BEGINNER · 7 min read · November 1, 2026 · By Kelly Stratton

How to Make AI Writing Sound Human: Fix the 3 Tells That Get It Caught

Make your AI drafts read like a person wrote them: the three tells researchers used to catch AI writing 93% of the time, the one prompt that finds them in your draft and rewrites them, and what to type when the rewrite still sounds off.

If you use ChatGPT or Claude to help you write, you've probably had this moment. The draft is clean, the grammar is perfect, and something about it still feels off. You can't point to a word that's wrong. It just doesn't sound like you. This guide gives you the reason, three tells you can spot in ten seconds, and one prompt that finds them in your draft and fixes them, so what you send sounds like a person wrote it. Because one did.

> IN A NUTSHELL
>
> AI writing has a shape. It spells out the point, runs in one straight line, and ties up every loose end. Researchers caught AI-written stories 93% of the time from that shape alone. Fix the shape, and your AI drafts read like you wrote them.

> WHAT YOU NEED
>
> A draft, and ChatGPT or Claude. The free plans work. Nothing to install.

PART 1 What Did the Researchers Find?

A team at the University of Maryland and Google DeepMind collected 61,608 stories: one written by a person and one written by each of five AI models (Claude, OpenAI's GPT, Gemini, DeepSeek, and Kimi) for the same 10,272 writing prompts. Then they built a tool that looked only at the story itself. How the plot moves. How the theme comes across. How it ends. No word choice, no punctuation, no em dashes.

That tool told the human stories from the AI stories with 93.2% accuracy. Writing style alone did worse, at 85.8%. In other words, the shape of AI writing gives it away more than its wording does.

One honest note: the study used stories, about 4,700 words each, not emails or posts. But the three habits it found show up in anything AI writes, and once you see them, you'll spot them everywhere.

PART 2 What Are the 3 Tells of AI Writing?

The three tells, with the study's numbers

1. It spells out the point
The writing tells you what it all means instead of letting a detail show you. In the study, AI stories explained their theme 77% of the time. Human stories did it 52% of the time.

2. It runs in one straight line
Every paragraph marches to the next. No side story, no aside, no second thread. 79% of AI stories had no subplot at all, compared with 57% of human stories.

3. It ties everything up
Every question gets answered and the ending lands with a bow, often a character coming to peace with something. 47% of AI stories ended that way, compared with 27% of human ones. People are more comfortable leaving things open.

Any one of these is normal. Good writers spell out a point sometimes. It's all three together, every time, that reads as AI.

PART 3 Why Does AI Writing Sound Like That?

The study measured what AI does, not why. The most likely reason is the job these tools are built for. ChatGPT and Claude are trained to be clear and helpful: answer the question, stay on topic, don't leave the reader confused. That's exactly what you want when you ask how to reset your router. In writing that's supposed to sound like a person, the same habits turn into a lecture. The point gets announced. The detour gets cut. The ending gets wrapped up for you.

People don't write like that. We mention the thing that happened on the way. We trust the reader to get it. We stop before everything is settled. That's what the prompt below puts back.

PART 4 How Do You Fix AI Writing With One Prompt?

I built this prompt straight from the study. Each tell in it is one of the patterns the researchers measured, and each fix asks the AI to do what the human writers did instead.

From the study to the prompt
AI explained the theme (77% vs 52%) So the prompt asks for the point to be shown through one real detail, and leaves a bracket for a detail only you would know.
AI wrote no subplot (79% vs 57%) So the prompt asks for one short aside or detour, the kind of side thought a person adds.

AI wrapped up the ending (47% vs 27%)
So the prompt asks for an ending that leaves one thing open, the way people are more comfortable doing.

It also asks the AI to quote the exact lines that do each one before it rewrites anything, so you see the problem in your own draft, not just a new version.

1. Open ChatGPT or Claude and start a new chat.
2. Drop in the prompt below.
3. Add your draft right after “My draft:” and send.
4. Read the check first. It quotes the exact lines that do each of the three.
5. Read the rewrite. If it left a bracket like [add the real detail here], fill it in with something true that only you would know.

PROMPT

```
Read my draft below. Researchers found AI writing has a shape, and three tells give it away:
1. It spells out the point. It tells the reader what the writing means instead of letting a detail show it.
2. It runs in one straight line. Every paragraph marches in order. No aside, no detour, no second thread.
3. It ties everything up. Every question answered, every loose end gone, a neat bow at the end.

First, check my draft for each of the three. For each one, quote the exact lines that do it, or say "clear" if it doesn't.

Then rewrite the draft so:
- The point is shown through one specific detail instead of stated. If you need a detail only I would know, leave a bracket like [add the real detail here] and I'll fill it in.
- There is one short aside or detour a person would make.
- The ending leaves one thing open instead of wrapping it up.

Keep my facts, my voice, and my length within 10%. Use contractions. No em dashes. Don't add claims I didn't make. Show the rewrite, then a two-line note on what you changed.

My draft:
```

Run it on anything before it goes out: an email, a post, a bio, a newsletter. The brackets are the most important part. A real detail is the one thing AI can't make up for you, and it's the thing that makes writing sound like a person.

PART 5 What Does a Before and After Look Like?

Here's a short announcement for a pretend mobile dog grooming business, Muddy Paws, written the way AI usually writes it. I ran the prompt on it in Claude.

Before

> *At Muddy Paws Mobile Grooming, we believe every dog deserves to feel their best. This month, we added a new de-shedding treatment designed to keep your pet comfortable through the changing seasons. Our groomers use gentle tools and premium products to remove loose undercoat, reduce shedding at home, and leave coats soft and healthy. Booking is simple: choose a time online, and we'll come right to your driveway. Ultimately, it's about more than grooming. It's about giving your dog the care they deserve and giving you more time to enjoy together.*

Claude flagged all three. It spells out the point twice ("we believe every dog deserves to feel their best" and "Ultimately, it's about more than grooming"). It marches in five straight steps. And the last two sentences exist only to wrap it up.

After, with the three brackets Claude left filled in the way the owner would fill them

> *Muddy Paws added a de-shedding treatment this month, for coats that let go when the seasons turn. Our groomers use gentle tools and premium products to lift out the loose undercoat, so there's less shedding at home and a softer, healthier coat.*
>
> *Last week we pulled a full grocery bag of undercoat off Biscuit, a three-year-old husky, in one session. If you've never seen loose undercoat in a pile, it looks like a second dog. His owner took one look and said, "Well, that explains my couch."*
>
> *Booking is simple. Pick a time online and we come to your driveway. Whether one session holds through the season, we'll find out.*

Look at what changed. The big statement about care is gone, and a pile of fur does that job instead. "It looks like a second dog" is the aside, the kind of thing a person says out loud. And the ending leaves a question open. Claude wrote the rest. The grocery bag, Biscuit, and the couch were the three brackets, the details only the owner would know. Those are the lines that make it sound like a real person runs this business.

PART 6 What Should You Type If the Rewrite Still Sounds Off?

The first rewrite is a starting point. These follow-ups fix the most common misses. Type them in the same chat.

- **Too long:** "Shorter. Same length as my draft."
- **The aside feels random:** "Make the aside something I'd say about this exact topic."
- **The ending is too vague:** "End on a real next step, but don't explain what it means."
- **It still sounds like AI:** "Read it again for the three tells and fix any you find."
- **It's an email, not a post:** "This is an email to [who]. Keep it under 120 words and end with the one thing I need from them."

THE TELL THAT IT SLIPPED BACK

Read the last sentence of the rewrite. If it starts with "Ultimately," "In the end," or "At the end of the day," or explains what the whole piece meant, the bow is back. Delete that sentence. Most of the time, the line before it is a better ending.

PART 7 What Does This Prompt Not Do?

It doesn't know your life. The prompt can move things around and cut the lecture, but the detail that makes writing yours has to come from you. That's what the brackets are for, so fill them in.

It isn't a way around a teacher's or an employer's rules. If a class or a job says no AI, this doesn't change that. Use it on your own writing, where your name is on it and you want it to sound like you.

And it fixes shape, not words. If you also want ChatGPT and Claude to stop using the words they overuse, my humanizer prompt handles that, and 20 new signs AI wrote it shows you the rest of the tells. Together they cover both.

FAQ Questions People Ask About Making AI Writing Sound Human

Straight answers

How do I make AI writing sound human?
Fix the shape, not just the words. AI writing spells out its point, runs in one straight line, and ties up every loose end. Drop the prompt in this guide into ChatGPT or Claude with your draft. It quotes the lines that do each one and rewrites them the way a person would.

Why does AI writing sound the same?
Researchers at the University of Maryland and Google DeepMind found AI stories cluster together, while human stories spread out. AI tends to explain the theme, follow one track, and close everything neatly. People wander, leave threads hanging, and end on a note that doesn't resolve. That sameness is what readers pick up on.

How can you tell if AI wrote something?
Look at the shape. Does it tell you what it all means instead of showing you? Does every paragraph march in order with no side trip? Does the ending wrap everything up with a bow? One of those is normal. All three together is the pattern researchers used to spot AI writing.

Is it the em dashes that give AI writing away?
Not in this study. The researchers' tool caught AI stories 93% of the time using only story features, like how the plot moves and how it ends, with no word choice or punctuation at all. Em dashes and favorite words are a separate set of tells, and newer models already use fewer of them.

What is a good prompt to humanize AI text?
One that names the problem instead of asking for a vague "make it sound human." The prompt in this guide lists the three tells, asks the AI to quote where your draft does each one, then rewrites with one real detail, one short aside, and an ending that leaves something open.

Does this work in Claude as well as ChatGPT?
Yes. The prompt goes in one message with nothing to install, so you can use it in ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini, on the free plans. The example in this guide was run in Claude. If a rewrite comes back too long, tell it "shorter, same length as my draft" and it will tighten it.

Will this make AI writing undetectable?
No prompt can promise that, and detectors change all the time. What this does is make your draft read more like you: a real detail, a moment of personality, an ending that doesn't lecture. The goal is writing people want to read, with your name on it.

SOURCES Where This Comes From

- Russell, Rajendhran, Pham, Iyyer (University of Maryland) and Wieting (Google DeepMind), “StoryScope: Investigating idiosyncrasies in AI fiction,” COLM 2026. arxiv.org/abs/2604.03136. All numbers in this guide come from the paper.

Want *more* like this?

Free AI guides added regularly. No jargon, no overwhelm.

kellystrattonai.com

Instagram / TikTok: @kellystratton.ai | Facebook / YouTube: @kellystrattonai