

What you can do **without AI** is what I hire for

Impressive output is cheap now. Understanding it, defending it and fixing it is where a person's value sits.

I see it more and more often.

The work looks finished

An analysis, a dashboard, working code, a proposal. Built with AI in an afternoon.

The explanation runs out

Why is it built this way? Where did this number come from? The answers stop quickly.

The fix never comes

When it breaks, the tool is asked again, and the new version fails somewhere else.

50 vs 67

Quiz scores for developers who learned a new library with AI, against those who coded by hand.

The widest gap was on debugging. Anthropic, randomised trial, 52 developers, January 2026.

They felt faster and were slower.



METR, randomised trial, 16 experienced open-source developers, 246 tasks, early-2025 tools.

17%

Lower exam scores for students who practised with an answer-giving AI tutor.

Students whose tutor gave hints and withheld answers showed no loss.
Bastani et al., PNAS, 2025, about 1,000 students.

Two public cases.

2023 · A New York court

Six non-existent cases cited in a brief, produced by ChatGPT.
Lawyers fined \$5,000 for bad faith.

2025 · An Australian government report

Fabricated references and a made-up court quote. Deloitte
refunded the final instalment of an A\$440,000 contract.

In both cases the tool did what it was built to do. Nobody had done all of the thinking.

Four things the output alone does not give you.

Judgement

Knowing when an answer is wrong.

Repair

Knowing where to look when it fails.

Defence

Explaining why to a client, a board or a regulator.

Change

Adapting the work when the requirement moves.

Four questions, asked without a screen.

Walk me through it

As if I had to maintain it tomorrow.

Change one thing

The requirement moved. What needs to change?

Fix this fault

Where would you look first, and why?

What did you reject?

Name an option and the reason it lost.

Teach the process.

Schools

Grade the reasoning along with the answer. Use tutors that give hints and withhold answers.

Employers

Give AI for tasks people have already shown they can do by hand. Make "explain it, then ship it" a rule.

Individuals

Try it first, then ask the tool, then check. If you cannot explain it, it is unfinished.



The output is the easy part.
The understanding is what
you are hired for.



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