

INSIGHTS

Behaviors of AI-Fluent Users: Beyond AI Literacy

LIM Sengkhoun¹, MD, MHPE, International FAIMER Fellow

¹ **LIM Sengkhoun** is a Health Advisor at GIZ Cambodia and Research Fellow at AI Forum

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has quickly become part of everyday life. Many of us now use GenAI almost every day - for learning, work, research, and increasingly, decision support. But frequent use does not necessarily mean effective or productive use.

The key questions are: Are we AI literate? And are we becoming AI fluent?

The distinction matters. AI literacy is about what we know and understand; AI fluency becomes visible in what we do - how we decide, interact, evaluate, and act when working with GenAI.

AI Literacy is the Foundation

Being AI literate means having enough conceptual and practical understanding to use GenAI critically and responsibly. It does not require becoming a GenAI expert. At minimum, users should understand broadly how GenAI works and its limitations, how to communicate effectively with it, and how to evaluate its outputs. This reflects UNESCO's AI competency frameworks emphasizing progression from understanding GenAI to applying and creating with it while maintaining human agency and accountability (Cukurova & Miao, 2024; Miao & Shiohira, 2024).

For everyday GenAI use, three capabilities are particularly important: model understanding, prompt and context engineering, and evaluative judgment. Together, these provide the foundation for AI fluency.

AI Fluency is the Goal

AI fluency is the ability to interact with GenAI effectively, efficiently, ethically, and safely across three modes of human-AI collaboration: automation, augmentation, and agency. Automation lets GenAI perform defined tasks; augmentation combines human thinking with GenAI capabilities; and agency gives GenAI greater autonomy to act on our behalf.

For knowledge workers, the opportunity is to move beyond automation toward augmentation - using GenAI not only to work faster, but to think and work better.

The 4D AI Fluency framework translates fluency into four behavioral competencies: Delegation, Description, Discernment, and Diligence (Dakan & Feller, 2025).

Delegation: Design the Workflow

One important shift in GenAI use is from prompt design to workflow design. Rather than starting with “*What and how should I ask GenAI?*”, a fluent user first asks: “What am I trying to accomplish, and how should the work be divided?”

For example, writing a research paper involves multiple tasks - from defining the research question and reviewing literature to drafting, critical analysis, and final review. These tasks should not all be delegated to GenAI in the same way. Some can be handled efficiently by GenAI, some require human expertise and judgment, and others benefit from human-AI collaboration.

In practice, fluent users demonstrate observable behaviors: they break complex work into tasks, consider GenAI's capabilities and limitations, and deliberately decide what humans should do, what GenAI should do, and what they should do together. For collaborative tasks, they also decide who should start - human or GenAI - and how the other should then review, challenge, refine, or build on that work.

A fluent user does not simply delegate more to GenAI; they delegate more deliberately. This ability to design the human-AI workflow is a key - and often underrated - AI fluency skill.

Description: Clarify, Interact, and Iterate

If Delegation is deciding what to do with GenAI, Description is about how to communicate and interact with it effectively. It goes beyond prompt and context engineering.

The 4D framework describes three dimensions: *Product Description* - defining the desired output, format, audience and style; *Process Description* - guiding how GenAI should approach the tasks; and *Performance Description* - defining how GenAI should behave during interactions (Dakan & Feller, 2025).

In practice, fluent users demonstrate observable behaviors: they clarify the goal, provide relevant context, specify format and structure, define the audience, give examples, set the tone or style, guide the process, ask for explanations, set interaction rules, and iterate and refine responses.

Effective GenAI use increasingly moves beyond one- or two-shot prompting toward ongoing conversations - iterating and refining, questioning outputs, and actively shaping how GenAI responds (Swanson et al., 2026) - for instance, *challenge my assumptions*, *push back when you disagree*, *walk me through your approach*, or *tell me what you are uncertain about*.

The behavioral shift is therefore from writing better prompts to building better interactions with GenAI.

Discernment: Question Before You Trust

GenAI can produce outputs that are coherent, confident, and persuasive, but still be flawed. Discernment is the ability to critically judge GenAI outputs for accuracy, completeness, relevance, bias, and usefulness.

In practice, fluent users demonstrate observable behaviors: they question GenAI reasoning, check critical facts and claims, identify missing context, detect potential hallucinations, validate sources and evidence, challenge assumptions, and compare alternative outputs or perspectives.

This also requires domain knowledge. Without sufficient understanding of the subject, it becomes harder to recognize when GenAI-generated answers are incorrect, misleading, incomplete, or inappropriate for the context (Asamoah et al., 2024).

As GenAI becomes more capable and its outputs more convincing, human judgment becomes more - not less - important

Diligence: Take Responsibility

Diligence is about responsibility and accountability for how we use GenAI and its outputs. The 4D framework distinguishes *Creation Diligence* - choosing and using GenAI systems thoughtfully; *Transparency Diligence* - disclosing GenAI involvement when appropriate; and *Deployment Diligence* - verifying and taking responsibility for outputs we use or share (Dakan & Feller, 2025).

In practice, fluent users demonstrate observable behaviors: they choose appropriate GenAI tools, protect sensitive information, disclose GenAI involvement when appropriate, verify outputs before using or sharing them, and take responsibility for final outputs and decisions.

We can delegate tasks to GenAI, but we cannot delegate accountability.

From AI Use to AI Fluency

AI fluency is not about using more GenAI, knowing more tools, or writing better prompts. It is about using GenAI with greater intention and judgment - knowing what to delegate, how to interact, what to question and verify, and where human responsibility must remain.

Good GenAI use should make us more productive today without making us less capable tomorrow. The goal is not to outsource thinking, but to use GenAI to help us think harder and better - while avoiding excessive cognitive offloading and retaining knowledge, skills, and judgment needed to work independently when necessary (Gerlich, 2025).

As GenAI becomes more capable and agentic, the question shifts from “*Can GenAI do this?*” to “*Should I delegate it, how much autonomy should GenAI have, and where must human judgement and oversight remain?*”

References

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