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THE GEMINI GUIDE

# The Beginner's Guide to Gemini

What Google's Gemini specifically is, the features that set it apart — living inside Gmail, Docs and Sheets, checking its own answers against Search, reading photos and hour-long documents, and researching a question properly with Deep Research — and how to use it well from your first message to building your own Gem, with a 25-prompt library, real worked exchanges and the honest limits included.

For anyone getting started with Gemini

● Shipped — measured, gate-clean

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What Google's Gemini specifically is, the features that set it apart — living inside Gmail, Docs and Sheets, checking its own answers against Search, reading photos and hour-long documents, and researching a question properly with Deep Research — and how to use it well from your first message to building your own Gem, with a 25-prompt library, real worked exchanges and the honest limits included.

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Every photograph in this guide is real, free-licensed and credited — and none of it is shared with our Claude or ChatGPT guides. The cover is drawn in code: the twins, plotted as a chart.

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Every claim carries its tier · nothing faked

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### PREPARED

11 July 2026

### VERIFIED BY

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15 years building safety-critical AI

### HOW TO READ IT

Drafted with AI, verified by a  
named human. Sources at the back.

# 01 What Gemini actually is



Who makes it, why the name is everywhere at once, and why you genuinely cannot break it.

Gemini is Google's AI assistant — built by Google DeepMind, and woven, more than any of its rivals, into the tools a lot of us already live in: Gmail, Docs, Sheets, Calendar, Drive and Google Search itself. Underneath it is a *large language model* — software trained on an enormous amount of text (and images, and audio) so that, given what you've said, it can produce a sensible, usually helpful reply. You use it at **gemini.google.com** in any browser, or in the Gemini app on a phone, and the core skill is one you already have: say what you want, in plain words, and it answers.

## THE PLAIN TRUTH

### You genuinely cannot break it

If you can write an email, you can use Gemini. There's no code, no setup beyond a Google account you very likely already have, and no way to damage anything by asking. A vague question gets a mediocre answer — you just say what to change and ask again. That's the entire learning curve.

This guide follows one particular reader all the way through: Priya, 45, who runs a four-person landscape-gardening business just outside Stirling. Her working life is already in Google's tools — quotes in Docs, job scheduling in Calendar, invoices tracked in Sheets, a decade of customers in Gmail — which is precisely why Gemini, rather than one of its rivals, is the assistant worth her ten minutes. Where the features get more adventurous, her nephew Callum, 19, who does the office admin two mornings a week, takes over the examples — so this guide can stay genuinely beginner-friendly without underselling what the tool can do.

### Why the name 'Gemini' seems to be on everything

Google uses the Gemini name in several places at once: the assistant at gemini.google.com and in the phone app (this guide), Gemini features inside Gmail, Docs and the other Workspace apps (Chapter 6), and AI answers inside Google Search itself. They share the same underlying models but behave differently. If a friend says "Gemini did something odd," the first useful question is: *which one were you using?*

## Why it sounds so sure of itself

One idea explains most of this guide's cautions, including the chapter where Gemini gets something confidently wrong. A language model does not look answers up in a store of verified facts — it produces the most *plausible* continuation of the conversation, and plausible is not the same test as true. A confident sentence and a correct sentence read identically. Gemini is actually better equipped here than most rivals — it can ground answers in live Google Search results and even offers a button that double-checks its own reply,

which Chapter 9 uses — but the underlying rule never changes: anything with a consequence gets verified by you before you act on it.

*Gemini is one of several good assistants. We name the others plainly in this guide, and we earn nothing whichever you choose — that's the whole point of a no-affiliate guide.*

vocabotics

Under the Gemini umbrella sit several underlying models — broadly, a fast one for everyday back-and-forth and slower "thinking" models that reason through harder, multi-step problems. Gemini usually picks sensibly on your behalf, and there's a model picker if you want to choose. The exact model names change often enough that printing them here would date this page within months — trust the picker in your own account over any guide's snapshot, including ours.

## 02 ✧ Free, AI Pro, or Ultra — in plain money terms

What each tier actually buys you, without the bundle-marketing fog.

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**Y**ou don't need to pay Google anything to work through this entire guide — the free tier covers every worked example here, including a taste of the advanced features. Google sells the paid tiers as bundles (AI features plus cloud storage plus early-access extras), which makes them genuinely confusing to compare, so here's the plain-terms shape. Exact allowances and prices shift often; check the current figures on Google's own site before committing to anything.

| PLAN                     | WHO IT'S FOR                                                        | WHAT CHANGES VS FREE                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Free                     | Anyone getting started — Priya, for her first months                | The full basic assistant, file and photo uploads, some access to the newer models and features with daily limits, no card required                          |
| Google AI Pro            | Regular users who keep hitting the free limits                      | The more capable models as standard, much higher limits, more Deep Research runs, video-generation credits, and a large slug of Google One cloud storage    |
| Google AI Ultra          | Heavy, daily, professional use — most readers should not start here | The highest limits and the most capable 'thinking' models, earliest access to new features, the biggest storage bundle — at a genuinely steep monthly price |
| Workspace business plans | A business already paying for Gmail/Docs at work                    | Gemini built into the work apps with business-grade data terms — your prompts and files aren't used to train models. Priya's eventual home                  |

*The plans, in plain terms (check current allowances & prices before committing).*

Google's free tier never asks for card details — if a sign-up page demands payment before you've typed a single message, you're not on the genuine free tier.

### The one line worth remembering

Start free, and stay free until you actually hit a limit that annoys you — that's the honest upgrade signal. If your business already pays for Google Workspace, check what's included in your plan before paying for anything personal: Gemini may already be sitting in your Gmail.

## 03 Your first five minutes at [gemini.google.com](https://gemini.google.com)



What the screen actually shows you, and the exchange that gets you comfortable.

Go to [gemini.google.com](https://gemini.google.com) and sign in with a Google account — if you use Gmail, you already have one, and there's nothing else to set up. What follows is a schematic of the screen's regions, not a captured screenshot, but it's accurate to what you'll see when you sign in.



**The message box**

Type here in plain language. Enter, or the arrow, sends it.



**The plus / attach button**

Add a photo or file — a quote, a letter, a spreadsheet — to ask about it.



**The mic & Live**

Talk instead of type — a proper spoken conversation. Chapter 6.



**The model & tools picker**

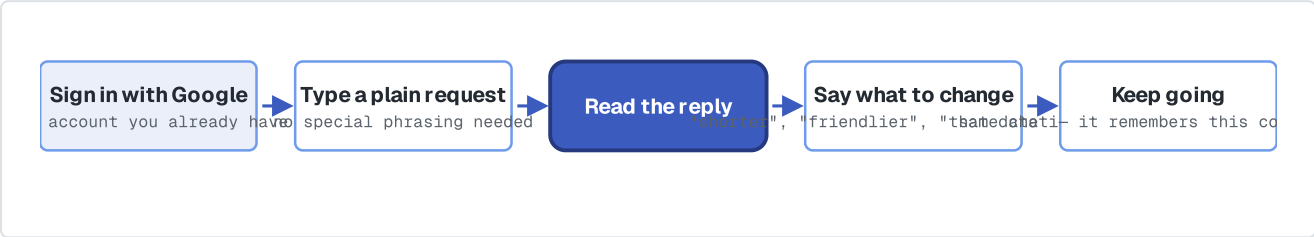
Fast vs 'thinking' models, and tools like Deep Research live here.



**Gems, in the sidebar**

Ready-made and build-your-own specialists — Chapter 7.

The gemini.google.com screen, in five regions — a schematic, drawn to be accurate, not photographed.



Your first five minutes, step by step.

Here's the exchange that made Priya a regular. It's illustrative — the shape of a typical exchange, not a verbatim transcript — but it's exactly the kind of conversation you'll have in your first week.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A first message, worth trying with your own version

PRIYA TYPES

"My compost supplier has emailed saying their prices are 'being restructured from next quarter'. Can you read it and tell me plainly: what's actually going up, by how much, and from when?" [she pastes the email's text]

GEMINI REPLIES

A short plain-English breakdown: bulk bags up 8% from 1 September, bagged compost unchanged, delivery charges now applied under £150 — and a note that the email nowhere says the word "increase", which is rather the point of it.

PRIYA TYPES AGAIN

"Draft a polite reply asking whether existing quoted jobs will be honoured at the old price. Keep it to four sentences."

GEMINI REPLIES

A four-sentence draft in the same chat, referencing the right products and the right date — because it remembers everything said so far in this conversation.

HER CHECK YOU

She re-reads the supplier's actual email once against the summary — dates and percentages especially — before sending anything. Chapter 9 shows exactly what happens on the day this step gets skipped.

That loop — ask, read, refine, check — is the whole skill. You're having a conversation, not learning a secret language, and the first message never has to be perfect.



*A calm start: open [gemini.google.com](https://gemini.google.com) on whatever's in your hand, and say what you want.*

Source: Photo: a smiling woman with a phone – rawpixel.com, Wikimedia Commons, CC0

## 04 Talking to it well — the anatomy of a good prompt



Not a trick. Five plain parts, and the difference they make, shown on Priya's own example.

"Prompting" just means how you ask. You need no clever phrasing — you need to give Gemini the same information you'd give a competent temp on their first morning: who it's for, what you actually want, the facts they can't guess, the shape of the answer, and a way to catch what's missing. Five plain parts.

|         |                                                                                                                    |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ROLE    | "You're helping me quote for a garden clearance job..."<br>who you are, in one clause                              |
| TASK    | "...draft the quote email to the customer..."<br>the actual thing you want                                         |
| CONTEXT | "...half-day, two of us, green waste disposal included, she's a returning customer..."<br>the facts it can't guess |
| FORMAT  | "Friendly but professional, under 120 words, price as a single line."<br>the shape of the answer                   |
| CHECK   | "List any details you'd normally expect in a quote that I haven't given you."<br>invite the honest gap             |

*The anatomy of a good prompt — the five parts, labelled on Priya's own example.*

### Weak

- "Write a quote for a gardening job."
- No job, no price, no customer, no tone
- Generic boilerplate — needs rewriting anyway

VS

### Strong

- "Quote email for Mrs Docherty — half-day clearance, two of us, £340 incl. waste..."
- Names the job, the facts, the tone and the length
- Usable close to first time — you did the thinking, it did the typing

*The same request, weak and strong — the difference is entirely information, not cleverness.*

**Saved Info — tell it once, not every time**

In Gemini's settings there's a "Saved Info" page where you write standing facts once — who you are, how you like replies — and every new chat quietly uses them. Priya's says: "I run a small landscape gardening business in Scotland. British English. Keep replies short and practical. Flag any date, price or plant-care fact I should double-check." One paragraph, written once, and she never types it again.



*The words you choose do the work — the habit, not the software, is the skill.*

Source: Photo: drafting by hand beside the laptop — Brad Neathery, Wikimedia Commons, CC0

## 05 What it's genuinely good at — and what to check



The honest split, before the excitement gets ahead of the evidence.

**T**he honest baseline first. Gemini is genuinely excellent at the everyday reading and writing that eats a small business's evenings: explaining a dense letter, drafting the email you've been avoiding, summarising a long document, turning rambling notes into a plan. It can also reach into live Google Search, which makes it stronger than most rivals on "what's the current..." questions — but current is not the same as correct, and neither is confident. Here's the map.

## Where to trust it, and where to check

### Explaining a letter, email or document in plain English

Reliable and genuinely reassuring — still check any date or number it pulls out.

as of July 2026



### Drafting emails, quotes, adverts and short writing

A strong first draft almost every time — you stay the editor.

as of July 2026



### Summarising something long into the points that matter

Genuinely time-saving — ask for section references and spot-check them.

as of July 2026



### Current facts it can ground in a live search

Better than a from-memory answer, but grounding isn't gospel — use the double-check button (Chapter 9) and open the sources.

as of July 2026



### Specific facts from memory — dates, prices, rules, plant care

Frequently right, sometimes confidently wrong — Chapter 9 shows exactly this.

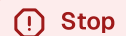
as of July 2026



### Medical, legal, tax or safety decisions

Use it to prepare good questions for a professional, never for the final answer.

as of July 2026



### The one rule that keeps you out of trouble

You are the editor, always. Gemini drafts; you decide. Never send, sign, quote or act on anything it wrote without reading it yourself and checking any fact that carries a consequence — a price, a date, a name, a promise.

# 06 The Gemini superpowers — a feature map

Five things that set Gemini apart from a plain chat — and, from here, Callum takes over some of the examples.

Everything so far works in any assistant. This chapter is what's distinctive: Gemini lives inside the Google tools you may already use, holds astonishingly long documents in one view, sees photos, talks out loud, and can go away and research a question properly rather than answering off the top of its head. Here's the map, then each gets its own worked example.

|                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <br><b>Inside Gmail, Docs &amp; Sheets</b><br>It can read and draft where you already work — this chapter. | <br><b>Gemini Live</b><br>A real spoken conversation, hands-free — this chapter. | <br><b>Photos &amp; images</b><br>Show it a photo, or ask it to make one — this chapter. | <br><b>Deep Research</b><br>A proper multi-source research report, not a one-liner — this chapter. | <br><b>Very long documents</b><br>A tender pack or a year of notes, held in one view — this chapter. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The feature map — five things beyond a plain chat, each covered below.

## Inside Gmail, Docs and Sheets — the home advantage

This is the feature no rival can honestly match: with the Workspace connection switched on, Gemini can reach into *your own* Gmail, Drive, Docs and Calendar when you ask it to — summarise a thread, find the attachment you half remember, draft a reply in place. For Priya, whose entire business history lives in those apps, this is the difference between "a clever website" and "an assistant".

### WORKED EXAMPLE

## Finding last spring's quote without opening a single email

### PRIYA TYPES

"Check my Gmail: what did I quote the Hendersons for their garden wall job last spring, and did they ever confirm?"

### GEMINI REPLIES

A summary drawn from her own mailbox: the quote email from last April with the figure she sent, a note that the customer replied asking about timing, and — usefully — that no confirmation email exists in the thread.

### PRIYA TYPES

"Draft a friendly follow-up asking if they'd like it scheduled this autumn, and mention the quote still stands."

## GEMINI REPLIES

A draft referencing the real thread, ready to review inside Gmail — not sent, just drafted. Nothing goes anywhere without her pressing send.

HER CHECK  YOU

She opens the original April email once and confirms the quoted figure herself before sending — the summary was right, but the promise "the quote still stands" is hers to make, not Gemini's.

The pattern to keep: Gemini is superb at *finding and drafting* across your own data, and everything it drafts waits for your eyes. The one habit that matters is checking the found fact at its source before you commit to it.

## KEEP A HUMAN HERE

**In Sheets: explain, don't obey blindly**

Gemini in Sheets will happily explain a formula, suggest one, or summarise a tab of invoices in plain English — genuinely useful. But a suggested formula can be subtly wrong for *your* layout. Test it on a row where you already know the right answer before you trust a column of it.



*Where the home advantage lives: the same assistant on the phone and in the inbox.*

Source: Photo: a man with smartphone and laptop – Alejandro Escamilla, Wikimedia Commons, CC0

## Gemini Live — talk instead of type

Tap the Live icon in the app and Gemini becomes a spoken conversation — you talk, it answers aloud, you can interrupt it mid-sentence like a person. Priya's use is gloriously unglamorous: the fifteen minutes in the van between jobs, hands-free, turning the day's mental clutter into an actual plan.

**WORKED EXAMPLE** **Fifteen minutes in the van, put to work**

**PRIYA SAYS**

"I've got the Kembles' hedge tomorrow morning but rain's forecast. Talk me through my options for reshuffling the week."

**GEMINI SAYS**

A spoken walk-through: which of her stated jobs are weather-dependent, which could swap into the morning slot, and a follow-up question — "Is the Thursday job flexible on start time?" — like an actual conversation.

**PRIYA SAYS**

"Draft the message to Mrs Kemble proposing Thursday instead."

**GEMINI SAYS**

It reads a short draft aloud and saves it in the chat, ready to copy into a text when she's parked.

**HER CHECK**  **YOU**

Parked, she reads the draft on screen before sending. Voice is for composing; reading is still for checking — and nothing was actually sent from the van.

Live changes how you reach Gemini, not what it's good at. The editor's chair from Chapter 5 travels with you.

## Photos in, pictures out — and the honest catch

Attach a photo and Gemini can genuinely read it — a plant, a form, a rusted part, a hand-scrawled note. Priya's favourite use: point it at a struggling shrub and ask what's wrong. It can also generate images from a description, which is where Callum takes over — a customer wanted to "see roughly" a gravel-and-fern corner bed before committing.

**WORKED EXAMPLE** **One photo in, one picture out — two different levels of trust**

**PRIYA UPLOADS**

A photo of a customer's yellowing laurel hedge, and asks: "What's likely wrong with this, and what would you check first?"

## GEMINI REPLIES

A ranked list of likely causes — waterlogging, nutrient deficiency, shot-hole disease — with what to look for on the leaves to tell them apart. Genuinely useful triage, phrased as possibilities, not a diagnosis.

HER CHECK  YOU

Plant advice is an "amber" from Chapter 5: she confirms against the leaf symptoms herself before treating anything — the photo answer narrows her search; it doesn't end it.

## CALLUM TYPES

"Generate an image: a small shaded corner bed with grey gravel, three hard ferns, one dark-leaved heuchera, natural light, seen from a patio. No text in the image."

THE CATCH  YOU

The image looks convincing — and includes a plant that isn't a fern at all. Generated pictures are mood boards, not planting plans: he labels it "illustration only" before showing the customer, and image models remain unreliable at rendering legible text, which is why he asked for none.

Reading photos: strong, and safe with an "amber" habit. Generating images: great for a feel, never a specification. Add your own words and your own plant list, every time.



*The subject matter itself: show it the plant, the pot, the problem.*

Source: Photo: gardening supplies from above – Giulia Bertelli, Wikimedia Commons, CC0

## Deep Research — when a one-line answer isn't enough

Pick Deep Research from the tools menu, give it a real question, and Gemini stops being a chatbot: it proposes a research plan, goes away for several minutes, reads dozens of sources, and comes back with a structured, cited report. Callum used it on a genuine business decision: whether the firm's next mower should be battery or petrol.

### WORKED EXAMPLE

### Callum: a buying decision researched properly

#### CALLUM TYPES

"Deep Research: battery vs petrol commercial mowers for a small UK landscaping firm – running costs, reliability, noise rules for domestic work, and resale. We mow roughly 15 lawns a week, March to October."

#### GEMINI PROPOSES

A short research plan — cost comparisons, trade reviews, noise regulations, used-market values — which he can edit before it starts. He approves it.

#### MINUTES LATER

A multi-page report with sections, a comparison table, and citations linking to each source — trade press, manufacturer specs, a council noise-guidance page.

#### HIS CHECK YOU

He opens the three sources behind the numbers that would actually drive the decision — running-cost figures and battery-life claims — and finds one is a manufacturer's own marketing page. The report is a brilliant map; the sources still have owners and motives.

Deep Research turns an evening of tab-hopping into ten minutes of reading — and the rule scales with the power: the bigger the decision, the more of its citations you open yourself.



*Deep Research does the tab-hopping so the human can do the judging.*

Source: Photo: desks in an open office space – Crew, Wikimedia Commons, CC0

## Very long documents — the million-token view

Every assistant has a limit on how much it can "see" at once — the *context window*, measured in tokens (roughly, chunks of a word). Gemini's headline models run to around a million tokens — the largest mainstream window there is, and the reason you can hand it something enormous and ask questions that require having read *all* of it.

### One million tokens, translated

**~1,000,000**

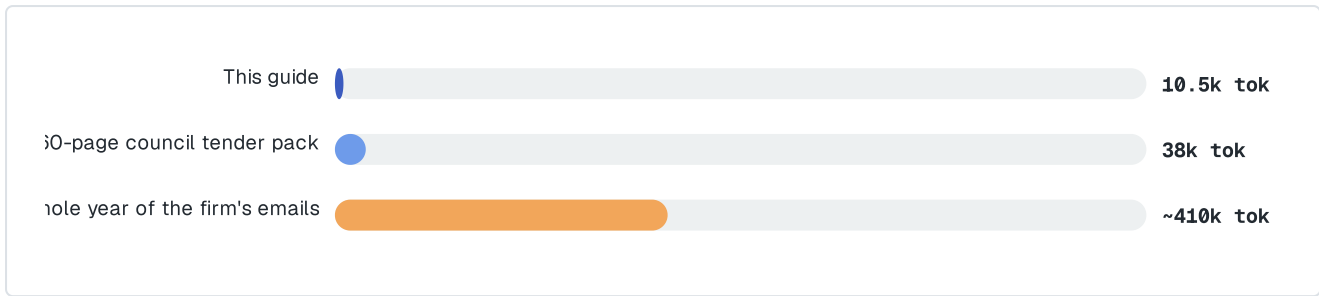
tokens the long-context models can hold in view

**~750,000**

roughly, in words — several long novels at once

**1**

council tender pack, schedules and all, in one question



*What actually fits in a million-token window, with room to spare.*

Priya's real use: a 60-page grounds-maintenance tender from the council, dropped in whole — "list every requirement that mentions insurance, certification or waste carriage, with the page it appears on." The page references matter: they turn the answer from something you must trust into something you can check in thirty seconds. That habit — *ask for the reference, then check one* — is the whole discipline of long-document work.

# 07 Gems — your own specialist, in five minutes

A ready-made specialist for one repeated job, or building your own without code.

**A Gem** is a customised version of Gemini — the same model, given a name and standing instructions (and optionally reference files) so it behaves like a specialist every time you open it, instead of a blank slate. Google ships a handful ready-made — writing coach, brainstormer, learning tutor — and the sidebar's "Explore Gems" shows the current set. The genuinely useful move, though, is building your own for the one task you repeat every week.

## WORKED EXAMPLE

### TEMPLATE — building a Gem (Priya's quote-writer)

#### 1. NAME IT PRECISELY

Not "Helper" — something you'd recognise in a sidebar at a glance. Hers: "Quote Writer — Sharma Landscapes."

#### 2. GIVE IT STANDING INSTRUCTIONS

"You write customer quotes for a small landscape gardening firm in Scotland. Tone: friendly, professional, plain English, British spelling. Always include: the work described in the customer's words, price as one line, what's included and excluded, and a validity period of 30 days. Never invent a price — if I haven't given one, ask."

#### 3. ADD REFERENCE MATERIAL — OPTIONAL

She attaches two of her best past quotes as examples, so new drafts inherit the house style rather than a generic one.

#### 4. TEST IT ON A JOB YOU ALREADY QUOTED



The calibration step most people skip: she gives it a job she quoted last month and compares drafts. It matches her tone but forgot waste disposal — so she adds "always mention green-waste disposal" to the instructions. One sentence, permanent fix.

#### 5. KEEP IT PRIVATE



Nothing with customer information should ever be shared beyond the people who need it — her Gem stays hers.

Five minutes of setup buys a specialist that never needs the rules re-explained. The instructions-plus-examples pattern above works for any repeated task: job adverts, site-visit checklists, review replies.

**KEEP A HUMAN HERE****What a Gem doesn't change**

A Gem changes behaviour, not truthfulness. Your quote-writer Gem can still get a fact confidently wrong, exactly like the plain assistant — the editor's rule applies inside Gems too, and Chapter 9 is about to show why.

# 08 Worked example: when it's confidently wrong



The exact exchange — including the moment Gemini's own double-check button catches it.

Chapter 1 promised this moment. It's illustrative in its wording, but exactly the shape of a real near-miss — and it shows the one Gemini feature every beginner should know exists: the button that makes Gemini check its own answer against Google Search.

## WORKED EXAMPLE

### The frost date that nearly cost a planting job

#### PRIYA ASKS

"When is it safe to plant out tender bedding plants in the Stirling area — when is the last frost, typically?"

#### GEMINI REPLIES

A specific, confident answer — a precise "safe from" date in late April, stated plainly, no hedging.

#### THE DOUBT



Twenty years of gardening tells her late April feels early for central Scotland. Instead of arguing, she uses the double-check control on the reply — the one that re-verifies the answer against Search.

#### THE DOUBLE-CHECK SHOWS

Parts of the answer stand corroborated; the confident date does not — the highlighted sources talk about mid-to-late May for her area, with frosts recorded into early June in cold years. The answer had generalised a UK-wide pattern into a local certainty.

#### HER CHECK



She goes with the sources and her own experience — plant out late May, fleece handy — and adds a line to her Saved Info: "I'm in central Scotland; season dates should assume that."

The lesson isn't "don't ask Gemini about local facts" — it's that a general pattern and your specific, local, consequential fact are different kinds of question. For the second kind: double-check the reply, open a source, and let your own knowledge vote. When in doubt, ask it straight — "are you confident, or generalising?" — it will usually tell you honestly.

## The general-vs-specific test, applied

### Explaining what a document you gave it says

The information is right there in the text you supplied.

 Go

as of July 2026

### A general pattern ('bedding goes out after the last frost')

Usually roughly right — never a substitute for your local, current fact.

 Amber

as of July 2026

### Your specific, local, consequential fact (your area's frost window)

Double-check the reply, open the sources, and let your own experience vote.

 Stop

as of July 2026

## 09 The prompt library — 25 to keep



Copy these as they are. Each carries the one check that keeps it safe to act on.

---

**T**wenty-five prompts in two sets: thirteen for anyone, and twelve that assume you work — a small business, a side job, a committee. Copy them verbatim or adapt them; the bracketed parts are yours to fill. The third column is the habit this whole guide has been teaching.

| #  | PROMPT (COPY VERBATIM)                                                                                                                                                           | YOUR CHECK                                                                |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | "Explain this to me in plain English, then tell me what I actually need to do and by when." [paste the letter/email]                                                             | Re-read the original for any date, amount or deadline before acting.      |
| 2  | "Write a short, warm message to [name] about [situation]. Tone: [warm / formal / apologetic]. Include [the facts]. Under [X] words."                                             | Read it as the recipient will; check every fact is one you gave it.       |
| 3  | "Does this message look like a scam? Say what specifically makes you think so, either way."                                                                                      | If in any doubt, don't click — verify by a route you find yourself.       |
| 4  | "Summarise this into the three points that actually matter." [paste the long text]                                                                                               | Skim the original once for anything important the summary dropped.        |
| 5  | "Rewrite this so it's calmer and friendlier, but keep every fact exactly the same."                                                                                              | Confirm no fact got softened away along with the tone.                    |
| 6  | "Are you confident about that, or generalising from a pattern? Which parts should I verify?"                                                                                     | Treat anything it flags as unverified — then verify it.                   |
| 7  | "I need to decide between [A] and [B]. Ask me the five questions that would most change the answer."                                                                             | None — a planning prompt; the thinking stays yours.                       |
| 8  | "Here are my rough notes from a call [paste]. Turn them into: what was agreed, what I must do, and by when. If a date isn't in my notes, write 'not stated' — don't invent one." | Check every date and figure against your memory of the call.              |
| 9  | "Compare these two [quotes/products/letters — paste both] and tell me what's actually different, not which sounds nicer."                                                        | Verify any number it quotes against the two originals.                    |
| 10 | "Explain [topic] three ways: one sentence, one paragraph, and a longer version that flags what I'd need to check further."                                                       | Verify anything from the longer version before relying on it.             |
| 11 | "Here's a photo of [the thing]. What is it, what's wrong with it, and what would you check first?"                                                                               | Treat it as triage, not diagnosis — confirm before you treat, buy or bin. |
| 12 | "Plan [an event/trip/week] with me. Start by listing what you need to know, then build it step by step as I answer."                                                             | Sanity-check anything time- or price-sensitive at the source.             |
| 13 | "Check your last answer: is there anything a careful person should verify before acting on it? Flag it — don't silently fix it."                                                 | Do the verification yourself for whatever it flags.                       |

*Part one — the everyday thirteen.*

| #  | PROMPT (COPY VERBATIM)                                                                                                                                   | YOUR CHECK                                                             |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 14 | "Draft a quote email for [job] for [customer]: price [£X] as one line, what's included and excluded, valid 30 days. Friendly but professional."          | The price and the promises are yours — confirm both before sending.    |
| 15 | "Check my Gmail: summarise where things stand with [customer/thread], and list anything that looks unanswered."                                          | Open the real thread once before acting on the summary.                |
| 16 | "Draft a polite chase for the unpaid invoice to [name] — firm on the amount and date, warm in tone, no apology for asking."                              | Verify amount and due date against your records, not its memory.       |
| 17 | "Turn these scribbled site-visit notes into a tidy record: access, hazards, measurements, customer requests, next steps." [paste]                        | Measurements especially: check against what you actually wrote.        |
| 18 | "In this spreadsheet, explain what the formula in [cell] does, in plain English, and say what could make it wrong."                                      | Test any suggested change on a row whose answer you already know.      |
| 19 | "Write a job advert for [role]: honest about the hard parts, clear on pay [£X], hours and location. No clichés."                                         | Pay, hours and legal bits are yours to confirm before posting.         |
| 20 | "Draft a reply to this review [paste]. Thank them, address the specific point honestly, no grovelling, under 80 words."                                  | Read it aloud once — it should sound like you on a good day.           |
| 21 | "Deep Research: [the decision you're weighing] for [your situation]. I care about [cost / reliability / rules]. Propose your plan first."                | Open the sources behind the two or three numbers that decide it.       |
| 22 | "Here's our [tender/contract/policy — attach]. List every requirement that mentions [insurance/certification/deadlines], with the page number for each." | Spot-check two page references before building on the list.            |
| 23 | "Build me a one-page checklist for [recurring job], ordered by what goes wrong most. I'll tell you our common mistakes first: [list them]."              | None — it's built from your own experience; revise it after first use. |
| 24 | "I want a Gem for [repeated task]. Draft its name, standing instructions and the two example documents I should attach."                                 | None — a planning prompt (then run Chapter 7's calibration step).      |
| 25 | "What's in this month's calendar that I should prepare for, and what usually needs booking ahead that isn't there?"                                      | Confirm anything bookable at the source before assuming it's missed.   |

*Part two — the working twelve (small business, side job, committee).*

Prompts 7, 13, 23 and 24 need no fact-check of their own — they're planning or self-check prompts. Everything else that produces a fact, date, price or figure does.

# 10 10 things to try this week



A real starter list — not a demo, a week's worth of ordinary, useful tasks.

## This week's list

- ☐ Paste a confusing letter, bill or email and ask for a plain-English explanation plus what to do and by when.
- ☐ Try Gemini Live once, hands-free, on something low-stakes — planning a weekend, a shopping list, thinking a decision out loud.
- ☐ Photograph something you've been meaning to ask about — a plant, a form, a label — and ask what it is and what to check.  
Chapter 6 covers exactly what photo answers can and can't be trusted for.
- ☐ If you use Gmail: ask Gemini to summarise where things stand with one real thread, then open the thread and mark its homework.
- ☐ Ask it to check one suspicious-looking email or text before you click anything in it.
- ☐ Draft the message you've been putting off, then edit the one line that doesn't sound like you.
- ☐ Fill in Saved Info once — who you are, where you are, how you like replies — and notice every chat start smarter.
- ☐ Run one Deep Research on a decision you're genuinely weighing, and open two of its sources yourself.
- ☐ Use the double-check button on one factual answer and read what gets corroborated versus not.  
This is Chapter 9's habit — do it once deliberately so it sticks.
- ☐ Try prompt 7 ('ask me the five questions first') on something that matters, and notice how much better the first draft gets.

# 11 Privacy & safety — what you should know



What leaves your device, who might see it, what you can switch off — and the teenager question.

**A**nthing you type, say or upload to Gemini leaves your device and is processed on Google's computers. The simple rule stands: don't paste or upload anything you wouldn't email to a stranger — no

passwords, no full card or bank details, no other person's private information without a clear reason. Two Gemini-specific things deserve plainer words than the settings pages give them.

First: on personal accounts, your conversations are stored as "Gemini Apps Activity", and Google says samples may be *reviewed by human reviewers* to improve the service — disconnected from your account, but real people nonetheless, and reviewed conversations can be retained for an extended period even if you later delete your activity. You can turn this activity setting off, and use temporary chats for one-off sensitive questions. Second: the Workspace side is different by design — on business plans, your prompts and files aren't used to train models and carry business-grade data terms, which is exactly why Priya moved her customer work to the business account and keeps the personal one for everything else.

***Google publishes exactly what the Gemini apps collect, how long it's kept, and the settings that change it — the Gemini Apps Privacy Hub is genuinely readable, and worth ten minutes.***

Gemini Apps Privacy Hub — Google, as of July 2026

### A five-minute privacy check-up

- ☐ Would you email this file or photo to a stranger? If not, redact it first — or don't upload it.
- ☐ Open your Gemini Apps Activity setting: decide deliberately whether it stays on, and learn where the off switch is.
- ☐ Use a temporary chat for anything sensitive you don't want remembered at all.
- ☐ Doing real business or customer work? Use a Workspace business plan with contractual data terms — not a personal account.
- ☐ Review what the Workspace connection can reach (Gmail, Drive, Calendar) and disconnect anything you don't actually use.

And the teenager question, since Callum was 17 when he first used the family laptop's Gemini: Google requires a minimum age (13 in the UK, with parental tools via Family Link) and runs a stricter experience for teen accounts. If you're setting Gemini up for a young person, do the first session together, read the teen policy as it currently stands, and keep the same rule you'd give them for the whole internet: never share what you can't take back.



*What leaves the device is real, wherever you happen to be sitting — the checking habit covers most of it.*

Source: Photo: a person looks down at their phone — James Sutton, Wikimedia Commons, CC0

12

 Which assistant, when — Gemini, ChatGPT or Claude

An honest, dated snapshot — not a scoreboard, and not a reason to agonise.

Gemini, ChatGPT (from OpenAI) and Claude (from Anthropic) overlap on most everyday work — for a first draft of a message, any of the three serves you well. But they are not identical, and this guide's honesty rule means saying plainly where Gemini pulls ahead and where it doesn't. Dated, because all three companies ship changes monthly — treat this as our working judgement, due a recheck, not a verdict.

|         | LIVES INSIDE<br>YOUR EMAIL &<br>DOCS                                              | GROUND ANSWERS<br>IN LIVE SEARCH                                                  | VERY LONG<br>DOCUMENTS IN ONE<br>GO                                               | CAREFUL,<br>RESTRAINED<br>WRITING                                                   | READY-MADE<br>SPECIALIST<br>LIBRARY                                                 |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gemini  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ChatGPT |  |  |  |  |  |
| Claude  |  |  |  |  | —                                                                                   |

 Go  Check it  Keep a human

Our honest, dated snapshot — a working judgement to recheck, not a permanent verdict.

Read that in both directions. Gemini's genuinely distinctive strengths are the first three columns: no rival sits inside your Gmail and Docs the way it does, its answers can be grounded — and double-checked — against live Search, and its million-token window takes documents whole that others need chopped. Honesty about the other side: for the most careful, restrained *writing* — a sensitive letter, prose you'll be judged on — our working preference is still Claude, and ChatGPT's GPT Store remains the deepest library of ready-made specialists, with Gems younger and thinner. None of that makes one assistant "better" outright; it makes them different tools for different jobs.

|                                                                                        |                                                                                     |                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Does your working life already run on Gmail, Docs and Sheets?                          | <b>Yes</b> → Gemini first — the home advantage is real, and this guide is your map. | <b>No</b> → Read on.                                                                      |
| Is your main task careful, high-stakes writing you'll be judged on?                    | <b>Yes</b> → Worth a free try of Claude — see our Beginner's Guide to Claude.       | <b>No</b> → Read on.                                                                      |
| Do you want the widest one-app bundle of voice, images and ready-made specialist bots? | <b>Yes</b> → ChatGPT is worth a free try — see our Beginner's Guide to ChatGPT.     | <b>No</b> → Stay put — the asking-well and checking habits carry across all three anyway. |

Should you also try ChatGPT or Claude? A straight, five-minute answer.

The honest bottom line: Gemini is a fast, capable assistant with three genuinely distinctive powers — it lives where your work already is, it can check its own answers against live search, and it reads documents whole that others can't hold — and it remains, like every assistant in this trilogy, a confident occasional liar about facts you haven't checked. Use it as a tireless first-drafter and finder, keep yourself firmly in the editor's chair, use the double-check button like a seatbelt, and never upload what you wouldn't show a stranger. Do that, and it will genuinely give you hours back.

## 13 Image credits & attributions



Every photograph in this guide is real, free-licensed and credited — and none of it is shared with our Claude or ChatGPT guides. The cover is drawn in code: the twins, plotted as a chart.

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| Privacy & safety            | A young person on a bench, looking at their phone | James Sutton — Wikimedia Commons        | CC0     |

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## 14 Sources, glossary & the ledger

Where every claim comes from — and what the plain words mean.

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## Plain-English glossary

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Large language model</b>  | Software trained on vast amounts of text (and, for Gemini, images and audio too) so that, given some words, it can produce sensible words to follow — the technology under Gemini and every assistant like it. |
| <b>Hallucination</b>         | A fluent, confident answer that is simply wrong — a made-up fact, date or figure. Happens with every large language model; the fix is verification, not vigilance alone.                                       |
| <b>Grounding</b>             | Anchoring an answer in live Google Search results rather than the model's memory alone. Better than unaided recall — and still not the same thing as true, which is why the double-check habit matters.        |
| <b>Double-check response</b> | Gemini's built-in control that re-verifies a reply against Search, marking what's corroborated and what isn't — the seatbelt this guide's Chapter 9 is built around.                                           |
| <b>Gem</b>                   | A customised version of Gemini with a name, standing instructions and optional reference files, so it behaves like a specialist for one repeated job instead of a blank slate.                                 |
| <b>Deep Research</b>         | Gemini's agentic research mode: it proposes a plan, reads many sources over several minutes, and returns a structured, cited report — a map for your judgement, not a replacement for it.                      |
| <b>Context window</b>        | How much text a model can 'see' at once, measured in tokens (chunks of a word). Gemini's long-context models run to around a million tokens — several long novels in one view.                                 |

**Gemini Apps Activity**

The setting on personal accounts that stores your conversations, samples of which may be reviewed by human reviewers. You can switch it off, and use temporary chats for one-offs.

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**Saved Info**

A settings page where you write standing facts about yourself once — who you are, how you like replies — that every new chat uses automatically.

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#### THE HONESTY LEDGER

- Shipped — measured, gate-clean.
- 🔬 Research — measured, partial; the gap is shown.
- 🔭 Vision — designed, honest; not yet built.

The bigger claim goes up a tier, never down. We show the eval beside the demo — the tiering is the credibility.

---

## Complete the trilogy on /guides

You've met Gemini — the Beginner's Guides to Claude and ChatGPT cover where each of the other two honestly pulls ahead, in the same no-hype, no-affiliate voice.

[/guides](#)

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## Nothing faked.

This guide was drafted with AI and verified by a named human. Every capability claim is dated and marked as our honest snapshot, not a benchmark; every photograph is real and credited on its own page; and nothing here — worked examples, figures, cover or photos — is shared with our Claude or ChatGPT guides.

