

A Beginner's Guide to ChatGPT

Large-print, step-by-step instructions
for anyone who has never used an AI assistant before

Keep this guide next to your computer or phone. You cannot break anything by trying. Every step can be undone, and nothing you type is a mistake.

ChatGPT is made by the company OpenAI. Website: chatgpt.com
Prepared October 2026. Screens change over time, so the real pages may look a little different from the drawings in this guide.

What is in this guide

1. What is ChatGPT, in plain words
2. What you need before you start
3. Creating your free account, step by step
4. A tour of the screen
5. Your first conversation
6. Talking instead of typing
7. Twenty useful things to try
8. How to ask so you get good answers
9. Staying safe and private
10. Common problems and easy fixes
11. Helpful links
12. Words you will see, explained
13. Practice checklist

1. What is ChatGPT, in plain words

ChatGPT is a computer program you talk to by typing (or speaking) in ordinary English. You ask a question or describe what you need, and it writes back an answer in a few seconds, in full sentences, like a knowledgeable and very patient assistant.

Think of it as a mix between a reference library, a helpful neighbor, and a secretary. You can ask it to:

- Explain something you do not understand, as simply as you like.
- Write or improve a letter, an email, a birthday message, or a complaint.
- Suggest a recipe from what is in your refrigerator.
- Plan a trip, a party, or a weekly schedule.
- Translate words into another language.
- Help you with a crossword clue, a word on the tip of your tongue, or a math problem.
- Read a confusing letter or form you photograph with your phone and tell you what it says.

A few things that are important to understand from the start:

Good to know

It is not a person. It is software. It does not know who you are unless you tell it, and it is not watching you.

It can be wrong. It is usually right, but it sometimes states things confidently that are not true. For anything about your health, your money, or the law, treat the answer as a starting point and check with a real professional.

You cannot offend it or break it. Ask the same thing five different ways. Tell it the answer was confusing. Tell it to use shorter words. It will happily try again.

The basic version is free. There is a paid version with more features, but you do not need it to follow this guide, and you never need to give a credit card to use the free version.

2. What you need before you start

- **A device:** a computer, a laptop, a tablet (such as an iPad), or a smartphone. All of them work. A larger screen is easier on the eyes.
- **An internet connection:** Wi-Fi at home, or your phone's cellular service.
- **An email address:** for example a Gmail, Yahoo, Outlook, or Comcast address. If you can receive email, you have what you need.
- **A phone that can receive text messages:** sometimes needed once, to confirm it is really you.
- **About 15 minutes** to create the account the first time. After that, it takes seconds to start.

If you have a family member or friend nearby for the first session, that is helpful but not required. This guide is written so you can do it alone.

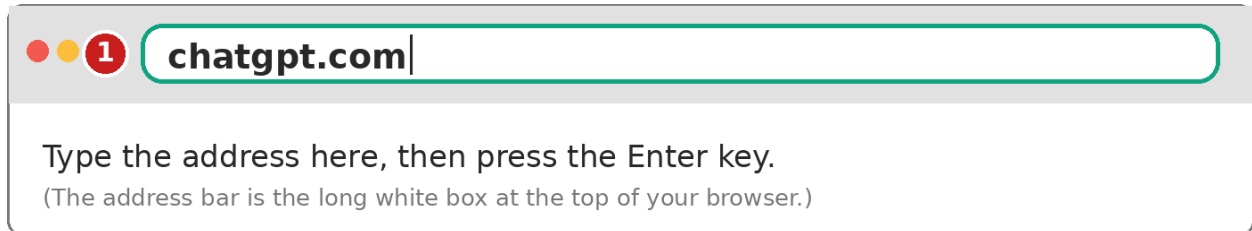
Two ways to use it

On the web: you open your internet browser and go to the address chatgpt.com. Nothing to install. This is the best place to begin on a computer.

As an app: on a phone or tablet, you can install the free "ChatGPT" app from the App Store (Apple) or the Google Play Store (Android). The app makes it easy to talk out loud and to photograph documents. Section 6 explains this.

3. Creating your free account, step by step

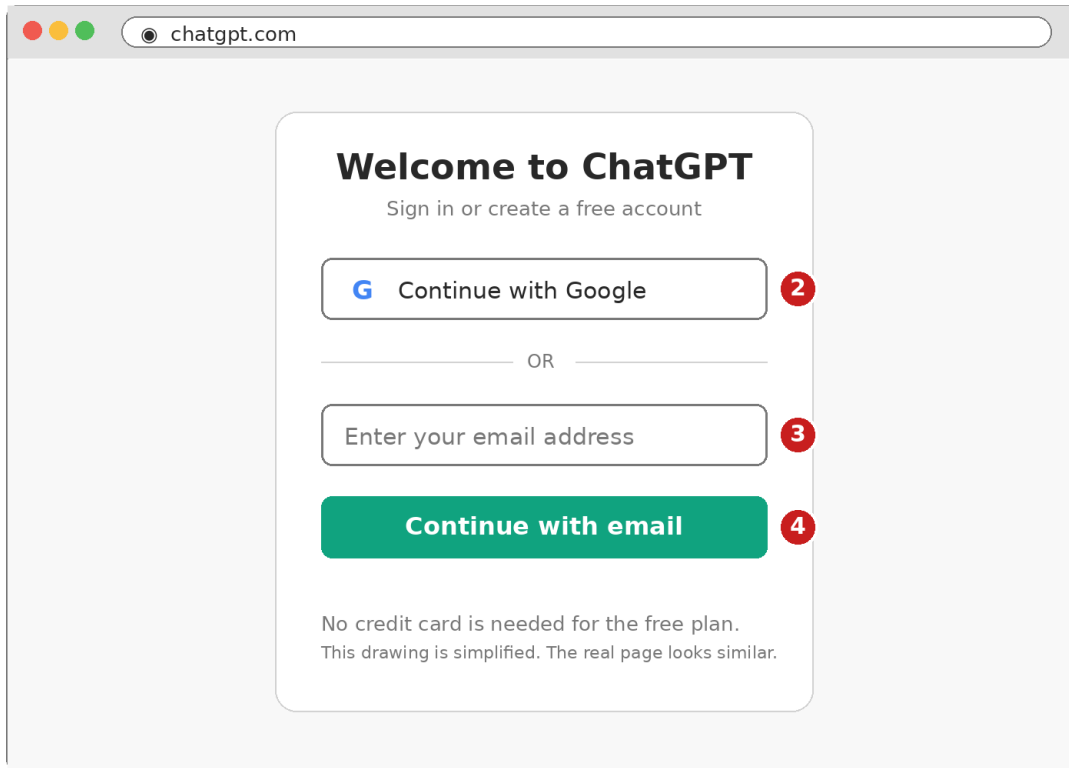
Do these steps in order. Take your time. If a step looks different on your screen, look for the same words ("Sign up," "Continue," "Log in") and keep going.



Step 1: type chatgpt.com in the address bar at the very top of the browser, then press Enter.

1. Open your web browser (Safari, Chrome, Edge, or Firefox) and type chatgpt.com in the address bar at the top. Press the Enter key.
2. In many places you can start typing a question right away without an account. That is fine for a quick try. To keep your conversations and get the full features, create a free account.
3. Look for the "Sign up" button (usually in the top right corner or in the middle of the page). Click it.
4. The easiest way is the "Continue with Google" button if you have a Gmail account. There are also buttons for Microsoft and Apple accounts. Otherwise, type any email address and click Continue.

5. If you used an email address, create a password. Write it down somewhere safe at home. A good password is long but easy for you to remember, such as four unrelated words with a number.
6. OpenAI will send a confirmation message to your email. Open your email, find the message from OpenAI, and click the button or link inside it. Check your Spam or Junk folder if you do not see it.
7. You may be asked for your name and birthday, and you may be asked to confirm a phone number by text message. Enter the code that is texted to you.
8. Pick the Free plan if you are asked. You do not need a credit card.
9. That is it. You will land on the main screen, which is described in the next section.



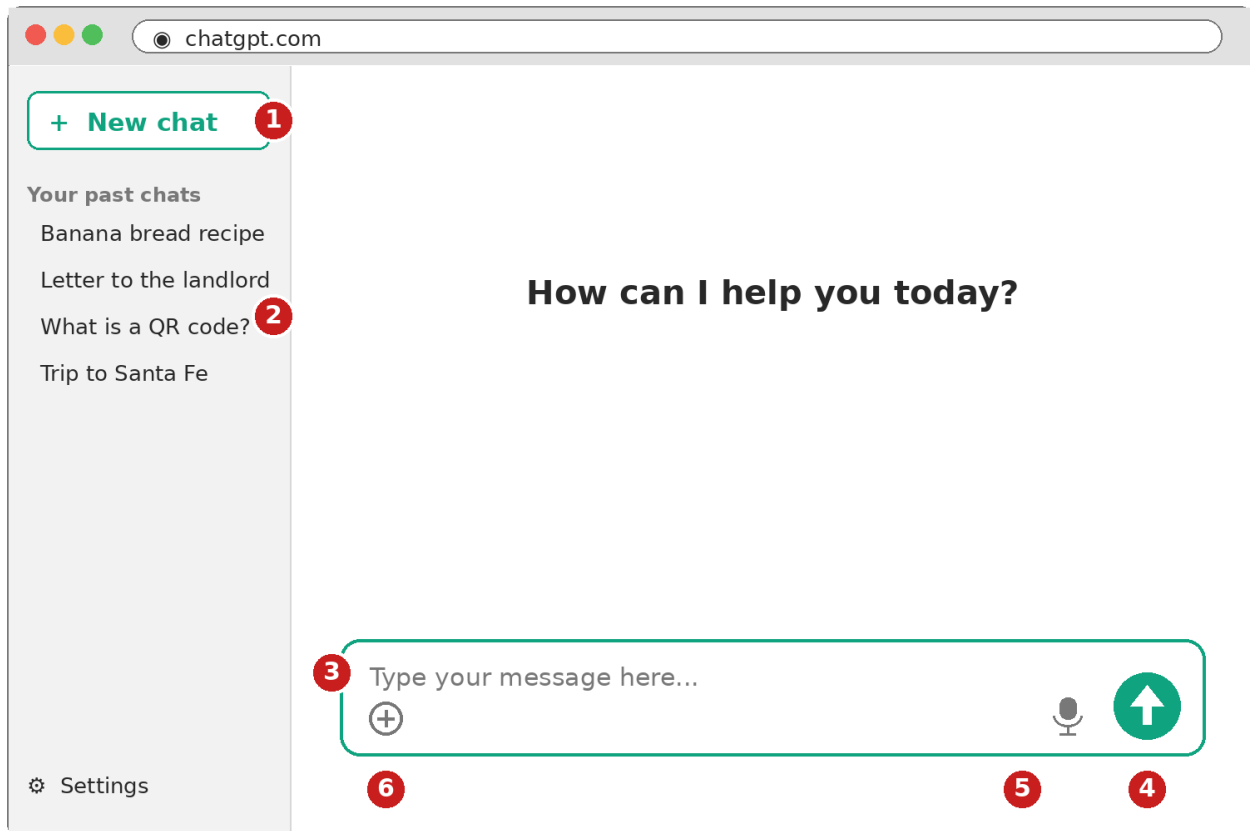
The welcome page. 2 = sign in with a Google account. 3 and 4 = sign in with any other email address.

Coming back later

Each time you come back, go to chatgpt.com and click "Log in." Use the same method you used to sign up (Google, or your email and password). You will often stay signed in, so you may not have to do this every time.

4. A tour of the screen

Once you are signed in, the main screen looks something like the drawing below. The numbers point to the parts you will use most.



The main screen, simplified. Your screen may arrange these pieces a little differently.

1. **New chat.** Click this to start a fresh conversation about a new subject. Think of each chat as a separate sheet of paper.
2. **Your past chats.** Every conversation is saved here automatically. Click one to read it again or continue it. On a phone, you may need to tap the three lines (≡) in the corner to see this list.

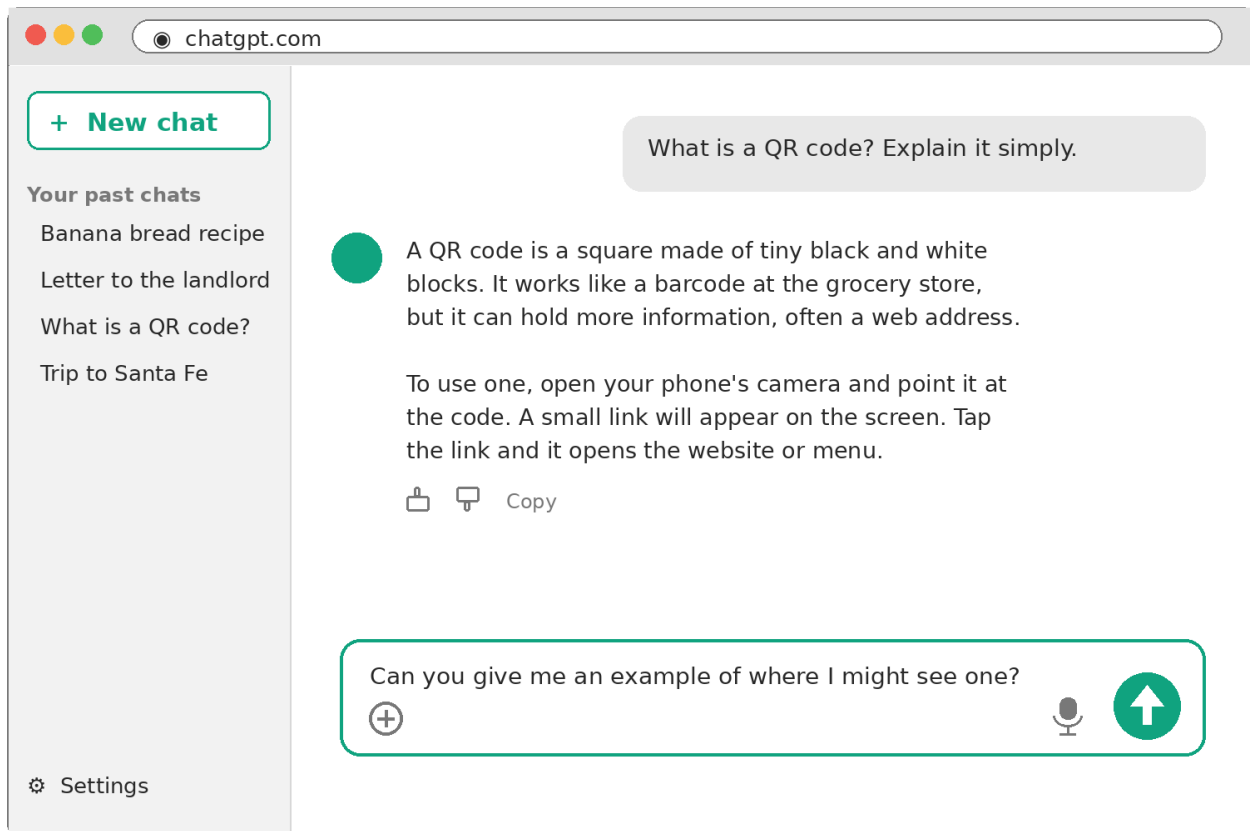
3. **The message box.** This is where you type. Click inside it and start typing, just like writing an email.
4. **The send button.** The round button with an arrow. Click it (or press the Enter key) to send your message. The answer appears above, within a few seconds.
5. **The microphone.** Lets you speak instead of typing. See section 6.
6. **Attach.** The plus (+) or paperclip symbol lets you add a photo or a document for it to look at.

Tip: If the words on the screen are too small, hold down the Ctrl key (on a Mac, the Command key) and press the plus (+) key a few times. Everything gets bigger. Ctrl and minus (-) makes it smaller again.

5. Your first conversation

Let's try it. Follow along exactly, then change the words to anything you like.

1. Click inside the message box.
2. Type: What is a QR code? Explain it simply.
3. Press the Enter key or click the send arrow.
4. Wait a few seconds. The answer will appear above the box, written out sentence by sentence.
5. Read the answer. Now type a follow-up question, such as: Can you give me an example of where I might see one?
6. Notice that it remembers what you were just talking about. You do not have to repeat yourself inside the same chat.



A conversation in progress. Your messages appear on the right, the answers on the left, and the follow-up question is being typed at the bottom.

Things you can say at any time

- "Please use simpler words."
- "Make it shorter." or "Tell me more about that."
- "I did not understand the second part. Explain it another way."
- "Give me that as a numbered list."
- "Write that in a friendlier tone."
- "I think that is wrong. Please double-check."

Starting over

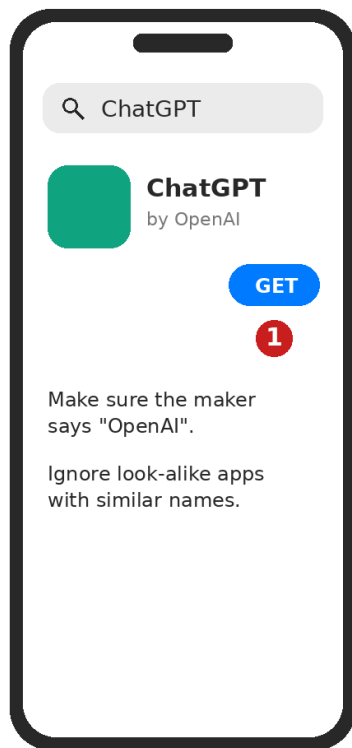
When you want to talk about something completely different, click "New chat." Your old conversation is not lost; it stays in the list of past chats.

6. Talking instead of typing

Many people find it easier to speak than to type, especially on a phone. Here is how.

Getting the app on your phone or tablet

1. On an iPhone or iPad, open the App Store. On an Android phone, open the Play Store.
2. Tap the search box and type ChatGPT.
3. Find the app named "ChatGPT" whose maker is listed as OpenAI. There are copycat apps with similar names, so check the maker's name.
4. Tap Get or Install. It is free.
5. Open the app and sign in with the same Google account or email you used in section 3.



1. Search the app store



2. Open the app and talk or type

Left: finding the app in the store. Right: the app itself, with the microphone (2) and send button (3).

You can also download the apps from this page:

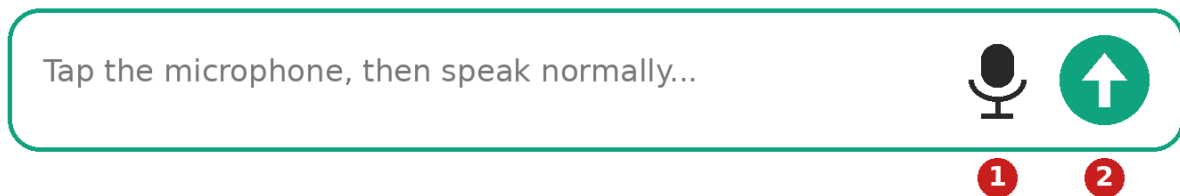
<https://openai.com/chatgpt/download/>

Using your voice

- On the phone app, tap the microphone symbol in the message box. Speak your question in a normal voice. Your words appear as text. Check them, fix anything that came out wrong, and tap the send arrow.
- There is also a voice conversation mode where you talk and ChatGPT talks back out loud, like a phone call. Look for a sound-

wave or voice symbol next to the message box. Tap it once to start, speak, and tap the X or stop symbol when you are done.

- On a computer, you can use the dictation feature built into Windows (press the Windows key and the letter H together) or into a Mac (press the microphone key or Fn key twice) to speak into the message box.



1 = Microphone (speak instead of typing) 2 = Send button

When you finish speaking, check the words, then press Send.

The microphone (1) turns your speech into text. Check the words, then press send (2).

Tip

The first time, your phone will ask permission to use the microphone. Tap Allow. If you tapped Don't Allow by accident, you can change it later in your phone's Settings under the app's name.

7. Twenty useful things to try

Copy any of these word for word, or change the details to fit your life. These are real examples of what people use it for every day.

Around the house

1. "I have eggs, spinach, and half an onion. What can I make for lunch?"
2. "Give me a simple weekly cleaning schedule for a two-bedroom apartment."
3. "How do I get a coffee stain out of a white tablecloth?"
4. "Explain how to set up a new TV remote in very simple steps."

Writing

1. "Write a short, warm birthday message for my granddaughter who is turning 16 and loves soccer."
2. "Help me write a polite letter to my landlord about a leaking faucet that has not been fixed."
3. "Here is an email I wrote. Please fix the spelling and make it sound friendlier." (Then paste your email.)
4. "Write a thank-you note to my neighbor who brought soup when I was sick."

Understanding things

1. "What does 'deductible' mean on an insurance plan? Explain it like I am new to this."
2. "What is the difference between Medicare Part A and Part B?"
(Then confirm anything important with Medicare directly.)
3. "My doctor said I have high cholesterol. What questions should I ask at my next appointment?"
4. "Explain what a podcast is and how I would listen to one."

Fun and family

1. "Plan a three-day trip to Santa Fe for two people who like history and good food, with not too much walking."
2. "Give me ten trivia questions about the 1960s for a family game night, with the answers at the end."
3. "Suggest a mystery novel for someone who liked Agatha Christie."
4. "I am trying to remember a word that means 'happy and peaceful.' What could it be?"

Technology help

1. "How do I make the text bigger on my iPhone?"
2. "What is a strong password, and how do I remember it?"

3. "I got an email saying my account will be closed unless I click a link. Is this a scam?"
4. "How do I take a screenshot on a Windows computer?"

8. How to ask so you get good answers

You do not need special words or commands. Just talk the way you would to a helpful person. A little detail goes a long way.

Too short

recipe

The helper has to guess:

A recipe for what?

For how many people?

Any foods to avoid?

Much better

Give me an easy dinner recipe for two people. I have chicken, rice, and frozen peas. Nothing too spicy, please.

Says what you want, who it is for, and what you have on hand.

The more you say about what you want, the better the answer.

- **Say who it is for and why.** "A message for my sister, who is nervous about her surgery" gets a much better result than "a nice message."
- **Say how long or how simple.** "In three sentences" or "as if to a ten-year-old" or "in plain English with no jargon."
- **Give it the facts it needs.** What you have, how many people, what you have already tried, where you live.
- **Ask follow-ups.** The first answer is a draft, not the final word. "Shorter," "warmer," "add a line about the weather," and so on.

- **Paste things in.** You can copy a confusing paragraph from a letter or website, paste it into the message box, and ask "What does this mean?"
- **Ask it to check itself.** "Are you sure? Where could I verify this?" is a perfectly good question.

Remember

Each new chat starts fresh. If you want it to know something (for example that you live in Albuquerque or that you are cooking for one), mention it in the chat.

9. Staying safe and private

Using an AI assistant is safe when you follow a few common-sense rules, the same ones that apply to anything on the internet.

Never type these into any chat

- Passwords or PIN numbers.
- Your Social Security number or Medicare number.
- Bank account, credit card, or debit card numbers.
- Anyone else's private medical or financial details.

You can ask about these topics in general ("how does a reverse mortgage work?") without typing your own numbers.

Treat important answers as a starting point

For health, legal, tax, and money questions, use the answer to prepare better questions for your doctor, pharmacist, lawyer, or bank. The assistant can be wrong, and it does not know your full situation.

Watch out for scams that use these names

- OpenAI will **never** call you on the phone, ask for remote access to your computer, or ask for payment by gift card. Anyone who does is a scammer, no matter what they call themselves.

- The free version never asks for a credit card. If a website that looks like ChatGPT asks you to pay before you can use it, close the window and type the address yourself: **chatgpt.com**
- Download the app only from the official App Store or Google Play Store, and check that the maker is **OpenAI**.
- Criminals can now imitate voices with AI. If you get a call from a "grandchild" or "relative" in trouble who urgently needs money, hang up and call that person back on the number you already have.

Your conversations

Your chats are saved to your account so you can come back to them. Do not share your login with others. If you do not want a conversation kept, you can delete it from the list of past chats: click the three dots next to the chat name and choose Delete.

10. Common problems and easy fixes

The page looks different from the pictures in this guide.

Companies update their designs often. The pieces are the same: a message box at the bottom, a send arrow, a "New chat" button, and a list of past chats. Look for those.

I cannot find the login code or confirmation email.

Check the Spam or Junk folder of your email. Wait two minutes. If still nothing, go back and click "Resend" or "Send again."

I forgot my password.

On the login page click "Forgot password?" and follow the email instructions. If you signed up with Google, there is no separate password; just click "Continue with Google."

It says I have reached a limit.

If you see a message that you have reached a limit or that it is switching to a simpler model, it only means the free plan allows a certain amount of chatting in a period of time. Nothing is wrong. You can usually keep going, or wait a few hours.

The answer stopped partway through.

Type "please continue" and send it.

I closed the window by accident.

Nothing is lost. Go back to chatgpt.com. Your conversation is in the list of past chats.

The text is too small.

On a computer, hold Ctrl (or Command on a Mac) and press plus (+). On a phone, go to Settings, then Display or Accessibility, and make the text size larger. That affects every app.

It gave me an answer I think is wrong.

Tell it: "I think that is incorrect. Please check again." Then verify with another source. Being wrong sometimes is normal for these tools.

It will not let me speak (microphone does not work).

Your device needs permission. On a phone, open Settings, find the app, and turn on Microphone. On a computer, check that the browser has microphone permission (a small icon in the address bar).

I want to delete a conversation.

In the list of past chats, find the conversation, click the three dots or press and hold on it, and choose Delete.

11. Helpful links

These are the official help pages. If you are reading this on paper, type the address exactly as shown into the address bar of your browser.

OpenAI Help Center (official)

<https://help.openai.com/en/>

What is ChatGPT? Frequently asked questions (official)

<https://help.openai.com/en/articles/12677804-what-is-chatgpt-faq>

Download the ChatGPT apps (phone, tablet, computer)

<https://openai.com/chatgpt/download/>

ChatGPT on the web

<https://chatgpt.com>

Another way to get help

If you get stuck, ask ChatGPT itself. For example: "I am new to this. How do I start a new chat?" or "How do I change the text size?" It is good at explaining its own buttons.

Many public libraries also offer free one-on-one technology help sessions. Ask at the front desk.

12. Words you will see, explained

AI (artificial intelligence) Software that can understand and produce ordinary language. ChatGPT is one example.

App A program on your phone or tablet. You get apps from the App Store (Apple) or Play Store (Android).

Browser The program you use to visit websites: Safari, Chrome, Edge, or Firefox.

Address bar The long box at the top of the browser where you type a website address.

Account Your personal sign-in. It keeps your conversations together and private to you.

Sign in / Log in Telling the website who you are, usually with your email.

Chat or conversation One back-and-forth exchange on a subject. You can have as many as you like.

Prompt A fancy word for the question or request you type. You will see this word in articles; it just means "what you asked."

Send The arrow button (or the Enter key) that delivers your message.

Scroll Moving the page up or down with the mouse wheel, the arrow keys, or by sliding your finger on a phone.

Link Underlined or colored text that takes you to another page when you click it.

Attach / Upload Adding a photo or file to your message so the assistant can look at it.

Free plan / Pro plan The free version is what this guide uses. Paid plans add more capacity and features but are not required.

Spam or Junk folder Where your email program hides messages it thinks are unwanted. Sign-up emails sometimes land there.

13. Practice checklist

Check each one off as you do it. By the end you will be comfortable with everything in this guide.

- ☐ I opened my browser and went to chatgpt.com.
- ☐ I created a free account and signed in.
- ☐ I typed a question and got an answer.
- ☐ I asked a follow-up question in the same chat.
- ☐ I asked for the answer in simpler words.
- ☐ I started a new chat with the "New chat" button.
- ☐ I found an old conversation in the list of past chats.
- ☐ I made the text bigger with Ctrl and plus (or on my phone's settings).
- ☐ I installed the ChatGPT app on my phone or tablet (optional).
- ☐ I used the microphone to ask a question out loud (optional).
- ☐ I attached a photo of a letter and asked what it said (optional).
- ☐ I asked it to write a short note to someone and sent that note.

☐ I know what I should never type into a chat (passwords, Social Security number, card numbers).

You are ready

There is nothing more to learn before you start. The best way to get comfortable with ChatGPT is to use it for small, real things every day: a recipe, a word, a letter, a question you were going to look up anyway. Enjoy it.