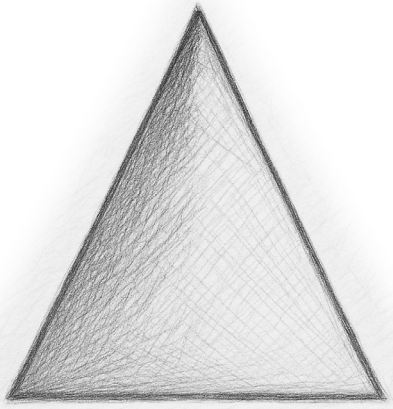
Mini-tool

The Persuasion Triangle

As you write, speak or put together your presentation, make sure your message includes all three elements of an effective communication. Each corner of the triangle is essential to your argument.

Logos (logic)

AI can help summarize facts and provide a logical argument but only you can decide if those facts and arguments are appropriate for the situation and if the audience will likely find them persuasive.



Pathos (emotion)

You must provide what AI cannot: human emotion. Provide a personal anecdote or metaphor and frame the data in terms of human impact.

Ethos (character)

AI has no reputation, no history and no accountability for real outcomes. You provide the credibility, trustworthiness, transparency and unique voice of the speaker.

Try it

Check a draft of your work using the three corners:

Logos: Is the argument sound? AI can help you here, but check the facts and make sure others understand your point.

Pathos: Highlight the sentences that would make a reader feel something. Write at least one sentence that connects the logic to a human emotion or story.

Ethos: Are you writing in a relatable human voice? Read it aloud and make sure it reflects your conviction and voice.

Example:

You are writing a proposal for a new community program. Review your draft. Does it include:

- Facts and figures to justify the program
- A personal story of someone who would benefit from the program
- An honest and authentic tone

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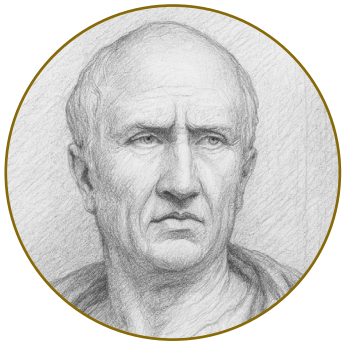
The Decision-Maker

Sharpen your judgment so you can make wise choices that are aligned with your values

Great Thinker



Cicero
106-43 BC
Roman statesman, orator and writer, renowned for his influence on Western rhetoric and political theory

"THE FOREMOST OF ALL VIRTUES IS WISDOM ... FOR BY PRUDENCE WE UNDERSTAND THE PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS TO BE SOUGHT FOR AND OF THINGS TO AVOID."

Why this matters

AI provides options and drafts. Humans choose, and answer for outcomes. We turn ideas into actions while incorporating our core knowledge in order to make decisions – even when the data is incomplete, the stakes are high and values are in conflict. AI has no responsibility for the outcomes. In making choices, humans define who they are and what they value.

Mini-tool

Panning for Gold

AI fills your pan with river mud – endless options, some of it valuable and some useless. Wisdom is the act of washing away the bulk to find the heavy nuggets of value. Use these four filters to sort through the machine's output and find the gold - the wisest choice.

Filter 1: The Reality Filter (facts)
Mud to wash away: False or misleading information
Test: Are these "facts" verified realities, or just plausible-sounding text?

Filter 2: The Identity Filter (values)
Mud to wash away: Decisions that are efficient but don't fit with who you are.
Test: Would I respect myself for making this choice?

Filter 3: The Empathy Filter (others)
Mud to wash away: Decisions that are selfish or ignore human dignity.
Test: How does this affect others?

Filter 4: The Durability Filter (time)
Mud to wash away: Short-term relief that creates long-term debt.
Test: How will this play out in a month? A year?

Try it

Next time you face a complicated choice, try to pan for gold to find the best option:

Fill the pan:

Combine your thinking with AI output to generate many ways to handle a difficult situation.

Wash it:

Reality: What are the real facts of the issue you are facing? Which options are just excuses and shortcuts? (discard)

Identity: Which options feel cowardly, manipulative or wrong? (discard)

Empathy: Which options would have a negative impact on other people? (discard)

Durability: Which options solve the problem now but are likely to cause problems in the future? (discard).

The Gold:
The option that remains – honest, brave and farsighted – is the wise choice.

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Guiding Principles

Set firm ethical boundaries in working with AI to protect people, property and society

Great Thinker

Ptahhotep

About 2400 BC

Ancient Egyptian minister renowned for his "Maxims," one of the earliest known works of moral and ethical instructions

"ENDEAVOUR ALWAYS TO BE GRACIOUS, THAT THINE OWN CONDUCT BE WITHOUT DEFECT ...IF THOU DESIRE THAT THINE ACTIONS MAY BE GOOD, SAVE THYSELF FROM ALL MALICE, AND BEWARE OF THE QUALITY OF COVETOUSNESS, WHICH IS A GRIEVOUS INNER MALADY."

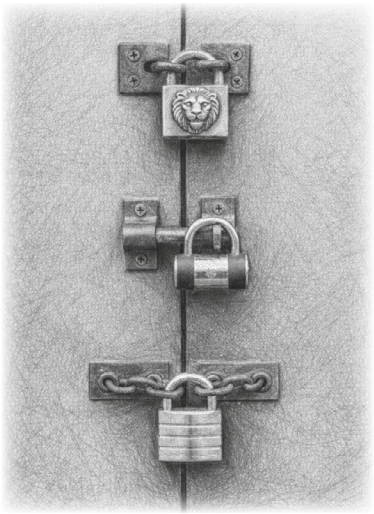
Why this matters

Using AI includes a temptation: to trade our independence for convenience. When we fully rely on an algorithm to generate our words or ideas, we risk weakening our ability to think for ourselves. Ethical practice means setting strict boundaries –protecting your own mind and respecting the rights and property of others. It is the discipline of staying in charge, even when using the AI tools is easier.

Mini-tool

The Three Keys

Ethics don't work if you make them up in the moment. When deadlines are tight and you are tired, you will be tempted to rationalize AI shortcuts. Preserve your integrity by mentally securing your workflow with three locks. You cannot proceed until you turn all three keys.



Key 1: Protect your own sovereignty – don't relegate yourself to being a button-pusher who can't think without AI.

Key 2: Protect privacy and property – don't share private or proprietary information with AI, or use others' creative works without their permission or proper attribution.

Key 3: Protect human rights – don't use AI in ways that could spread misinformation or bias, waste valuable resources, aid bad actors or harm others.

Try it

On your next AI project, take these three steps:

1. Describe exactly what you are planning to do with AI.
2. Identify the padlocks: Write down the ways AI could diminish your role, violate the privacy and property rights of others, or negatively impact society.
3. Can you open the locks? If you can't turn all three keys with a clear conscience, rethink the project and the role of AI in your work.

Example:

You're considering using AI to generate an entire essay.

Padlocks:

- Eliminates my role as author
- Uses sources without attribution
- Devalues the work of other students who do their own work

Verdict: Turn the keys only if you can resolve these issues with a different approach.

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A Resilient Spirit

In an environment of constant, accelerating change, embrace an adaptive mindset

Great Thinker

Okakura Kakuzō
1863-1913
Japanese cultural theorist and aesthetic philosopher who interpreted Taoist ideas of harmony, adaptability and change

"THE ART OF LIFE LIES IN A CONSTANT READJUSTMENT TO OUR SURROUNDINGS."

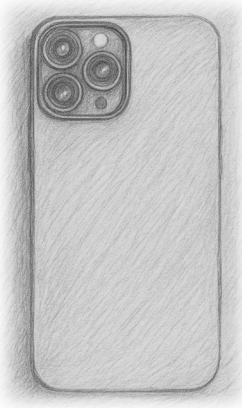
Why this matters

In the AI era, many work skills can quickly become obsolete. An adaptive mindset is your ultimate survival strategy. You can transform disruption into opportunity. By embracing constant readjustment, you ensure that your value isn't tied to a specific tool, but to your capacity to evolve.

Mini-tool

Lens Adjustment

Resilience isn't about "toughing it out." It's about reframing your field of view. By practicing a shift in thinking from Threat -> Fact -> Opportunity, you are rewiring your brain to be adaptable rather than defensive. In working with AI, think about adjusting the view on your camera.



Telephoto setting
Zoom in on the AI change you are worried about and describe it as a threat.

Normal view
Take an objective look and strip away the fear. What is the actual, neutral fact of the situation?

Wide angle
Look at the big picture to find the opportunity. If the "neutral fact" is true, what advantage can you offer?

Try it

Pick an AI capability that makes you worry about your future value in your career and look at it through three different lenses:

Example: Career goal to be a marketing director for a company

Zoom in
Threat: "AI tools can now automate the writing and strategy tasks I spent years learning. My current skillset is depreciating in value, and I could be replaced by a cheaper, faster workflow if I do not evolve."

Objective perspective
Fact: "The reality is that the cost of producing average-quality text and market tactics has decreased."

Panoramic view
Opportunity: "Since the cost of average-quality content is small, I now have the opportunity to expand my skills and provide more valuable services in my work, including project coordination, quality control, team building and perspectives grounded in relationships, context and accountability."

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Your Meaning and Purpose

Define who you are when AI can do what you do

Great Thinker

Mencius
371-289 BC
Chinese Confucian philosopher who emphasized human goodness, benevolent governance and moral responsibility of rulers

"THOSE WHO FOLLOW THAT PART OF THEMSELVES WHICH IS GREAT BECOME GREAT MEN; THOSE WHO FOLLOW THAT PART WHICH IS LITTLE BECOME LITTLE MEN."

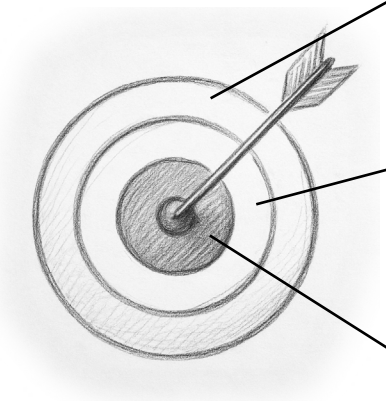
Why this matters

AI may change your situation (your future job duties, your career path). If your identity is tied to "I write code" or "I analyze spreadsheets," you are limiting your potential. If your identity is "I solve problems for people," you remain valuable. Decouple your identity from your tasks and attach it to your purpose in life.

Mini-tool

Target practice

Think of your career goals as an archery target. The outer rings are tasks based on data and logic – easy for AI to hit. The closer you get to the center, the harder it is to automate. To thrive, you must aim for the bullseye: the ability to connect, empathize and solve problems for other humans.



The "what" ring
The commodity. The product. The output.
AI Threat: High. AI generates output instantly. If your career goal is to create information, you are in the danger zone.

The "how" ring
The process. The strategy. The expertise.
AI Threat: Medium. AI can mimic methods, but you still set goals and make decisions.

The "bullseye"
Your central purpose. Your conviction and passion. Your meaning.
AI Threat: Lowest. People stick with those who bring values, accountability and trust built through real relationships.

Try it

If you think your career goals are threatened by AI, look honestly at the contributions you can make to your community and society and analyze who you are at three different levels:

What you do: Describe the output of your future work and think about whether AI could duplicate the things you will produce.

How you do it: Describe your approach to your work and the unique skills you bring to your tasks, perhaps working with the assistance of AI tools.

Why you do it: Identify why your work matters, how your career path will support your personal passion and life goals, how you will help others and our world, and the reasons you could never be replaced by a machine.

Download the Teacher's Guide
PDF | Powerpoint

Choose Your Favorite "Great Thinker"

Wisdom isn't limited to antiquity. Which philosophers, scholars, poets, artists, musicians or mentors inspire you to be your best?

Who inspires you?

Which of their quotes, lyrics or creative expressions resonate the most with you?

Which of this guide's core human capabilities does this person speak about in their words or work?

Based on what you know about this Great Thinker, what would they think about AI? Would they use these tools? If so, how would they use AI in their work?

Now It's Your Turn to be Wise

History's greatest minds had the courage to think and speak clearly about values and practices that would stand the test of time. As AI reshapes the world, the future needs your unique perspective. What wisdom can you share in this time of transition?

Your signature quote

Thinkers in this guide have quotes that define their thinking. If you were quoted 100 years from now about what it means to be human in the age of machines, what would you say?

Your human superpower

The pages of this guide cover 10 important human capabilities. What is a different uniquely human trait, quirk or capability that you possess and why is it important in the age of AI?

Your unchanging anchor

As technology transforms the world around you, what is the one core value, belief or passion that will anchor you and guide your decisions?

About This Field Guide

10 Fundamental human capacities

This field guide is not about AI. It's about you. Ten of humanity's greatest minds are our guides as we explore fundamental human capacities that must be developed and harnessed in the age of AI.

The skills in this guide reflect the essential learning outcomes championed by the **American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)**. As detailed in the publication, "What Liberal Education Looks Like," this approach to learning emphasizes broad knowledge and transferable skills – such as critical inquiry, ethical reasoning and creative problem-solving. This field guide adapts those enduring educational goals for the algorithmic age, demonstrating that the core competencies of a liberal education remain the best preparation for a future shaped by artificial intelligence.

The human capacities featured in this publication were inspired by the **Imagining the Digital Future Center** report, "Being human in 2035: How are we changing in the age of AI?" More than 300 technology experts reflected on the future impact of AI on a set of essential human traits and capabilities:

- curiosity and capacity to learn
- decision-making and problem-solving
- innovative thinking and creativity
- social and emotional intelligence
- capacity and willingness to think deeply about complex concepts
- trust in widely shared norms and values
- confidence in humans' native abilities
- empathy and application of moral judgment
- mental well-being
- sense of agency
- sense of identity and purpose
- metacognition

Why classical wisdom for modern technology?

It may seem odd to call upon classical wisdom in a guide about artificial intelligence. But while AI tools are rapidly evolving, human challenges stay familiar. AI can generate myriad options at high speed, but it cannot choose what you value or take responsibility for the results of your work. Values and accountability remain with you.

The thinkers featured in this guide wrestled with the same questions we face every day: how to seek truth, manage attention, work with others, and make good decisions under pressure. This guide helps you translate enduring ideas into practical habits. As AI becomes more capable, these habits become more important, not less. They allow you to benefit from AI without letting the tools quietly replace your judgment.

Using this guide

We call this a field guide because it is meant to be used as an active learning and personal development resource. Your learning will be deeper if you work through the hands-on exercises as you think about each human skill. Keep the guide handy and refer to the mini-tools as you work on projects using AI.

For students and educators
This guide is most appropriate for undergraduate university students in any discipline, as well as upper secondary school students. Learners in other age groups may also benefit from using the guide. Each human capacity page includes a companion teacher's guide that can be used with classes and workshops. Using the links on each page, download the files in PDF or Powerpoint format to learn more about the great thinkers, explore the human capacities in greater depth and obtain worksheets and discussion questions. The exercises can be used in any order and can be adapted by faculty to align with course goals and content.

Bonus teacher's guide resource: Thoughts from modern scholars

Human Wisdom for the Age of AI:

A Field Guide to Cultivating Essential Skills

AI-U 2026 | www.studentguidetoai.org

Acknowledgments

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Imagining THE Digital Future CENTER

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AAC&U

The American Association of Colleges and Universities is a global membership organization dedicated to advancing the democratic purposes of higher education by promoting equity, innovation, and excellence in liberal education. AAC&U serves as a catalyst and facilitator for innovations that improve educational quality and equity and that support the success of all students. Its membership includes degree-granting higher education institutions around the world as well as other organizations and individuals.

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Writing, editing and design for this guide was done by humans working in collaboration with one another. AI tools were used to research and brainstorm content, suggest improvements and create and manipulate images. AI tools used in production of this guide include ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity and MidJourney.