Beyond the Prompt

Exploring AI, creativity and critical thinking



Jon Lopez

Hi, I’m Jon Lopez

WHO I AM

I work at Microsoft on Copilot experiences: the way people interact with AI in everyday life.

Today I’m speaking personally, not for Microsoft. I’m not an AI researcher, attorney, or professional novelist.

MY GOAL FOR TODAY’S SESSION

Help you make informed choices about AI, whatever you decide.

We’ll explore how AI works, how to use it with your judgment and boundaries intact, and how writers can put it to work.

Along the way, I’ll be sharing my own understanding and perspective based on my experience.

Austen’s world was changing

New machines were changing how people worked and what they could make. That brought possibilities, uncertainty, and concerns.

History gives us questions, not a prediction:

Who benefits? Whose work is affected? How much say do people have in these changes?

Curiosity and concern can exist together.

You can explore a tool while questioning how it is built and used.

Oversight and human choices matter,

but the history of industrialization was not a smooth or uniformly beneficial handover from people to machines.

Do not edit
How to change the design



How often are you using AI today?

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Which AI tools have you used?

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What have you used AI for?

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The AI we are discussing

Software

Explicit instructions define many familiar tasks.

Machine learning

Systems learn statistical patterns from data.

Generative AI

Models generate text, images, and other outputs.

Today’s focus: language-based AI assistants. Tools and access vary by product.

What word comes next?

To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love.

Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice

The model predicts tokens: words or parts of words, using learned patterns and context.

How a language model learns

01 Training adjusts patterns using many examples.

02 Your prompt and supplied context guide this response.

03 Browsing and file access depend on the tools available.

Training, current access, and stored chat history are different questions.

A convincing answer can be wrong

01 A model can invent a detail or a citation.

02 A real link can still fail to support the claim.

03 Consequential claims need independent checks.

Fluency gives us a reason to read. Evidence gives us a reason to trust.

Critical thinking comes first

01 What is this answer based on?

02 What might be missing, assumed, or wrong?

03 What decision am I still responsible for?

A helpful answer should leave you better able to judge.

Know what you share with AI

What you share

Prompts, uploads, and connected files can include sensitive or unpublished work. Share only what the task needs.

Training policies

Free and paid consumer tools may use chats for training, with opt-outs available. Business terms can exclude training by default.

Settings & controls

Check your tool’s policy and account settings. Review training opt-outs, retention, and access permissions before sharing.

Trust, but verify: check the policy and settings for your exact tool, plan, and account.

The peanut butter sandwich problem



People leave assumptions unstated. AI may fill those gaps differently.

A prompt with a clear purpose

VAGUE REQUEST

“Help me make my chapter better.”

MORE USEFUL REQUEST

I am writing a slow-burn Regency romance.
Act as a developmental editor.
Identify three strengths and three opportunities in motivation, tension, and subtext. Quote evidence.
Do not rewrite my prose. Ask if context is missing.

The useful details are the goal, context, requested help, boundaries, and format.

Who is doing the creative work?

Generate

“Write this scene for me.”

Explore

“Help me think through this scene.”

Critique

“Challenge my assumptions. Do not rewrite.”

The author chooses the assistant’s role.

Who knows what, and when?

Eleanor confides in Mrs. Vale.
Later, Pembroke knows her plans.

Trace when each character learns the information.

Quote the evidence. Separate gaps from contradictions.

Ask the author whether the gap is intentional.

A question for the author, not an automatic correction.

Research can widen a writer’s world

A useful first explanation can lead to a better question.

AI can suggest sources and questions for a specialist. The writer still checks the evidence.

Could Martian wind do this?

Could the opening storm in
The Martian force an evacuation
through destructive wind force?

Audience prediction: Yes / No / Unsure

Thin air changes the answer

The destructive wind force is the dramatic tradeoff.

Mars has dust storms, but its atmosphere is very thin.

Dust can still affect sunlight, equipment, and operations.

A story can make a deliberate scientific compromise.

Research, verification, artistic choice

1

Explore

Ask for the science in plain language.

2

Verify

Open a NASA source. Check the claim.

3

Decide

Choose the story’s tradeoff deliberately.

Skills to keep developing

Think	Test assumptions. Use AI as a thought partner.
Learn	Explore unfamiliar ideas, then check your understanding.
Work	Give the assistant a role; keep ownership of the decisions.
Adapt	Revisit your methods and boundaries as the tools change.

Human in the loop: set the purpose, review the work, make the choice.

The author still decides

Curiosity. Imagination.
Human judgment.

Understanding the tools can help us make informed choices.

Three questions to leave you with

1 If AI can produce a story, what makes the human author essential?

2 What is one way a skeptical writer could use AI without giving up creative control?

3 Do I need to tell readers or publishers that I used AI in my work?