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A PPA BUDDY GUIDE · FOR TEACHERS

Teach the Thinking

Your students are graduating into a world that's already shifted. Six checks to assess whether your curriculum has shifted with it.

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Before you start

This is a guide. It won't tell you what to do. It'll help you look at what you already teach and ask whether it builds the skills that are getting more valuable as AI gets better, or the ones that are getting cheaper.

Work through it on your own, or bring it to a department meeting. Six sections. Take as long as you need.

Why now. Motor execution is being captured. Fact recall is automated. Pattern-matching is a commodity. What machines can't do yet is the decision layer: defining the problem, choosing between trade-offs, knowing when to stop, knowing when something isn't good enough and why. That layer is the bit we want to be teaching more of, not less. Every subject has a version of it. This audit helps you find yours.

SECTION 01

Problem definition

The first human move in any real task is deciding what the problem actually is. Most assessments hand students a pre-defined problem and mark them on how neatly they solve it. That's the bit machines are fast at.

REFLECT

- In your current scheme, who decides what the problem is worth solving? You, the exam board, or the student?
- How often do your students get to reject a brief and argue for a better one?
- What does a 'good question' look like in your subject, and do you ever mark students on the quality of theirs?

ADD YOUR NOTES

REFRAME

A finished answer to the wrong question is worth less than a half-finished answer to the right one. Students need practice choosing what to work on, not just how to work on it.

THIS WEEK

Pick one upcoming task and add a short framing step before students start. Ten minutes. Ask them to write one sentence on what the real problem is and one sentence on what they're choosing to leave out.

SECTION 02

Reasoning trails

The expensive part of student work is now the thinking around it, not the thing itself. A polished final piece without a reasoning trail is the cheapest version of that piece. A rough piece with clear reasoning is worth more.

REFLECT

- Look at your last set of marked work. What percentage of the mark came from the outcome, and what percentage from the reasoning behind it?
- If a student handed in a perfect final piece with no evidence of how they got there, could you still mark it well? Should you be able to?
- Where in your subject is annotation, evaluation, or justification currently underweighted?

ADD YOUR NOTES

REFRAME

The reasoning trail is the bit a machine can't forge convincingly yet. If you want to know whether a student did the thinking, mark the thinking.

THIS WEEK

Take one existing success criteria and rewrite it so at least a third of the weight sits on the reasoning, not the outcome. Test it on the next piece of work.

SECTION 03

Productive failure

If every student work gets 'helped' to a finished state by an adult, the object becomes the cheapest thing in the chain. The learning is in the iteration and what the student chose to change, and why.

REFLECT

- In the last term, how often did a student hand in something genuinely rough, with permission to be rough?
- When you intervene in student work, are you protecting the outcome or protecting the learning?
- Does your department have a shared definition of what a 'good mistake' looks like in your subject?

ADD YOUR NOTES

REFRAME

Productive failure isn't about letting students struggle. It's about protecting the space where they notice something isn't working and choose what to change. That noticing is the skill.

THIS WEEK

Name one task this term where the 'rough version' is the assessed version, not a stepping stone to a final piece. Tell students that's deliberate.

SECTION 04

Trade-off thinking

Real decisions are almost never between right and wrong. They're between two defensible options with different costs. Most school tasks don't test this because they have a correct answer hiding somewhere.

REFLECT

- Where in your curriculum do students have to choose between two reasonable options and justify the one they picked?
- Do your rubrics ever reward a student for explaining what they chose not to do?
- How would you mark a student who picked the 'wrong' answer but reasoned well?

ADD YOUR NOTES

REFRAME

A student who can articulate the trade-off they made is demonstrating a skill that doesn't exist in a training dataset. That's worth assessing directly.

THIS WEEK

Add one 'what did you choose not to do, and why' question to a piece of work you're already setting. Read the answers before you read the outcomes.

SECTION 05

Critical AI literacy

Students will be offered deals for the rest of their working lives. Short-term money in exchange for data, labour, or attention that trains the thing that later competes with them. They need to be able to see the trade clearly.

REFLECT

- Where in your subject could you teach students to read a deal, a platform, or a tool critically, without it feeling bolted-on?
- Do your students know the difference between using AI as a thinking partner and outsourcing the thinking to it?
- When did you last have an honest conversation with a class about what AI is good at and what it isn't?

ADD YOUR NOTES

REFRAME

This isn't a citizenship-only topic. Every subject has a version of 'who benefits, who pays, who decides.' Your subject knowledge makes you the right person to teach it there.

THIS WEEK

Find one place in your existing scheme where a ten-minute 'who benefits from this' conversation would fit. Mark it. Plan the question you'd ask.

SECTION 06

What you're measuring

This is the audit's final question and the one that does the heavy lifting. Your assessment tells students what you actually value. Everything else is decoration.

REFLECT

- Look at your most recent assessment. If a student could produce the exact same outcome with AI help, would they still get full marks?
- Which parts of your marking are about what was produced, and which are about what the student thought?
- If you redesigned one assessment this year around judgement rather than output, which one would you pick and why?

ADD YOUR NOTES

REFRAME

You don't have to rebuild your curriculum. You have to shift the weight of what you count. The content can mostly stay. The marking criteria probably can't.

THIS TERM

Pick one assessment. Just one. Redesign it so at least half the marks sit on judgement, reasoning, or decision-making. Run it. See what happens.

Before you close this

You don't need to do all six. You probably shouldn't try. Pick the one section that felt uncomfortable to read, and start there. The uncomfortable one is usually the one that matters.

None of this is about keeping up with AI. It's about teaching the bit of thinking that was always the point, and that's now also the bit that holds its value. Those two things have never been this aligned before.

If you want to think this through with other teachers working it out in real time, PPA Buddy's community is free. We're asking the same questions you are.