

Relying on AI without losing your skills: What to keep sharp

Adaptive module

~20 min

AI is taking over a growing share of writing, analysis, and even decisions, raising the risk of a quiet erosion of judgment and autonomy: what researchers call “agency decay,” taken seriously enough for Gartner to predict “AI-free” skills assessments from 2026. Without demonizing the tool or handing everything over, the module offers a clear criterion for deciding which abilities are truly worth cultivating, and concrete practices for delegating without letting skills waste away.

— LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 01 Distinguish the skills that can waste away without consequence from those you must keep cultivating.
- 02 Recognize the four stages through which dependence on AI sets in, from experimentation to loss of autonomy.
- 03 Identify the three reasons not to delegate to AI: the joy of doing, creative and critical thinking, and embodied knowledge.
- 04 Adopt three concrete practices: think for yourself first, seek out counterarguments, and protect AI-free time.

— WHO IT'S FOR

Anyone who delegates part of their work to AI and wants to keep their judgment and autonomy.

- **Prerequisite:** none

— HOW THE MODULE WORKS

Self-paced, with practice tailored to each learner.

- 1 **Self-assessment:** on 9 dimensions, to gauge current habits and guide the practice.
- 2 **Expert video:** 10 minutes, with 3 pauses for reflection.
- 3 **Practice scenarios:** the first 2 chosen from the self-assessment, then 16 optional ones. Every answer gets feedback: what it leads to, and one way to improve.
- 4 **Dated commitment:** one action to try, written by the learner or picked from the suggestions.
- 5 **Memo to download:** key takeaways, questions, commitment, personal notes and checklists.

— A SAMPLE PRACTICE SCENARIO

For a year, Eleni, a lawyer, has been handing her clause analyses to AI; before that, she answered off the top of her head. This morning, the tool is down until Thursday. A colleague asks Eleni for a quick opinion. Eleni hears herself reply: “I’ll get back to you on Thursday.” How can Eleni react, now and afterward?

— ASSESSMENT AND COMPLETION

Pass mark: 80%

The score takes into account your answers to the practice scenarios, your commitment and, where relevant, any additional learning activities. Passing requires a commitment and a score of at least 80%.

METHODS & MODELS

- Skill atrophy / “agency decay” – concept formalized by Cornelia C. Walther (Wharton, 2025)
- Cognitive offloading – inspired by Risko & Gilbert (2016)
- The 3 reasons not to delegate (the joy of doing, creative/critical thinking, embodied knowledge) – Afthonios method
- 3 practices against atrophy (think for yourself first, ask AI to challenge you, AI-free time) – drawn from Afthonios coaching practice

SOURCES & REFERENCES

- Gartner (October 2025): by 2026, the atrophy of critical thinking caused by GenAI will lead 50% of organizations worldwide to require “AI-free” skills assessments
- Bellemare-Pépin, Lespinasse, Bengio, Jerbi et al. (Université de Montréal / Mila) – Scientific Reports (January 2026): on the Divergent Association Task, GPT-4 outperforms the average human, but the 10% most creative people keep a clear advantage
- Cornelia C. Walther – “agency decay” (Forbes / Psychology Today, 2025)
- NIST AI 600-1 (2024) – generative AI risks and guidelines for controlled use