BEGINNER · 9 min read · November 17, 2026 · By Kelly Stratton

How to Use ChatGPT to Find Things You've Lost: Earrings, Keys, Emails, Even Money

Every way ChatGPT can help you get back what you've lost: the earring you just dropped, the keys you set down somewhere, an email you can't find, money you forgot you had, and the song stuck in your head.

There’s nothing like that sinking feeling when an earring back, an earbud, or a tiny screw disappears right in front of you. You know it’s right there. You just can’t see it. Here’s how to get a second set of eyes on the problem in under a minute: what to say to ChatGPT, how to take the photo so it can actually spot the thing, and what to ask when there’s nothing to photograph at all. Then it gets bigger. ChatGPT can track down money you forgot you had, search your inbox for an email you can’t find, name the song or book you only half remember, and find the right people to call when you’ve left something behind or your pet slips out.

IN A NUTSHELL

ChatGPT can look at a photo and point out a small object you can't spot, like an earbud in gravel or an earring in carpet. You take a close photo straight down, tell it exactly what you lost, and it tells you where to look. When there's nothing to photograph, it helps you retrace your steps, and it can track down forgotten money, search your email, and find old chats.

WHAT YOU NEED

ChatGPT on any plan, including the free one, and your phone's camera. The ChatGPT app on your phone is easiest, since you take the photo and send it in one place. Nothing to install.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Can ChatGPT Find Something in a Picture?

Often, yes. In late October 2026, a man dropped a white earbud into a pile of pale gravel near a park. He searched and couldn’t find it, so he took a picture and asked ChatGPT for help.

ChatGPT couldn’t see it at first either. It asked him for closer photos, taken straight down. On the third photo, it found the earbud tucked between the rocks and told him right where to look. The whole thing took about five minutes.

That’s the method. You and ChatGPT go back and forth, one photo at a time, until it finds the thing.

WHY IT WORKS

Why Can ChatGPT See What I Can't?

When you’re hunting for something, your eyes keep landing on the same spots, and an object that’s the same color as the floor just blends in. ChatGPT doesn’t get tired or skip the corners, and it knows exactly what it’s looking for because you told it.

It works best when the photo is close, sharp, and well lit. A wide shot of the whole room makes a tiny earring only a few dots in the picture, and nobody can find it that way, human or AI.

STEP 1

How Do I Take a Photo ChatGPT Can Search?

1. **Stop moving.** Don’t walk around the spot, so you don’t kick the thing further or step on it.
2. **Get close and hold the phone straight down** over one small area, about the size of a placemat.

3. **Turn on more light.** Daylight or your phone's flashlight makes metal, glass, and shiny plastic catch the light.
4. **Keep one landmark in the frame**, like a chair leg, a leaf, or the edge of a rug, so ChatGPT can tell you where to look.
5. **Go section by section.** If the thing could be anywhere in a bigger area, take one photo per section and send them one at a time.

STEP 2 What Do I Say to ChatGPT to Find Something in a Photo?

Open ChatGPT, attach your photo, and paste this. Fill in the parts in brackets. The more exact you are about what the thing looks like, the better it can find it.

PROMPT

```
I lost [what it is] somewhere in this photo. It's [color], about the size of [something to compare it to], and it might be partly hidden.

Look carefully across the whole picture, edge to edge. If you see it, tell me exactly where it is: use things in the photo as landmarks, and tell me roughly how far it is from the left edge and from the top.

If you can't see it, don't guess. Tell me what photo to take next: how close, what angle, what lighting, and which part of the area to shoot. I'll keep sending photos until we find it.
```

Here's a filled-in example: *I lost a small gold earring back somewhere in this photo. It's shiny gold, about the size of a grain of rice, and it might be partly hidden.*

STEP 3 What If There's Nothing to Take a Picture Of?

Lost your keys, your glasses, or your wallet somewhere in the house? A photo won't help when you don't know which room it's in. Use this one instead. ChatGPT asks you questions, one at a time, to walk you back through your day.

PROMPT

```
Help me find something I lost. It's [what it is]. The last time I remember having it was [when and where].

Ask me questions one at a time to help me retrace my steps: where I went, what I was doing, what I was carrying, and where I usually set things down. Wait for my answer before you ask the next one.

After a few questions, give me a short list of the places I should check, with the most likely place first.
```

MORE WAYS Where Do Lost Things Usually End Up?

Every kind of thing has its favorite hiding spots. Keys end up in yesterday's coat pocket, glasses end up on top of your head, the remote ends up in the couch. Ask ChatGPT for a search plan built for the exact thing you lost, so you check the likely spots first instead of tearing the house apart.

PROMPT

```
I lost my [what it is] somewhere in my [house, car, office]. Make me a search plan. List the places this kind of thing usually ends up, starting with the most common, and include the odd spots people forget to check. Keep it to one short checklist I can walk through.
```

LOST MONEY

Can ChatGPT Help Me Find Money I Forgot About?

Yes, and ChatGPT does the digging. States hold on to money from old bank accounts, uncashed checks, deposits, and refunds until the owner claims it. Old 401(k)s from past jobs get forgotten too. Tell ChatGPT where you've lived and worked, and it searches the web for the right official site for every state on your list, tracks down who runs the retirement plans at your old jobs, and hands you one checklist with the exact links.

PROMPT

```
Search the web and build me a forgotten-money checklist. I've lived in [list every state]
and worked at [past employers, with rough years]. For each state, find the official
unclaimed property website. For each employer, find out who runs their 401(k) or pension
plan and how a former employee checks for an old account. Include the Department of Labor's
Retirement Savings Lost and Found. Give me one checklist with the exact official links and
what I'll need to have ready. Only free, official sites.
```

The last step is yours: type your name into each site on the checklist. ChatGPT can't do that part for you, because every site checks who you are. With the links in hand, it takes a couple of minutes.

> NEVER PAY TO SEARCH
>
> Searching and claiming through your state or the Department of Labor is free. Government offices don't call you about unclaimed money. If someone calls, texts, or emails offering to get your money back for a fee, it's a scam.

MORE WAYS Can ChatGPT Help Me Find a Lost Email, File, or Photo?

Yes. Connect Gmail to ChatGPT once, and it searches your inbox for you, even when you don’t remember who the email was from or what the subject said. Connecting Gmail needs the $20 plan.

PROMPT

```
Search my Gmail for [what you're looking for, like a receipt, a confirmation, or a message from someone]. I don't remember [the sender, the subject, the exact date]. Here's what I do remember: [roughly when, a price, a name, a place, any words that might be in it]. Show me the best matches, most likely first.
```

On the free plan, or for a lost file or photo on your phone or computer, ChatGPT gives you the exact searches to type. Gmail, Outlook, your phone’s photo app, and your computer all have search tricks most people never use.

PROMPT

```
I'm trying to find [an email, a file, a photo] I lost. Here's what I remember: [who it was from or who was in it, roughly when, any words or places you remember]. I use [Gmail, Outlook, iPhone Photos, Google Photos, a Mac, a Windows PC]. Tell me exactly what to type into the search bar, step by step, starting with the search most likely to find it.
```

MORE WAYS How Do I Find an Old ChatGPT Chat?

Lost that great recipe, plan, or answer ChatGPT gave you weeks ago? Click the **search icon** at the top of the ChatGPT sidebar and type a word you remember from the chat. It searches your chat titles and messages, plus your projects, images, and files, and it works on every plan, on your phone or your computer. Archived chats show up too. Deleted chats are gone for good, so they won’t come back in search.

MORE WAYS What's the Name of That Song, Book, or Movie?

You remember a line, a scene, or what the cover looked like, but not the name. ChatGPT is great at this.

PROMPT

```
I'm trying to remember the name of a [song, book, movie, TV show]. Here's what I remember: [a lyric, the plot, a character, one scene, what the cover looked like, roughly when it came out or when I saw it]. Give me your best guesses, most likely first, and ask me questions to narrow it down.
```

When it names one, look it up to make sure. ChatGPT can sound sure about a wrong guess, so check before you buy the book.

MORE WAYS What Should I Say If I Left Something Somewhere?

Left your sunglasses at a restaurant, a scarf on a flight, or a jacket at a hotel? The faster you ask, the better your chances. ChatGPT finds the place's lost-and-found contact for you and writes the message, so all you do is hit send.

PROMPT

```
I left my [what it is] at [the place, with the city] on [day and time]. It looks like [color, brand, anything that stands out]. Search the web for their lost-and-found contact: a phone number, an email, or a claim form. Then write a short, friendly message I can send them, and tell me what to do if I don't hear back.
```

MORE WAYS

How Do I Write a Lost Pet Post?

When a pet slips out, every minute counts. ChatGPT finds the shelters and lost-pet groups near you and writes the post and the flyer, while you get out there and look.

PROMPT

```
My [dog or cat] got out near [street or neighborhood, with the city] at [time]. Name: [name]. Looks like: [breed, color, size, collar]. Friendly or shy with strangers: [which]. Search the web for the animal shelters and lost-pet groups near me, with their phone numbers. Then write a short post for my neighborhood Facebook group and Nextdoor, and a flyer with a big headline. Use [your phone number] as the contact.
```

WHICH ONE TO USE

Which ChatGPT Prompt Should I Use?

What you lost	What to ask ChatGPT for
Something small you saw fall	Photo search, close and straight down
Keys, glasses, wallet, or the remote, somewhere at home	Retrace your steps, then a search plan
Money you forgot about	A checklist with every official link, found for you
An email	A search of your Gmail ($20 plan), or the exact searches to type
A file or a photo	The exact searches to type
An old ChatGPT chat	The search icon in the ChatGPT sidebar
A song, book, or movie you half remember	Its best guesses, then questions to narrow it down
Something you left at a restaurant, hotel, or on a flight	Their lost-and-found contact and a message to send
Your pet	Nearby shelters, a neighborhood post, and a flyer

KEEP GOING

What to Say If ChatGPT Doesn't Find It Right Away

It took three photos in the earbud story, so don’t stop at one. Try these follow-ups in the same chat:

- “Look again, closely, at the bottom left corner.”

- “Here’s the next section, just to the right of the last photo.”
- “Here’s a closer photo of the spot you pointed to. Is that it?”
- “It’s more of a dull silver than shiny. Look again with that in mind.”

THE TELL How Do I Know If ChatGPT Is Guessing?

A real find comes with a specific spot: “just left of the gray rock, about a third of the way down.” A guess sounds vague, or describes something that isn’t in your photo. If you’re not sure, ask: “Describe exactly what you see at that spot.” Then go look. The spot it names is where you check first, and your own eyes have the final say.

> WHAT THIS DOES AND DOESN'T DO
>
> ChatGPT can only search what's in your photo. It can't see under the couch or track a device. For earbuds, phones, and tags like AirTags, open Find My on an iPhone, or Find My Device on Android (SmartThings Find on Samsung), first. It shows the last place they were connected. Then use ChatGPT to spot them once you're standing in the right place.

FAQ Questions People Ask About Finding Lost Things With ChatGPT

Straight answers

Can ChatGPT find something in a picture?
Often, yes. Upload a clear, close photo of the spot where you dropped something and tell ChatGPT exactly what it looks like. It looks over the whole picture and tells you where it thinks the thing is. It doesn't always spot it, so a closer photo, taken straight down, usually helps.

How do I use AI to find something in a picture?
Take a close photo of the area pointing straight down, in good light. Open ChatGPT, attach the photo, and say what you lost, its color, and its size. Ask it to describe the exact spot using things in the photo as landmarks. If it can't see it, ask what photo to take next.

How do I find something I lost in my house?
Start by retracing your steps. Tell ChatGPT what you lost and the last time you remember having it, and ask it to question you one step at a time: where you went, what you were carrying, what you set down. It then gives you a short list of places to check, most likely first.

How do I find a lost earring in carpet or grass?
Work in small sections. Get low, hold your phone straight down over one patch at a time, and use good light or your flashlight so metal or stones catch it. Send each photo to ChatGPT with the earring's color and size, and check the exact spot it points to before you move on.

How do I find lost earbuds that are dead or offline?
First check Find My on an iPhone, or Find My Device on Android (SmartThings Find on Samsung). It can show the last place your earbuds were connected, even after the battery dies. Go to that spot, take close photos of the ground straight down, and ask ChatGPT to look for them in each photo.

Can ChatGPT find a lost email or photo?
Yes. On the $20 plan you can connect Gmail and ask ChatGPT to search your inbox for you. On any plan, tell it what you remember, like who sent it, roughly when, and any words in it, plus which app you use, and it gives you the exact searches most likely to find it, best one first.

Can ChatGPT find unclaimed money?
It does most of the digging for you. Tell it the states you've lived in and where you've worked, and it searches the web for each official unclaimed property site and your old retirement plans, then gives you one checklist with the links. You type your own name in at the end, because each site checks who you are. It's always free.

Does this work on the free version of ChatGPT?
Yes, almost all of it. Every prompt here works on the free plan, in the ChatGPT app on your phone or on the website, except the Gmail search, which needs the $20 plan. Free accounts also have a daily limit on photo uploads.

Sources: USAGov: How to find unclaimed money · MissingMoney.com, run with NAUPA · U.S. Department of Labor: Retirement Savings Lost and Found · OpenAI help center: Search your chat history · Siasat: ChatGPT finds man's earphones lost in gravel · HypeFresh: ChatGPT vision finds lost Bose earbud hidden in gravel · Pratidin Time: ChatGPT finds lost Bose earbud in 5 minutes

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