WHEN YOU ARE STUCK AND TEMPTED TO USE AI

Pause Before You Prompt

Before I use AI because I am stuck

Moves practiced: Practice First + Monitor + Adjust. Use this when: you are reaching for AI and need to name the real barrier first.

You are most tempted to open AI when the task feels hard, unclear, tiring, or overwhelming. Reaching for AI is not automatically a problem. The important question is why you are reaching for AI and what next move would support your learning without taking it over.

Step 1. What is the real barrier right now?

- ☐ I do not understand the task.
- ☐ I do not know where to start.
- ☐ I am tired or overloaded.
- ☐ I am avoiding the hard part.
- ☐ I need feedback.
- ☐ I need a better study strategy.
- ☐ Time is short and I feel overwhelmed.
- ☐ Other: _____

Different barriers need different fixes, and only some of them are AI. Not understanding the task calls for the instructions, the rubric, or a question to your instructor. Tiredness calls for rest or a smaller step. Avoidance calls for a two-minute starter, not a chatbot.

Step 2. Choose the support that actually fits the barrier.

My best next support is: ☐ AI ☐ my instructor or TA ☐ a classmate ☐ my notes or the readings ☐ rest ☐ a smaller step ☐ office hours ☐ other: _____

AI is one option on this list, not the default one.

Step 3. Make your own attempt first.

Minimum move: If the task is clear, make one small attempt: write one rough sentence, solve one step, or retrieve what you know. If the task itself is unclear, clarify what it requires first. Then decide what support, if any, would help next.

What I will try myself first: *One sentence. Then decide what support, if any, would help next.*

Based on what I checked, my next useful move, with or without AI, is:

Stuck rule: If you use AI when you are stuck, use it to regain direction, not to escape the thinking. While you use AI, keep making the decisions and doing the reasoning yourself. Always follow your course and institution's AI expectations.

Want the full system? Think First expands this tool into a complete Learning Ownership System for studying, assignments, exams, AI use, weekly planning, feedback, and recovery. It includes Quick checks, Core tools, comprehensive assignment and exam tools for added scaffolding, and Deep reflection prompts. Start anywhere: the Find Your Problem index begins with the situation in front of you, not page one.

In the book: See Part 2: Pause Before You Prompt, High-Ownership and Low-Ownership AI Use, and the AI Use Log and Disclosure Template.

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