

AI for Business

A practical workbook for
Australian small and medium
businesses

2026

About this workbook

This workbook gives Australian small and medium businesses practical ways to use AI safely and responsibly.

It complements the AI for Business Masterclass delivered online with National Australia Bank from 20 October 2026. During the masterclass, the National AI Centre demonstrates examples based on the prompts in this workbook. You can use this workbook to follow along during the session or repeat the activities later.

Important information

The material in this workbook is general in nature and provided for information only. It does not take into account your circumstances and does not constitute legal, financial, accounting, taxation or other professional advice. You should consider seeking independent professional advice relevant to your own situation before acting on anything in this workbook.

Any third-party products or tools referred to in this workbook are subject to their own terms and conditions, privacy and data protection policies, and any applicable fees or charges. Neither NAB nor the National AI Centre controls, endorses or is responsible for the products and their features, and their pricing and terms may change. Examples of tools are given for illustration only and are not product recommendations.

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1. Getting started

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a broad term for technologies that learn from data and produce outputs such as predictions, recommendations, decisions or content.

Three common types of AI used in business

- **Narrow AI** is designed for a specific task, such as fraud detection, spam filtering, recruitment screening, medical diagnosis or product recommendations.
- **Generative AI** creates text, images and other content from prompts; it includes tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and Claude that can support analysis, coding and website creation.
- **AI agents** perform a sequence of actions to achieve a goal, such as booking meetings, running workflows, browsing the web or completing tasks on your behalf.

This workbook focuses on generative AI. The generative AI tools most people talk about at work are large language models (LLMs). Products such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Copilot are built on LLMs. They generate responses by predicting likely words, based on patterns in the enormous amount of text they were trained on.

Where can AI go wrong?

Understanding common risks helps you choose practical safeguards and use AI responsibly.

Where AI can go wrong	What happens	How you can manage the risk
Hallucination	A hallucination is when AI makes up false information. It can present this information confidently as though it is fact.	Understand that AI can sometimes make mistakes. Always review AI outputs, including important information like names, numbers, dates and claims.
Biased outputs	AI may treat groups unfairly based on biased patterns in training data.	Take extra care where outputs affect people; e.g. recruitment, customer communications.
Sycophancy	AI tells users what they want to hear rather than what is accurate.	Ask your AI tool to test and challenge ideas or approaches rather than simply agree with you.
Security vulnerabilities	If there is a data leak, AI might expose confidential or personal information.	De-identify data when necessary and do not enter personal, confidential or sensitive information into an AI tool

Where AI can go wrong	What happens	How you can manage the risk
		unless your business has confirmed that the information can be used there.
Reproduction of copyright content	AI reproduces protected creative works without authorisation.	Check AI-generated or assisted content before publishing. Do not publish material that is known to be copied or closely resembles someone else's work.
Inconsistent outputs	AI may give different answers to the same question, and performance can vary depending on the task or context.	Test important prompts more than once. Compare the results and review them for accuracy.

Choosing an AI tool

You should be able to complete all the activities in this workbook using a free version of an AI tool. Check the tool's features, usage limits, privacy settings and terms, as these vary and may change. Use one tool as you work through this workbook.

Key questions to consider when choosing a tool:

- **Does it fit what you already use?** For example, if your business runs on Microsoft 365 or Google Workspace, you may already have access to tools that integrate directly with your workspace.
- **Does it 'remember' between sessions?** Most tools now offer a way to save key context about your business.
- **Does it produce good results on the tasks you do often?** You can try the same task in different tools to figure out which one works best for your business.

For more information on getting started with AI, you can read the National AI Centre's [Guidance for AI Adoption](#).

Responsible AI tip:

Review how the AI tool handles your information. Check whether data may be stored, reviewed or used to improve services. This information is often available in the tool's settings, terms and conditions or privacy policy. Treat personal, confidential and sensitive information as a risk and only enter it into tools that have been approved for that purpose.

2. Identify the right problem to solve

AI can support many tasks in your business, including:

- responding to a customer email or online review
- turning meeting notes into a structured document
- compare supplier quotes, explain a contract clause in plain English
- sense-check your business strategy or brainstorm a new product.

AI can handle many tasks at high volume, but value comes from choosing the right problem. Start with a task that is frustrating, costly, time-consuming or a recurring issue for your customers. Ask:

- What takes more time or effort than it should?
- What recurring problem affects staff or customers?
- Where could a better process save time or money?

Choose a task you understand well enough to spot mistakes in the AI-generated output.

Write down the problem you want to solve

The problem I'll try to solve with AI in my business:

Right now it costs me each week (quantify in time, energy or money):

A good result would look like (for you, staff or customers):

AI can act as a thought partner to identify problems to solve

The below prompts can be copied and pasted into your preferred AI tool to give it instructions. Before copying and pasting, replace the text in square brackets with current information about your business.

Some activities in this workbook include a short prompt and a more detailed prompt. Try both and compare the results. Longer prompts provide more context and clearer instructions, which can produce a more useful response.

Prompt – Identify the right problem to solve with AI

"Where could AI help my [type of business]?"

This short prompt may produce generic ideas.

Prompt – Identify the right problem to solve with AI

"You are a proficient business advisor. I run a [type of business] with [number] staff. I currently use [software systems and AI tools] I want to identify one task where AI could genuinely be helpful. Do not give me a list yet. Ask me questions, one at a time, about where my time goes, and what I find frustrating. After several questions, suggest two or three low-risk, easy to implement options and help me choose. Ask your first question now."

This longer prompt adds business context and asks more specific questions. This produces a more relevant response that gives you a clearer starting point.

3. Working with AI

The method: context, goal, review

AI makes it easy to produce large volumes of information. The challenge is to turn that output into value by applying clear goals and professional judgement.

- Think of an AI tool as a sidekick rather than a search box.
- Interact conversationally and encourage it to ask you for further information, as this can help produce a more nuanced response.
- Brief the tool the way you would brief a capable new employee on their first day: more **context** than feels necessary, a clear **goal** of what finished looks like and expect to **review** their work and answer follow on questions.
- Most common AI tools have voice-to-text function you can speak into, which allows you to communicate more rapidly and with more detail than typing.

Create marketing content in your voice

Marketing is a common way for Australian small and medium businesses to use AI. But without enough context, AI-generated content can sound generic and have little impact. Improve the result by describing what good communication looks and sounds like for your brand.

Prompt – Marketing for your brand

“You are a brand expert helping me write in an authentic voice to our business. I run [business] for [customers]. Our tone is [three words]. This week we want to communicate [message]. I want you to draft a short social post, a reply to a customer review and an email to regular customers. Before you begin, ask me one question at a time to understand my exact requirements. Use only verified information and do not invent prices, dates, services or claims.”

You can also upload examples of high-quality content that illustrate your brand voice (e.g. your brand’s website, previous email newsletters) to help shape output to be specific to your business.

Responsible AI tip:

Before uploading any work, check that you have permission to use the content and to upload it into an AI tool. Before publishing AI-generated marketing content, ensure you review all outputs carefully for accuracy. Carefully check all the details – for example prices, dates and product features. Remove or revise any details you cannot verify, and make sure the overall message is not misleading or exaggerated.

Understand revenue, costs and cashflow

If you are not operating within a secure environment with explicit permission to use sensitive data (e.g. your accounting tool), ensure you use a de-identified report from your accounting software. Remove direct identifiers (e.g. names, addresses, contact details, account numbers and customer IDs) and check for indirect identifiers that could reveal identity when combined (e.g. exact dates, job titles, locations, distinctive transaction details). Replace these with broad categories or neutral labels where needed.

Prompt: Understanding your business data (shorter version)

“Act as a practical business data analyst. I’ve attached a de-identified [type of report/s or data]. Before analysing it, interview me one question at a time until you understand my business, the data and what I want to learn. Then summarise it in plain English, flag anything unusual, show your calculations and list questions for my [accountant / bookkeeper / manager / adviser]. Do not invent missing information or make decisions for me. Tell me what to check against the original.”

[Attach the report]

This short prompt lets the AI tool ask questions and shape the analysis as it learns about your business.

Prompt: Understanding your business data (detailed version)

“Act as a practical business data analyst. Help me understand a de-identified [type of report/s or data].

Before analysing it, interview me one question at a time to understand:

- *my business and the purpose of the report*
- *what the data contains and the period it covers*
- *what I want to learn or check*
- *what comparison, target or benchmark matters*
- *who should review the findings.*

Ask only questions that are relevant to my previous answers. If anything is unclear, ask me rather than guessing.

Once you have enough context, confirm your understanding and ask me to approve the analysis.

Then:

1. *summarise the data in plain language*
2. *categorise the information*
3. *identify patterns, changes, gaps or unusual items*
4. *show any calculations*
5. *separate facts, assumptions and possible explanations*
6. *list questions for [accountant / bookkeeper / manager / adviser].*

Do not make business, financial or professional decisions for me. Do not invent missing information. Identify anything uncertain and tell me what I should verify against the original report.”

[Attach the report]

This detailed prompt gives the AI tool clearer instructions about what to ask, what analysis to perform and how to present the results. This can be helpful for financial data, where the same report could be analysed in several ways with key assumptions, calculations or limitations that need to be made clear.

Results of the 'Understanding your business data' prompt activity:

Patterns the AI tool identified:

Items the AI tool categorised incorrectly:

Key questions for my accountant:

Creating onboarding documents for new employees

Prompt: Onboarding documentation for your business (short version)

"Act as a workplace onboarding adviser. Help me write a comprehensive onboarding pack for a new [role] at my [type of business] in [location, including country]. Interview me one question at a time before drafting, ensuring you are meeting all relevant obligations for my industry. Then create the pack, a first-day checklist and a one-page summary. Mark anything legal, pay-related or safety-critical that I must verify. Do not invent details."

This short prompt lets the AI tool interview you and develop a basic onboarding pack as it learns about the role and workplace.

Prompt: Onboarding documentation for your business (detailed version)

"Act as an experienced workplace onboarding and safety communications adviser. Help me draft an onboarding document for a new staff member joining my [type of business] as a [role] in [location, including country]."

Before drafting, ask me one question at a time to understand:

- *the role's main duties and responsibilities*
- *the workplace, work arrangements and expected hours*
- *relevant workplace rules, policies and procedures*
- *site-specific hazards and required safety controls*
- *required training, equipment, systems and access*

- *emergency procedures and important contacts*
- *who the staff member should approach for help or to raise a concern*
- *any accessibility, language or communication requirements.*

Ask only questions relevant to my previous answers. Do not guess or invent missing information.

Once you have enough information, confirm your understanding and ask me to approve the structure. Then create:

- *a clear onboarding document organised under practical headings*
- *a first-day checklist for the staff member and their manager*
- *a short list of tasks for the first week*
- *a one-page quick-reference summary.*

Use plain English, short sentences and clear bullet points. Make the document suitable for someone unfamiliar with the business.

Clearly mark any missing details, legal requirements, pay or entitlement information, safety instructions, emergency information or business-specific policies that I must verify and add myself. Do not invent these details or present general information as specific advice.

If I request a translation into another language, treat it as a first draft and remind me to have safety-critical or employment-related content checked by a suitably qualified bilingual person before use.

Ask your first question now."

This detailed prompt gives the AI tool clearer instructions about the information to collect, the documents to create and the details that must be verified. This can be helpful for onboarding, where duties, work arrangements, safety requirements, emergency procedures and workplace policies can vary considerably between businesses and roles.

The paid versions of most AI tools have features that allow you to retain context and memory of interactions relating to your business. This can make outputs more relevant and consistent, but you should still avoid uploading sensitive information and carefully review all outputs from the tool.

4. Responsible AI use

Responsible AI use involves thinking about and planning for key actions and outputs, including:

- the information you upload
- the potential benefits and risks
- the safeguards needed to manage those risks
- the accuracy and suitability of AI-generated output.

Using AI does not change your business's responsibility for what it publishes or decides. If an AI tool generates an incorrect claim and your business shares it with customers, your business remains responsible. AI-generated content may also raise intellectual property issues. Before publishing, check whether it closely resembles existing material, including names, logos, characters or slogans belonging to others.

When using AI in your business, it can be helpful to get into a habit of asking quick 'sense check' questions. For example:

- **If uploading information:** Was this given to me in confidence? Do I have permission to share this? Would I be comfortable if this became public?
- **When reviewing:** If the AI-generated output is wrong, would I be able to detect it?

Essential AI practices

The National AI Centre's Guidance for AI Adoption sets out 6 essential practices for responsible AI use in Australian businesses.

The 6 practices:

Essential practice	Key actions
1. Decide who is accountable	Assign someone with appropriate authority to oversee how AI is used in your business. Set clear rules for staff, including which tools may be used, what information may be entered and who is responsible for each AI tool used.
2. Understand impacts and plan accordingly	Identify who may be affected by AI use, including customers and staff. Consider the intended benefits, possible harms and whether anyone may be treated unfairly. Make it easy for people to raise a concern or ask for help.
3. Measure and manage risks	Screen each proposed use of AI before you begin, using the AI risk screening questions. Consider what could go wrong, how likely and serious the harm could be, and what controls are needed. Higher-risk uses may need additional assessment or expert advice.
4. Share essential information	Keep a record of the AI tools and systems your business uses. Let staff, customers and other affected people know when they are interacting with AI, when AI materially shapes content or when it influences a decision that affects them. Explain important limitations where relevant.

Essential practice	Key actions
5. Test and monitor	Start with low-risk uses. Decide what a good result looks like, test the tool before relying on it, and continue checking its accuracy, behaviour and risks over time. If you are buying an AI system, ask the supplier how it has been tested.
6. Maintain human control	Make sure a suitably skilled person oversees important AI use and can question, correct or stop it if required. Require human review before AI-generated work is used for important customer, financial, legal, safety or people-related decisions.

Responsible AI is a journey. You do not need to have everything in place on day one. The goal is to start thoughtfully and strengthen your approach over time.

Read the Essential Practices in full and access more detailed guidance on implementing AI responsibly at ai.gov.au

5. Additional resources

Essential AI Practices

The National AI Centre's Essential AI Practices support the safe and responsible use of AI and provide guidance for AI adoption.

<https://www.ai.gov.au/staying-safe-and-responsible/essential-ai-practices>

AI and Australian Law

Understand how Australian laws support AI safety by addressing common AI risks and harms.

<https://www.ai.gov.au/staying-safe-and-responsible/ai-and-australian-law>

AI risk screening questions

A simple questionnaire to help you check what processes and level of control you may need to have in place for different types of AI use.

<https://www.ai.gov.au/practical-guides-and-learning/planning-tools-and-templates/ai-screening-questions>

Prepare your business for AI

A guide to help you decide how AI fits into your work, from planning through to rollout.

<https://www.ai.gov.au/planning-ai/prepare-your-business>

AI Directory

An online directory of Australian businesses with AI products and services that can support your organisation.

<https://aidirectory.industry.gov.au/directory>

Digital Solutions Program

The Australian Government's Digital Solutions Program offers practical support to help businesses build their digital skills.

<https://www.digitalsolutionsprogram.com.au/>

AI Adopt Centres

AI Adopt Centres help small and medium businesses operating in key industries to use AI in a practical and responsible way. Free support is available to eligible Australian organisations.

<https://www.ai.gov.au/about/connect-us/ai-adopt-centres>