

AI FOR REAL PEOPLE · A SHORT COURSE FROM PFI

Paperwork

A short, hands-on course on using AI to read, draft, and check the kinds of letters and forms most of us put off.

About 30 minutes

Free

Five short lessons

No videos

No quiz you can fail

You will actually try things in this course — open an AI tool in another tab, paste in a real example, see what happens. You don't have to follow along. But the people who do are the ones who walk away with the habit.

IN THIS PACKET

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Welcome — is this course for you? | 5 min |
| 2 | Your first conversation with AI | 6 min |
| 3 | Reading a real document with AI | 8 min |
| 4 | Writing a reply with AI | 7 min |
| 5 | What you did, what's next | 4 min |
| + | The prompts, in one place — a copy-and-keep page | |

Pacific Forward Initiative is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. PFI is a Hawaii-based nonprofit helping individuals, communities, and small businesses build the future-defining skills needed to thrive in a changing economy. This course is free, and it stays free.

Welcome

You're here to see if AI is actually useful to you. Fair enough — most of what gets called "AI literacy" online is either too technical to be useful or too vague to be honest. This course tries to be neither.

What this course is

A short, practical walkthrough of one thing — using AI to handle the kind of paperwork you have been putting off. The agency letter you stopped reading. The form you do not understand. The reply you keep meaning to send.

Five short lessons. About thirty minutes of your time total. No videos.

What this course is not

- A pitch for any particular AI tool.
- A promise that AI will change your life.
- A test you can fail.

How this course works

You read. You try a few things in your own browser, in your own AI tab. You answer a couple of questions to yourself (not graded, not saved). You move to the next lesson when you're ready.

Think of it like an old-school text adventure. You're the person it's happening to. The lesson asks you to do something small, you do it, the next part shows you what to notice.

You can skip any of the questions. You can skip whole lessons. You can do this on the bus, on your lunch break, on the couch.

One thing to know before we start

AI tools are useful. AI tools also make things up sometimes, very confidently. By the end of this course you will know one small, reliable routine for handling the paperwork you have been putting off. Whether you use it is up to you.

A SHORT SELF-CHECK BEFORE WE BEGIN

Three quick scenarios. Ask yourself if any of them sound like you.

Scenario 1. A letter has been sitting on your kitchen counter for a week. Every time you walk past it, you tell yourself you'll read it later. You know the deadline is coming. You don't open it.

Scenario 2. You opened an email from an agency or a doctor's office. You read it three times. You're still not sure what they want. You close the tab.

Scenario 3. You need to reply to someone. You know what you want to say. You sit down to write it. You stare at the blank page for ten minutes and then go check email instead.

If even one of those sounds familiar, you're in the right course. Keep going.

If none of them sound familiar — also fine. The verification habit you'll learn here is useful for anyone who uses AI for work.

A note about the live version

Everything in this course also runs as a free live 30-minute class on Zoom. Alex walks through the same workflow in real time, takes questions, and shows what AI looks like in action. If you want that, sign up at lu.ma/pacforward. The next session is on the website.

If you'd rather just read your way through this course, that works too. Keep going.

BEFORE LESSON 2 — SET UP AN AI TOOL

This course is tool-agnostic. It works with any popular AI chat tool. If you don't already use one, take 2 minutes now to set up a free account with the AI tool of your choice — the free versions are enough for everything in this course.

If you're not sure which to pick, that's fine. They all do the same basic thing for a beginner: you type, it answers, you correct it when it's wrong. Pick one and stick with it for this course. You can always try others later.

Your first conversation with AI

The fastest way to get over being scared of AI is to talk to it about something low-stakes. So that's what this lesson is.

What you'll do in this lesson

You'll open an AI tool in another browser tab, type one real question, read what comes back, and notice one thing about it. That's it.

TRY IT NOW

Open your AI tool in a new browser tab. The free tier of any popular AI chat tool is enough for everything in this course. In the message box at the bottom, copy and paste this exactly:

COPY AND PASTE

I am working on planning a small gathering for friends this weekend. Ask me three questions to figure out what I most need help with right now. Then help me with the most important one.

Send the message. Read what the AI sends back.

Stop here. Actually do this before reading on — the rest of this lesson assumes you've seen what just happened.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

The AI asked you three questions. Maybe something like "*How many people?*" and "*What's the weather supposed to be?*" and "*Are you cooking or ordering food?*" — different wording, similar idea.

It didn't try to plan the gathering for you. It tried to figure out what *you* didn't know yet. That is the most important thing about working with AI: it's better when you let it ask first, instead of asking it to perform.

Now answer the questions

In the same chat, answer the AI's three questions in your own words. Send the answers. The AI will come back with a draft, a list, an explanation — something. Read it.

A QUICK QUESTION FOR YOURSELF · not graded, not saved — just for you

What was the AI's response — *useful*, *useless*, *surprising*, *generic*? Pick one word. Hold onto it.

What to do if the AI gets it wrong

You will hit a moment in the next ten minutes (or the next ten conversations) where the AI gives you something that isn't what you needed. When that happens, type back something like:

COPY AND PASTE

That isn't what I needed. What I actually needed was [X]. Try again.

The AI won't be offended. It won't remember the mistake an hour from now. Correcting it is part of using it well — possibly the most important part. People who get good results from AI are not better at typing. They are better at telling it when it is wrong.

One thing that will surprise you

The AI does not remember anything you said yesterday. Every conversation starts from zero. If something worked today, copy the prompt somewhere you can find it tomorrow. A note on your phone is fine.

TRY TO REMEMBER · TWO QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours. Your answers aren't saved.

1. What is the move when the AI gives you a wrong answer?

Our answer: Tell it what you actually needed and ask it to try again. The AI isn't offended; the correction is part of using it.

2. Why is it worth saving prompts that worked somewhere you can find them later?

Our answer: The AI doesn't remember the conversation tomorrow. Every conversation starts from zero. If a prompt worked once, you'll want it again.

Want someone to walk through this with you in real time? The free live class covers the same ground at lu.ma/pacforward.

Reading a real document with AI

Most of us have a letter somewhere — agency, doctor, landlord, lawyer, insurance — that we have read three times and still do not fully understand. The language is precise. It is not friendly. You read it. You put it down. You read it again. You put it down again.

This is the move that fixes that.

A scenario

Imagine you opened your mailbox last week and found this letter. It's three pages, printed on the kind of stationery agencies use. Two paragraphs are excerpted below.

THE LETTER — EXCERPT

"This Notice of Case Action requires supplemental documentation pursuant to 17 HAR §1700-2 (g) within thirty (30) days of receipt to maintain eligibility for continued participation. Failure to provide complete documentation by the date indicated above shall result in an ineligibility determination, effective at the close of the current certification period.

Supplemental documentation shall include, at minimum: (a) verification of current income via paystubs or employer attestation; (b) current proof of residence (utility bill, lease, or equivalent); (c) a completed and signed Form 4A, available in the enclosed appendix or upon request from the agency."

Read it once. Notice what happens in your head — most likely, your eyes slide off it before you reach the end of the first paragraph. That is normal. That is what this language is *designed* to do.

What does the letter actually want?

Before you read further — try to answer in your head:

- What is the agency asking for?
- By when?
- What happens if you do nothing?

If you can't answer all three with confidence, the AI is about to make this much easier.

TRY IT NOW

Open your AI tool in another tab. Copy and paste this prompt, then paste the letter excerpt above where it says **[letter]**:

COPY AND PASTE

I received this letter and I am not sure what it actually wants me to do. Read it for me. Then tell me:

1. In one sentence — what does this letter want from me?
2. By when?
3. What happens if I do nothing?
4. What parts of this letter are unclear or might mean different things?

[letter]

Send it. Read what comes back.

Stop here. Actually try this before reading on.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

The AI's answers should look something like this — yours will be worded a little differently:

1. The agency wants you to send three things: pay stubs (or employer letter), a current utility bill or lease, and a signed Form 4A.
2. Within 30 days of when you received the letter.
3. Your enrollment ends at the close of the current certification period.
4. The unclear part is whether Form 4A needs to be notarized — the letter doesn't say.

The first three answers should be short and specific. **The fourth answer is the most important one.** It tells you what you need to call the agency about, before you do anything else.

If your AI's answers look very different — that's worth noticing too. AI is sometimes confidently wrong. Which is what the next part is about.

Now check the AI's answer

Type this in the same chat:

COPY AND PASTE

For each of your four answers above, quote the exact words from the letter that support what you said.

Send it. Read what the AI returns. If the quotes are real (you can find them in the letter), the AI actually read the letter and gave you a reliable summary. If the quotes are missing, paraphrased, or made up — the AI guessed, and you should read the suspect parts yourself.

This is the **verification habit**. Three sentences of typing. Catches most of the mistakes AI makes.

TRY TO REMEMBER · THREE QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours.

1. What are the four questions to ask the AI when you give it a confusing letter?

Our answer: What does it want from me? By when? What happens if I do nothing? What parts are unclear?

2. Why is question 4 — what's unclear — the most important?

Our answer: It tells you what to call and ask about, before you do anything else. Even the AI can't be sure about everything.

3. How do you check that the AI actually read the letter and didn't just guess?

Our answer: Ask it to quote the exact words from the letter that support each answer. Missing or paraphrased quotes mean it guessed.

This is the move Alex demonstrates in the free live class — with a real letter that an attendee brings, in real time. If you want to see that with your own paperwork, join at lu.ma/pacforward.

Writing a reply with AI

Once you understand what the letter wants, the next problem is writing back. This is where most people stall. The blank page is harder than the agency letter was.

Use the AI for the first draft. You take it the rest of the way.

Back to the scenario

You're still working on the letter from Lesson 3. The AI told you the agency wants three things: pay stubs, a utility bill, and a signed Form 4A. The unclear part is whether Form 4A needs to be notarized — and you're going to call the agency about that.

For now, you want to write a short, professional reply that says: *"Enclosed are the documents you asked for, and please confirm whether Form 4A needs to be notarized."*

TRY IT NOW — THE DRAFT PROMPT

Open the same chat in your AI tool (or start a new one). Type:

COPY AND PASTE

Help me draft a response to a letter I received. The main thing I want to say is: I am enclosing the requested documents, and please confirm whether Form 4A needs to be notarized.

The response should be calm, polite, and short. Show me two options — one more formal, one more conversational.

Send it. Read both versions the AI returns.

Stop here. Actually try this.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN

The AI should have given you two short reply drafts. Maybe something like:

FORMAL VERSION

*Dear [Agency Name],
Enclosed please find the documents requested in your notice of [date]: pay stubs for the last 30 days, current utility bill, and signed Form 4A. Please confirm whether Form 4A requires notarization.
Thank you for your time.
[Your name]*

CONVERSATIONAL VERSION

*Hi,
I'm sending the documents you asked for in your letter: my recent pay stubs, a current utility bill, and the signed Form 4A. One quick question — does Form 4A need to be notarized? The letter wasn't clear.
Thanks,
[Your name]*

Pick whichever sounds closer to how you'd actually write. If neither sounds like you, type back: *"Rewrite it so it sounds less formal and uses shorter sentences."*

The AI will keep revising. Push until it sounds like you.

A QUESTION FOR YOURSELF · not graded, not saved

Which version did the AI's first try sound closer to — formal or conversational? What does that tell you about how the AI guessed you'd want to sound?

(For most people the AI defaults a little too formal at first. Once you tell it your preferred register, it adjusts. That's worth knowing.)

The check before you send

This is the move most people skip. Before you send any AI-assisted draft to anyone important, paste your draft back to the AI and ask:

COPY AND PASTE

Read what I'm about to send. Tell me:

1. Am I giving them information they did not ask for?
2. Am I leaving out information they did ask for?
3. Is there anything that could be misread?
4. Anything that sounds defensive or angry when I did not mean it that way?

Try this with your draft from above. See what the AI flags. Read the AI's answers. Fix what needs fixing. Then send.

This step adds about 90 seconds to the work and catches the kind of mistakes that take weeks to clean up.

One last thing

Do not let the AI sound like a robot in your name. Read your final draft out loud. If a sentence makes you wince, change it. AI drafts are starting points, not finishing points. The signature at the bottom is yours.

TRY TO REMEMBER · THREE QUESTIONS, UNGRADED

Try answering each one yourself before reading ours.

1. Why ask the AI for two options — one formal and one conversational?

Our answer: It gives you something to compare so you can pick the version closer to how you actually write.

2. What four questions should you ask the AI to check your draft before you send it?

Our answer: Am I giving info they didn't ask for? Am I leaving out info they did ask for? Anything that could be misread? Anything that sounds defensive or angry?

3. What is the final check, after the AI has reviewed your draft?

Our answer: Read it out loud. If a sentence makes you wince, change it before sending.

The live class walks through this read-verify-draft-check workflow with a real document the attendees pick. If you want to bring your own letter to the next session: lu.ma/pacforward.

What you did, what's next

You came in here unsure whether this was going to be useful. You leave with one small, reliable routine for handling the paperwork that most people put off — and a habit (asking the AI to check its own work) that will catch most of the mistakes AI tools make.

That is the whole course.

Your checklist — what you can do now

Tick each one you have actually done. These are not assignments. They are reminders for you, not us.

- ☐ I have signed in to an AI tool at least once.
- ☐ I have had a real conversation with an AI tool about something I actually wanted help with.
- ☐ I know how to ask an AI to read a letter for me and tell me what it wants.
- ☐ I know how to ask an AI to draft a reply, and to give me two versions to choose from.
- ☐ I know the verification move: ask the AI to quote the exact words from the letter, then check before I send anything.

What to do this week

Find one piece of paperwork you have been avoiding. It does not have to be the scariest one. Pick something a little uncomfortable but not panic-inducing.

Use the four-question read from Lesson 3. Use the draft prompt from Lesson 4. Use the check before you send.

The first time you do this with real paperwork, the whole thing takes about 15 minutes. After three or four times, it takes about five.

A QUESTION, IF YOU WANT TO ANSWER IT · optional, not saved

What was one moment in this course where something surprised you, or something clicked, or you thought "wait, I could use this for..."?

If you want to tell us, email hello@pacforward.org — Alex reads every reply.

Two things that go further than this course

The Field Guide to AI — a free downloadable PDF that covers everything in this course plus chapters on email, family conversations, and the honest limits of AI. pacforward.org/repository.

The free live class — 30 minutes on Zoom with Alex. Same material, but live, interactive, with your own questions answered in real time. People who attend the live class consistently say it lands differently than the self-paced version. If you got value from this course, the live version is the next step. lu.ma/pacforward.

KEEP THIS PAGE

The prompts, in one place

Five prompts from the course you can copy when you need them — plus three more to grow into. Open this page when you sit down to do real paperwork. Replace the bracketed parts with your actual situation.

1 • Start a conversation — from Lesson 2

I am working on [one sentence about what you're working on]. Ask me three questions to figure out what I most need help with right now. Then help me with the most important one.

2 • Read a confusing letter — from Lesson 3

I received this letter and I am not sure what it wants me to do. Read it for me. Then tell me: 1) In one sentence, what does it want from me? 2) By when? 3) What happens if I do nothing? 4) What parts are unclear? [paste letter]

3 • Check that the AI actually read it — from Lesson 3

For each of your answers above, quote the exact words from the letter that support what you said.

4 • Draft a reply — from Lesson 4

Help me draft a response to this letter. The main thing I want to say is: [one sentence]. The response should be calm, polite, and short. Show me two options — one more formal, one more conversational.

5 • Check before you send — from Lesson 4

Read what I am about to send. Tell me: 1) Am I giving them information they did not ask for? 2) Am I leaving out information they did ask for? 3) Anything that could be misread? 4) Anything that sounds defensive or angry when I did not mean it that way?

THREE MORE TO TRY — THESE BUILD ON THE FIVE ABOVE

6 • Prep for a phone call

I need to call [who] about [what]. Help me prepare: write three questions I should ask, in priority order, and one follow-up for each in case their first answer is vague.

7 • Find what is missing

I need to send [type of document] to [who]. Here is what I have so far: [paste]. Tell me what is likely missing and why it matters. Then quote any specific requirements you found in the source.

8 • Write a polite "no"

I need to politely turn down [the request]. Help me write a short reply that says no without burning the relationship. Show me two options — one warmer, one firmer.

One habit to keep: use prompt 3 (the quote-check) after any prompt that asks the AI to read something. That is the verification habit — the one thing that catches most AI mistakes.

‘A‘ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho‘okahi

"All knowledge is not learned in one school."

Pacific Forward Initiative is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Our courses are free for everyone — if this one gave you time back, you can help keep it that way at pacforward.org/donate.

FORWARD TOGETHER