

FIVE BRAINS DIGITAL · CLOCK OFF · CASEY WILDE

Stop Retyping the AI

Get clean, formatted text out of a chat window and into your document. First try.

It was never the model's fault. You never told it where the text was going — and it cannot see your screen. Three commands, one ten-second test, and the setting nobody tells you about.

FREE · NO EMAIL · PRINT IT OR TYPE ON IT

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BEFORE YOU READ ANY FURTHER

Is this you?

You asked an AI to write something — a letter, a summary, a list, a report. You copied the answer. You pasted it into your document.

This is what landed:

WHAT ENDS UP IN YOUR DOCUMENT

Certainly! Here's your quarterly update:

Quarterly Update

Here are the **three things** that changed:

- Revenue is **up 12%**
- We hired **two** people
- The **Dallas office** moved

And this is what you actually wanted:

WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO GET

Quarterly Update

Here are the three things that changed:

- Revenue is up 12%
- We hired two people
- The Dallas office moved

So you sat there deleting hash marks and asterisks one at a time, putting the bold back in by hand, and cutting off that chirpy first line. Six minutes cleaning up the thing that was supposed to save you twenty.

If the first box looks familiar, this guide is for you. If it does not — if text arrives clean every time — you do not need this. Close it, keep it for the day it changes, pass it to whoever is swearing at their screen down the hall.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING

Nobody is broken here

The AI is not malfunctioning, and you are not doing it wrong. Two ordinary things are colliding.

One. AI models write using a shorthand for formatting. Instead of pressing a Bold button — they have no buttons — they wrap a word in two stars, like ****this****, and mark a heading with a hash mark, like **## This**. It is a real convention with a name, **Markdown**, and it is about twenty years old. The shorthand is not a mistake. It is how they were built to write.

Two. Some programs understand that shorthand and quietly turn it into real headings and real bold. Others have never heard of it and show you the stars exactly as typed.

So the whole problem is this: the AI does not know which kind of program you are about to paste into. **It cannot see your screen.** You never told it. It guessed, and it guessed the way it always guesses.

Three words this guide uses

Prompt. What you type into the AI. Your question or instruction. That is all the word means.

Markdown. The shorthand above — stars for bold, hash marks for headings. You never have to write it. You only have to know that is what those symbols are.

Where the text is going. The program you paste into — Word, Google Docs, an email, a box on a website. This guide says it a lot, because it is the thing that decides everything.

What this guide gives you. A ten-second way to find out which kind of program you are dealing with, three blocks of text you paste into the AI to make it behave, and one setting inside Google Docs that solves the whole thing for anybody who lives in Google Docs. Nothing to install. Nothing to buy.

How to use this file

This is a workbook, not an article. There are lines to fill in. It works two ways and you do not have to choose in advance.

Printed. Any home printer, plain paper. The cover is deliberately plain — no big blocks of ink — so it does not cost a fortune to copy. The blocks you paste into the AI are set in typewriter-style type so you can retype them by eye without guessing at the spaces.

On a device. Open it in any PDF reader that allows annotation or text boxes — Preview on a Mac, Acrobat Reader, Edge, or the markup tools on a phone or tablet — and type straight onto the lines.

SAVE AS — do this before you fill anything in.

Use File > Save As (or Duplicate) and give your filled-in copy a new name, something like “Retyping — my sheet.” That keeps this original blank so you can run it again for the next program, the next tool, the next job. Fill in the original and you get one go.

No form fields, on purpose. Every line in here is drawn, not a fillable PDF field. Form fields silently truncate long answers in some readers and vanish entirely in others. Drawn lines behave the same everywhere and photocopy cleanly.

This guide is about getting text formatted. It is not legal, tax, financial or employment advice, and it does not tell you what to put in your documents.

It was never the AI's fault

You ask for a clean document. You get a wall of text with stars and hash marks in it, or a cheerful paragraph of “Certainly! Here’s your document:” before anything useful starts. So you spend six minutes cleaning up the thing that was supposed to save you twenty.

Here is the part nobody says out loud. **The model did exactly what you asked.** You never told it where the text was going, and it cannot see your screen.

The shorthand is not the problem. The problem is that **the programs you paste into disagree with each other** about whether they understand it. Here is who does what.

WHERE THE TEXT GOES — AND WHAT IT DOES WITH # AND **

Note-taking apps built for this — Notion, Obsidian, and most programmer tools — turn the symbols into real formatting. Send them the shorthand and it works.

Google Docs — ignores them unless one specific setting is switched on. It ships switched off. See section 05.

Microsoft Word — shows the raw symbols, every time. There is no setting to switch on. See section 06.

Email, and most comment or message boxes that have a Bold button — usually shows the raw symbols. Test yours; section 03 takes ten seconds.

A plain box on a website, or a form — shows the raw symbols. You want no shorthand at all here.

No single instruction covers all five. That is why the one-magic-prompt advice you have read elsewhere keeps letting you down. You have to know which room you are walking into.

And before any of that — section 02 — you need to check whether somebody already built you a door.

Look for the button first

Most advice about this jumps straight to prompt engineering. That is backwards, and it wastes your time.

A lot of tools now have an export or copy button that does the whole job in one click. If yours has one, every clever command in section 04 is solving a problem you do not have. Spend thirty seconds looking before you spend five minutes prompting.

Where to look, in order:

- ☐ **The end of the answer itself.** Copy, export, share, download — usually a small row of icons under the last line of the response.
- ☐ **The three-dot menu** on the message or the conversation.
- ☐ **The share icon.** Some tools hide “export to document” in there rather than under copy.
- ☐ **The document panel** if the tool has one — a side canvas or artifact view often has its own download button, and it downloads the clean version.

Two real examples, so you know what you are looking for.

Google’s Gemini has an **Export to Google Docs** button that pushes the answer straight into a Doc with the formatting

intact. No prompt needed, no cleanup. Worth knowing it exists, and worth knowing users have reported it failing intermittently — so check the result before you trust it.

Google Docs can **export any document as Markdown** — File > Download > Markdown (.md) — and **open a Markdown file as a Doc**, through File > Open, or by right-clicking the file in Drive and choosing Open with Google Docs. Both of those work whether or not the setting in section 05 is switched on.

The honest catch

Buttons move. Products rename things and quietly retire features. If the button you are looking for is not where this guide says, that is not you being stupid — that is a menu that changed. Fall back to the ten-second test on the next page, which never goes stale because it tests your actual screen instead of trusting a guide.

The ten-second test

Do this once for each place you paste into. Then you never have to guess about that one again.

Type these two lines **directly into wherever your text needs to end up** — the Google Doc, the Word file, the email, the box on the website:

```
# Test  
**bold**
```

Now look at what happened.

→ **“Test” turned into a big heading and “bold” went bold.** That program understands the shorthand. Use Command A.

→ **You are staring at a literal hash mark and a pair of asterisks.** It does not. Use Command B or C.

Why type it instead of paste it?

Some apps treat typed text and pasted text as two different things, and handle them differently. Google Docs is one of them. Typing is the honest test of whether the program understands the symbols at all. If you want to be thorough, do it both ways — it costs another ten seconds and it is the difference between knowing and assuming.

Write down what you found

Fill this in once. It stops being a mystery permanently.

WHERE THE TEXT GOES	HEADING?	BOLD?	SO, COMMAND
	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C
	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C
	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C
	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C
	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C
	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C
	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C
	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ Y ☐ N	☐ A ☐ B ☐ C

SECTION 04

The three commands

Paste the whole block at the **very end** of your message to the AI, after you have asked for what you want. Last instruction wins more often than first instruction — see section 07.

Command A — for programs that understand the shorthand

Notion, Obsidian, GitHub, most note apps, and Google Docs once the setting in section 05 is on.

OUTPUT RULES - follow all of them:

1. No preamble, no sign-off, no commentary. Start at the first word of the deliverable.
2. Use strict Markdown: # for the title, ## for sections, - for bullets, ** ** for anything I must act on.
3. No emoji unless I asked for emoji.
4. If a rule conflicts with my request, follow my request and say so in one line at the very end.

Command B — for Word, email, and boxes with a Bold button

The one most people actually need. It bans the symbols instead of asking for them.

OUTPUT RULES - follow all of them:

1. No preamble, no sign-off, no commentary.
2. Use NO Markdown. No #, no *, no _, no backticks.
3. Structure with plain text only: title on its own line in CAPITALS, section headings on their own line in Title Case, hyphen and a space for bullets.
4. Separate every section with one blank line.
5. Where something needs emphasis, rewrite the sentence so the emphasis is in the words. Do not use symbols.

Command C — when you want it to arrive already formatted

Ask for HTML, open it in a browser, then copy from the browser and paste. Most programs keep the formatting when you paste it in from a web page. More steps, best result.

OUTPUT RULES - follow all of them:

1. Output ONLY valid HTML. No preamble, no explanation, no code-fence markers around it.
2. Use h1, h2, p, ul/li and strong. Nothing else.
3. No CSS, no inline styles, no scripts.
4. Do not wrap it in <html> or <body> tags - fragment only.

Save it as a file ending .html, double-click it, select all in the browser, copy, paste. Check the result before you trust it — editors vary more than they should.

The Google Docs setting

If you live in Google Docs, this single setting is worth more than every prompt in this guide.

Google Docs can read and write Markdown. It just does not, until you tell it to — and Google ships it switched off.

TURN IT ON

In Google Docs on the web: Tools > Preferences > Enable Markdown. Tick it. Done.

If you have read an older guide that told you to look for “Automatically detect Markdown,” that was the original name when the feature launched in March 2022. It is called **Enable Markdown** now, in the same place. Same checkbox, new label.

What that one tick actually turns on

More than people realise. In July 2024 Google widened this from a typing convenience into a genuine import and export path:

- ☐ **Markdown as you type.** Typing # and a space makes a heading, on the spot.
- ☐ **Paste from Markdown.** Right-click where you want it and choose Paste from Markdown — your Command A output lands as real headings and real bold.

- ☐ **Copy as Markdown.** Select part of a Doc, right-click, Copy as Markdown. Now you can move formatted text back *into* an AI tool, or into Notion, without it arriving as mush.

And two things that work whether the setting is on or off

Export the whole document as Markdown — File > Download > Markdown (.md).

Open a Markdown file as a Doc — File > Open > Upload, or right-click the .md file in Drive and choose Open with Google Docs.

Those two are the reason section 02 exists. If all you need is to move one finished document across, the menu already does it and no prompt is involved.

Two honest caveats

It is a setting on your account, not on the document.

Turning it on for you does not turn it on for the colleague you send the Doc to. They will need their own tick.

Typed and pasted text can behave differently, and Google has changed this area more than once. Run the ten-second test in section 03 after you switch it on, so you know what your account does today rather than what a guide claimed last year. Including this one.

Word is a different animal

People assume Word must have the same switch buried somewhere. It does not.

As of August 2026, Microsoft Word has no native Markdown support. There is no setting to enable, no Paste from Markdown, no Download as .md. Paste the shorthand into Word and you get the raw symbols, because to Word that is all they are.

So stop looking for the switch. Here is what actually works, cheapest first:

- ☐ **Use Command B.** Ban the symbols at the source. For most documents this is the whole answer and it costs you one paste.
- ☐ **Use Command C** when the document has to look sharp — HTML through a browser, then paste. Word accepts formatting pasted from a web page.
- ☐ **Go through Google Docs.** Paste from Markdown into a Doc (section 05), then File > Download > Microsoft Word (.docx). Longer, but it keeps real heading styles, which matters if the document needs a table of contents.

- **Third-party converters and Word add-ins exist.** They work. They are also another tool to install, trust and keep updated — and for one document a month that is a bad trade. Reach for one only if you are doing this daily.

The reframe worth keeping

Markdown is a drafting language that feeds Word. It is not a rival to it. Nobody is asking you to give up tracked changes and comments. You are asking a chat window to hand you clean text, once, on the way in.

When it ignores you anyway

It will. Not often, but it will, and usually deep in a long session right when you need it least. These are the five moves, in the order worth trying.

1. Move the rules to the end.

Instructions at the bottom of a prompt get followed more reliably than instructions at the top, especially once the prompt gets long. Your request first, the command block last.

2. Re-send the command on its own.

Do not re-explain and do not apologise to it. Paste the block again as its own message with: *Rewrite your last answer under these rules. Output only the rewrite.*

3. Show it one example.

Paste three lines of exactly the shape you want and say “match this shape.” One concrete example beats three sentences of description almost every time.

4. Cut the rules down.

Around eight constraints is where compliance starts sliding. If your block has grown, keep the three that matter for this document and drop the rest.

5. Start a clean chat.

A long conversation carries a lot of contradictory instruction. When formatting has gone sideways and stayed sideways, a fresh chat with the command block at the end fixes it faster than arguing does.

The one that is not worth your time

Typing IN ALL CAPS. Adding “IMPORTANT!!!”. Telling it you will be disappointed in it. Put the rules last, keep them few, show an example. That is the whole game.

FILL THIS IN ONCE

Your command sheet

Fill it in and keep it next to the keyboard. Print it, or type into it with any PDF annotation tool.

The document I make most often

Where it ends up

Is there an export or copy button? (section 02)

What the ten-second test showed

Heading turned into a real heading: ☐ Yes ☐ No Bold went bold: ☐ Yes ☐ No

So my command is: ☐ A — Markdown ☐ B — no markup ☐ C — HTML ☐ none, the button does it

My edited command block — the rules I actually keep

What it still gets wrong, and which move in section 07 fixed it

The next program I need to work this out for

Where this came from

Every claim in this guide about a menu, a setting or a feature was checked against the company's own documentation in August 2026, not against another blog post. Here is the list, so you can check it yourself when this guide gets old — and it will.

The Google Docs setting, and what it controls. Google Docs Editors Help, “Use Markdown” (support.google.com/docs).

The July 2024 expansion — paste from Markdown, copy as Markdown, export and import. Google Workspace Updates blog, “Import and export Markdown in Google Docs,” July 2024.

The original March 2022 launch, under the old name “Automatically detect Markdown.” Google Workspace Updates blog, March 2022. This is why older guides send you looking for a checkbox that has been renamed.

Word's lack of native Markdown support, and the write-then-convert workaround. Office Watch, “What is Markdown and how it works with Microsoft Word,” 2026.

Gemini's Export to Google Docs button, and the reports of it failing intermittently. Google Gemini Apps Help and its public community threads.

Why a free guide bothers with sources

Because the last version of this guide did not, and it went stale without anyone noticing. It sent people to a menu item Google had renamed. A guide that names its sources and dates them can be checked; a guide that does not just quietly rots. If something here does not match your screen, trust your screen — then go look at the source and see what moved.

How to check any of this yourself

You do not need this guide to stay right. You need to be able to test it. Three habits that outlive any guide:

- ☐ **Trust your screen over any instruction, including this one.** If a menu item is not where a guide says, the guide is old. That is the normal state of software writing.
- ☐ **Search the company's own help pages, not a blog.** support.google.com for Docs, support.microsoft.com for Word. Blogs copy each other and copy old versions.
- ☐ **Look for the date.** A page about software with no date on it is a page you cannot use. That is why every source below is dated, and why this guide puts its own check date on the cover.

Credit where it is due. Markdown was created by John Gruber, with substantial input from Aaron Swartz, in 2004. It was designed so that a document would stay readable as ordinary text even if no program ever turned the symbols into formatting. Twenty years later that decision is the reason AI models write in it, and the reason this problem is annoying rather than catastrophic — the worst case is you can still read it.

THIS ONE IS FREE. SO ARE THE OTHERS.

Where to go next

This guide is free because it should be. No email required, nothing to unsubscribe from, no upsell screen at the end. If it saved you an afternoon, that was the entire point.

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Every free guide we publish sits on that one page. Download them, print them, hand them out. New ones get added as they are finished, so it is worth a look now and then.

Clock Off is the line this guide belongs to. Work, without the reverence.

The Gray Age — later life and its paperwork. Hospitals, Medicare, dementia, estates, clearing out a house. Priced at a few dollars and kept there on purpose.

The Scam Sheet — a free newsletter on the frauds going around right now, and what to do if one already landed.

Did somebody leave this lying around for you? Good — that is what it is for. It is free, you may keep it, and you may copy it for anyone else who needs it. There are more like it at fivebrainsdigital.com.

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