

Imagine Talking to an Intern

You open your AI chat tool. There's an empty text box staring at you. What do you even say?

Research shows that people who are more comfortable simply *talking* to AI get dramatically better results than those who treat it like a search engine. The shift from typing keywords to having a conversation is the single biggest unlock for most people. But how do you get comfortable talking to a machine?

Here's the trick: **imagine you just hired a new intern.**

Meet Your AI Intern

This intern is unusual. They've memorized most of the internet. They're incredibly fast, eager to help, and very inexpensive. They can research, format, calculate, compare, and draft almost anything you ask.

But they have two critical weaknesses:

1. **They're not very smart.** They can follow instructions well, but they don't understand your organization, your context, or the nuances of your work the way a seasoned colleague does.
2. **They're good at lying.** Not on purpose, but when they don't know the answer, they'll confidently make something up rather than say "I don't know."

Knowing this, you wouldn't hand them your most complex strategic project on day one. You'd start small. You'd give clear instructions. You'd check their work.

That's exactly how to approach AI.

Start Small: What Would You Have an Intern Do?

Look at what you're working on today. What might you ask a new intern to help with?

- Research something and summarize what they find
- Format a document or clean up a spreadsheet
- Double-check a calculation or compare two versions of something
- Draft a first attempt at an email you'll rewrite
- Pull together background information before a meeting

These are perfect AI tasks. They're bounded, checkable, and low-risk if the output isn't perfect.

Try It Now

Pick one small task from your day and use this prompt:

I'm a {{ your role }} and I need help with {{ small, specific task }}. Before you start, tell me what information you need from me to do this well.

Notice what happens: instead of getting a generic answer, the AI asks you clarifying questions. Now you're in a conversation, not a search. That's the shift.

Before and After



Before (search engine mode): You type "employee onboarding best practices" and get a generic article-style response you could have found on Google.

After (intern mode): You say "I'm onboarding three new hires next week in our Austin office. Help me build a first-week checklist, but first ask me what our current process looks like so you can build on it instead of starting from scratch." The AI asks about your existing materials, your team structure, and what's worked before. The output is specific to your situation.

Beyond Managing, Amplifying

The intern analogy is useful for getting started, but don't stop there. AI isn't really an intern you manage. It's a tool that amplifies, expands, and grows your capability.

A [Harvard Business Review article](#) makes the case that organizations fail with GenAI when they treat it as traditional automation, something that just executes tasks, rather than as an assistive agent that gets smarter and makes *humans* smarter over time. The same applies to how you work with it individually. The intern framing gets you past the blank-page problem and into a conversation. But the real payoff comes when you shift from delegating small tasks to using AI as a thinking partner that helps you learn, grow, and tackle work you couldn't do alone.

That shift is what the [Growth Mindset](#) guide is about: approaching AI with the goal of building your own capability, not just getting output.

Start Small, Then Grow

Many people start with large, ambitious jobs for AI and are met with disappointment. That's like handing your intern the company's five-year strategic plan on their first day. When you break work down into smaller tasks, AI performs dramatically better, and you build the intuition for when to push further.

The other thing we've found is that it's hard to know what AI can help with and hard to break jobs down into the right-sized tasks. The good news? That's something you can use AI for too. Which leads to the [Persona SuperPrompt](#), a technique for getting AI to figure out what kind of expert you need and start asking the right questions.

Next Steps

- Pick one task from your day and try the intern approach
- When you're ready to go beyond simple tasks, see the [Persona SuperPrompt](#) for turning AI into a specialist
- For a framework on choosing the right level of AI involvement for any task, see [Three Ways to Work with AI](#)

Guide by Jonathan and Neil at [Workplace Labs](#) where we teach people how to leverage AI more effectively in their work through mindsets, frameworks, and practical applications.