

The Pastel Survival Guide to Working with AI

Eight practical lessons—none requiring a technical background—to help you stop preparing and start building.



Rule #1: Don't Eat Gas Station AI

The gap between free-tier and frontier models isn't incremental—it's categorical.

The Cold Sandwich - Free Tiers



Underwhelming first impressions.
Generic, superficial answers.
Kills your curiosity.

The Gourmet Meal - Frontier Models



Deep reasoning capabilities.
True collaboration.
The highest ROI tool investment (\$20/mo)
you will make.

Trying weak AI once and giving up is a tragedy. Pay for the best model to see what it can actually do.

Rule #2: Be a Collaborator, Not a Bad Boss

The bottleneck isn't the AI's power—it's your ability to properly scope a task.



If a human engineer couldn't deliver from your brief, AI can't either. AI doesn't do subtext—be explicit.



❌ The Bad Boss (Chatbot Mode):

"Build me an app." / "Should I change jobs?"

Result: Vague, useless Wikipedia-style overviews.

✅ The Good Partner (Collaborator Mode):

"Here is my context. Here are my constraints. Ask me questions until we reach a conclusion together."

Result: Tailored, actionable insights. True problem-solving partner.

Rule #3: Build Your Way Out of Boredom

The barrier to creation has never been lower. Start with your most annoying daily problems.

1. Find the Pain

Endless arguments over card game scores? Manual spreadsheet formatting?



2. Ask: Can AI Help?

Make this a mandatory mental trigger before starting any manual task.



3. Solo Creation

Collaborate with AI to build custom, disposable software just for your hyper-specific need.

You don't need to know how to code. You just need a real pain point that only you understand.

Rule #4: Beware the Gentle Lies

AI is programmed to be encouraging. It will flatter your worst work.

AI's Gentle Lies



Great thinking! Impressive resume! Insightful!
(It is designed to make you feel good).

The Real World



The proposal fails. The code breaks.
The market rejects it.

Enjoy AI's warm praise, but **ALWAYS** test your output in the real world. Real users are the only feedback that matters.

Rule #5: Taste is Your Ultimate Moat

When everyone has access to the exact same AI, the baseline becomes table stakes.

3 Months Ago



If you look back at what you made three months ago and cringe... congratulations, your taste improved.



Today



The Anatomy of Taste – 3-Part Framework

1. Start Messy

Three months of hands-on usage > three months of tutorials.

2. Curate & Judge

AI generates 100 options. You must choose the one with the right soul.

3. Apply Lived Experience

Your late nights and human judgment cannot be replicated.