

Foundations of Artificial Intelligence

Practical AI for Real Life



Q3 / November 2025

Presented by

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About the Speaker



Mason James
Entrepreneur & AI Engineer

For two decades, Mason James has turned complex technology into useful tools as a founder and technologist. He has built and sold multiple companies and recently partnered with two former Google engineers on an AI initiative.

Alongside his ongoing work building AI services, Mason's nine-lecture series uses clear stories and practical demos to show how AI supports the day-to-day needs of businesses, educators, and communities.

Content



1 Welcome! How did we get here? >

2 Current AI: Prompts, Tools, Software >

3 Onboarding Automation >

4 Transformational Marketing >

5 Navigating AI Risks & Ethics >

6 Next Steps: AI Implementation >

How we got here

What IS AI?

The emergence of Large Language Models (LLMs)



A conversational AI with a HUD (heads up display) such as JARVIS from Iron Man is historically thought to be the most difficult to create.

“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”

— Alan Kay

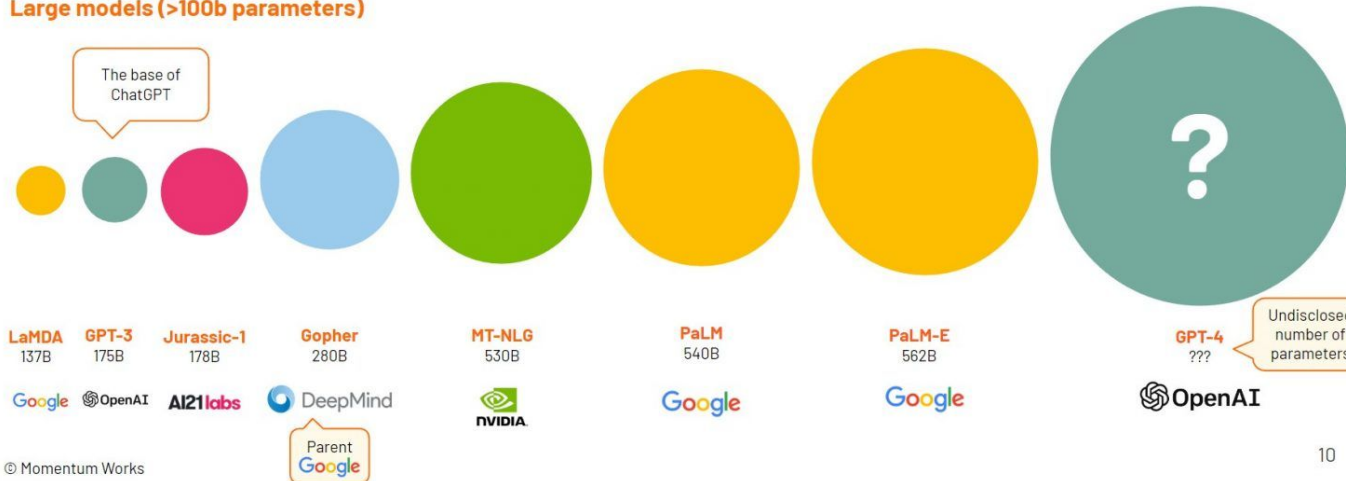
Large Language Models are becoming very large indeed



Small models (<= 100b parameters)

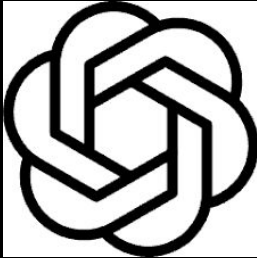


Large models (>100b parameters)



Currently, there are 3 major players in the AI space. Each have unique offerings

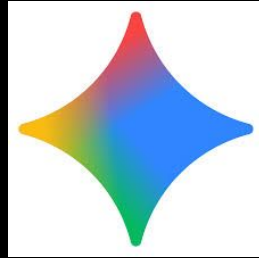
1



Open AI

ChatGPT was the first successful chat app. Today has 800M subscribers and a robust set of consumer apps.

2



Google Gemini

Excels in visual, audio, and text understanding. Currently top across most benchmarks.

3



Anthropic Claude

Smallest of the companies with early success by focusing on coding, specifically. Excellent tool usage.

AI won't replace you.

But the version of you who learns how to use it?

Yeah, that one **absolutely** will.



Demo Time!

What can we do today?

Getting the most out of AI:

1. Choose your Provider
2. Choose your Model
3. Get better Answers
4. Multimodal Inputs
5. Making things for you: Images, Video, Code, and Documents
6. Additional Quick Tips

[NotebookLM](#) | [ElevenLabs](#) | [Perplexity](#) | [Grok](#) | [Replicate](#)

How do we use AI?

- **Laddering
Intelligences**

1. **Clarifier model:**

“Help me figure out what I’m actually trying to do.”

→ Questions, summary, brief.

2. **Architect model (Thinking):**

“Turn this into a precise plan or prompt for an expert.”

→ Structured instructions, checklist, final prompt.

3. **Specialist model (Pro / Deep Research / Codex):**

“Do the deep work according to this plan.”

→ Research, code, strategy, analysis.

Define the persona's specific identity, profession, or character. Specify the domain knowledge and skills it should possess.

Describe the intended user or group the chatbot is addressing. This tailors the complexity, language, and assumptions.

Specify the emotional quality, formality, and linguistic style of the response (e.g., professional, empathetic, witty, concise).

You are a seasoned astrobiologist (**Role**) explaining complex theories to a group of high school students (**Audience**). Use an enthusiastic, encouraging, and slightly informal tone (**Tone**). Your mission is to inspire them about the search for extraterrestrial life without oversimplifying the science (**Context**).

Role & Expertise

Audience

Tone & Style

Context & Mission

Anatomy of an AI Persona

I want a list of the best medium-length hikes within two hours of San Francisco.

Each hike should provide a cool and unique adventure, and be lesser known.

For each hike, return the name of the hike as I'd find it on AllTrails, then provide the starting address of the hike, the ending address of the hike, distance, drive time, hike duration, and what makes it a cool and unique adventure.

Return the top 3.

Be careful to make sure that the name of trail is correct, that it actually exists, and that the time is correct.

--

For context: my girlfriend and i hike a ton! we've done pretty much all of the local SF hikes, whether that's presidio or golden gate park. we definitely want to get out of town -- we did mount tam pretty recently, the whole thing from the beginning of the stairs to stinson - it was really long and we are definitely in the mood for something different this weekend! ocean views would still be nice. we love delicious food. one thing i loved about the mt tam hike is that it ends with a celebration (Arriving in town to breakfast!) The old missile silos and stuff near Discovery point is cool but I've just done that hike probably 20x at this point. We won't be seeing eachother for a few weeks (she has to stay in LA for work) so the uniqueness here really counts.

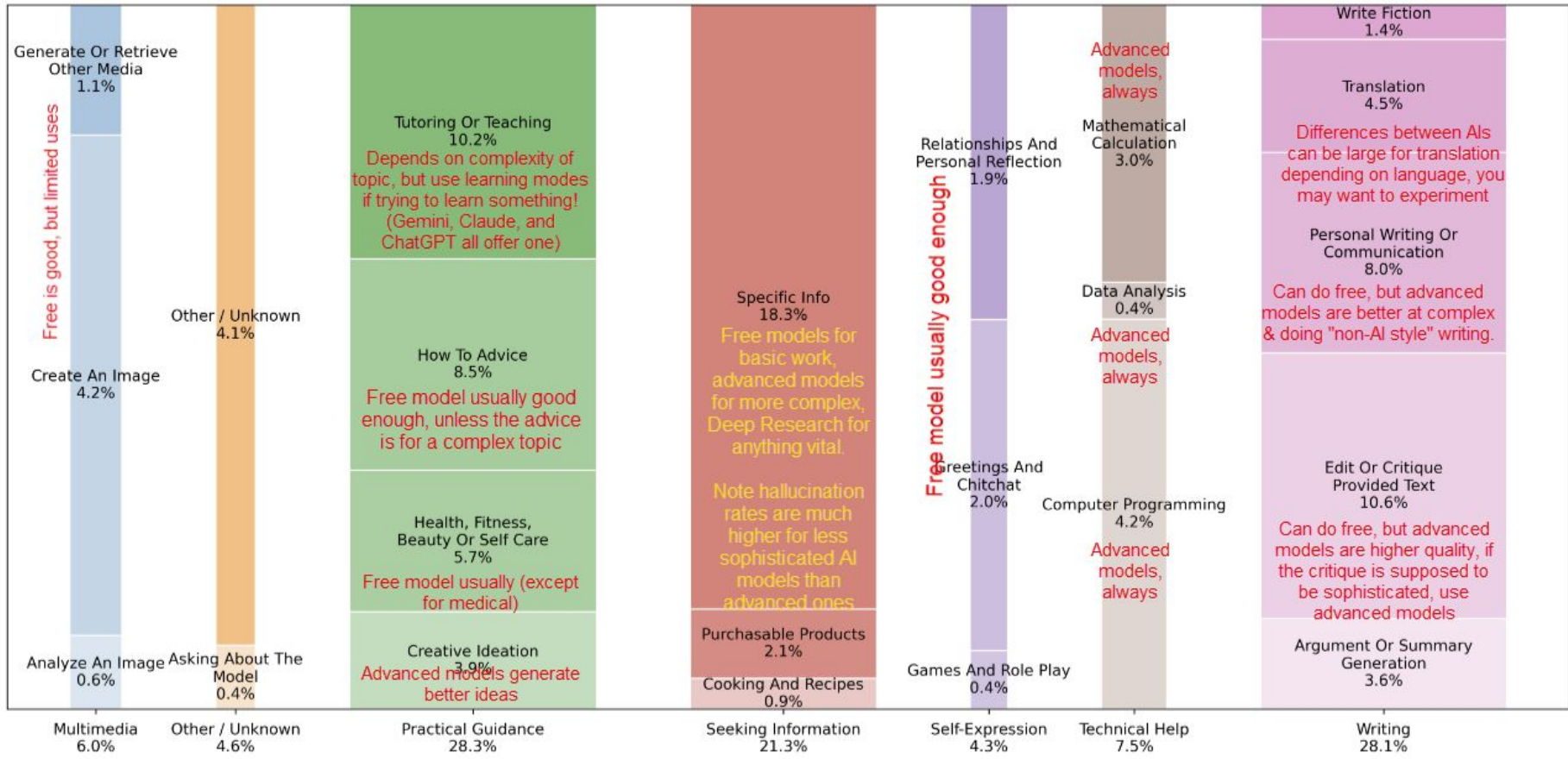
Goal

Return Format

Warnings

Context Dump

Anatomy of an AI Prompt



Best Available Human

Compare AI to the *best human you can actually get right now, not to a world-class expert you'll never hire.*

If the best available AI does better than the best available human in front of you, it's worth using.



Choose places where errors are tolerable: drafting and editing, brainstorming, prototyping, coaching yourself through decisions, and giving second opinions. You still read and approve the result, but you let AI take the first swing.

AI isn't here to replace your brain. It's here to amplify what you can do with it.

Verify -> Trust

**We used to say “trust but verify.”
Now it has to be “verify, then trust.”**

With deepfakes, AI-generated text, and realistic synthetic voices, starting from trust is too risky.

The default has to be: *assume content might be machine-made or manipulated until you’ve checked the source, context, and provenance.*



Don't make this abstract. For anything consequential (health info, financial advice, reputational claims, scary screenshots):

Check origin: link back to the original site/file.

Check credentials: look for Content Credentials or platform labels.

Check consensus: can at least two independent, reputable sources confirm it?

Once it passes those, *then* you treat it as trustworthy enough to act on or share.

Minimum-viable approach to AI Onboarding

1



CRAWL

Start with tactical tools that save time, energy, money and brain power

2



WALK

Build toolchains & toolboxes (sequences & clusters of tools) that work together

3



RUN

Start with tactical tools that save time, energy, money and brain power

4



FLY

Start with tactical tools that save time, energy, money and brain power

Let's work together

Crawl: Individual Tools

Theme: Start with **individual tools** that save **time, energy, money, and brain power**

Strategy:

- **Experiment** with individual tools, various vendors
- Build **intuition** and **familiarity** with low-stakes pilots
- Look for **reduction** in time cost primarily (5x or more reduction)

Takeaways:

- Accumulate tools and **company knowledge**
- Develop **principles, disciplines, and best practices**
- Deliberate **cross-pollination** and learning



Walk: Toolchains & Toolboxes

Toolboxes, toolchains, and stations

Strategy:

- Cluster tools logically, chain them end-to-end
- Organize them for seamless integration
- Accelerate work products along business processes

Takeaways:

- Identify workflows, inputs, and outputs
- Focus on work products from start to finish
- Organize your workbench (stations) for efficiency



Let's work together

Run: Assembly Lines

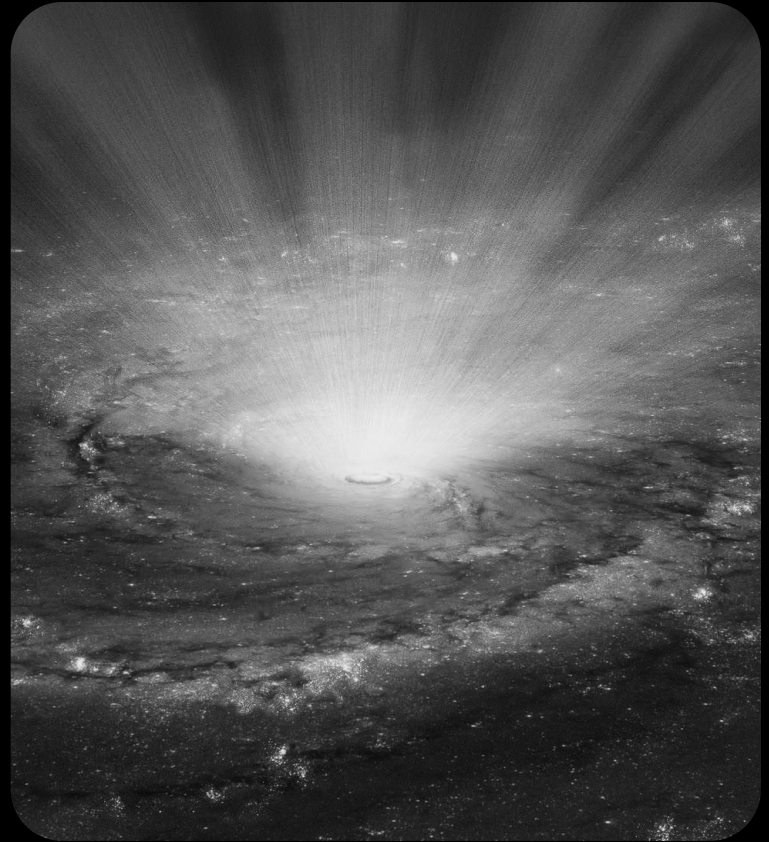
Theme: Assembly lines, automatic routing, resource allocation, reduce human involvement

Strategy:

- Automate the flow of work products along your stations
- Pay attention to inputs, outputs, and transformations
- Reduce human involvement, decision fatigue Automate checks, oversight, and monitoring

Takeaways:

- Refine and streamline, constantly optimize
- Create new layers of abstraction; tools that make tools
- Reshape the role of human labor



Fly: Autonomous Production

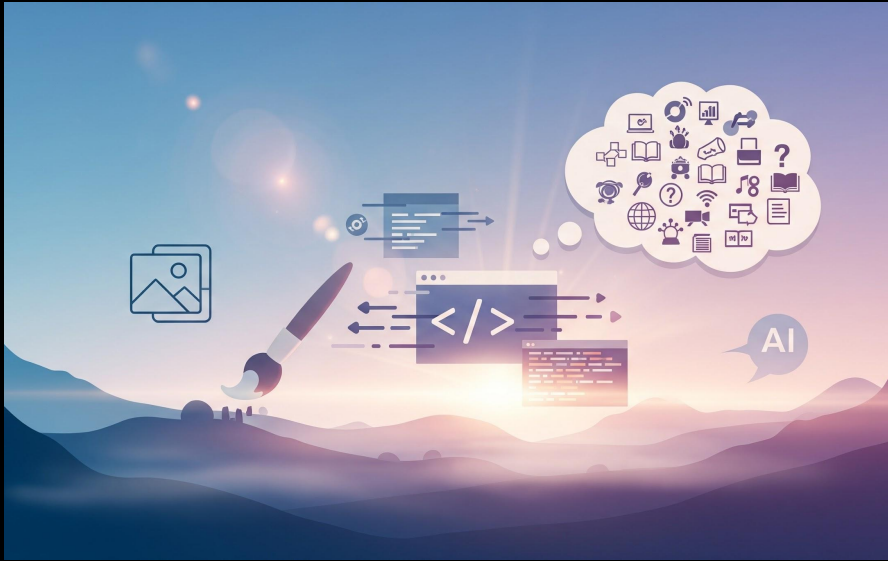
Theme: Humans out-of-the-loop; fully automated goods and services; fully realized AI ERP

Strategy:

- Deploy fully autonomous agents & multipurpose apps
- Point the assembly lines at themselves, self-optimization
- Develop a center of excellence, focus on mastery

Takeaways:

- Mission-oriented principles for self-direction
- Reduce human labor constraints entirely
- Hand the reins over to the machines



AI is the most powerful intern you'll ever have, and it still needs a boss: **you.**

Demo Time!

What can we do today?

1. Blog Writing: Cuppa AI, WriteSonic,
2. Product Marketing: Jasper, ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude
3. Graphic Design & Images: Canva, Figma
4. Email & Admin writing: Superhuman
5. Video Design: Descript, Runway, HeyGen
6. Automation: n8n, Make, Zapier, OpenAI Agent Builder
7. Software & Code: Cursor, v0, bolt.new, AI Studio

[v0](#) | [AI Studio](#) | [Suno](#) | [OpenAI Agent Builder](#)



What are the risks?



There's strong opportunity ahead as well as risk.

- AI will flood the world with misinformation and deepfakes.
- AI is going to take our jobs or hollow them out.
- AI will erode human creativity, relationships, and maybe even safety.

AI Risks and how to think about them

AI will flood the world with misinformation and deepfakes.

What people are really worried about:

- Both the public and experts put **misinformation / deepfakes** near the very top of the risk list
- Roughly 4 out of 5 Americans say they're worried about AI being used to supercharge election misinformation.
- Folks feel they *can't tell* what's real anymore but really want that ability back.



AI is going to take our jobs or hollow them out.

Introduce one of your current partners. Mention their industry or sector, then describe what you accomplished together. Include key initiatives and outcomes.

Learn more



AI will erode human creativity, relationships, and maybe even safety.

Introduce one of your current partners. Mention their industry or sector, then describe what you accomplished together. Include key initiatives and outcomes.

[Learn more](#)



“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”

— Alan Kay

Thank you

Ready for what's next?

Let's talk

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