

Keep It Simple: AI for Teachers

Keep It Simple series

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Which AI Tool to Use, What to Ask, and What to Check Before It Reaches Students

Koushik Deb

Keep It Simple

Take this book a little at a time. Pick one low-risk task. Try the suggested approach with general information only, and check every line before you teach it, send it, or save it. Your school's policies and your professional judgment come first. Always.

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Published by Koushik Deb — www.koushikdeb.com

ISBN: 9798173605382

First edition, 2026

This book is general information for educational purposes. It is not professional advice for your particular situation. Your professional decisions remain yours, as do the school policies and legal duties you work under.

AI-assisted editing tools were used to improve the grammar and clarity of this book, and some illustrations were created with generative AI. The author reviewed and verified every chapter and takes full responsibility for the content.

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Tools change, and so do their prices, tiers and features. Everything here was checked at the time of writing. Verify current information and your school's current guidance before relying on either.

The characters and classroom scenes are fictionalized composites. Any resemblance to real people is coincidence.

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Do Any of These Sound Familiar?

6:45, and Maya Rodriguez has reheated the same coffee twice. Tomorrow's lesson is a title with nothing underneath it. Twelve years into eighth-grade science, with a full timetable and two children at home, she knows the standard cold. The missing part is the period itself.

Down the hall, Frank Bell has rewritten the same worksheet three times. First the reading load, then the directions, now the last question, while the copier warms up and asks for the code nobody can remember.

On Jordan Kim's kitchen table, twenty-seven responses sit next to a plate of toast gone cold, all of them waiting on comments that keep circling the same three misunderstandings.

In the front office, Denise Carter types a message home about a difficult afternoon, deletes it, types it again. Clear, without making a guess sound like a fact.



The work keeps arriving in small pieces. Plan, explain, adjust, make, sort. A general AI assistant can take a run at some of those pieces. So can a document-grounded tool, or a tool built for classrooms. What none of them can do is decide. That part stays with you.

Five things AI can actually help with

DRAFT a lesson, message, rubric, or first version.

UNDERSTAND a pile of trusted notes or documents.

ADAPT one resource for different learners.

CREATE questions, visuals, or classroom materials.

ORGANIZE scattered notes into a usable shape.

This book will not make you an AI expert. The next chapters are where the work starts.

BY THE NUMBERS

53

Teachers work an average of 53 hours per week, about 7 hours more than the average working adult, per the RAND State of the American Teacher survey.

Source: Education Week, 2023

BY THE NUMBERS

43%

Direct teaching accounts for about 43% of a full-time teacher's working time; lesson planning takes about 14% and marking student work about 9%, so roughly a quarter of the job happens outside the classroom.

Source: Education Week, 2022

Start Here Tonight

You do not have to read this book in order. You probably do not have time to. So pick the thing that is actually eating tonight. Go to that chapter. Do the ten-minute version. Come back another evening for the rest.

What is eating your time tonight?

If this is the problem	Go to
Tomorrow’s lesson is still a blank page	Your General AI Assistant
Six PDFs are open and none of them is the one you need	Ask Your Documents
One reading does not fit everyone in the room	One Lesson, Different Learners
Your notes need to become something students can look at	From Boring Notes to Visual Lessons
Sunday’s quiz is half finished	Quizzes Without Spending Sunday Evening
The same four students answer everything	Make the Lesson Interactive
The feedback pile grew again today	Feedback Without Losing the Human Voice
A routine message home has been open for twenty minutes	Emails, Notes, and the Small Jobs That Eat Your Day

Pick one. Set ten minutes. Stop trying to learn AI tonight.

Before you paste anything

One page, read once, before you open any tool. The Safety chapter at the back has the reasoning and the details. This is the version you can hold in your head at 9pm.

Green — go ahead. Generic planning. Public information. Material you wrote yourself that names nobody. A topic, a grade level, a standard, a time limit, a reading level.

Yellow — ask first. Anonymized student work with every name stripped. Internal school documents. Anything a student will use directly. Browser extensions on a school device. None of these is forbidden; all of them are your school's decision before they are yours.

Red — not into a tool your school has not approved for it. Student names, student ID numbers, grades, attendance, discipline records, IEP or 504 details, health or disability information, anything about a family, and any piece of student work that could identify who wrote it. Also red: letting a tool make the call on a grade, a placement, a referral, or a concern about a student's safety.

The line is not about how clever the tool is. It is about whose information you are handing over, and whether your school has agreed that this particular tool may hold it.

If you are unsure which color something is, it is yellow. Ask.

Draft, check, decide

Every workflow in this book is the same three moves.

The tool drafts. You check it against what you know. You decide what reaches students.

That is the whole method. The next chapter takes ninety seconds to explain why it works.

You Don't Need to Be an AI Expert

When these tools answer, they predict likely text from patterns in their training and from the words you provide. They are not automatically looking up your curriculum or checking each claim, so a fluent answer can sound certain while being wrong.



The five kinds of tool

General assistant: drafts, rewrites, explains, or summarizes whatever you paste in.

Document-grounded tool: answers only from documents you supply, and points back to them.

Teacher-specific tool: walks you through common classroom jobs using ready-made forms and workflows.

Visual tool: turns text or an outline into slides, worksheets, or posters.

Assessment tool: builds quizzes, quick activities, or checks for understanding.

One rule applies to all five. Never put anything identifying into a public tool; the Safety chapter explains why.

Draft, Check, Decide

Draft: Ask for a possible starting point.

Check: Inspect it for accuracy, fit, access, safety, and school rules.

Decide: Keep, change, or discard it. The tool drafts. You decide.

RESEARCH NOTE

60%

60% of US K-12 public school teachers used AI tools during the 2024-25 school year, per the Gallup and Walton Family Foundation "Teaching for Tomorrow" survey of 2,232 teachers.

Source: Walton Family Foundation, 2025

The Prompt Is the Instruction, Not the Product

The second energy-transfer worksheet of the day lay beside the first. Maya Rodriguez had written shorter sentences for Period 2, something to occupy the early finishers for Period 4. Last year's answer key still pointed at a diagram the unit dropped in September. The copier thumped away in the workroom, and a skin had formed on her coffee.

At 6:18 p.m., the page looked finished, or finished enough to fool a tired eye. Maya wanted questions that dug at one idea: cold does not move from one object to another. A page asking students to recite a definition would miss that completely. Three classes still needed a version.



Frank Bell, the veteran social studies teacher, filled the doorway.

“Are these tomorrow’s questions?”

Maya looked at the worksheet. Then at the answer key.

Produce a first draft worth keeping, check it properly, and spare herself the empty box next Thursday. That was the job in front of her.

A vague request makes the tool guess

A general AI assistant can draft a worksheet quickly. It can also guess nearly everything that matters.

A vague instruction gives it a topic and a genre. The tool must guess the grade level, the objective, the length, the reading load, the materials available, the kinds of mistakes students make, and what the teacher wants to inspect.

Here is the weak version:

Make me an energy worksheet.

The result might be a three-page packet. It might include a lab, a vocabulary crossword, an invented standard, or questions about a concept the class has not learned. It may sound polished. That is not the same as being useful. A stronger instruction gives the tool a bounded job:

Draft an eighth-grade science worksheet for a 15-minute lesson on energy transfer. Include eight short retrieval questions, one short-response question about particles, a two-question exit ticket, student-facing success criteria, a likely misconception for the teacher, and a separate answer key. Use these facts only: thermal energy transfers from warmer objects to cooler ones; cold is not a substance that moves; particle motion increases as thermal energy increases. Use plain language. Do not require equipment, color printing, extra diagrams, homework, or a full lesson plan. Flag anything I must verify.

The strong version does not guarantee good science. It gives Maya something narrower to read.

That difference matters. The prompt is an instruction to a drafting tool. The worksheet is the product, and the teacher remains responsible for it.

Maya tried the longer version in the school-approved general assistant available to her. She put nothing identifying into it.

The first draft still had problems. One item suggested that cold traveled from a table into a mug. Two questions tested the same definition. The answer key said that heat energy disappeared into the air.

Maya circled the errors. She rewrote the science, removed the duplicate items, and lowered the reading load on one question. Frank found the “disappeared” line while they stood at the copier.

“Another circle,” he said.

The next day, Eli Thompson noticed that the exit ticket asked students to explain *why*, not just fill in a word. That was useful evidence. It still did not make the page approved.

Maya saved the prompt beside the worksheet. Next week, she could change the topic and the facts without rebuilding the whole request.

The seven ingredients

A good prompt does not need fancy language. It needs the information the tool would otherwise invent. These seven ingredients make a classroom request easier to draft and easier to check.

1. Context

Context tells the tool what changes the answer. Give it the grade band, subject, learning objective, content already taught, the vocabulary that matters, and the broad conditions of your room. “Grade 8 science; students have learned producers, consumers, and decomposers; use plain language” gets you something usable. “make it age appropriate” gets you mush. Keep private student information out. Describe a general need, like “shorter sentence structure,” rather than describing an identifiable child.

2. Goal

One job. That’s the goal. “Draft six questions that show whether students can explain energy transfer in a food web” is a goal. “Make an ecosystems quiz” is a topic, and topics get you mush. Say who will use the draft and what decision you will make afterward. Maya wanted a worksheet she could inspect. What her students should learn was her call, not the tool’s.

3. Constraints

Constraints are the limits that prevent unwanted extras. State the length, number and type of items, reading level, materials, tone, vocabulary, and things the tool must not invent. “Do not add a lab, homework, invented standards, citations, or student information” may feel fussy. It is cheaper than deleting a page of material you never asked for.

4. Examples

Show the tool an example. One question in your own classroom voice fixes sentence length, distractor quality, the thinking you want. Dig up an old teacher-created item, or write one while the kettle boils. Never paste identifiable student work into a public tool. No example handy? Say that plainly, then give it plain directions instead.

5. Output shape

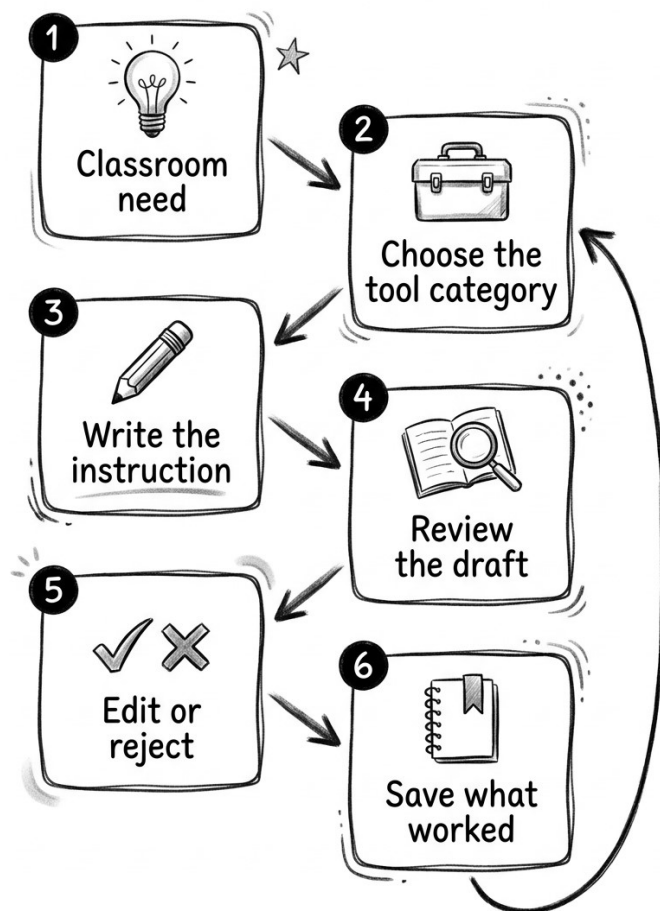
Output shape tells the tool how to arrange the draft. Ask for a student section and a separate answer key. Request numbered items, blank lines, a table, or teacher notes when those features matter. A shape makes errors visible. Maya could scan a separate key more carefully than a key placed directly beneath every question.

6. Review

Review instructions identify what you want surfaced for checking. Ask the tool to flag uncertain facts, possible multiple answers, reading-load problems, missing information, or wording that might reinforce a named misconception. This does not make the tool a fact-checker. It gives you a shorter list of places to inspect.

7. Iteration

Iteration means fixing the useful draft instead of starting over. Quote the weak item and ask for one change: “Rewrite question 3 so only one answer is defensible. Keep the objective and leave the other questions unchanged.” One narrow request. The rest of the draft stays intact. And if the facts are still wrong? Stop asking for another rewrite. Check the source you trust. A prompt can be short. Three words, if that’s all it needs. Or it can be a saved block that you reuse for a month. Either way, the ingredients serve the classroom job.



Choose the tool, instruct it, review the result, and adjust the next attempt.

One reusable prompt

Maya kept one prompt for worksheet drafts. It was long enough to be useful and plain enough to edit.

You are helping an eighth-grade science teacher draft classroom materials.

Context:

- Topic: energy transfer
- Learning objective: Students explain how thermal energy moves between objects.
- Content taught: thermal energy transfers from warmer objects to cooler ones; cold is not a substance that moves; particle motion increases as thermal energy increases.
- Class condition: mixed reading levels
- Available materials: ordinary paper and pencil; no lab equipment or color printing

Goal:

Draft a 15-minute retrieval-practice worksheet that I will review before students see it.

Constraints:

- Use plain language.
- Include eight short retrieval questions, one short-response question, and a two-question exit ticket.
- Do not add homework, extensions, a full lesson plan, extra diagrams, invented standards, citations, or student information.
- Keep the science within the facts listed above.

Examples:

Use familiar classroom objects such as a mug, spoon, table, or cold pack. Include at least one item that surfaces the mistaken idea that cold moves from one object to another.

Output shape:

1. Student-facing success criteria
2. Student worksheet
3. Teacher-facing misconception note
4. Separate answer key

Review:

Flag any scientific statement, answer, or wording I must verify. Identify any item with more than one defensible answer. Do not call the draft ready for students.

After drafting, wait for my revision requests.

Maya saved the block with the worksheet and added two notes: “shorten item 4” and “check the answer about particles.” The saved prompt gave her a starting point. It did not make the worksheet true.