

FOR ANYONE WHO HAS NOT USED IT YET

Directing ChatGPT Work

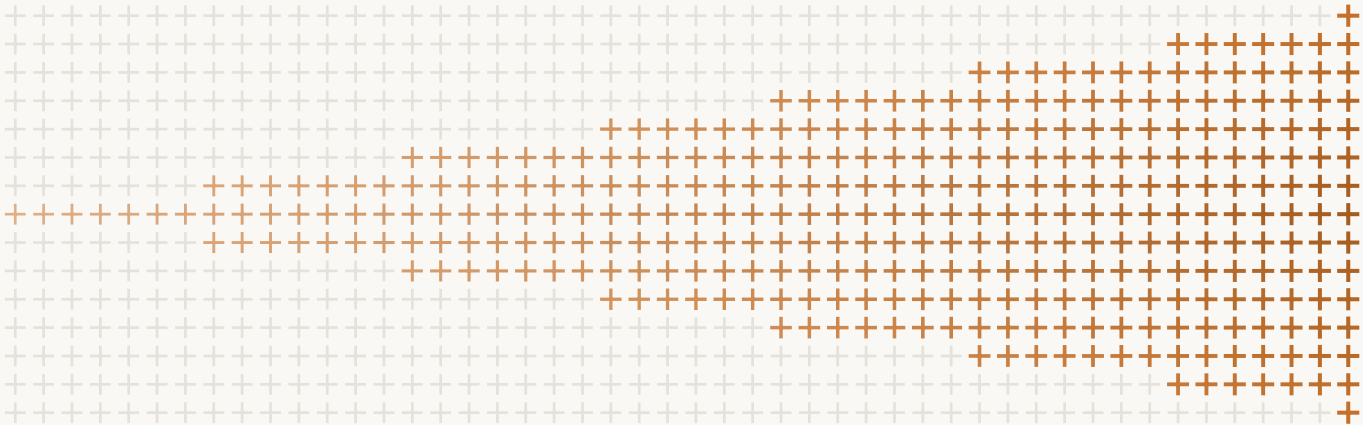
It hands you a finished file while you get on with something else. *Whether it is any good is still your call.*

Ordinary ChatGPT gives you text to copy somewhere else. Work does the whole job and hands you the file itself: a spreadsheet, a slide deck, a report, finished. This guide covers how to set it up, how to brief it, and how to judge what comes back.

ONE INSTRUCTION

IT WORKS WHILE YOU ARE ELSEWHERE

A FINISHED DRAFT



“Read these and build me a table.”

Set like this: words that pass between you and the agent.

Whether it is any good is still your call.

Set like this: the part that stays yours.

CONTENTS	READING TIME	ASSUMED KNOWLEDGE	SETTING IT UP
Six sections over five pages	Four minutes end to end	None. No technical background needed	A few minutes, the first time

01 What it does

THE DIFFERENCE

You already know what happens when you ask ChatGPT something. Work is the same program doing more of the job.

Never used ChatGPT either? It is a program you type instructions into and it writes back. Work is one mode inside it, and switching over takes a single click.

You describe what you want to end up with. It goes off, reads the files you gave it, searches where it needs to, and comes back with the document, spreadsheet or presentation itself rather than a description of one.

It keeps going on its own for a long time, so you can set it off and leave. Be realistic about what that buys you: the assembling, not the deciding. You will read what comes back, and some of it will need work.

02 Which mode you need

THREE MODES, ONE APPLICATION

MODE	USE IT FOR	TYPICAL REQUEST	AVAILABLE ON
Chat	Quick answers, questions and conversation. The version you already know.	“Explain this idea in simple terms.”	Web, mobile, desktop
Work THIS BRIEF	Research, analysis, and producing a document, spreadsheet, presentation or report.	“Read these twelve policy PDFs and build a comparison table.”	Web and mobile on paid plans. Desktop on every plan
Codex	Writing and debugging code, running tests, working across a repository.	“Run the tests and fix what fails.”	Desktop application only

Chat and Codex are here so you can tell the three apart on screen. If you never touch Codex, nothing is lost.

03 Setting it up

FIVE STEPS

DESKTOP APPLICATION



Names the mode you are in. Opens to offer ChatGPT Codex.

Step 01

Sign in

Browser, phone or desktop application, whichever you already use. Nothing to install if you stay in a browser.

Check: you are looking at a message box you can type into.

Step 04

Say what you want back

Say what you want to be holding at the end, along with your constraints and how you will judge it. Section 05 breaks that into four parts.

Check: your instruction names a deliverable, a source, a constraint and a test.

WEB BROWSER



Also in the sidebar. Everything runs in the cloud.

Step 02

Switch to Work

Use the control shown above for whichever surface you are on.

Check: the mode label reads Work, not Chat. If it still says Chat you have not switched.

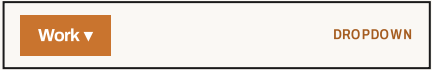
Step 05

Check it, then refine

Ask for changes in the same conversation and it keeps everything it has already read. Expect to do this. First versions are rarely the one you use.

Check: you can trace each claim back to something you attached.

MOBILE APPLICATION



Shows Chat or Work. Codex cannot be selected here.

Step 03

Add your material

Attach whatever it should work from. Plenty of what you need is on paper, in another system, or halfway down an email thread, so that needs turning into a file first.

Check: every file you meant to add is listed before you send.

If Work is not there

No Work option

On web and mobile it needs a paid plan and is still rolling out, so it may simply not have reached you.

Try this. Install the desktop application for Mac or Windows. It carries all three modes on every plan, including Free.

04 Asking well

FOUR PARTS

In Chat you type something short and refine as you go. That habit works against you here, because Work acts on your opening instruction for a long time before you see anything. It is worth spending two minutes on the brief.

THE DELIVERABLE	“Produce a two-page briefing note...”	Name the object you want, not the topic you want covered.
THE SOURCE	“...drawing only on the four attached reports...”	It has no access to the context you are carrying in your head.
THE CONSTRAINTS	“...for readers outside the department, avoiding jargon...”	Length, reader, register, and anything to leave out.
THE TEST	“...with every claim traceable to one of the attachments.”	State how you will judge it, so it can check its own work.

Then hold it to that test. A quick way in: take three claims from what comes back, one near the start, one from the middle, one near the end, and find each in the files you gave it. If one of the three will not trace back, assume the rest need the same scrutiny and ask it to cite a source for every point.

05 Three things worth knowing

NORMAL, NOT ALARMING

01

It reaches real files

In the desktop application it opens folders on your machine, and a folder exposes everything inside it.

What works. Copy the files a job needs into a new empty folder and point it at that. A shared drive is more than it needs.

02

It keeps going without you

Long tasks and Scheduled Tasks continue when nobody is watching, working from what you approved at the start, after that material has moved on.

What works. Say something the moment a job looks like it is going the wrong way. Anything you set to repeat deserves a reason to exist and a date to stop.

03

Long jobs wander

On a long job it can misattribute a source or lose track of an instruction. Read the steps it took as well as what it produced.

What works. Rather than patching it with edits, go again with a narrower instruction, or split the job in two. Shorter jobs come back cleaner.

For a first go, pick something you would normally give an hour to and could check quickly. Three or four documents you know well, and ask for a comparison table with a short summary underneath. Be prepared for the first result to be middling. That is usually the brief rather than the tool, and the second attempt is where most people see the point.

06 Getting the go-ahead

BEFORE YOU USE IT AT WORK

Before work material goes near it, someone in your organisation needs to say yes. The law differs by country. The questions you will be asked barely differ, so here is what to know and what to bring.

Anything about a person	Records that identify a living person are personal data almost everywhere, and putting them into an AI tool counts as processing. Three questions follow: your legal ground for doing it, the purpose you have defined, and how long it is kept. Check the law that applies where you are (GDPR in the UK and EU, or your national equivalent) before the first task, not after it.
Which account	Personal and organisational accounts differ in how what you type is handled and kept. A personal subscription used for work sits outside your organisation's arrangements, which is usually what causes trouble later.
What it can reach	Opening a folder shows it everything inside. Linking email, calendar or cloud storage gives it reach over whatever those accounts hold, including colleagues' material.
What gets recorded	Most regimes expect an assessment before processing of this kind begins, and most organisations keep some record of the tools they use. Both are easier to do first than to reconstruct later.

Six answers to bring

FILL THESE IN BEFORE YOU ASK

Whoever handles this where you work is not trying to block you. They are trying to answer a question they usually get asked far too vaguely to answer.

01	What do I want to use it for?	One sentence. The task, not the technology.
02	Which account would I use?	A personal subscription, or one your organisation holds.
03	What information goes in?	List the categories, not examples.
04	Does any of it identify a living person?	Names, photographs, assessment records, contact details.
05	What can it reach on my behalf?	Email, calendar, cloud storage, a local folder. Name each.
06	Where is this use recorded?	The record or register it goes in, if one is kept, and who else needs to know.

If your organisation has not worked this out yet. Plenty have not. Ask for an answer in writing rather than reading silence as a yes, and carry on in the meantime with material that identifies nobody: published documents, your own drafts, anything already public. That covers a good deal of what you would want it for.

NOTICE

This is a general introduction and does not constitute legal, regulatory or data protection advice. It does not account for your organisation's contractual position, sector obligations or internal policy. Before using ChatGPT Work for work purposes, speak to whoever is accountable for data protection and AI where you work. Depending on where you are that may be a Data Protection Officer, a privacy or compliance lead, legal counsel, or whoever signs off new tools. If those sit with different people, speak to each of them.

Product details compiled from OpenAI's published documentation, July 2026, and subject to change. Verify current functionality, availability and terms before relying on any statement here.