

AI LITERACY WORKSHOP FOR SENIORS

45-MINUTE WORKSHOP CURRICULUM

ABSTRACT. The goal of this workshop is to introduce seniors to artificial intelligence, specifically AI chatbots like ChatGPT and Claude. Additionally, participants will learn how to use these tools safely and effectively for everyday tasks. This curriculum seeks to balance education and interactive exercises, all of which allow seniors to use AI in their own lives.

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1. WHAT IS AI?

1.1. Understanding AI Basics. We will begin by explaining what AI actually is and how it differs from regular computer programs. Traditional programs follow exact instructions written by programmers, while AI learns patterns from data to make decisions or generate responses. We cover everyday examples seniors already know: voice assistants (Siri, Alexa), recommendation systems (Netflix suggestions), navigation apps (Google Maps), and chatbots they may have encountered. This section should take about 5 minutes and uses no equipment.

1.2. How AI Chatbots Work. This subsection will be a non-technical, simple explanation of how chatbots like ChatGPT work. Chatbots are trained on massive amounts of text and learn to recognize patterns. When you ask them a question, they predict what words should come next based on patterns they learned during training. Take a concrete example: if I say “The quick brown fox jumps over the,” most people naturally continue with “lazy.” Chatbots work the same way but with millions of patterns and far more sophistication. This section should take about 3 minutes.

2. GETTING STARTED WITH AI CHATBOTS

2.1. Major AI Chatbots. We introduce the main platforms: ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Copilot. The key message is that these are all similar tools with only minor differences. This overview will be very high-level and should only take about 2 minutes and requires no equipment.

2.2. Interactive Activity 1: Downloading and Using ChatGPT.

Activity 1: Getting Started (10 minutes)

Purpose: Participants gain confidence using an AI chatbot on their own smartphone. They send their first prompt and see how AI responds in real time.

Setup and Materials: I bring a laptop or tablet to demonstrate the process step by step. Participants follow along on their smartphones at their own pace. The app is free to download from the App Store or Google Play. Participants need WiFi or mobile data access.

How It Runs: I will walk the group through downloading the ChatGPT app, creating an account (or using it without an account), and navigating the interface. Then everyone will send a simple prompt on their own device. Then, I'll ask the room to send a prompt of their choice (and will give suggestions if they can't think of any). Then, we can review a few responses together as a group and discuss them. I will then go around the room to help anyone who gets stuck and answer questions as they arise.

3. PRACTICAL USES OF AI

3.1. Learning and Understanding Topics. Seniors can ask AI to explain unfamiliar concepts (how does an airplane work?), simplify dense information into everyday language, or adjust complexity on the fly. Someone can ask "explain this like I'm 12" for a simple answer or "give me a detailed explanation" for more depth. AI is also a great tool for learning about history, science, current events, or any topic they are curious about. Follow-up questions are encouraged. This section is informational and takes about 5 minutes.

3.2. Everyday Help. Beyond learning, AI is practical for daily life. It can help troubleshoot technology problems, explain confusing settings or notifications on phones and computers, suggest recipes, and answer practical questions about household tasks. We will give a handful of real-world examples relevant to seniors. This section takes about 3 minutes.

3.3. Interactive Activity 2: Explanation and Image Generation.

Activity 2: Creating Visual Explanations (10 minutes)

Purpose: For participants to see the capabilities of AI chatbots beyond text. After AI explains a topic in words, they can watch it generate a picture of that topic to make it even clearer.

Setup and Materials: I will bring a laptop pre-loaded with ChatGPT and an image generator (like DALL-E, which is integrated into ChatGPT).

How It Runs: I will ask the group if they have any suggestions for topics to ask about (history, nature, animals, technology). Then, I'll use ChatGPT to write a clear explanation of it, then I will generate an AI image based on that explanation. After this, participants can try doing this themselves with their own topic on their phone. The goal is showing what AI can accomplish when combining text and images.

4. DANGERS OF AI AND AI SAFETY

4.1. AI Can Be Wrong. AI sometimes produces confident-sounding answers that are completely false, a problem called "hallucinations." It also uses information up to a certain training date, so it can give outdated information. We discuss when it is important to verify AI's responses, especially for critical information like medical advice, financial decisions, or legal questions. This section takes about 3 minutes and is important for responsible use.

4.2. AI Fraud and Scams. Seniors are frequently targeted by scams. We cover how AI is being used to create fake messages, clone voices, generate deepfake videos, and make convincing emergency calls pretending to be family members. Understanding these threats builds awareness, and it should only take about 4 minutes.

4.3. Protecting Yourself. We'll cover simple rules to prevent scams. Never share passwords with anyone or any service, be cautious entering personal information, and always verify unexpected requests (especially requests for money) by contacting the person directly through a number you know, and when in doubt, ask someone you trust. This section takes about 2 minutes.

4.4. What Not to Share with AI. Clear guidance on information that should never be entered into an AI chatbot: personal sensitive information (Social Security numbers), secret financial information (credit card numbers, bank account details), passwords, and any sensitive information. We explain that data may be stored or used for AI training. This section takes about 2 minutes and is practical and specific.