

The Complete Gemini Guide

Models, plans, research, Gems, Canvas, Live, creative tools, Spark and useful prompts in one practical guide.

By Maverick Maltin · Last verified 2026-09-28 · 22 min read

Gemini is Google's AI, and in 2026 it is a lot more than the chat box at gemini.google.com. It is the assistant on Android phones, a native app on Mac and Windows, a side panel in Chrome, a helper inside Gmail and Docs, an agent called Spark that keeps working after you close your laptop, and the engine behind Google's image, video and music generators. If you already use Google's apps, connecting the ones you need can make Gemini more useful for your everyday work. Access depends on your account, settings and region.

This guide walks the whole product the way it looks today. Which model to pick, which plan is worth paying for, where every feature lives, and the settings that decide what Google keeps about you.

Getting Started

You need a personal Google account. Sign in at gemini.google.com and you are chatting. Once you are set up, my [Gemini secret codes](#) list gives you 100 shortcuts to paste straight in, and [Google's free AI tools](#) covers the rest of the Google lineup. Start with the features available in your account. Plans, ages, regions and work or school policies affect access. Where you use it matters a little more than it used to, because the apps are not all identical:

- **Web** (gemini.google.com): the full product. Chat, Deep Research, Canvas, Gems, Notebooks, image and video creation, Spark, settings.
- **Android**: Use Gemini as your digital assistant on supported Android devices. Activation and available app actions depend on your phone and settings.
- **iPhone**: the Gemini app from the App Store, plus Gemini inside Chrome for iOS.
- **Mac and Windows**: native desktop apps at gemini.google/desktop. On Mac, Option + Space opens a mini window from anywhere. On Windows it is Alt + Space. Feature availability differs between desktop apps and the web. Spark currently supports the web, mobile and Mac app; do not assume Windows has every Mac feature.
- **Chrome**: a Gemini button in the top right of the browser summarizes pages, compares tabs, and on paid plans can browse and fill forms for you.
- **Gmail and Docs**: Gemini is built into Gmail for free (summaries, Help me write, suggested replies), and into Docs, Sheets, Slides, Drive and Meet on the paid plans.

MAVERICK'S TIP

Set up the desktop app on day one. Being able to hit Option + Space (or Alt + Space) and ask a question without leaving what you are doing is the habit that makes Gemini stick. Same idea as Spotlight, except it can read your screen.

The Interface

The app was redesigned in 2026 and it is cleaner than it used to be. Use the navigation to find chats, saved creative work, Gems and Notebooks. The web app is the clearest place to learn the full workflow, although available sections depend on your account.

Use the prompt box for your request and its attachment control for files. Choose a tool such as Deep Research or Canvas when that is the job you want to do. Review the model and thinking options shown in your account before sending a difficult task.

For uploads, start with one file and name the pages, columns or sections you want analyzed. Limits differ by file type, length, plan and platform. If a file is rejected, split it into relevant sections or use a smaller export. Ask Gemini to confirm what it could read before relying on its summary.

The Models, Explained

The everyday choices are Flash-Lite, Flash and Pro. Version numbers change, so use the model names in your own picker as the current reference.

- **Flash-Lite:** quick, simple work and a fallback when you reach other limits.
- **Flash:** a useful everyday starting point for writing, planning and questions.
- **Pro:** harder analysis, coding and problems that need more reasoning.

Where available, Standard is the faster thinking setting and Extended gives a problem more thought. Deep Think requires Pro and an eligible Ultra plan. More reasoning uses more of your allowance.

MAVERICK'S TIP

Start with Flash for an ordinary task. Try Pro or a higher thinking setting when the task needs it. To check allowances and reset times on the web, open Settings, then Usage Limits. Five-hour and weekly limits can apply and may change with demand.

Pricing: What You Actually Get

Compare the current offer for your country at [Google AI plans](#). These are the listed U.S. monthly base prices at verification, before temporary promotions. Your checkout is the final price.

Plan	Listed monthly price	Start here if...
Free	\$0	You want to try the everyday features
Google AI Plus	\$4.99	You need more access than the free plan
Google AI Pro	\$19.99	You use Gemini and Google workspace tools regularly
Google AI Ultra 5x	\$99.99	You need higher limits and eligible advanced features
Google AI Ultra 20x	\$199.99	Your work repeatedly reaches the lower Ultra limit

Paid features still have account and region requirements. Spark's current Help Center includes eligible Pro and Ultra accounts, even though the subscription page emphasizes Ultra. Check access in your own account before buying a plan for one feature.

Use the free plan for a week before choosing. Write down which limits you actually hit and which feature you would pay for. Extra storage can matter, but it is not a reason to buy an AI tier you will not use.

MAVERICK'S TIP

If you are a U.S. college student, check the current student offer at [Gemini for students](#). Eligible U.S. students can redeem a year of Pro through December 31, 2026. Check verification, payment and renewal terms when signing up, and save the renewal date.

Deep Research

Deep Research is Gemini's research agent. You give it a question, it plans a search, reads dozens of sources, and comes back with a cited report, with links you can check. Free access is limited and can be affected by demand.

Choose Deep Research from the prompt tools, give it a specific question and review the research plan before starting. Add relevant files or enable the connected sources you want it to use. Open the finished report, inspect important citations and ask follow-up questions before using its conclusions.

PROMPT 1 · COPY & PASTE

Research [topic] for me. I want to understand the current state of it, who the key players are, what changed in the last 12 months, where the experts disagree, and what a smart person would do about it. Cite your sources, flag anything that is opinion rather than fact, and finish with the three things you are least sure about.

MAVERICK'S TIP

Deep Research is the feature that rewards a specific question. "Research electric bikes" gets you a Wikipedia article. "Research which electric bike under \$2,000 holds its value best after two years, using owner forums and resale listings" gets you something you could not have found yourself.

Gems

A Gem is your own version of Gemini with standing instructions. Make one for the tasks you repeat: a writing assistant that knows your voice, a study coach for one class, a meal planner that knows your allergies. You can attach files as its knowledge so it always has your reference material.

Where it lives: Gems in the left sidebar, then New Gem. Give it a name, write the instructions, add files under Knowledge if you want, test it in the preview, and Save. Gems are not available inside Temporary chats or Gemini Live.

PROMPT 2 · COPY & PASTE

You are my editor. Every time I paste a draft, do three things in this order: (1) tell me the one thing that is most unclear to a first-time reader, (2) cut it by 20 percent without losing any point, (3) return the edited version with your changes in bold. Keep my voice. Never add an intro or a summary. Ask me one question at the end if something is genuinely ambiguous.

Canvas

Canvas is a workspace next to the chat for documents, code and pages. Instead of regenerating a whole answer, you edit it in place. Highlight a paragraph and ask for a rewrite, change the tone of one section, or build a working web page and preview it.

Where it lives: choose Canvas from the prompt tools, describe the document or app, and refine the result in the workspace. Use the available sharing or export controls when you are ready. Check the actual exported file before sending it to someone.

PROMPT 3 · COPY & PASTE

Open this in Canvas. Write a one-page landing page for [product] with a headline, three benefits, one short testimonial placeholder, and a single call to action. Then give me three alternative headlines below it and tell me which one you would test first and why.

Gemini Live

Live is the voice mode. Open the Gemini app on your phone and tap Live at the bottom, and start a voice conversation. It is a real conversation: interrupt it, change the subject, think out loud.

The part that makes it different from every other voice assistant is that it can see. Tap the camera icon and point your phone at something, and it can tell you what it is, read the label, translate the sign, or walk you through fixing it. Tap Turn on screen sharing and it can look at whatever is on your screen while you talk. Check the visible camera and screen-sharing indicators, and stop sharing when you are finished.

Two things to know: Live does not work with Gems, and Google's own help pages still describe it as a phone feature, so treat it as mobile-first even though the web app has been getting a version of it.

MAVERICK'S TIP

Live plus the camera is the best way to learn anything physical. Point it at the back of your router, the error on your dashboard, the plant that is dying, or the recipe you are halfway through, and ask.

Images: Nano Banana

Nano Banana is the name of Gemini's image models. There are three: Nano Banana 2 Lite, Nano Banana 2 (the default), and Nano Banana Pro, which paid plans can use to redo an image at higher quality.

Where it lives: open the sidebar and click Images, pick a template or type a prompt, or use Create image from the Tools menu. To edit something you made, open Library, click the image, click Chat underneath it, and describe the

change. On a paid plan you can click More in the bottom right of any image and choose Redo with Pro. Downloads are 1K on the free tier and 2K on any paid plan.

Keep the generated image's provenance information. Inspect small text, hands, logos and product details before using a result.

PROMPT 4 · COPY & PASTE

Create a product photo of [item] on a plain warm-white background, soft studio lighting from the top left, shallow depth of field, shot on a 50mm lens, no text, no logos, photorealistic. Then show me the same shot from a 45 degree angle.

Video: Gemini Omni

Omni is Gemini's video model. It makes 10-second clips from text, an image, or another video, and you can extend a scene in 10-second steps up to 40 seconds, set the first and last frame, draft at low resolution, and upscale to 4K. Video needs a paid plan (Plus, Pro or Ultra) and you have to be 18 or over.

Where it lives: open the sidebar and click Create video. Choose the aspect ratio, upload up to one video and five reference images if you want, and describe the shot. It takes a few minutes and you cannot use that chat while it works. Edits are conversational: ask it to remove an object, change the camera angle, or swap the scene, and it returns a new version.

For bigger video projects, Flow at labs.google/flow is Google's full video studio, and it comes with the paid plans with its own monthly credits.

Music

Gemini can write songs now. Choose Create music from the Tools menu, describe the genre and mood, pick vocal or instrumental and short or long, and it produces a finished track. Availability and limits depend on your account and location.

Notebooks and Gemini Notebook

There are two notebook things and they sync with each other, which confuses everyone at first.

Notebooks inside the Gemini app live in the sidebar. Click New notebook, drop in chats, files and instructions, and every conversation you start inside it has all of that as context. This is how you keep a project or a class together.

Gemini Notebook is the standalone product at notebooklm.google (it used to be called NotebookLM). Upload your sources, and it answers only from them, makes study guides, and generates the famous podcast-style Audio Overviews. Sources, names and custom instructions can sync across the apps. Shared notebooks and chat context have additional restrictions, so check what is actually visible before relying on a sync.

MAVERICK'S TIP

Audio Overviews also work straight from the Gemini app. Upload a document, ask for an audio overview, and you get a two-host conversation about it in three to five minutes. Great for the commute.

Personal Intelligence and Memory

This is the feature that separates Gemini from everything else. Personal Intelligence lets Gemini use your Gmail, Calendar, Photos, Search history, YouTube, Contacts and Workspace files to answer you. "What was the name of the hotel we stayed at in Lisbon?" "Find the invoice from the plumber." "Pull the flight details from my confirmation email into my calendar."

Where it lives: Settings and help, then Personal Intelligence, then Connected Apps, and pick which apps it may use. There is a Memory toggle in the same place that lets it remember your past chats. Both need you to be 18 or over on a personal account, and availability varies by region and account. You can also switch Personal Intelligence off for a single chat from the Tools menu.

Google says it does not train on your Gmail or Photos through this feature, only on limited prompts and responses. Review which apps you have connected instead of assuming Gemini can see everything.

PROMPT 5 · COPY & PASTE

Look through my Gmail and Calendar for the last 30 days and give me a briefing: every commitment I made in an email that is not on my calendar yet, every unanswered message from a real person older than three days, and anything that looks like a bill or a deadline. Group it by urgency.

Daily Brief

If you turn on Personal Intelligence, Memory and your Workspace connection, Gemini builds you a morning briefing: Top of mind, FYI, and Looking ahead, assembled from your email, calendar and recent chats. It arrives as a notification and lives in the side panel, and you can ask for it in Live with "What's my daily brief?" U.S. only right now.

Connected Apps

Connected Apps are the services Gemini can act inside of. Google's own apps (Maps, YouTube, Photos, Home, Contacts, Messages) plus supported third-party services. The current list in your account is the authority for what you can connect. In a chat, just name the app or type @ followed by the app name. Manage the list under Settings and help, then Personal Intelligence, then Connected Apps. A lot of the third-party ones are U.S. only.

PROMPT 6 · COPY & PASTE

@Google Maps find three coffee shops within a 10 minute walk of my next calendar event that are open before it starts, and @Google Calendar add a 20 minute buffer before the event so I have time to get there.

Scheduled Actions

Tell Gemini to do something on a schedule and it will. "Every Monday at 8am, give me a summary of the week's tech news." "On the first of the month, remind me to review my subscriptions." It confirms the schedule, and you manage everything under Settings and help, then Scheduled actions, up to 10 active at a time. It needs Keep Activity turned on, and Google's plan comparison lists it as a paid feature, so expect it on Plus and above.

PROMPT 7 · COPY & PASTE

Every weekday at 7:30am, send me a 5-bullet briefing: the top story in [my industry], anything on my calendar today that has no location or link attached, the weather where I am, one thing from my recent chats I said I would follow up on, and a single question to think about on my commute.

Gemini Spark: The Agent

Spark is worth exploring if it is available in your paid account. It is a personal agent that runs on Google's servers, so it keeps working after you close the laptop. Give it a task, a list of tasks, or a standing schedule, and it browses, books, fills forms, cleans your inbox, organizes Drive, and reports back. You can teach it reusable skills for tasks you repeat.

Where it lives: on the web, open the sidebar and click Switch to Spark, then Tasks. On the Mac app it is Spark in the sidebar. Current Help Center requirements include Pro or Ultra, age 18+, a personal account and Keep Activity on. It excludes the EEA, Nigeria, Switzerland and the UK, and supports web, mobile and Mac. Google's own rule is worth repeating: never give Spark sign-in details or payment information. Set clear limits and supervise it. Some actions need confirmation, but do not assume every consequential action will automatically pause.

PROMPT 8 · COPY & PASTE

Task for Spark: Go through my Google Drive and find every file I have not opened in over a year. Group them by type and by the project they seem to belong to. Do not delete or move anything. Give me a table with your recommendation for each group (archive, keep, or review) and a one-line reason.

MAVERICK'S TIP

Start Spark on something boring and reversible, like sorting Drive or drafting replies, before you let it near anything with a checkout button. The point of the first week is to learn how it thinks.

Gemini in Chrome

The Gemini button at the top right of Chrome opens a side panel that can read the page you are on. Ask it to summarize an article, compare the products in your open tabs, pull dates into your calendar, or explain a contract clause. It is free on desktop in the U.S., UK, Canada, India and a growing list of countries, and on Android and iPhone in the U.S.

On Pro and Ultra in the U.S. there is Auto Browse: Gemini clicks through sites for you, fills forms, and completes bookings and orders, pausing for your confirmation before anything sensitive.

Gemini in Gmail and Workspace

Gmail gets Gemini for free: AI Overviews that summarize a long thread, Help me write, and suggested replies. Asking questions across your whole inbox, Proofread, and the AI Inbox that sorts and triages for you need a paid plan (Plus and up). The Gemini side panel inside Docs, Sheets, Slides, Drive and Meet needs Pro or Ultra on a personal account.

PROMPT 9 · COPY & PASTE

In Gmail: find every email from the last two weeks where someone asked me a question I have not answered. List them with the person, the question in one line, and a suggested one-sentence reply for each.

Study Tools

Gemini has a real study kit built in. Ask for a quiz, flashcards or a practice test on any topic and it builds one. Guided learning in the Tools menu turns it into a tutor that teaches step by step instead of handing you the answer. Storybook, under Gems, writes and illustrates a ten-page picture book from a single prompt. The student hub at gemini.google.com/students collects all of it.

PROMPT 10 · COPY & PASTE

Teach me [topic] using guided learning. Start by asking me three questions to find out what I already know. Then teach the next concept in under 150 words, give me one practice problem, and do not move on until I get it right. Keep a running list of what I have mastered.

Privacy: The Settings That Matter

Review [Gemini Apps Activity](#) before connecting personal files or accounts.

Keep Activity: With it off, future chats are not used to train Google's AI models unless you submit feedback. Chats are still retained with your account for 72 hours, and human review can still occur for safety. Some connected features require activity to be on.

Auto-delete: The default is 18 months. You can choose a different retention period, including three months. Deleting Gemini activity does not delete data stored in other Google services.

Temporary chat: These chats do not appear in activity and are not used for model training. They still have a 72-hour retention window. Temporary chat is not the same as a zero-retention service.

MAVERICK'S TIP

Material already selected for human review can be kept for up to three years, disconnected from your account. Review the settings before the conversation and avoid uploading unnecessary sensitive details.

Prompting Gemini Well

Gemini responds best to prompts that read like a brief to a capable colleague. Three habits that change the output more than anything else:

- **Give it the job, the audience and the format.** "Write a 200-word update for my team who have not seen this project, as a bulleted email" beats "summarize this."
- **Point it at your own stuff.** With Personal Intelligence on, "based on my emails with Sarah" or "using the spreadsheet in my Drive called Q3 forecast" turns a generic answer into a specific one.
- **Ask for the disagreement.** Add "tell me where experts disagree and what you are least sure about" to any research question. It exposes the guesses.

PROMPT 11 · COPY & PASTE

Before you answer, ask me up to three clarifying questions if anything in my request is ambiguous. Then answer in this format: a two-sentence direct answer first, then the reasoning, then a short list of what could make you wrong. Use plain language and no filler.

25 Things To Try This Week

1. Ask it to plan your week from a calendar summary you provide.
2. Run one Deep Research report on a purchase you are about to make.
3. Build a Gem for the email you write most often.
4. Point Live at something broken in your house and ask how to fix it.
5. Ask Gmail to find every unanswered question in your inbox.
6. Generate a product photo with Nano Banana, then Redo with Pro.
7. Make a 10-second video from a photo with Omni (paid plans).
8. Create a song for a friend's birthday with Create music.
9. Upload a PDF and ask for an Audio Overview.
10. Start a Notebook for one project and dump every related chat into it.
11. Use Canvas to write and preview a one-page website.
12. Ask Gemini in Chrome to compare the three tabs you have open.
13. Schedule a Monday briefing.
14. Ask "What's my daily brief?" in Live.
15. Give Spark a Drive cleanup task and read its report.
16. Use @Google Maps to plan a route with stops.
17. Turn a Deep Research report into a quiz.
18. Ask Guided learning to teach you something you have avoided for years.
19. Make a Storybook for a kid you know.
20. Take a photo of a menu in another language with Live and ask what to order.
21. Ask it to find every commitment you made by email this month.
22. Open Settings > Usage Limits to see your allowance and reset time.
23. Read your Gemini Apps Activity page once.
24. Turn on a 3-month auto-delete.
25. Install the desktop app and use Option + Space or Alt + Space ten times in one day.

Where Gemini Is Strongest, And Where It Is Not

Strongest: anything that touches your Google life. Email, calendar, photos, Drive, Maps, YouTube. Deep Research is excellent. The creative tools let you explore ideas alongside the rest of your work. Spark can handle longer tasks with your connected apps when you have access.

Weaker: long-form writing with real voice still needs a heavy edit. The naming is a mess (two Ultra tiers, two kinds of notebooks, models that change version number every month). Usage limits are opaque, and a long chat with

attachments can eat a five-hour window fast. Several features are U.S. only or need a personal account, so work accounts and European users get a smaller product.

Your First Week

- Day 1: Sign in, install the desktop app, review the model picker and set auto-delete.
- Day 2: If eligible, connect the one app you need and ask a question grounded in it.
- Day 3: Run a Deep Research report and turn it into an audio overview.
- Day 4: Build your first Gem and use it three times.
- Day 5: Try Live with the camera on something physical.
- Day 6: Try the image, music or video feature available in your account.
- Day 7: Decide whether Plus, Pro or free is right for how you actually used it.

Pick one thing from the list above, open Gemini, and do it right now. That first result will tell you why Google put this in everything.

Quick Reference

Your job	Feature to try
Current evidence	Deep Research
Repeated task instructions	A Gem
An editable document or prototype	Canvas
A spoken walkthrough	Live
Your own source library	Notebooks
A longer delegated task	Spark, if available
Control stored activity	Gemini Apps Activity

MAVERICK'S TIP

DO THIS TODAY: Pick one question you actually need answered. Give Gemini the relevant material, ask it for a concrete result and verify the most important detail against the source.

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