

# AI BASICS FOR THE CURIOUS — SPRING 2026

## Session 2: What AI Is — and What It Isn't

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<p><b>THE CENTRAL IDEA</b> Artificial Intelligence does not think, understand, or possess awareness. It generates language by predicting what comes next based on patterns learned from large text data. AI predicts words — it does not understand meaning.</p> <p><b>WHY AI FEELS INTELLIGENT</b> AI copies human tone, organizes information clearly, and sounds confident. But fluency does not equal understanding, structure does not equal truth, and confidence does not equal accuracy.</p> <p><b>HOW AI WORKS</b> Tokens: small text units such as words or parts of words. Prediction: calculates the most likely next word repeatedly to form sentences.</p> <p><b>WHAT A LARGE LANGUAGE MODEL IS</b> Large = trained on enormous text data. Language = detects word patterns. Model = mathematical relationships.</p> <p>AI is pattern-rich but experience-poor. It</p>	<p><b>PROMPTING CONTROLS RESULTS</b> AI responds directly to instructions. Better instructions produce better results. Clarity reduces guessing.</p> <p><b>WEAK VS STRONG PROMPTS</b> Weak: “Explain Medicare.” Strong: “Explain Medicare to a 75-year-old retiree in California using 5 bullet points and one simple analogy.”</p> <p><b>THE 4-PART PROMPT FORMULA</b> 1. Role — perspective 2. Task — action 3. Format — structure 4. Constraints — limits, tone, audience</p> <p><b>EXAMPLE</b> Act as a travel planner. Create a 3-day itinerary for Santa Barbara for a retired couple. Use bullet points. Keep it relaxed and walkable.</p> <p><b>WHAT THE DEMOS SHOWED</b> Changing perspective, emotion, tone, or structure changes the output. AI does not feel or imagine — it predicts storytelling patterns. You guide</p>
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<p>has read widely but lived nothing.</p> <p><b>MAJOR AI TOOLS</b> ChatGPT (OpenAI), Gemini (Google), Microsoft Copilot, Claude (Anthropic). Different tools — same prediction mechanism.</p> <p><b>USING AI WISELY</b> Helpful for: writing drafts, summaries, explanations, brainstorming, planning. Do NOT rely on for: medical, legal, financial, or safety-critical decisions.</p> <p>Rule: AI drafts. You decide.</p>	<p>direction.</p> <p><b>CORE TAKEAWAY</b> AI predicts. You direct. Wisdom is human.</p> <p>AI provides language and structure. Humans provide judgment, values, experience, and responsibility.</p> <p><b>CONFIDENCE MINDSET</b> Understand the tool. Structure prompts. Experiment safely. AI is an assistant — not an authority.</p>
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