BEGINNER · 7 min read · October 28, 2026 · By Kelly Stratton

Why ChatGPT Gets Worse in Long Chats, and the One Prompt That Fixes It

Get sharp answers back when a long chat starts slipping. You get the handoff prompt that moves everything important into a fresh chat, a one-line quick version, the six signs it's time to start over, and the habit that keeps ChatGPT and Claude from getting lost in the first place.

You’re deep into a chat, and it starts slipping. It forgets what you told it ten minutes ago. It gives you back the version you already said no to. You find yourself typing the same correction a second time. You don’t have to start from scratch, and you don’t have to keep fighting it. One prompt moves everything that matters into a fresh chat, and the answers get sharp again.

> IN A NUTSHELL
> AI chatbots like ChatGPT and Claude give worse answers as a conversation gets long. They guess early, build on their own earlier answers, and lose track of the middle. Asking for a summary and continuing in a new chat fixes it.

> WHAT YOU NEED
> Any plan of ChatGPT or Claude, including the free ones. Nothing to install and no settings to change. Everything here is something you type.

PART 1 Why Does ChatGPT Get Worse the Longer You Chat?

It answers before it has the whole picture, and then it keeps building on that first answer. Every message you add sits on top of its earlier guesses. After enough back-and-forth, the chat is carrying its own mistakes forward, and the answers show it.

Researchers at Microsoft Research and Salesforce Research measured this in a 2025 study. They gave 15 AI models the same tasks two ways: all at once in a single message, and spread across several messages the way a real conversation goes. Across more than 200,000 test conversations, the spread-out version came out 39% worse on average. The models tested included ones from OpenAI, Anthropic, Google, and Meta, and every one of them slipped.

The study names four things the models do when a conversation runs long:

What goes wrong	
It answers too soon	It hands you a full answer before you've finished explaining, and fills the gaps with its own assumptions.
It leans on its old answers	It keeps reworking its earlier attempt, even a wrong one, so the answers get longer and messier.
It loses the middle	It pays the most attention to your first message and your latest one. What you said in between fades.
It gets wordy	The answers grow, and the part you needed gets buried.

It even has a name. Researchers call it context rot, and Anthropic, the company behind Claude, uses the same term: the longer the conversation gets, the less reliably the model pulls the right thing out of it. The study's own words: when LLMs take a wrong turn in a conversation, they get lost and do not recover. That's why correcting it again rarely works, and why a fresh chat does.

PART 2 How Do You Fix a Chat That's Gone Off Track?

You move to a new chat and bring the important parts with you. It takes one prompt.

1. In the chat that's slipping, paste this:

PROMPT

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I'm moving this conversation to a new chat. Write a summary I can copy and paste so the new
chat can pick up exactly where we left off. Use these headings:
GOAL: what I'm trying to get done and why.
DECIDED: every decision we've made, and the reason behind it.
STATUS: what's done and what's still open.
DETAILS: anything I'd otherwise have to explain again, like names, numbers, dates, and links.
NEXT: the one thing to do next.
Don't leave out anything the new chat needs, and don't add anything we didn't talk about.
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2. Copy the summary it writes.
3. Open a new chat.
4. Paste the summary in, and add what you want next.

The new chat starts with everything in one message, which is the way these tools do their best work. The researchers recommend the same move: ask the AI to pull together everything you've told it so far, then take that to a new conversation.

READ THE SUMMARY BEFORE YOU PASTE IT

Give it ten seconds. If something important is missing, like a price, a name, or a decision you made, type "add this" and say what it is. Then copy the corrected version.

PART 3 What Makes the Handoff Work Even Better?

In the new chat, put this line above the summary:

PROMPT

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Here is a summary of an earlier chat. Read it, tell me in two sentences what you understand the job to be, and then wait for my next message.
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That line is worth the extra few seconds. It makes the new chat say the job back to you before it does anything, so you catch a misunderstanding in the first reply.

If you corrected how it writes, add one more heading. Put this line into the prompt, right above the last sentence, so the new chat keeps your tone and your fixes:

PROMPT

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STYLE: how I like the answers written, including anything I corrected you on.
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For a short, simple chat, one sentence is enough:

PROMPT

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Summarize everything important in this chat so I can continue in a new one.
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PART 4 How to Actually Use It

One job, one chat. When you switch to something different, open a new chat. A chat about your budget doesn't need to carry yesterday's birthday party plans along with it.

Say it all in the first message. This is the habit the study points to. Before you send, put the whole request in one message: what you want, who it's for, the details that matter, and what a good result looks like. A chat that starts with the full picture has far less to get lost in.

When you need to correct it twice, stop correcting. Ask for the summary and move. A fresh chat with the right information beats a third round of "no, I said."

Keep the old chat. It stays in your history. If the summary missed something, you can go back, find it, and add it to the new chat.

Bring your files too. A summary carries words, not attachments. If the old chat had a document or a photo in it, upload it again in the new chat.

It works the same in Claude. Same prompt, same steps.

PART 5 The Signs It's Time to Start Over

You don't need to count messages. Watch for these.

Six signs the chat is past its best	
It forgets something you told it	A name, a number, or a detail from earlier in the same chat comes back wrong or missing.
It repeats itself	You get the same suggestion again, or the version you already turned down.

It contradicts a decision
You settled something earlier, and the new answer ignores it.

You've made the same correction twice
If it didn't take the first time, a third try won't help.

The answers keep getting longer
More words, less of what you asked for.

It starts redoing finished work
It changes a part you had already approved.

One sign is enough. Ask for the summary and move.

PART 6 Where You Still Come In

You check the summary. The AI decides what counts as important, and it can leave something out. Reading it over before you paste is what makes the handoff work.

A long chat is fine for talking. Thinking out loud, asking follow-up questions, chatting through an idea: none of that needs a restart. This is for when you're working toward a result and the result is getting worse.

The study is from 2025. It tested that year's models. Newer ones may hold up longer, and the habit still costs you nothing: a clear first message and a fresh chat when things slip.

> DO THIS FIRST
>
> Open the longest chat you have going right now and paste the handoff prompt from Part 2. Read what comes back. Seeing your whole conversation boiled down to a few lines is the fastest way to understand what the AI was holding onto, and what it had already dropped.

FAQ Questions People Ask About Long ChatGPT Chats

Straight answers

Why does ChatGPT get worse in long conversations?
It guesses early, then builds on its own guesses. Researchers at Microsoft and Salesforce found that when a task was spread across several messages, AI models answered too soon, leaned on their own earlier attempts, and lost track of the middle of the conversation. Answers came out 39% worse on average.

Does Claude get worse in long chats too?
Yes. The study tested 15 AI models, including models from OpenAI, Anthropic, Google, and Meta, and every one of them did worse when a task was spread over a long back-and-forth. The same fix works in Claude: ask for a summary and continue in a new chat.

How do I move a ChatGPT conversation to a new chat?
Paste the handoff prompt from this guide into the old chat. It writes a summary of your goal, your decisions, what's done, the details, and your next step. Copy it, open a new chat, paste it in, and keep going. For a short chat, one sentence works: "Summarize everything important in this chat so I can continue in a new one."

When should I start a new chat in ChatGPT?
Start a new one when it forgets something you told it, repeats itself, contradicts a decision you already made, or needs the same correction twice. It's also worth a fresh chat any time you change to a different task.

Will I lose anything if I start a new chat?
Not if you bring a summary with you. The handoff prompt in this guide pulls out your goal, your decisions, and your facts so the new chat starts with all of it. Your old chat stays in your history, so you can go back to it.

How long is too long for a ChatGPT chat?
There's no set number. In the study, answers started slipping as soon as a task was split across two messages. Watch for the signs in this guide, and when one shows up, move to a fresh chat.

SOURCES Where This Comes From

- "LLMs Get Lost In Multi-Turn Conversation", by Philippe Laban and Jennifer Neville of Microsoft Research and Hiroaki Hayashi and Yingbo Zhou of Salesforce Research, May 2025. The 39% average drop, the 15 models, the 200,000 test conversations, the four behaviors, and the advice to consolidate and start a new conversation all come from this paper.

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