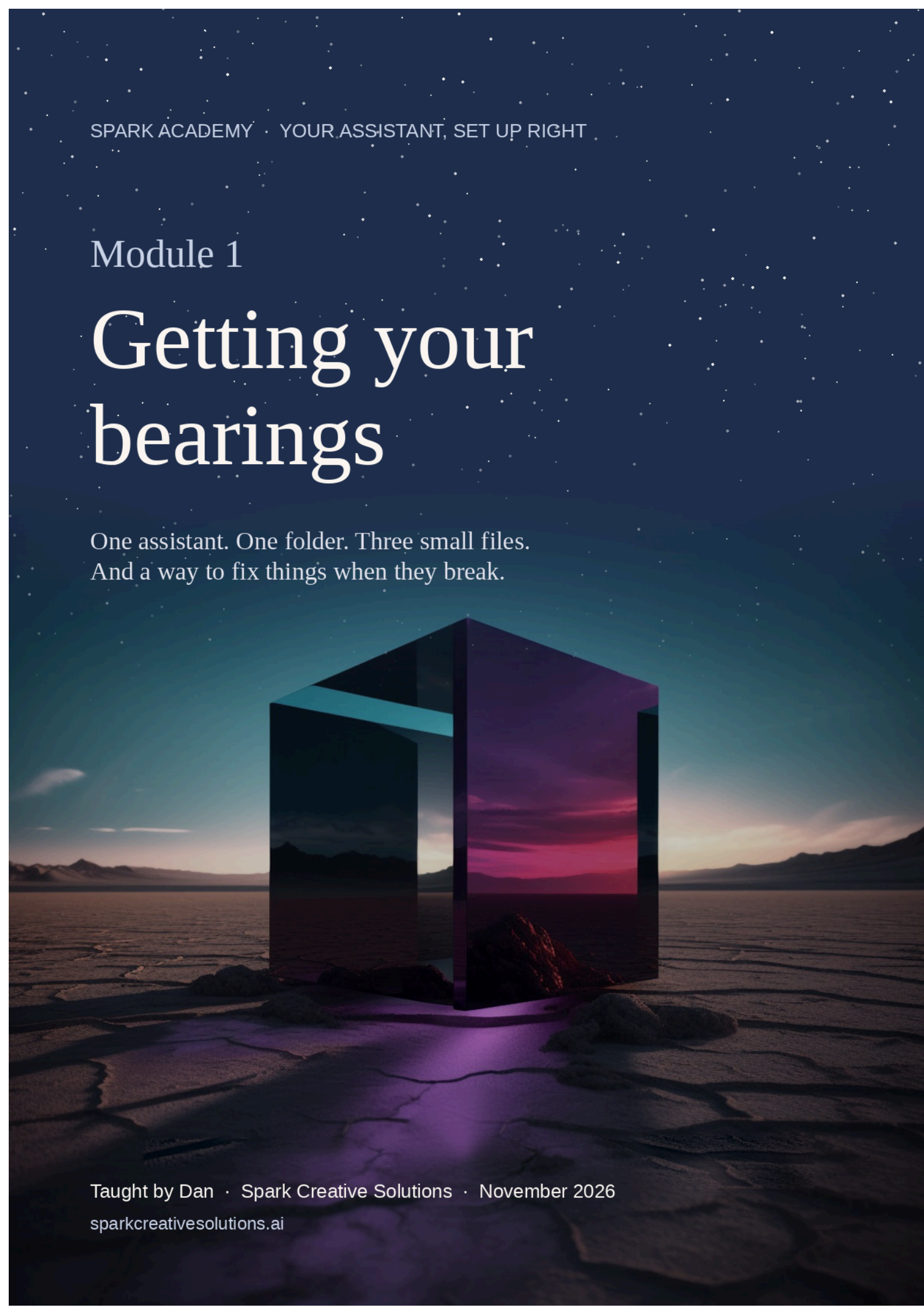
Module 1

Getting your bearings

One assistant. One folder. Three small files.
And a way to fix things when they break.



Taught by Dan · Spark Creative Solutions · November 2026
sparkcreativesolutions.ai

Getting your bearings

Taught by Dan · Spark Creative Solutions · First edition, November 2026

Welcome

This module gives you solid ground. By the end of it you will have one AI assistant you pay for on purpose, a computer you can find your way around, three small text files in a folder of your own, and a way to fix things when they break. That is the whole of it. Nothing to install beyond the assistant's own app, no scripts, no code.

It is written for someone on a Windows laptop who is not a programmer and never wants to be. Mac notes sit under each step. If you are reading this through a translator, that is fine and expected; the sentences are kept short for exactly that reason.

How to use it. Six lessons, one a day, twenty to forty minutes each. Do them in order, because each one leans on the last. Rest days are allowed. Rushing is not, and there is no prize for finishing early. The point of this course is that your assistant gets to know you and your machine a little better every week, and that only works if you understand each piece as it goes in.

Four promises we make to each other.

- Slow and concrete. Every lesson ends with something you can see on your own screen.
- Windows first. Every step is written for Windows 10 and 11, with the Spanish menu names where Windows shows them. Mac in a note underneath.
- You fix your own machine. This course does not do remote support, and the group does not take the mouse. It teaches one calm method for getting unstuck, and you practise it on purpose in Lesson 6. Every fix you make yourself is a skill nobody can take from you.
- Free first. Paid only where it earns its place, and never without a spending cap set first.

A word on pace. The first version of this material was one long afternoon, written from a day of my own work. It was too fast. This version is the same ground, taken at walking speed, with the stones laid where people actually slipped.

Reading this in your own language

This course stays in English on purpose. Translating it is your first exercise, repeated every lesson, and by Module 3 you will do it without thinking. It costs nothing if you do it the way below, and it teaches you more about your assistant than any lesson could.

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One lesson at a time. Never paste the whole module. Copy one lesson, paste it into your assistant, and ask for that. A lesson is a few hundred words; the whole module is thousands, and long pastes are where free tiers run out and where translations go vague. You also only need today's lesson today.

Ask for a translation, not a summary. The exact words matter here, because they name buttons and menus. Say: "Translate this into Spanish. Keep every file name, folder name, menu name and anything in `code marks` exactly as it is, in English. Do not shorten it." Without the second sentence, assistants helpfully translate `ops` into `operaciones` and `NOW.md` into `AHORA.md`, and then nothing you build matches the course.

Use the free one for this. Translation is an easy job. The free tier of Claude, ChatGPT or Gemini does it as well as the paid one, and Google Translate does it well enough for most lessons. Save your paid messages, if you have them, for the moments you are actually stuck. DeepL reads smoothly but drops and changes things in longer passages; use it for a sentence, not a lesson.

Screenshots and menus. If a menu on your screen does not match the words in the lesson, do not guess. Take a screenshot of the menu (Windows key, Shift and S), paste it to your assistant and ask: "Which of these is File name extensions?" The phone camera in Google Translate does the same for a printed page or another screen.

Keep a glossary. When a word trips you twice, add it to your learning log: the English, your word, and what it means in this course. Ten lines will cover most of the course. One to start you off: when this course says "summary", it means resumen, a short retelling, not a CV.

When the translation does not make sense, that is information. Sometimes the machine got it wrong; sometimes the English was unclear; sometimes the idea is new. Ask your assistant to explain the sentence rather than translate it again: "Explain what this paragraph is asking me to do, in simple Spanish, as if to a friend." If it still does not land, ask in the group in your own language. Someone else was stuck on the same line.

Lesson 1. Your learning log

About 15 minutes

Before we touch any AI, make the one file that will save you the most time in this whole course: a log of what you changed.

When something breaks next week, the first useful question is "what changed since it last worked?" People who keep a log can answer in ten seconds. People who do not spend an evening guessing. This is your undo button, and it costs one line a day.

Do this.

- Open Notepad. Press the Windows key, type Notepad (in Spanish Windows it is Bloc de notas), press Enter.

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- Type today's date and one line: "Started the course."
- Save it on your Desktop as `learning log.txt`. The Desktop is fine for now; we move things into their proper home in Lesson 5.
- Find out which Windows you have. Press the Windows key and R together, type `winver`, press Enter. A small window opens. Copy the version line into your log, something like "Windows 11, version 24H2". You will be asked for this every time you ask for help, so having it written down saves a step each time.

From today, every time you change a setting, install something, or switch something off, write one line: what you changed and where. That is the whole habit.

Mac: open TextEdit, then in the menu choose Format, Make Plain Text. Your version is under the Apple menu, About This Mac.

If it goes wrong. If Notepad will not save to the Desktop, save it in Documents instead. Where it lives matters less than being able to find it again. Write where you put it in the log itself, which sounds silly and is not.

Lesson 2. One assistant, one plan, one spending cap

About 30 minutes

Pick one assistant and decide, on purpose, what you will pay for it. Two paid plans at once is the most common way people waste money on AI, and it is usually an accident: a trial that quietly renewed, a second app that seemed worth a look.

Which one. The one you already use most. The examples in this course show Claude, because that is what I use day to day, and every step also says where the same thing lives in ChatGPT and Gemini. They are more alike than different. What matters is that you pick one and get to know it well.

Free or paid. Stay on the free tier for the first four modules if money is tight. Everything we build in them works on free; the limits only bite with heavy daily use. The moment to upgrade is when you hit the limit most days, not before. The standard paid tier of one app is enough for everything in this course; the top tiers are for people who run their business through it all day.

Do this.

- Decide: which assistant, free or paid. Write it in your log.
- Install the desktop app, if your assistant has one. Claude and ChatGPT have Windows apps; Gemini runs in the browser and reads your Google Drive instead, which does the same job later on. Type the company's own website into the address bar yourself. Never install from an advert, a search result you did not check, or a link someone sent you, however friendly.

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- Find the billing page. If you pay, set a monthly spending limit and switch off anything called auto-reload, top-up or extra usage. If you are on free, look anyway, so you know where it is.
- Write in your log: which assistant, which plan, the monthly price, the cap.

Why the cap comes first. A cap is what makes it safe to experiment. With one in place, the worst mistake you can make this month has a known price, and you can stop thinking about it.

Where it lives. Claude: Settings, then Billing. ChatGPT: Settings, then Subscription. Gemini: your Google One or Google AI plan page. Menus move between versions. If yours does not match, ask the assistant itself: "Where in your current settings do I find billing and spending limits?" It knows its own app better than any guide.

Mac: the same apps exist for Mac, from the same websites.

If it goes wrong. Windows may show a blue box saying "Windows protected your PC" when you run an installer. That is SmartScreen, and it appears for many new downloads. If, and only if, you typed the company's own address yourself, click More info, then Run anyway. If you are not sure where the file came from, delete it and download again from the official site. Two minutes of care here saves a very bad week later.

Lesson 3. Prune

About 20 minutes

Everything you have switched on in your assistant is read again with every message you send, whether you use it or not. Think of carrying every book you own to every class, every day. Pruning is the biggest single saving in this course, and it takes twenty minutes.

Do this.

- Open the app's settings and find the list of connectors, plugins, apps, GPTs or extensions that are switched on. Different apps use different words for the same thing: a connection to your email, your calendar, your files, a weather service.
- Before you switch anything off, copy the list into your learning log. Now every switch is reversible, and you can relax.
- Switch off everything you have not used in the last two weeks. Anything you miss can be switched back on in one click when you need it.
- If you have two things that do the same job, keep one. Two automation connectors, two note apps, two calendars.
- Count before and after. Write both numbers in your log. Most people start between ten and twenty and end under five.

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Leave memory alone for now. Your assistant's memory of you gets its own lesson in Module 2, where we clean it carefully rather than quickly.

Where it lives. Claude: Settings, then Connectors. ChatGPT: Settings, then Apps and connectors. Gemini: Settings, then Apps. If yours does not match, ask the assistant where its connectors are switched off.

If it goes wrong. If you switch something off and a task you rely on stops working, your log tells you exactly what to switch back on. That is the log doing its job on day three.

Lesson 4. Your computer's filing cabinet

About 40 minutes

Most "the AI cannot find my file" problems are really "I do not know where my file is". This lesson has no AI in it at all. It is plain Windows, and it is worth more than any clever prompt, because everything from Module 2 onward depends on your assistant and you agreeing on where things live.

Do this.

- Open File Explorer: the Windows key and E together (Explorador de archivos).
- Find your home folder. Click once in the address bar at the top, type `%USERPROFILE%` and press Enter. You are now in `C:\Users\yourname`. Your Desktop, Documents and Downloads all live inside this folder. This is home.
- Show file extensions, the letters after the dot. Windows 11: View, then Show, then File name extensions. Windows 10: the View tab, then tick File name extensions (Extensiones de nombre de archivo). Write it in your log. Without this, Windows hides the truth about your files: a file you called `NOW.md` can secretly be `NOW.md.txt`, and nothing will read it. This one setting prevents the single most common problem in the whole course.
- Check for OneDrive. Click Documents and look at the address bar. If the path contains OneDrive, your Desktop and Documents are being copied to Microsoft's cloud. That is fine for most things. Write it in your log, because it matters in Module 5, and in the next lesson we will put your ops folder outside OneDrive on purpose.
- Learn to copy a path. Hold Shift, right-click any file, choose Copy as path. You will paste paths to your assistant many times. Never type them by hand; one wrong letter and the file does not exist.
- Look at your user name in the path, `C:\Users\...`. If it has a space or an accent in it, write that down. Some later steps need the path wrapped in quotes, and knowing this now saves an hour later.

Mac: Finder, then Go, then Home. Extensions: Finder, Settings, Advanced, Show all filename extensions. Copy a path: right-click a file while holding Option, then Copy as Pathname. Mac has no OneDrive by default; iCloud Drive plays the same role if Desktop and Documents sync is on.

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If it goes wrong. If the address bar shows words like “This PC > Documents” instead of a path, click once on the empty space in it and the real path appears. If `%USERPROFILE%` does nothing, type `C:\Users` and open the folder with your name.

Lesson 5. The ops folder and its three files

About 30 minutes

One folder, three small text files. This is the whole memory system the rest of the course builds on, and it fits in forty lines. Today you make the files and fill them in by hand. In Module 2 your assistant learns to read them before it says anything else, and that is the moment a new chat stops starting from zero.

What the three files are for.

- `NOW.md` is where you are right now. What you are working on, the last thing you finished, the next step, the one thing waiting on you. Twenty lines at most.
- `handoff.md` is two lines per working session, newest on top: the date, what got done, what is next.
- `hands.md` is a tick list of things only you can do: a password to type, a file to share, a button to click.

Nothing in them is secret and nothing is long. They are the notes a good colleague would leave on your desk.

Do this.

- Go to your home folder (Lesson 4), not inside OneDrive. Right-click, New, Folder. Name it `ops`.
- Open Notepad and type the NOW template from the appendix. Choose File, Save as. Go to your `ops` folder. Set “Save as type” to All files (Todos los archivos), set Encoding to UTF-8, name it `NOW.md`, Save.
- Do the same for `handoff.md` and `hands.md`, using their templates.
- Open the `ops` folder in File Explorer. Check that all three names end in `.md`, not `.md.txt`. If one does, you have just met the most common bug in the course, and Lesson 6 is where you fix it.
- Now fill in `NOW.md` with your real day, in four short lines. Not a plan, not a diary. Where you actually are.

Mac: TextEdit, then Format, Make Plain Text, then save with the `.md` name. If it asks whether you mean .md or .txt, say .md.

If it goes wrong. Strange characters in the file, such as an ñ turning into two symbols, mean it was saved in the wrong encoding. Save as again, with Encoding set to UTF-8. If Notepad will not let you pick an encoding, you are in a very old version; your assistant can walk you through using WordPad or installing the free Notepad++ instead.

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Lesson 6. The fix-it loop

About 30 minutes

You will break things in this course. Good. Every fix you make yourself is a skill nobody can take away, and the feeling of “I sorted that out on my own” is most of what we are here for. Today you break something on purpose, and then you fix it.

The exercise.

- In Notepad, type one word and save the file into `ops` as `test.md`, but this time leave “Save as type” on Text documents.
- Look in File Explorer. The file is called `test.md.txt`. That is the bug, the real one, the one that catches almost everyone.
- Run the loop below on it, out loud or in your log, as if you did not know the answer.
- The fix: right-click the file, Rename, delete the `.txt` at the end, press Enter, say Yes to the warning about changing the extension. Then delete the test file. Write one line in your log.

The loop. This is the method for every problem from here on, in this course and outside it.

- Stop and write it down. Three lines: what I did, what I expected, what happened instead. Half of all problems dissolve at this step, because writing them down shows you the gap.
- Get the exact words. Copy the error message as text if you can. If you cannot, take a screenshot of just that part: Windows key, Shift and S together, drag a box around it, then paste it into the chat with your assistant.
- Check your log. What changed since it last worked? Undo that one thing first, before trying anything new.
- Restart it. The app first, then the computer if needed. This is not superstition. It clears most stuck states, and it costs two minutes.
- Ask your assistant, properly. Use the help request from the appendix. One problem per message. Fill in every line, including the one about what you already tried.
- Change one thing at a time. Try one fix, check, write it in the log. Two changes at once and you never learn which one worked, so the problem comes back and you are no wiser.
- The twenty-minute rule. Still stuck after all of that, twenty minutes in? Stop. Post the same help request in the group, and go do something else. Coming back fresh solves more than pushing on, every time.

What the group is for. People in the group read a help request written in the template and suggest the next single step. Nobody takes over your computer, and nobody will fix your account or your password for you. A request that is not in the template gets the template back, kindly. It is not unfriendliness. A problem described properly is already half solved, and we want you to have that half.

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Mac: screenshots are Command, Shift and 4. Everything else in the loop is the same.

If it goes wrong. If Windows will not let you see or edit the `.txt`, file extensions are still hidden. Go back to Lesson 4 and switch them on. That is the loop working: the fix was in something you changed, or did not change, earlier.

Checkpoint

Tick these off before you move on. If one is not true yet, that is the lesson to go back to.

- [ ] A learning log on my Desktop or in Documents, with my Windows version in it
- [ ] One assistant chosen, free or paid, and the spending cap set if I pay
- [ ] Settings pruned, with the before and after counts in my log
- [ ] File extensions showing, and I know whether I have OneDrive
- [ ] An `ops` folder with `NOW.md`, `handoff.md` and `hands.md`, all ending in `.md`
- [ ] I broke `test.md.txt` on purpose and fixed it with the loop
- [ ] The help request is saved somewhere I can find it

To share with the group. One screenshot of your `ops` folder in File Explorer, with the three file names visible. Crop it so nothing else on your screen shows; your screen is your business.

What comes next. Module 2 teaches your assistant to read these three files before it speaks. You open a new chat, say hello, and it tells you where you were. That is the moment this stops being a filing exercise and becomes a working relationship.

Take a rest day first. You have earned it.

Appendix. Templates to copy

The three files, as they should look on day one. Type them in or copy them; either is fine.

```
# NOW.md
Working on:
Last finished:
Next:
Waiting on me:
```

```
# handoff.md (newest on top)
2026-11-08 Made the ops folder and the three files. Next: Module 2, teach my
assistant to read them.
```

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```
# hands.md: things only I can do
- [ ] set the monthly spending cap and switch auto-reload off
- [ ] connect the ops folder to my assistant (Module 2)
```

The help request. Save this where you can find it. Paste it into your assistant, or into the group, with every line filled in.

```
I am on Windows [version from my log], using [assistant and plan].
I was trying to:
I expected:
What happened instead (exact error text, or a screenshot of just that part):
What I changed recently (from my log):
What I already tried:
Please give me one step at a time and wait for me to say it worked before the
next one.
```

That last line matters more than it looks. Without it, the assistant gives you ten steps at once, and on step four you are lost. With it, you stay in charge of the pace.

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