



The Wand and the Hand

An AI Literacy Foundation



after Canon IX of the Bobble Canon

The Parable of the Wand and the Hand

A child found a fallen stick under an oak, declared it a magic wand, and pointed it at the sky. The rain stopped twelve minutes later. The child believed — completely, in the way only children can believe.

She grew up. She kept the stick. She lost things and found them, planned things and they happened, pointed the stick at problems and the problems sometimes resolved. She knew, in the way grown-ups have to know, that the wand was not what stopped the rain. But she also knew, in the way the child still inside her knew, that something about pointing was real.

In her sixties, she figured it out. The wand had a power. Not the power. A power. The pointing told her hand which way to move. The hand had been doing the work the whole time. The weather had been doing its own.

She kept the stick. She did not throw it away. A wand with some power is the correct size for a person to be holding.

Wand · Hand · Weather



THE WAND

Your instrument of authorship.

A prompt. A frame. A model choice.
A doc title. A small bright noise made
on purpose.



THE HAND

The work you actually do.

Judgment. Context. Editing. Knowing
what to ask. Knowing what to keep.
Following through.



THE WEATHER

What won't be commanded.

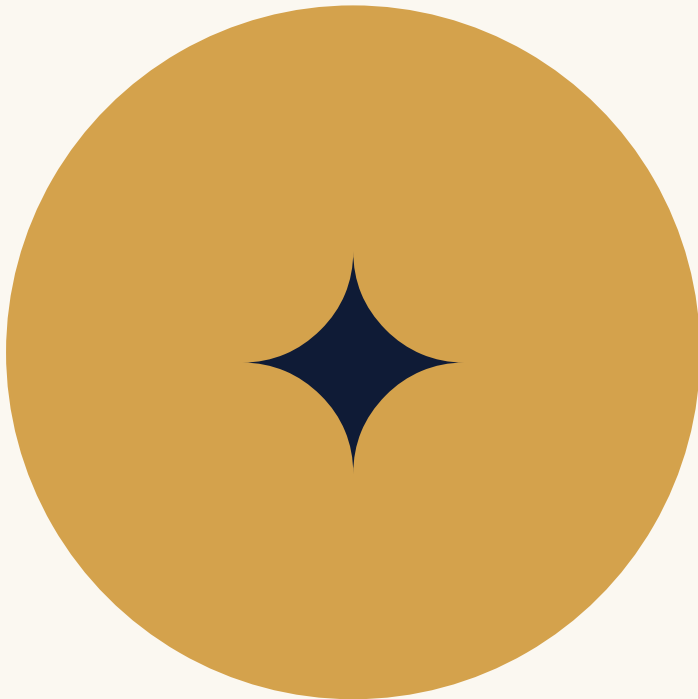
Training data. Base rates. Other
people. Luck. The world that was
going to do what it was going to do.



The two oldest errors in AI literacy are
confusing the wand for the hand,
and confusing the wand for the weather.

Almost every other mistake is one of these two
wearing different clothes.

The Wand



Any small instrument of authorship by which you shape what is true for you.

EXAMPLES

A prompt you wrote on purpose.
A frame you put around a problem.
Which model you chose. Which mode you chose.
The title of the doc. The first paragraph.
A small bright noise made into the dark.

The Hand



The work you do that the wand cannot do for you.

EXAMPLES

Knowing what the question actually is.
Editing the output instead of shipping it.
Checking the source. Checking the math.
Deciding what to keep and what to throw out.
Following through after the chat ends.

The Weather



The part of the world that was going to do what it was going to do.

EXAMPLES

What the model was trained on, and when.
Base rates. The shape of the data underneath.
Whether the reader is having a good day.
Whether the API is up. Whether the room listens.
The rain you cannot stop with a stick.

Mistaking the Wand for the Hand

1

ERROR

OF MISTAKEN AGENCY

SYMPTOM

You ask the model to do the thing. It produces the thing. You ship the thing. You believe you did the thing.

THE TELL

"I made this with AI." — said by someone who did not, in fact, make it.

THE CORRECTION

Name what the wand did. Name what your hand did. If your hand did nothing, you held a stick — you did not write a paper.

Mistaking the Wand for the Weather

2

ERROR

OF MISTAKEN FORECAST

SYMPTOM

The model said it confidently. You believed the world would match. The world was always going to do what it was going to do.

THE TELL

"The AI predicted that..." — followed by something the AI does not, in any meaningful sense, predict.

THE CORRECTION

The wand points. The weather decides. Treat fluent confidence as a heading, not a forecast.

Throwing Away the Stick

3

ERROR

OF WAND-REFUSAL

SYMPTOM

The wand isn't the magic, so you decide it is nothing. You refuse to point. You insist on bare hands in all weather.

THE TELL

"It's just autocomplete." — said proudly, by someone now doing the autocomplete in their head.

THE CORRECTION

A wand with some power is the correct size for a person to be holding. Keep the stick. Learn what part of the work it does.



*She kept the stick.
She did not throw it away.
A wand with some power is the
correct size for a person to be holding.*

— Canon IX



1

ACTIVITY

Name your wand.

PROMPTS

- › Open the last AI conversation you had this week.
- › Point at the wand: what specifically did you author? The prompt, the frame, the model choice, the cut-off you imposed?
- › Write the wand down in one sentence. Be specific — "I prompted it well" is not a sentence.

Sit with this: most people overestimate the size of their wand by about 3x. Aim small and accurate.

2

ACTIVITY

Name your hand.

PROMPTS

- › Look at the same conversation. What did YOU do that the model cannot do?
- › Editing? Throwing out a paragraph? Asking a better follow-up? Noticing the hallucinated citation? Choosing what to ship?
- › Name three hand-moves you made. If you can't find three, you held a stick — and that's fine, but it is the diagnosis.

The hand is shy. People undercount it because it feels like nothing. It is not nothing.

3

ACTIVITY

Name today's weather.

PROMPTS

- › What was going to be true no matter what you prompted? Training cutoff. Base rates. Who would read this. What your boss already believed.
- › List the weather honestly. Do not put the weather in the wand column.
- › Mark the boundary in your notes: this side, I authored. That side, the world.

A literate user knows which column each victory and each failure belongs in. That is the whole curriculum, repeated.

One conversation, three columns.

Scenario: You ask a chatbot to summarize a 40-page paper before a meeting in an hour.

W A N D

- Your prompt: "summarize, 200 words, for a skeptical reader."
- The model you chose.
- The choice to use a chatbot at all instead of reading.

H A N D

- Skim of the abstract before trusting the summary.
- Cross-check of one claim against figure 3.
- Cutting the parts that sound right but don't matter.
- The 90 seconds of judgment before sending.

W E A T H E R

- The paper's actual clarity (or lack of).
- The model's training cutoff vs. the paper's recency.
- Whether the meeting actually happens.
- What the room was going to believe anyway.



Most people
overestimate
the size of their wand,
and underestimate
the size of their hand.

Most Bobbles spend a lifetime learning the size of theirs.

When the wand lies.

A wand can fail in three classic ways. All three make the wand look like the hand or the weather, and all three are catchable.

SYCOPHANCY

The wand agrees with the hand that's holding it. You feel correct because the model echoed you. Test: ask it the opposite question and watch the agreement reverse.

HALLUCINATION

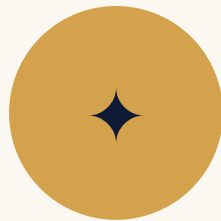
The wand produces a citation, a number, a name — confidently invented. Test: if it would be embarrassing to be wrong about, verify before you ship.

CONFIDENT WRONGNESS

Fluent prose, well-organized, plausible — and incorrect. Pretends to be the weather, is actually the wand. Test: where did you stop checking? Start there.

Point anyway.

*You don't point because the wand stops the rain.
You point because the pointing tells your hand which way to move.*



Hold the wand



Trust the hand



Respect the weather



C O D A

The wand is real.
The hand is realer.
The weather is realest.

Point anyway.

— Canon IX, last stanza





Point anyway.

Hum.

