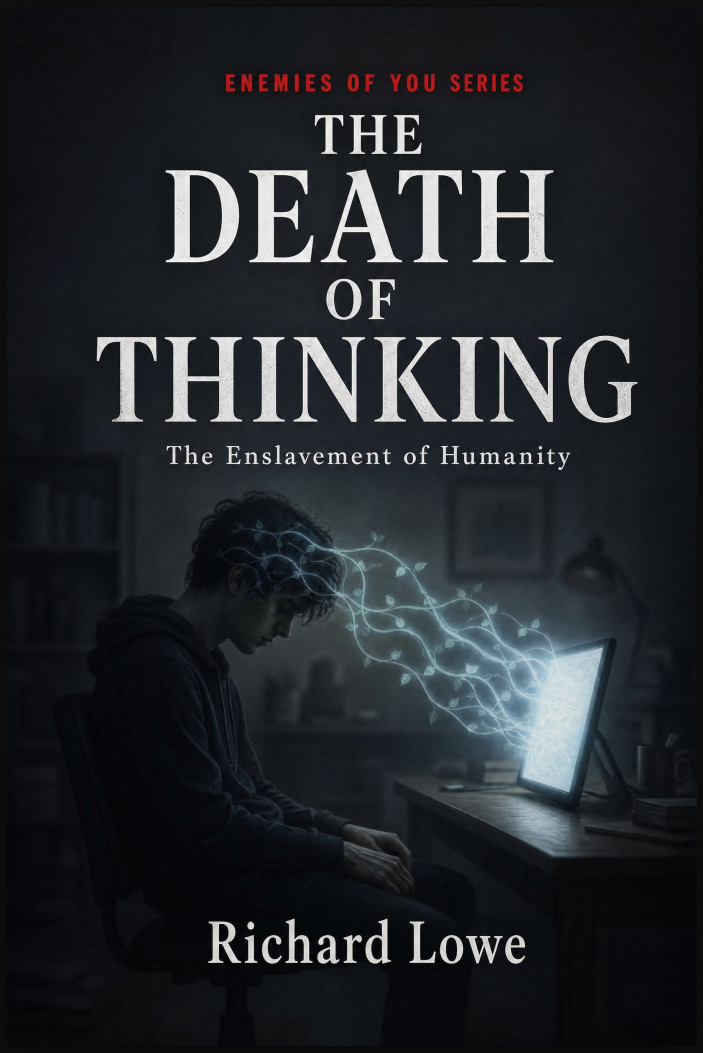
A FREE COMPANION TO THE DEATH OF THINKING

Twenty Minutes Before the Prompt

A thirty-day workbook for using AI every day and keeping the thinking yours.



RICHARD LOWE

How to Use This Workbook

Nobody is asking you to stop using AI. This is about what comes first.

The Death of Thinking follows Ray, a writer who stopped staring at the blank page, and Sasha, a programmer who could not explain the architecture of a system he had built. Neither of them decided to lose anything. They made a series of reasonable choices that added up to a pattern.

Part Four of the book describes the practice that reverses it: the notebook before the prompt, the hypothesis before the paste, the position before the framing. This workbook turns that practice into a month of pages you can fill in.

1. **Where am I?** The warning signs, and a one-week log of how you actually use AI.
2. **The three practices** and the three questions to ask before every session.
3. **The thirty-day plan**, matched to where you are in your career.
4. **Your standards and the session review**, so your choices become visible.
5. **Beyond your own desk**: work, your profession, your children, your community.

> *Each decision was reasonable. The pattern is not.*

Why the Order Matters

The book's picture is the circular saw. It cuts faster and more precisely than the carpenter can by hand, but it does not decide what to cut, where, or why. Earlier tools took over a narrow slice of a task and left you the demanding part: the calculator left you to set up the problem, the GPS left you to choose the destination. AI does the demanding part. It produces the argument and solves the problem.

So before you pick up the saw, make sure you are the carpenter.

> *The saw amplifies what the person brings to it. When the person brings nothing, the result is confident, fast, and wrong.*

Part 1: Where Am I?

The book calls it the dependency gradient. Each step feels reasonable, and nothing in the tool tells you when you have gone too far.

The warning signs

- [ ] The blank page makes me anxious in a way it did not used to
- [ ] I can't hold an argument in my head without writing it down immediately
- [ ] A task that used to feel routine is hard now, because the routine runs through AI
- [ ] My own first draft feels inadequate in a way it did not three years ago
- [ ] I ask for a structure before I have tried to find my own
- [ ] About ten seconds into a problem, my hand moves to the prompt before my mind has engaged
- [ ] I could not fully explain why something I built or wrote is shaped the way it is
- [ ] I treat a confident answer as a checked answer

0 to 2
You have a foundation. Your work is the adversarial practice in Part 2.

3 to 5
The muscle is softening. Start the thirty-day plan this week.

6 or more
Treat it as rehabilitation. Short sessions first, longer later.

The one-week log (from Chapter Eighteen)

For one week, note every time you consult AI and what you were doing right before. Most people find more first reaches than they expected.

DAY	WHAT I ASKED FOR	TRIED IT FIRST?	HAD A VIEW?	DRAFTED FIRST?
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Part 2: The Three Practices

Chapter Seventeen names them plainly, because the general can be evaded in ways the specific cannot.

1. **Draft before prompting, always.** For writers: sit with the blank page long enough to find your own angle. A rough paragraph of unedited thinking, or one sentence stating your argument, gives you something to defend when the AI produces its version. The messy period of notes and false starts is the work itself.

2. **Attempt a hypothesis before accepting an explanation.** For programmers: form an opinion about the architecture before the AI produces one, and guess at the bug before you paste the error. A wrong hypothesis, compared with the right explanation, teaches you something. The right explanation received cold teaches less.

3. **Use AI as an adversary at least as often as a helper.** Find the weakest point in this argument. Give me the strongest counterargument. What assumption am I making that I have not defended? Then revise, or explain why the objection is wrong.

Three questions before every session (Chapter Nineteen)

QUESTION	MY ANSWER TODAY
Have I formed a view?	
Have I attempted the problem?	
What exactly do I want the AI to do that I cannot do, or cannot do as well, without it?	

A weak answer and a strong one

	RAY IS WRITING ABOUT WHY A COMPANY'S STRATEGY WILL FAIL
Weak	"I want the AI to write a first draft." That describes a task without identifying a gap.
Strong	"I have a thesis and three supporting arguments. I want the AI to generate the strongest possible counterargument from someone who thinks the strategy will succeed, so I can see whether my thesis holds up."

Clean uses need no ceremony: looking up a fact, running a calculation, generating code in a language you don't know for a task you fully understand. The questions matter most for drafting, analysis and problem solving, where the line between help and replacement blurs.

Part 3: The Thirty-Day Plan

You don't reverse atrophy by lifting the maximum on day one. Reintroduce the demand gradually, the way a physical therapist reintroduces load.

Find your starting point

IF YOU ARE	YOUR FOCUS FOR THIRTY DAYS
A student or early in your career	**Sequence.** Spend real time with every problem before AI sees it. Twenty minutes of independent work changes what the AI does to you. Zero minutes does not.
Mid-career and deep in the habit	**Recovery.** Pick one kind of work you now do entirely with AI and do it unassisted for four weeks. The discomfort in week one tells you how deep the dependency goes. Less discomfort in week four tells you how fast the capacity returns.
Senior, with the foundation	**Adversarial use.** Ask the AI to attack your strongest arguments and find the failure modes you have not thought of, instead of producing work you could have done yourself.

The work I will do unassisted for four weeks: _____

Check off each week

PRACTICE	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
Did my chosen work unassisted				
Drafted or designed before prompting				
Guessed before pasting an error or question				
Asked the AI to attack my work				
Read something long without skimming				
Wrote by hand for twenty minutes				
Learned something new without AI until I could explain why it works				
Checked a claim against a primary source				

WEEK	HOW HARD DID IT FEEL? WHAT DID I NOTICE?
Week 1	
Week 4	

The book's character Gideon, whose editor killed a piece for having no point of view, takes on one real piece a month that AI never sees until the full draft exists. The early pieces will probably be worse. When they start being better, that is the information too.

Part 4: Your Standards and the Session Review

The tools do not come with standards. You have to set your own and write them down.

The book offers examples: I will always draft before prompting on pieces where my voice is the value. I will always attempt a hypothesis before pasting an error message. I will always verify any factual claim before it goes to a client or an audience. I will use AI to challenge my arguments, not to form them.

#	MY STANDARD
1	
2	
3	
4	

> *Visibility is the minimum condition for agency.*

Read AI output like a practitioner

- [ ] Is this claim verifiable?
- [ ] Is this argument supported by what comes before it?
- [ ] Does it match what I know from other sources?
- [ ] Where might it be wrong, and would the system know if it were?
- [ ] Extra skepticism for facts, statistics, research findings and named sources, where confident invention is most common

A language model predicts the most likely text. Its confidence measures fluency, and fluency says nothing about whether the claim is true. Checking that is still your job.

The three-minute session review

Before closing the tools, look at what you did and what the AI did. There is no correct ratio. The point is to know.

QUESTION	TODAY
Where in the session did I do the thinking?	
Where did the AI do it?	
What did I bring that the AI could not have provided?	
What did I accept without fully evaluating it?	

Part 5: Beyond Your Own Desk

Chapter Twenty is honest that one person's influence is limited. It also shows where that influence is available.

At work: ask the risk question

When the team celebrates the efficiency gain, you don't need the whole argument. You need one question:

> *Great. Question for the group: if the tool goes down for a week, or produces something confidently wrong on a client deliverable, who on the team can do this without it?*

- [ ] Model the practices where others can see them
- [ ] Ask what we are outsourcing, what human capacity we need to keep, and how we are building it
- [ ] Make the case for keeping junior roles, where senior capacity used to be built

In your profession and community

- [ ] Say it once, clearly, at your professional association: we talk about AI and our industry's economics, and we also need to talk about what it does to our members' ability to do the work
- [ ] Raise the development question at a school board meeting that only talks about detection and prohibition
- [ ] Have the honest, personal conversation: have you noticed this happening to you?
- [ ] Use the term the book offers, cognitive sovereignty: the right to develop and exercise your own reasoning

With your children

- [ ] Explain, once and then now and then, that AI produces statistically likely text and not verified fact
- [ ] Use AI in front of them to challenge your ideas, not to produce them
- [ ] Ask for a handwritten rough draft before the typed version, and explain why

Protect the pipeline

Choose one junior person whose development you can influence, and build that influence around the unassisted attempt. Ask what they tried before you give the answer. **My person:**

_____

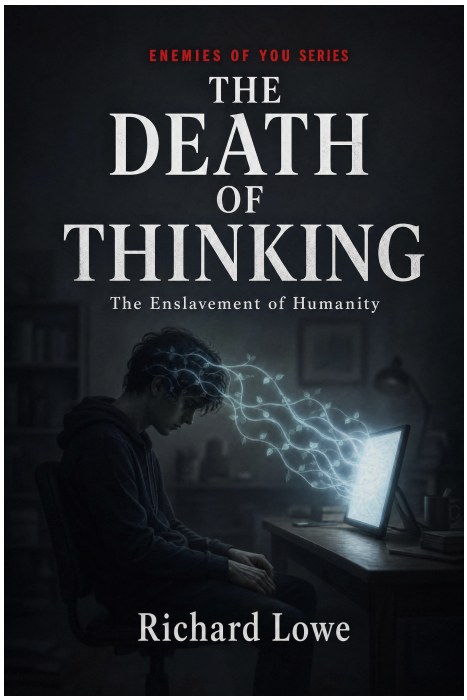
Read

Nicholas Carr's The Shallows and Neil Postman's Amusing Ourselves to Death, which the book recommends for the long view. And the primary sources in your own field, not summaries of them.

> *This question is larger than the workflow. This question is: what are you building?*

The Whole Story

This workbook is the practice. The Death of Thinking is the reason for it: how the boundary between your thinking and the machine's dissolved, who profits from the dependency, what it costs the next generation, the professions and the democracy, and why the question at the end is yours to answer.



The Death of Thinking:
The Enslavement of Humanity
Enemies of You

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