

THE AI SHELF · BOOK 1 OF 11

AI, Plainly

What it can and can't do for your work



ProShelf

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How every chapter works

The idea → Why it matters → The method → An example
→ Your worksheet → 3-line summary

Included with this book

Printable worksheets: **one for each chapter, the AI time-saver audit, the 30-day habit tracker**, in your download.

1

What AI really is: a fast, well-read assistant that guesses

The AI tools you hear about predict the most likely next words, based on patterns in a huge amount of text. That makes them fast and fluent, but not always right.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Three kinds of AI you already use
- How a chat assistant produces an answer
- Fluent is not the same as true
- The new colleague test
- Jugalbandi: AI in Indian languages, and its honest limits
- Example: Anjali's first try
- Your worksheet: what you expect from AI

By the end, you will be able to

- Explain in two sentences how a chat assistant works
- Tell the difference between fluent and correct
- Treat AI as a junior colleague whose work you check

THE IDEA

Three kinds of AI you already use

“AI” is used for many different things. You have been using some of them for years without calling them AI. This book is mostly about the third kind, the one that writes, summarises and answers in plain language.

Kind	What it does	Everyday examples
Sorting and predicting	Learns patterns from past data to sort, score or forecast	Spam filters, fraud alerts on your card, delivery-time estimates
Seeing and hearing	Recognises images, faces, speech and handwriting	Face unlock, voice typing, scanning a cheque in a banking app
Generating (generative AI)	Writes text, answers questions, makes images, voices and video from an instruction	Chat assistants, AI writing help in email and documents

Why the third kind feels different

Earlier AI did one narrow job inside an app. Generative AI takes instructions in ordinary language, in English, Hindi or Hinglish, and can attempt almost any task that involves words. That is why it feels like talking to a person, and why it needs careful handling.

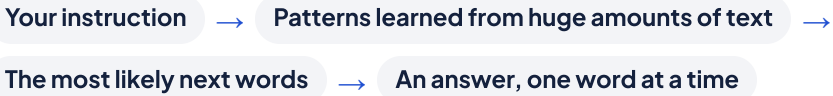
In this book, “AI” means generative AI tools: chat assistants and the AI features built into email, documents, spreadsheets and phones.

One test for any “AI” claim: ask what the tool actually does with your input, and what it gives back. A vendor's label tells you little; the task tells you everything.

THE IDEA

How a chat assistant produces an answer

You don't need to know the engineering, but one idea explains most of what AI does well and badly.



- 1 **It has read a lot.** The model behind the tool was trained on an enormous amount of text: books, websites, articles, code. It learned how words and ideas usually go together.
- 2 **It predicts.** When you ask something, it produces the words most likely to follow, given your question and everything it learned. It does this very fast.
- 3 **It does not look things up (unless told to).** A plain chat assistant answers from patterns, not from a database of checked facts. Some tools can also search the web or read your files; then they quote from those.
- 4 **It has no judgement of its own.** It does not know your business, your customer or what is true today, unless you tell it.

The one-sentence version

A chat assistant writes what sounds right. Often that is also what is right, but not always, and it cannot tell you which is which.

The word “model”: the trained system behind a tool. One tool may offer several models; you don't need to choose between them to start.

WHY IT MATTERS

Fluent is not the same as true

People trust confident, well-written answers. AI answers are always confident and well written, even when they are wrong. That gap is the single biggest risk for a busy professional.

SOUNDS RIGHT

“Under Section 12 of the Act, overtime is capped at 50 hours a quarter.” (Sounds exact; the section and the cap may be wrong or out of date.)

WHAT TO DO

“Check the current law or ask your consultant: AI quoted a rule I haven’t verified.”

SOUNDS RIGHT

“Your competitor’s revenue was ₹42 crore last year.” (A neat figure with no source.)

WHAT TO DO

“Ask for the source. If none, treat it as a guess.”

SOUNDS RIGHT

“The total is ₹3,48,750.” (Add the column yourself.)

WHAT TO DO

“Use a spreadsheet for sums; use AI for words.”

Why it happens

Because the model predicts likely words, it will fill a gap with something plausible rather than say “I don’t know”. A section number, a date or a figure that fits the pattern is easy to produce, whether or not it exists. Chapter 3 shows how to catch this.

Rule of thumb: the more specific and checkable a detail is (a number, a name, a date, a quote, a law), the more carefully you check it.

THE METHOD

The new colleague test

The most useful way to think about AI: a very fast, very well-read new colleague on their first day. They have read everything but know nothing about your company, your customers or what happened this morning.

A new colleague...	So with AI, you...
Needs a clear brief	Say who it is for, what you want and in what format
Doesn't know your context	Paste in the notes, figures and background it needs
Works fast on a first draft	Ask for a draft, then improve it together
May get facts wrong with confidence	Check every fact, figure and name before using it
Shouldn't sign anything on your behalf	Never send, file or decide without reading it yourself
Shouldn't see secrets on day one	Keep confidential data out of tools you haven't approved

Why this test works

It sets the right level of trust. You would not ignore a bright new hire, and you would not let them send a legal notice unchecked. Treat AI the same way.

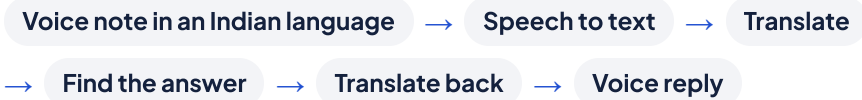
Book 2 in this Shelf, Ask It Right, turns “a clear brief” into a simple template you can reuse every day.

INDIAN STORY

Jugalbandi: AI in Indian languages

In April 2023 a group from Microsoft Research and AI4Bharat, an open-source language AI centre at IIT Madras, launched Jugalbandi: a chatbot on WhatsApp that helps villagers find out about government schemes in their own language. The name means a duet, two musicians playing together.

A farmer can send a voice note in Hindi asking about a scheme. AI4Bharat's speech model turns the voice into text; a translation model turns it into English; a large language model finds the answer from information about the schemes; the answer is translated back and read out as a voice reply on WhatsApp.



Why WhatsApp and voice

Microsoft's description at the launch noted that only about 11% of Indians speak English. Government websites are hard to use for many rural citizens; a voice note on a familiar app is not.

Why this story is in this book

It shows what modern AI is made of: several models, each doing one job (hearing, translating, answering, speaking), joined together. And it shows how useful that chain can be for people who were left out.

Sources: Microsoft India feature (May 2023); TechCrunch (24 May 2023); MediaNama (June 2023). Full list on the Sources page.

INDIAN STORY

What Jugalbandi's makers said about its limits

The team was open about the gaps. At launch the bot covered 10 of India's 22 scheduled languages and 171 of roughly 20,000 government programmes. AI4Bharat's Pratyush Kumar told reporters that the models do sometimes make errors, because they work on probabilities. Commentators asked who would be accountable if a farmer acted on a wrong answer.

- 1 **AI can widen access.** A voice reply in your own language can do what a website in English never did.
- 2 **Every step can add an error.** A misheard word, a loose translation, a wrong scheme: each link in the chain can slip, and the errors add up.
- 3 **Someone must own the answer.** When people act on AI's output (a farmer, a customer, your own team), somebody has to be responsible for checking it.

A word of caution

Launch figures describe a pilot in 2023. Don't read them as a measure of how good such tools are today. The lessons, not the numbers, are why the story is here.

Useful and fallible at the same time: that is the right way to hold AI in your head.

ProShelf's summary of the lesson

Try this: think of one place in your business where customers or staff struggle with forms or English. Could a plain-language answer help? Who would check it?

EXAMPLE

Anjali's first try

Example (invented): Deshpande Engineering Works, Pune

Anjali Deshpande runs an engineering works in Pune with 85 staff. It machines shafts, flanges and housings for tractor and pump makers. Turnover is about ₹38 crore. Her days are full of quotations, customer emails, supplier calls and bank reports.

Her nephew set up an AI chat tool on her phone. She typed one line: “Write a reply to a customer asking for a 5% discount.” The answer was polite, long and generic. It apologised twice and offered a 3% discount she had never mentioned.

Anjali's first attempt

YOU

Write a reply to a customer asking for a 5% discount.

AI

Dear Valued Customer, thank you for reaching out regarding your request for a discount. While we truly value our partnership, we are able to offer a 3% discount on your next order...

What went wrong: she gave the new colleague no context: who the customer was, why they asked, what she was willing to do, or what tone to use. So it guessed, and even invented an offer. Chapter 5 shows her second try.

Her verdict that evening: “It writes well and knows nothing.” That is close to right, and it is exactly why a good brief matters.

APPLY IT · YOUR EXPECTATIONS

What you expect from AI

Answer these honestly before you read further. You will come back to them in Chapter 8.

1 What have you heard AI can do for people in your kind of work?

2 Have you tried an AI tool? What happened?

3 Which part of your week would you most like to hand over?

4 What worries you most: mistakes, confidentiality, cost, your team's jobs, something else?

5 Which colleague or friend uses AI well, and could show you?

6 One task you will try with AI this week

Example (invented): a hospital administrator in Lucknow

Heard: it writes reports. Tried: asked it for a leave policy; got a generic one. Hand over: monthly bed-occupancy notes. Worry: patient data. Will try: summarising the minutes of the weekly department meeting, with names removed.

CHAPTER 1 IN 3 LINES

What to remember

- 1 Generative AI writes, summarises and answers by predicting the most likely next words.
- 2 Its answers are always fluent, but fluent is not the same as true: check specific facts.
- 3 Treat AI like a fast, well-read new colleague: brief it well and check its work.

KEY WORDS

Generative AI

AI that produces new text, images, audio or video from an instruction.

Model

The trained system behind an AI tool.

Prompt

The instruction or question you give an AI tool.

Common mistakes

- Expecting AI to know your business
- Trusting a confident answer without checking
- Giving up after one vague attempt

Try this week

- Ask AI to explain your own job back to you
- Try one real task with full context
- Notice one fact it gets wrong

Quick self-check: A colleague says “AI told me the GST rate on our product is 12%, so I’ve updated the price list.” What two things should you say? Model answers are in the toolkit.

Next: **Chapter 2 · What AI does well**

You've just read Chapter 1 of AI, Plainly.

The full book has 8 chapters, 9 worksheets and 92 pages. It is Book 1 of The AI Shelf: 11 short, practical books on one subject, sold together.

STILL TO COME IN AI, PLAINLY

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| 3 Where it fails | 7 The golden rules |
| 4 The kinds of AI tools | 8 Your 30-day AI habit plan |
| 5 Your first week with AI | |

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| 4 Content on Tap | 10 Let It Run |
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