A FREE TEACHING RESOURCE | FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

The First AI Conversation

Two ways to use it: at course start, or with a specific assignment. About 15 minutes either way.

Policies and course expectations tell students what AI use is allowed. This activity helps them decide what the learning still requires from them.

YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE AN AI EXPERT TO RUN THIS

Your expertise is in the learning you want students to develop. This activity connects that learning purpose to your course expectations for AI. You do not have to decide whether AI is generally good or bad, and deciding that students use no AI on a task is a complete outcome, not a failed one.

THREE QUESTIONS THIS ACTIVITY KEEPS APART

Permission	Am I allowed to use AI here?
Learning	Even if I am allowed, would using it here develop the capability I need, or replace it?
Responsibility	If I use it, what must I check, revise, verify, or disclose?

CHOOSE YOUR VERSION

AT COURSE START

Student Page A · AI Learning Boundaries

"*How will we think about AI and learning in this course?*"

Sets standing boundaries and a default.

WITH A SPECIFIC TASK

Student Page B · AI Expectations Check

"*What does learning ownership require on this task?*"

Requires a fresh decision.

Page A at course start, then Page B when a significant task arrives. Page B can also stand on its own.

PREPARATION

Before class, choose one capability you want students to protect and practice. Page 3 can help.

Print or share the one student page you need. Have the syllabus available, and the assignment instructions too if you are running the task version. If your course has no AI statement yet, find any program or institutional expectations first.

Time: about 15 minutes. No background in learning science is required.

BY THE END, STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO

1. name one important capability the course or task is designed to develop;
2. locate and interpret the course or task expectations for AI;
3. distinguish AI use that could support that learning from use that would replace it; and
4. make one concrete Practice First decision.

The First AI Conversation

MINUTES 1–2 Name the learning first

Ask students to think silently for about ten seconds. Do not take responses yet. Then say aloud:

"*Before we talk about AI, I want to make part of the purpose here explicit.*"

COURSE START "*This course is designed to help you become better able to _____. What thinking or practice would you need to do yourself to get better at that?*"

SPECIFIC TASK "*This task is designed to build your ability to _____. What thinking or practice would you need to do yourself to develop that?*"

Then: "Now we can ask where AI might support that learning, where it might replace it, and what our course permits."

MINUTES 3–7 Students complete the page

COURSE START *Hand out Page A. "Work down the page. The boundaries you set are starting defaults for this course, not rules for every assignment."*

SPECIFIC TASK *Hand out Page B. "Use the course materials for the permission and disclosure rows."*

Brief phrases are enough. Silence is fine. The individual thinking is the point.

MINUTES 8–10 Pairs compare

Students compare answers with one other person and identify either one place where their interpretations differed or one question they could not resolve. Then invite two or three examples aloud, prioritizing issues shared by several pairs.

MINUTES 11–15 Clarify and commit

Clarify the two or three issues most useful to the class. If one needs an answer you have to check, say when and where you will post it. Then have every student complete the Practice First decision, which page 4 explains in full.

COURSE START *Before you finish, name the first assignment when the class will return to Page B, and have students write it in the closing line. Do not skip this step. It turns the conversation into a commitment to return.*

SPECIFIC TASK *Students leave with a decision for this task, not only an interpretation of the policy.*

Support and Examples

Read once. Keep it beside you the first time you run the activity.

WHAT YOU ACTUALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT AI HERE

Generative AI can draft, summarize, explain, suggest, and give feedback on many academic tasks.

Its output can also be inaccurate, incomplete, or invented, and it does not automatically know your course expectations or learning goals.

You do not need a position on whether that is good or bad. You need to decide what this course or task is meant to develop, what your expectations permit, and what students must practice themselves.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Even when students intend to learn, if the capability a task is meant to develop is not explicit, it can be easy to offload the very thinking the task was designed to build. An AI policy says what is permitted. It does not make the learning purpose visible. That is the gap this activity addresses.

CHOOSING THE CAPABILITY

Everything downstream depends on this being specific.

AT COURSE START choose one capability students will practice repeatedly across the course. A course learning outcome, a recurring disciplinary practice, or a capability central to a major assessment can help you choose.

FOR A TASK look at the rubric criterion you weight most heavily, or finish this sentence: "If a student submitted flawless work but still could not _____, I would feel this assignment had failed."

TOO BROAD	SPECIFIC ENOUGH TO PROTECT
Critical thinking	Compare two explanations, weigh the evidence, and justify which is better supported
Writing	Develop a defensible claim and support it with relevant evidence
Problem solving	Select a method when the solution path is not given, and justify why it fits

By discipline: argue from primary sources · reason when the method is not given · justify a clinical judgment

ONE WORKED EXAMPLE, WHERE SOME AI USE IS PERMITTED

Task	Analyze three primary sources and argue why public attitudes changed.
Capability	Construct an evidence-based historical argument from primary sources.
Stays theirs	Interpreting the sources, deciding which evidence matters, forming the argument.
AI could	Test their interpretation with questions, or offer a counterargument after they have one.
AI should not	Read and interpret the sources, choose the evidence, or produce the argument.
Practice First	"Before using AI for feedback, I will write my own claim and find three pieces of evidence."

Support and Examples

A NO-AI DECISION IS A COMPLETE OUTCOME, NOT A SHORTENED ACTIVITY

If AI is not permitted, students still name the capability, name the thinking they are responsible for, and make a Practice First decision about how they will begin that thinking. The AI column stays blank.

IF A STUDENT SAYS

"AI could brainstorm ideas for me."
Is generating possible directions part of what this is meant to develop? If it is, what will you try first?

"I only want it to fix my writing."
Is the writing part of the learning here, or is it carrying ideas you have already developed yourself?

"But the syllabus says AI is allowed."
That answers permission. Now the learning question: which parts would you benefit from doing yourself?

"I do not know if this counts as AI use."
Useful. Record it as your unresolved question. If I cannot answer now, I will give the class an answer.

First time? Allow up to 20 minutes if students need time to locate or interpret course expectations.

IF YOU ARE UNSURE, SAY SO

"I do not want to invent an answer. I am going to check the course or program expectations and post a clarification by _____. For now, treat this use as unresolved."

ONLY HAVE FIVE MINUTES?

Name the capability in minutes 1 to 2. Have students circle the AI-expectations row, then complete the Practice First decision.

WHAT THIS IS NOT

Not a policy and not a detection strategy. It helps students interpret your expectations. It does not create them for you.

FOR THE INSTRUCTOR | THE SYSTEM BEHIND THIS ACTIVITY

The Learning Ownership System

New to Learning Ownership? Read this section once. It explains why the activity is built this way.

WHAT THE LEARNING OWNERSHIP SYSTEM IS

Seven moves students can use across many academic tasks. Each is a question rather than a rule, so students enter wherever the situation requires and return as often as it takes. The system is a practical translation of research on self-regulated learning, metacognition, retrieval practice, feedback, and motivation. This activity uses three of the seven.

UNDERSTAND → **PRACTICE FIRST** → **VERIFY**

The other four moves, used elsewhere in the system: Plan · Monitor · Adjust · Transfer

The Learning Ownership System

UNDERSTAND *What am I being asked to learn or do?*

Before students decide whether AI belongs, they need to separate four things.

The deliverable	What must I produce or submit?
The learning	What knowledge, skill, or thinking is this meant to develop or demonstrate?
Success	What do the instructions, rubric, criteria, or examples say strong work requires?
AI expectations	What is allowed, limited, prohibited, or unclear?

Producing the deliverable is not necessarily the same as doing the learning.

AI can sometimes make the first easier while reducing the second. That is the central learning problem this activity addresses.

PRACTICE FIRST *What will I do myself first?*

Making your own first attempt at the thinking or skill the task is meant to develop, before turning to AI for help. The attempt does not need to be polished or complete. It helps students build the capability and see what they understand, where they are stuck, and what support might help next.

Practice First does not mean completing the whole task without AI. It means protecting the student's first attempt at the learning the task is designed to develop.

VERIFY *What do I need to check, revise, reject, or disclose?*

Verify means checking before you trust, use, or submit. Before using AI, students check course expectations and disclosure requirements. If AI is used, they remain responsible for checking accuracy, sources, reasoning, appropriate disclosure, and the work they hand in. That is why Verify appears on Page B, where a real task and its actual expectations are in front of them.

HOW THE TWO STUDENT PAGES FIT

Page A · AI Learning Boundaries
UNDERSTAND + PRACTICE FIRST
Students set starting boundaries and a default for the course.

Page B · AI Expectations Check
UNDERSTAND + PRACTICE FIRST + VERIFY
Students return to a real task, decide again, and check permission and disclosure.

Think First teaches the complete seven-move Learning Ownership System directly to students across assignments, exams, AI use, feedback, weekly planning, and recovery. This activity applies three of those moves to one teaching moment.

KEEP GOING WITH LEARNING OWNERSHIP

The whole system	The Seven Moves, a one-page reference
Across one assignment	The Assignment Learning Cycle: launch, midpoint, after feedback
The complete book	Explore Think First
Everything free	LearningOwnership.com/educators

All free resources

AI Learning Boundaries

Set your starting boundaries for learning with AI in this course.

Course: _____

LEARNING OWNERSHIP MOVES PRACTICED Understand + Practice First.

These are starting boundaries for the course, not rules for every assignment. Some tasks will allow more AI use, some less, and some none. When a task matters, you will come back to the learning purpose and decide again. Brief notes are enough.

> **What Practice First means**
> Making your own first attempt at the thinking or skill a task is meant to develop, before turning to AI. The attempt does not need to be polished or complete, and it does not mean doing the whole task without AI. It helps you see what you understand and where you are stuck.

What is this course meant to help me learn or become able to do? *Your instructor will name one.*		
Which kinds of thinking or practice should generally stay mine?		
What does this course say about AI overall?	Allowed / With limits / Not allowed / Varies by task Unclear, ask *Check the syllabus or other course materials. Circle one.*	
In general, where could AI support my learning, and where would it replace it? *If AI is not allowed in this course, leave the left side blank and complete the right.*	**Could support my learning**	**Should stay mine**
My default Practice First approach in this course: *What will you generally try yourself first?*		

> **NEVER PUT THIS INTO AI. This one does not change by assignment.**
> Private information about yourself or others, restricted course materials, exam or quiz questions, confidential data, unpublished work, or anything your instructor has told you not to share. Files and images count too. If the material is not yours to share, do not upload it. When in doubt, ask.

IF YOU NEED TO ASK

Asking about AI is not an admission that you want to cheat. It shows you are trying to follow the expectations rather than avoid them.

"*I want to make sure I use AI in a way that follows your expectations and supports my learning. What kinds of AI use are generally appropriate in this course, what should I avoid, and when should I ask before using it?*"

We will return to these questions when _____ is assigned.

AI Expectations Check

Make a fresh decision for this assignment, project, exam, lab, or other task.

Course: _____ Assignment or task: _____

LEARNING OWNERSHIP MOVES PRACTICED Understand + Practice First + Verify.

If you completed Page A, use your course-start boundaries as a starting point, not the answer. Either way, check what this task actually requires and allows, then decide again. Brief notes are enough.

UNPACK THE TASK **1. What must I produce or do?** **2. What is this task meant to help me learn or become able to do?** **3. What thinking or practice do I need to do myself to develop or demonstrate that?** *Check the instructions, rubric, or criteria.*		
For this task, AI use is:	Allowed / Allowed with limits / Not allowed / Unclear, ask *Circle one.*	
What do the task instructions or course materials say about AI? *Note the key rule or wording.*		
Applying that to this task: *If AI is not permitted, leave the left side blank and complete the right.*	**If permitted, one way AI could support my learning**	**Thinking or practice I need to do myself**
If I use AI for this task, do I need to disclose it?	Yes / No / Not sure If yes, how? _____ *Circle one.*	
One question I still need to ask, if any:		

PRACTICE FIRST: my decision for this task *Choose one:*

☐ I will not use AI for this task.

☐ If I use AI where permitted, I will first: _____

_____

IF YOU ARE UNSURE

"*I want to make sure I follow the expectations and still do the learning this task is meant to develop. Is this use of AI permitted, and if so, how should I disclose it?*"

For group work, ask the same question before the group starts using AI, so everyone is working from the same expectation.

THE PRINCIPLE

Permission and learning are different questions. A use of AI may be permitted and still replace thinking you need to practice. Do some of the thinking yourself so you can build the skill and see what you understand. Be able to explain and stand behind the work you submit.

Practice First means making your own first attempt at the thinking a task is meant to develop. It does not need to be polished, and it does not mean doing the whole task without AI.