

AI TOOLS ACADEMY

SOUND LIKE YOURSELF

Get AI to write in your voice, not its own.

Five steps. One reusable instruction. No more beige.

The Finisher's Workbook · Guide

What this is

The most common reason people stop using AI for writing is not that it is wrong. It is that it sounds wrong. The email is fine, technically, and you would never in your life have written it. So you rewrite it, and now the tool has cost you time instead of saving it.

This workbook fixes that one problem. In five steps you will work out what your writing actually sounds like, turn that into a short instruction your AI can follow, test it against something you really wrote, and keep it somewhere it loads automatically. After that, every draft starts closer to you.

Each step has two pages. A **Think** page, which tells you why the step exists and what it looks like in practice. And a **Do** page, with the exact actions, a prompt to paste into your AI, a line that tells you when you are done, and a space to write down what you decided. Fill the spaces in. By the end, this is a record of how you did it, and the template for next time.

Where this comes from

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

I coach working professionals on using AI at their desks, and the first thing almost everyone shows me is a draft they are embarrassed by. Perfectly formed, oddly formal, three adjectives where they would have used one, and a closing line no human has ever said out loud.

The fix is never "write a better prompt." It is "tell it who you are." People who do the five steps here stop rewriting and start editing, which is a different job and a much faster one. The examples in this workbook are composites from those desks, with names and details changed.

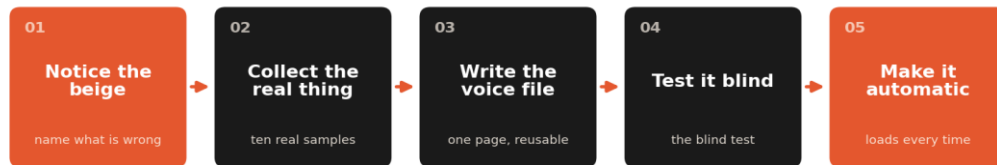
Who it is for

Anyone who writes for a living without calling themselves a writer. Managers, account handlers, teachers, civil servants, consultants, founders, executive assistants. If you send more than ten emails a day and at least one of them matters, this is for you.

It is not a grammar course, and it will not teach you to write. It assumes you already can, and that the problem is getting a machine to keep up.

How to use this workbook

The whole method on one page, then two ways in. Pick one and start tonight.



Five steps from "this sounds like a robot" to a voice file your AI reads every time

Option one: hand it to your AI

This workbook is built to be run, not just read. Upload it to your AI (or paste it in), give it the instruction below, and from that point on you have a coach. It walks you through each step, asks you the questions on the Think pages, waits for your answers, checks the "done when" line on the Do pages, and will not let you skip ahead.

COPY THIS INTO YOUR AI

I'm giving you a workbook called "Sound Like Yourself". Be my coach through it from start to finish.

Take me one step at a time. At each step, ask me the questions on the Think page and wait for my answers. Then walk me through the Do page. Hold me to the "done when" line before we move on, and remind me to fill in the "write it in" lines.

Do not let me skip Step 03. If I try to write my voice instruction before I have collected real samples, stop me and send me back.

Start by asking me what kind of writing I do most, and who reads it. Then begin at Step 01.

Option two: go it alone

Read each Think page, do each Do page, fill in the lines. The prompts are there for a running start. You will soon write better ones yourself, and that confidence is half the point.

Your Finisher's Log

This page is the spine of the workbook. Come back and fill in a row at the end of every step.

5 rows, one per step. Each one has a "write it in" space on its Do page that feeds this summary. Keep it to one line each. When every row is filled, you have done the thing, and you have a one-page account of how you did it that you can hand to your AI next time.

01 Notice the beige	The AI habit I hate most: The thing I do that AI never does:
02 Collect the real thing	The phrase I searched for that found the most "me": The sample that is most me:
03 Write the voice file	The most important rule in my voice file: Top of my never list:
04 Test it blind	Who judged the blind test: What gave the AI draft away:
05 Make it automatic	Where my voice file lives: My monthly feed slot:

QUICK ANSWER

How long does it take?

One evening for the first pass, about two hours, most of it spent finding old emails. Then ten minutes a week for a month while you tune it. The voice file keeps improving for as long as you keep using it.

01

Notice the beige

Learn to spot exactly where AI writing stops sounding like you.

You cannot fix what you cannot name. Most people know an AI draft feels off but cannot say why, so they fiddle with individual words and the whole thing still reads like a press release.

The tells are predictable once you see them. Sentences that all run the same length. Three items in every list. An adjective before every noun. Openers like "I hope this finds you well" and closers like "Please do not hesitate to reach out." A habit of announcing what a paragraph is about to do before doing it. And a flatness of feeling: nothing is ever annoying, disappointing or funny, only "challenging" or "exciting."

Your own writing has the opposite tells, and they are yours. Maybe you start emails with the ask. Maybe you use one-word sentences for emphasis. Maybe you swear, lightly, with people you trust. Those are the things the AI will sand off unless you tell it not to.

IN PRACTICE

A finance manager I worked with sent his team a weekly update that the AI had drafted. Nobody replied. The previous week, written by him in four minutes, had six replies and a joke in the thread.

We put the two side by side. His version had two sentence fragments, one question, and the phrase "this one bit me." The AI version had none of those things and was twice as long. The difference was not quality. It was that his team could hear him in one and not the other.

ASK YOURSELF

1. Which AI draft did I most recently rewrite from scratch, and what was wrong with it?
2. What is the phrase I would never use that AI keeps giving me?
3. Who in my life would spot an AI email from me instantly? What would give it away?

01 Notice the beige

Take the last AI-written draft you sent, or one you abandoned. Paste it into your AI with the prompt below and get a list of everything in it that is not you. Do not ask it to fix anything yet. This is a diagnosis.

Then do the same to a piece of writing you are proud of. You want two lists: what the machine does that you do not, and what you do that the machine does not.

COPY THIS INTO YOUR AI

I want you to diagnose, not fix. Here is a draft an AI wrote for me: [**paste it**]

And here is something I actually wrote and would happily send again: [**paste it**]

Compare them. List the specific habits in the AI draft that I do not have: sentence length, openers and closers, list patterns, adjectives, tone, anything. Then list the habits in my real writing that the AI draft is missing. Be concrete. Quote the phrases. Do not rewrite either piece.

THIS STEP IS DONE WHEN

- ☐ You have a written list of at least five things AI drafts do that you do not.
- ☐ You have a list of at least five things your real writing does that AI drafts miss.
- ☐ You could explain the difference to a colleague in one sentence.

WRITE IT IN

The AI habit I hate most:

The thing I do that AI never does:

How I would describe my voice in five words:

02

Collect the real thing

Gather ten pieces of writing that already sound like you.

AI learns your voice the same way a new colleague does: by reading a lot of it. The mistake is describing your style in adjectives ("friendly but professional") and hoping. Adjectives are how everyone describes themselves. Samples are how you actually sound.

You need ten. Not ten of your best. Ten that are typical, across the kinds of writing you actually do, written to the people you actually write to. A quick reply to a colleague. A careful message to a client. A note to your team. Something where you were annoyed. Something where you were pleased. Range matters more than polish.

Two rules. Only use things you wrote without AI help, or the machine will learn its own voice back. And strip out anything confidential before it goes anywhere near a chatbot: names, figures, client details. The voice survives that; the risk does not.

IN PRACTICE

An executive assistant collected her ten samples in twenty minutes by searching her sent folder for "just checking" and "quick one," two phrases she knew she used constantly. Every hit was pure her.

Her tenth sample was a message to a supplier who had let her down. She nearly left it out for being too blunt. It turned out to be the most useful one, because it showed the AI what she sounded like when she was being firm, which was the exact register it kept getting wrong.

QUICK ANSWER

What if I write differently to different people?

Everyone does, and that is useful data. Label each sample with who it was to. In Step 04 you will tell the AI about the registers, and it can switch between them. One voice, several volumes.

ASK YOURSELF

1. Which two or three phrases do I know I overuse? Search my sent folder for them.
2. Where is the writing I do when nobody is watching the tone: Slack, Teams, texts?
3. Which sample am I tempted to leave out because it is too honest? That is probably the one to keep.

02 Collect the real thing

Open your sent folder, Slack or Teams, and pull ten samples into one document. Aim for a spread: two quick replies, two careful ones, two to your team, two to people outside, one where you were pleased, one where you were not.

Under each one, write a single line: who it was to and what mood you were in. Then redact anything you would not read aloud in a lift. Save the file. This is your voice bank, and you will add to it.

Sample type	Where to find it
Quick internal reply	Search sent mail or chat for your tic phrases ("quick one", "just checking", "cheers")
Careful external message	Anything to a client, parent, supplier or senior person that you drafted twice
Team note	A weekly update, a thank you, a heads-up about a change
Firm message	The one where something went wrong and you had to say so
Something warm	Congratulations, condolences, a welcome to a new starter

COPY THIS INTO YOUR AI

I am building a bank of my own writing so you can learn how I sound. Here are ten samples, each labelled with who it was to and the mood I was in:

[paste all ten, with the one-line labels]

Do not rewrite anything. Read them all, then tell me: what stays constant across every sample regardless of audience? What changes when I write to my team versus outside? Point to specific phrases and sentence shapes. Then tell me which two samples are the most "me," and why.

THIS STEP IS DONE WHEN

- ☐ You have ten labelled samples in one file, none of them AI-assisted.
- ☐ Confidential details are gone.
- ☐ The AI has told you what stays constant across all ten, and you agree with it.



WRITE IT IN

The phrase I searched for that found the most "me":

The sample that is most me:

What stays constant no matter who I write to:

03

Write the voice file

Turn the samples into one short instruction your AI can follow every time.

This is the step people skip, and it is the one that makes everything reusable. A voice file is a short document, half a page to a page, that tells the AI how you write: what you do, what you never do, and how you change register for different readers. It is written as rules and examples, not adjectives.

The good news is you do not write it from scratch. You have ten samples and a diagnosis from Step 01. You ask the AI to draft the file from those, then you correct it, because you are the only person who knows which rules are real and which are coincidences.

A useful voice file has four parts. How I open and close. How I build sentences and paragraphs. Words and phrases I use, and ones I never would. How I sound to different readers. And it ends with two or three short samples pasted in whole, because examples teach faster than rules.

IN PRACTICE

A consultant's first voice file came back from the AI with the line "uses a warm and professional tone." She crossed it out and replaced it with: "Opens with the point. One idea per paragraph. Uses "look" to start a sentence when being direct. Never says "reach out." Signs off with just her first name, no "kind regards."

That version was shorter, blunter and worked immediately. The adjective version had described half the working population.

ASK YOURSELF

1. Which of the rules the AI drafted are real habits, and which are one-offs it has over-read?
2. What are three phrases I would genuinely never write? Put them in the never list.
3. If a new assistant had to write as me on day one, what is the single most important rule?

03 Write the voice file

Give the AI your samples and your Step 01 diagnosis and ask for a draft voice file in the four-part shape. Then edit it hard. Delete every adjective. Replace every vague rule with a concrete one that quotes your own words. Add the never list. Paste two of your best samples at the bottom.

Keep it under a page. If it is longer, it is describing rather than instructing.

COPY THIS INTO YOUR AI

Using my ten samples and this diagnosis of what AI drafts get wrong for me:

[paste your Step 01 lists]

Draft a voice file I can give to any AI so it writes as me. Four sections: (1) how I open and close; (2) how I build sentences and paragraphs, with typical lengths and rhythm; (3) words and phrases I use, and a separate list of ones I never use; (4) how I shift for different readers. Write every rule as an instruction with a quoted example from my samples. No adjectives like "friendly" or "professional." Under one page. Then leave space at the end for two samples.

THIS STEP IS DONE WHEN

- ☐ Your voice file is under a page and contains no adjectives describing tone.
- ☐ Every rule quotes something you actually wrote.
- ☐ There is a never list with at least five entries.

WRITE IT IN

The most important rule in my voice file:

Top of my never list:

How my voice shifts for outside readers:

04

Test it blind

Prove the file works against writing you have not shown it.

A voice file that has only been used on the samples it was built from has not been tested. It has been fitted. The real test is new material: a message you need to send this week, drafted by the AI with the file, and compared against how you would have written it.

Better still is the blind version. Give the AI the file and a brief. Write your own version of the same message without looking. Then show both to someone who knows your writing and ask them to pick which is you. If they hesitate, the file works. If they pick instantly, the difference they spotted is your next rule.

Expect to fail the first time. That is the point. Each miss gives you one more concrete line for the file, and three rounds of that usually gets you to a draft you edit rather than rewrite.

IN PRACTICE

A headteacher tested his file on a letter to parents about a change to the school day. His deputy, asked to pick the real one, chose the AI version, because it had a phrase he used every term and had forgotten was his.

On the second test she got it right, because the AI version had put the reassurance before the news and he always did it the other way round. That went into the file as one line: "Bad news first, then what we are doing about it." It has held ever since.

QUICK ANSWER

What if the AI keeps drifting back to its own voice mid-draft?

It will, on longer pieces. Two fixes. Ask for the draft in sections and check each one. And add a line to the file that says "if unsure, shorter and plainer." Drift is almost always toward long and formal.

ASK YOURSELF

1. What message do I need to send this week that I can use as the test?
2. Who knows my writing well enough to judge, and will be honest?
3. When the tester spotted the difference, what exactly did they point at?

04 Test it blind

Pick a real message you need to send. Give the AI your voice file and a two-line brief, and get a draft. Write your own without looking at it. Show both to your judge, unlabelled, and ask which is you and what gave it away.

Take what they pointed at and turn it into one new rule in the file. Run the test again next week with a different kind of message. Three rounds is usually enough.

COPY THIS INTO YOUR AI

Here is my voice file: [**paste it**]

Write this message as me, following the file exactly: [**two-line brief: who it is to, what it needs to do**]

Before you give me the draft, check it against the never list and remove anything on it. Then give me the draft only, no preamble, no explanation, no options.

THIS STEP IS DONE WHEN

- ☐ A real person has compared an AI draft with your own and hesitated, or got it wrong.
- ☐ You have added at least one new rule based on what they pointed at.
- ☐ You edited the last draft rather than rewriting it.

WRITE IT IN

Who judged the blind test:

What gave the AI draft away:

The rule I added because of it:

05

Make it automatic

Put the file somewhere it loads every time, then keep it alive.

A voice file you have to remember to paste in is a voice file you will stop using in a fortnight. The final step is making it load by itself, so every new chat starts as you.

Every major tool has a place for this. ChatGPT has custom instructions and Projects. Claude has Projects with project instructions, custom styles, and an account-wide instructions setting. Gemini has Gems. Copilot has custom instructions too, and in the business version you can build agents. Whichever you use, the voice file goes in the standing instruction, and you never think about it again.

Then keep it alive. Once a month, add one new sample and one new rule. When your role changes, when you start writing to a new kind of reader, the file changes too. A voice file is a living thing, and the ones that work are the ones that get fed.

IN PRACTICE

A project manager set her file up as project instructions and forgot about it. Three months later a new colleague asked how she managed to draft so fast. She had stopped noticing that every draft already sounded like her. That is the finish line: the tool disappears.

She now keeps two versions. One for internal writing, one for the board pack, where the register is different and the never list is longer. Same voice, different volume, and both load automatically depending on which project she opens.

ASK YOURSELF

1. Which tool do I actually write in most days? That is where the file lives first.
2. Do I need one file or two? Internal and external are usually enough.
3. When is my monthly ten minutes to feed it, and is it in the calendar?

05 Make it automatic

Open the tool you write in most and find its standing-instruction feature. Paste the voice file in. Start a fresh chat, ask for something small, and check it sounds like you without any further prompting.

Put a ten-minute monthly slot in your calendar called "feed the voice file." Each time: one new sample into the bank, one new rule or never-phrase into the file, one old rule deleted if it no longer holds.

Tool	Where the voice file lives
ChatGPT	Settings, Personalisation, Custom instructions (the free plan caps these at 1,500 characters, so keep the rules short and put your samples in a Project). Or a Project with the file in its instructions.
Claude	A Project, with the file pasted into Project instructions. Or a custom style made from your writing samples. Or the instructions setting in your Claude profile, for a lighter version.
Gemini	A Gem, with the file as the Gem's instructions.
Copilot	Custom instructions in Copilot's settings. Or an agent made in Agent Builder if your organisation has Microsoft 365 Copilot.

COPY THIS INTO YOUR AI

This is my standing voice file. Apply it to everything you write for me in this project unless I say otherwise: [**paste the file**]

Confirm you have read it by telling me, in one sentence, the most important rule and the top item on the never list. Then wait for my first request.

THIS STEP IS DONE WHEN

- ☐ The voice file loads automatically in the tool you use most.
- ☐ A fresh chat produces a draft you would send after a light edit.
- ☐ The monthly feed slot is in your calendar.

WRITE IT IN

Where my voice file lives:

My monthly feed slot:

The first draft it got right without help:

What comes next

One rule, one habit, and where to find the rest.

The rule: when a draft sounds wrong, do not rewrite it. Find the one thing that is wrong, add it to the file as a rule, and regenerate. Every rewrite is a lost lesson. Every rule is a permanent one.

The habit: keep the voice bank growing. Ten samples got you started. Thirty samples, six months from now, will let the AI handle things you would not trust it with today, like the message to the client who is upset or the note that has to land a hard decision gently.

And go back to your Finisher's Log on page four. Read the five lines. That is your voice, described by you, in a way no adjective ever managed.

That is the method. Your voice, on file, working for you.

The natural next workbook is The Difficult Message, which takes this voice file into the conversations you have been putting off. Find the rest of the series, and the free courses, at aitoolsacademy.co.uk. Questions come through the site too; I read everything.

But you do not need it to start. You need this, and one evening.