



Using AI to Improve Production Decisions

Practical Approaches for Analyzing and Optimizing Plant Operations

Dan Troesser & Jill Meems, Simpson Strong-Tie

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Practical Approaches for Analyzing and Optimizing Plant Operations

Dan Troesser & Jill Meems, Simpson Strong-Tie

Introductions



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Getting Started with AI

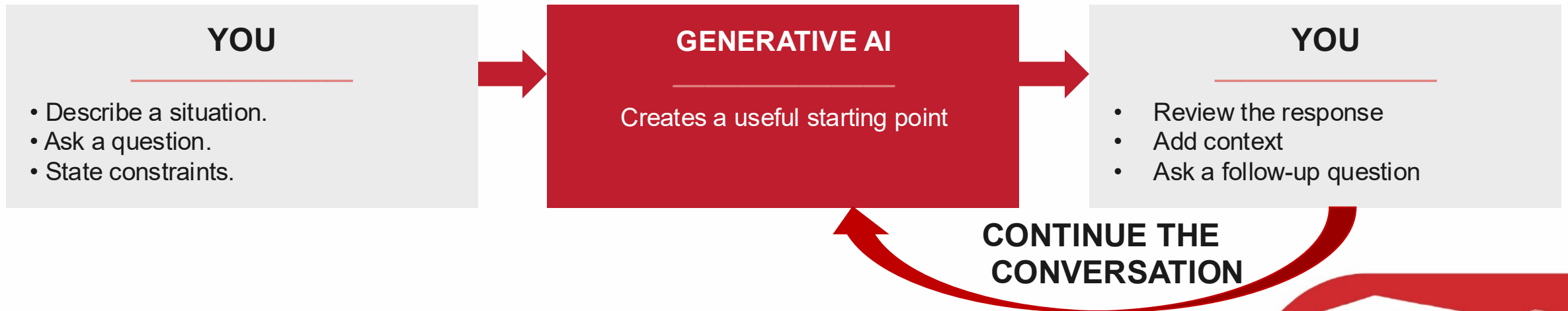
Start with the work and questions you already have.

Part 1



What is Generative AI?

Generative AI is a type of artificial intelligence that creates new content—such as text, summaries, comparisons, formulas, images, or code—in response to your instructions.



Protecting Your Data



Know what account you are using—and what your company permits.

BUCKET 1 — SAFE TO EXPLORE

- General process descriptions
- Public industry benchmarks
- Anonymized scenarios
- Hypothetical “what-if” questions

BUCKET 2 — ANONYMIZE OR VERIFY

- Company and customer names
- Employee names
- Pricing and financial information
- **Individual account:** remove identifying details
- **Company-approved tool:** check policy first

BUCKET 3 — USE SERIOUS CAUTION

- Proprietary designs and trade secrets
- Confidential contracts
- Employee personal information
- Sensitive financial or legal records
- **Use only with explicit company approval**

Remember: Personal, free, and “pro” accounts can have different privacy settings. Paying for an account does not automatically make it a private company workspace or prevent your information from being retained or used under the provider’s data policies.



Never paste credentials into an AI prompt!
Instead connect an approved tool through its normal sign-in process.

For AI tool-selection suggested questions, see the appendix

It Can Start with Just a Simple Question

TRY IT NOW – Pick One. Type It. See What Comes Back.

PROMPT A · THE STARTING POINT

I am a production manager for a component manufacturer. I want to improve my operation but I'm not sure where to focus. Where should I start?

PROMPT B · CAPACITY IMBALANCE

I run a component manufacturing plant. My saw can cut faster than my tables can build, and I'm trying to figure out the best way to use my people and equipment. I'm not sure if the issue is with the saw, the assembly tables, or how we're scheduling and batching.

PROMPT C · DATA & LABOR

I run a component manufacturing plant. My production numbers (BF/MH and total BF produced) vary a lot from day to day depending on who shows up for work. How can I make sense of my data when labor is inconsistent, and use it to help me make improvements?

Decoding the AI response

I am a production manager for a component manufacturer. I want to improve my operation but I'm not sure where to focus. Where should I start?

Great question—and the fact that you are thinking systematically about improvement puts you ahead of most!

- Start by Recognizing What's Working
- Establish a Baseline
- Find Your Biggest Opportunity
- Spend Time with Your Team
- Make Performance Visible
- Pick One Improvement Project

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

LOGICAL STRUCTURE

Do you want to talk through what is working well?

**This is a condensed example. AI responses are often much more detailed, unless given specific instructions.*

AI as a Thought Partner

More to work with. Still yours to decide.

WHAT AI DOES

- ✓ **Helps you ask better questions**
Not answer them for you – ask them better, more completely.
- ✓ **Lays out options side by side**
You can see the tradeoffs clearly before you decide.
- ✓ **Surfaces what you might be missing**
A second perspective with no agenda.
- ✓ **Helps you use data you already have**
You often have more data than time to look at it.

WHAT AI DOES NOT DO

- ✗ **Replace your experience**
Your experience is what makes the answer useful.
AI doesn't know your plant – you do.
- ✗ **Decide for you**
You stay in control and can redirect at any point.
- ✗ **Need to be right every time to be useful**



AI can “hallucinate” — and sound completely convincing

A hallucination is when AI gives a confident, well-written answer that is inaccurate or made up. Ask to see source links in its responses (if not shown).



The bottom line: AI helps you think more clearly about hard problems.
You keep the wheel — and verify important facts, numbers, and recommendations before you act.

Applying AI to the Plant Floor

Lessons Learned



Part 2

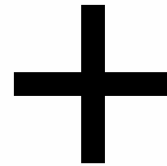


Lesson 1: Let AI Organize Large Amounts of Data

PROMPT:

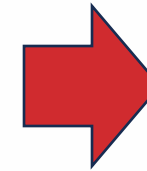
Analyze the attached data and:

- *Organize it into key themes and categories*
- *Identify patterns, trends, risks, and opportunities*
- *Create an executive summary with recommended actions*
- *Act as my research analyst for follow-up questions using evidence from the data*



RAW INFORMATION

- Meeting Videos
- Shift Reports
- Photos
- Spreadsheets
- PDFs
- Design Files



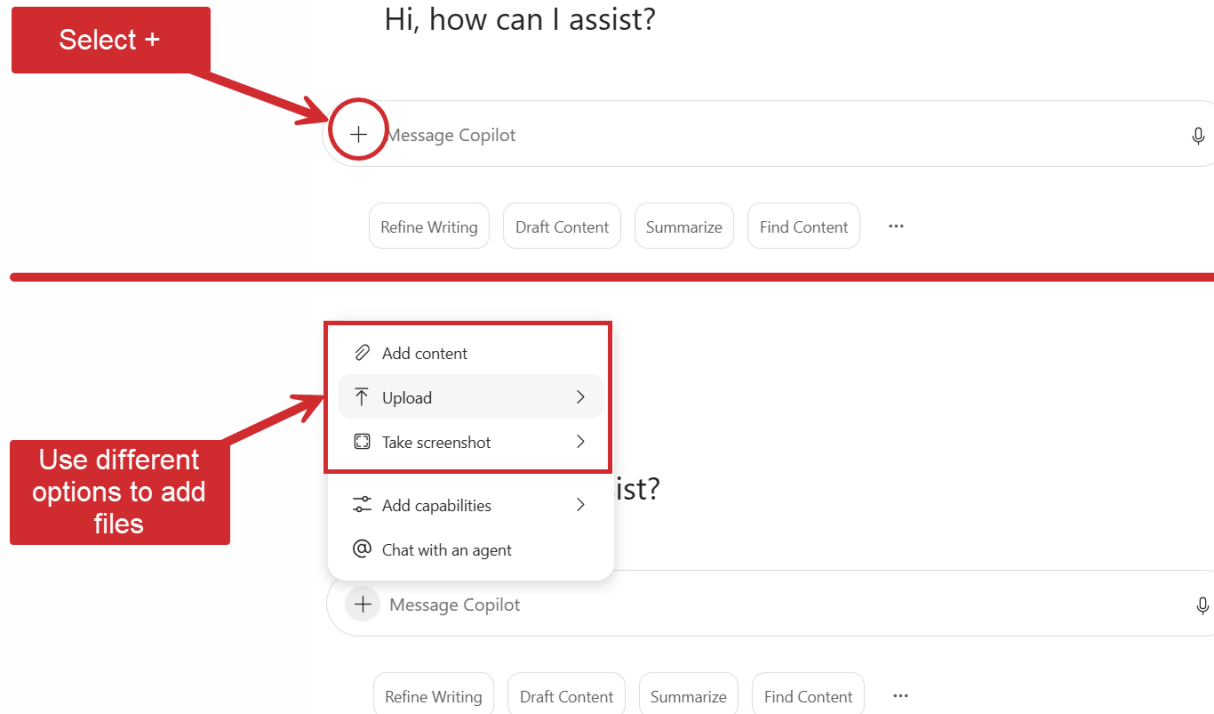
AI OUTPUT

- ✓ Executive Summary
- ✓ Key Themes & Trends
- ✓ Risks & Opportunities
- ✓ Recommended Actions
- ✓ Answers to Questions
- ✓ Data-Driven Decisions

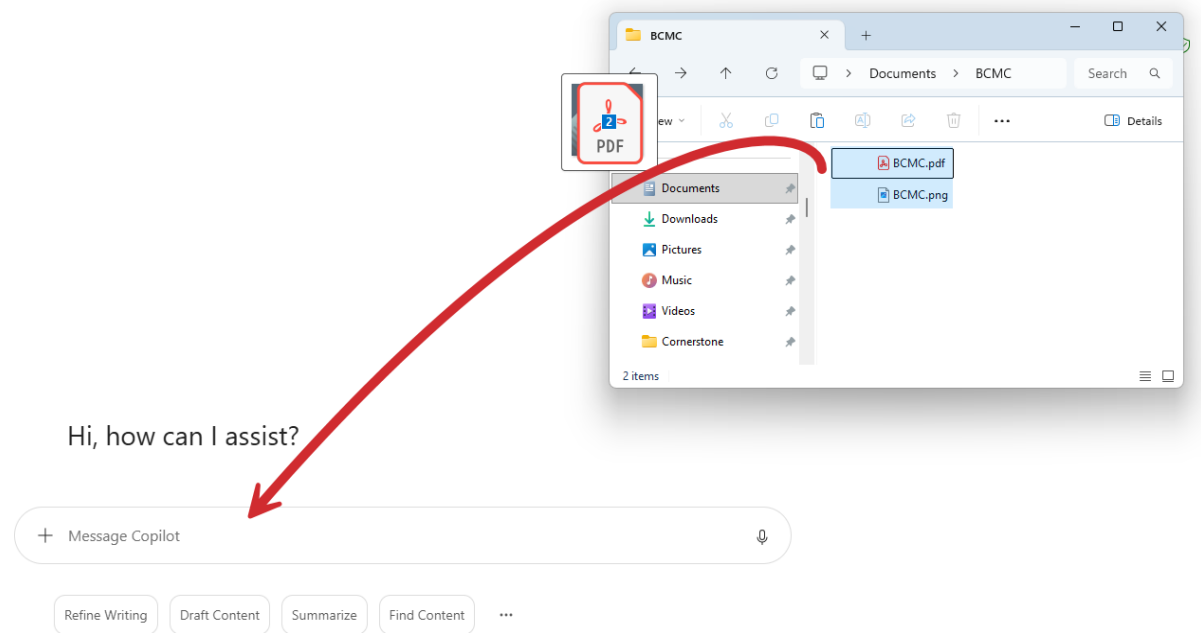
Lesson 1: Let AI Organize Large Amounts of Data

Two easy ways to add files to your AI assistant

Option 1: Use AI Tool



Option 2: Drag & Drop



Lesson 1: Let AI Organize Large Amounts of Data

Getting your files into AI

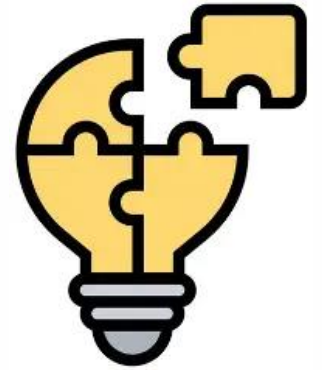
POTENTIAL ROADBLOCKS

- ⦿ **File Size Limits**
30-100 MB (typical)
- ⦿ **File Extensions**
May not be recognized/allowed



POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- ✓ **Direct connection to Cloud File Storage**
One Drive, Google Drive, etc.
- ✓ **Videos**
Upload transcripts instead of full files
- ✓ **Copy & Paste Text or Screenshots**
- ✓ **Unknown File Extensions**
For text-based files, rename with .txt
Try renaming with .zip to see if it is a compressed file

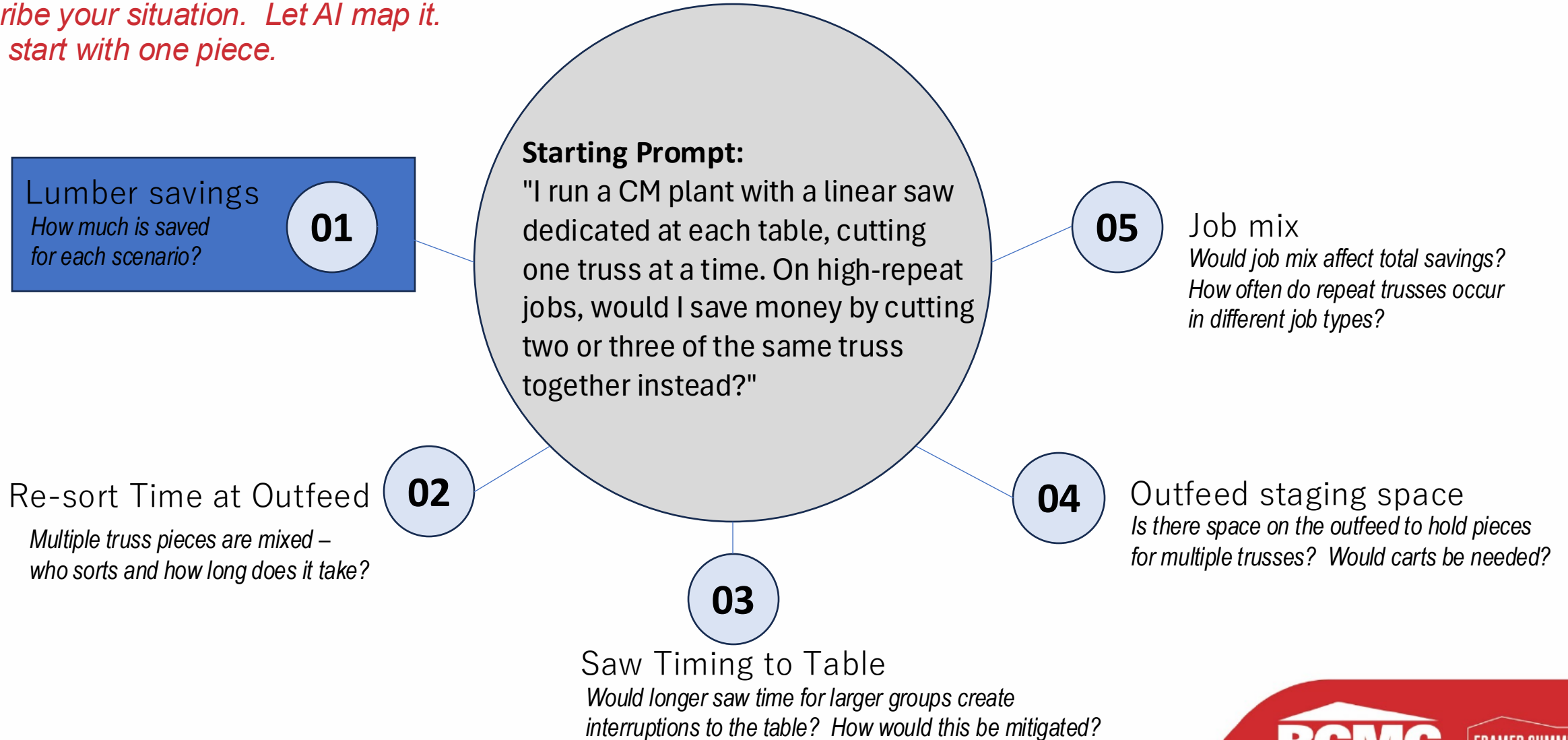


When in doubt, ask AI to help with a solution!

I have a .xyz file generated by [Application Name] and need to extract data from it. I can't upload the file because the format isn't supported. What are my options for converting, exporting, extracting, or packaging the data into a format that can be uploaded and analyzed?

Lesson 2: Break Big Problems into Small Problems First

*Describe your situation. Let AI map it.
Then start with one piece.*



Lesson 2: Break Big Problems into Small Problems First

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

1 of 9

The Lumber Savings Question

You

I'm a Production Manager at a CM plant. I have a linear saw that optimizes the pieces I'm feeding it. I have jobs with multiple trusses in them, but I currently cut one truss at a time... would it be better to cut and optimize for more than one truss at a time? How could I measure how much money that would that save me?

DT

PROMPT

AI response summary

AI

Measure the same demand four ways: 1 truss, 2 trusses, 3 trusses, and the full job. Validate quantities, lengths, grades, prices, and stock constraints before trusting the savings.

SUMMARY

AI wording is summarized.

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

2 of 9

Right before the correction: extracting and plotting the geometry

AI

AI response summary

GEOMETRY EXTRACTION

The file is powerful but hard to decode. Reverse-engineered the assemblies and member data to rebuild each truss and its pieces.

SUMMARY

You

Here are the job files. Can you pull the truss geometry and the pieces out of them?

DT

You

Draw the truss from this file so I can see the pieces you extracted.

DT

AI

AI response summary

FIRST PLOT ATTEMPT

Plotted the extracted members as single line segments — the first look at what had been read out of the file.

That line-segment plot is what triggered the next correction: the pieces are not lines.

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

3 of 9

The prompts that produced the truss image

You

The pieces are not lines.

DT

AI

AI response summary

Redraw each member as a board cut from 2x lumber instead of a centerline.

You

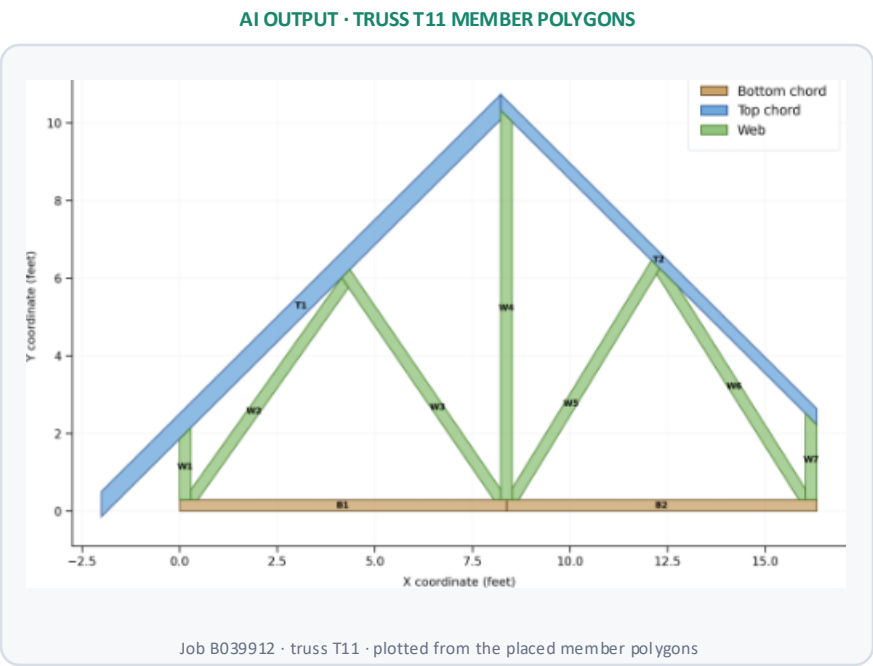
Use the first set of points.

DT

AI

AI response summary

Plot the placed <file format 2> member polygons — bottom chord, top chord, and webs — as the truss image used for visual QA.



These two corrections turned centerlines into board polygons — the image proved the AI had read the truss geometry correctly.

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

4 of 9

From price list to the first optimizer run

You · shortened from actual prompt

Create a price list for the lumber needed in these PDFs and the lumber from earlier.

DT

AI response summary

ACTUAL REQUEST

AI

The price list turns the problem from waste reduction into cost-first optimization.

SUMMARY

You

Now run the optimizer on the full cut list and show me the nests.

DT

AI response summary

FIRST OPTIMIZER RUN

AI

The first optimizer nested the pieces across stock boards from 6 to 20 feet and returned very efficient-looking results.

Those efficient-looking nests are what prompted the next question about lumber lengths.

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

5 of 9

Third validation: use realistic lumber lengths

AI

AI response summary

Did you find 17 and 19 ft lumber?

ACTUAL PROMPT

The first model allowed every integer length from 6 through 20 feet, including odd lengths that made the nests look artificially efficient.

DT

AI

AI response summary

Only use standard purchasable lengths.

DOMAIN CORRECTION

Restrict stock to 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 feet.

DT

RESULT

A mathematically valid answer can still be operationally wrong when the constraints are wrong.

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

6 of 9

Fourth validation: optimize dollars, not only waste

AI

AI response summary

ACTUAL PROMPT

Change the objective from waste-first to cost-first. Select the combination of stock boards that minimizes purchased-board dollars.

You

Objective = minimize total cost.

DT

AI

AI response summary

ACTUAL PROMPT

Move from the heuristic toward column generation so the optimizer can discover useful cutting patterns without generating every possible pattern first.

You

Can you build a global optimizer?

DT

The workflow matured from local nesting to a cost-focused cutting-stock formulation.

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

7 of 9

Run the four optimization windows

You · concise reconstruction

Compare one truss, two trusses, three trusses, and the full job.

DT

AI response summary

CORE EXPERIMENT

AI

1 truss is the baseline with the least optimizer visibility. Two and three trusses widen the piece pool. The full job gives the optimizer all 11 distinct trusses.

You

What does full job mean in this example?

DT

AI response summary

AI

The You full-job run includes 11 truss labels: G01, T01, G01A, T01A, T02, T02X, C01X, J03, J02, J03A, and J02A.

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

8 of 9

You job: final cost result

You

What did the final column-generation run find?

DT

AI response summary

AI

1 truss at a time cost \$865.84. Full-job optimization cost \$844.01.

FINAL RUN

You

How much did full-job optimization save?

DT

AI response summary

AI

\$21.83 compared with the one-truss baseline.

SAVINGS

Result: \$865.84 baseline, \$844.01 full job, \$21.83 savings.

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

9 of 9

The answer to the You question

You - actual question condensed

Would it be better to optimize more than one truss at a time?

DT

AI response summary

AI

In the four analyzed examples, greater optimizer visibility reduced selected-board cost. Full-job optimization produced the lowest cost in each example.

You

What should a Production Manager take away?

DT

AI response summary

AI

Compare 1-truss, 2-truss, 3-truss, and full-job options using validated piece data, realistic stock lengths, and plant-specific prices. **Then weigh material savings against production handling.**

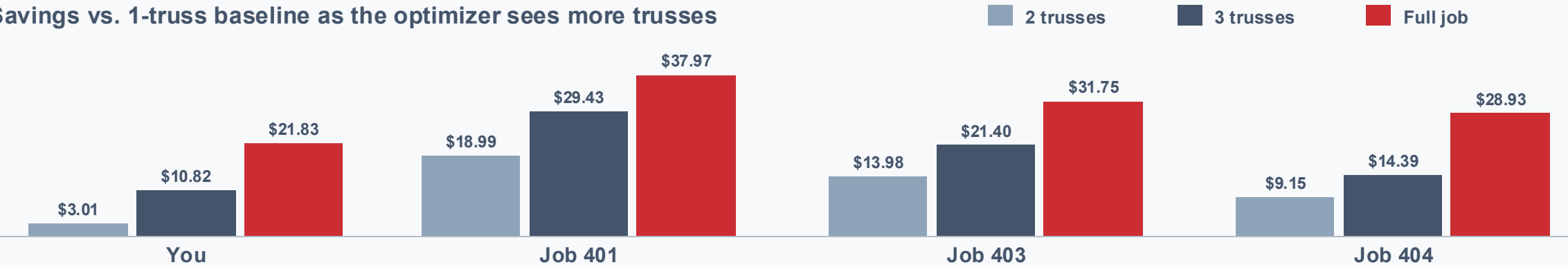
FINAL TAKEAWAY

Lesson 3: Verify AI Work at Each Stage

Lumber Savings Analysis using AI-generated Linear Saw Cutting Optimizer

JOB	DISTINCT TRUSSES	1 TRUSS	2 TRUSSES	3 TRUSSES	FULL JOB	SAVINGS
You Job	11	\$865.84	\$862.83	\$855.02	\$844.01	\$21.83
Job 401	21	\$3,527.82	\$3,508.83	\$3,498.39	\$3,489.85	\$37.97
Job 403	13	\$2,157.06	\$2,143.08	\$2,135.66	\$2,125.31	\$31.75
Job 404	15	\$1,901.14	\$1,891.99	\$1,886.75	\$1,872.21	\$28.93
COMBINED TOTAL	60	\$8,451.86	\$8,406.73	\$8,375.82	\$8,331.38	\$120.48

Savings vs. 1-truss baseline as the optimizer sees more trusses



Costs are selected-board totals; savings are measured against the 1-truss-at-a-time baseline for each job.

Lesson 4: Sometimes You Need More Data

Knowing what you need is still progress

PROMPT:

“I am a component manufacturer. I currently use BF to schedule. How can we put a complexity factor onto board footage to more accurately predict capacity?”

WHAT AI CAME BACK WITH:

- Piece Count
- Joint Count
- Plate Count
- # of Multi-Ply
- Lumber Diversity
- Average Member Length
- Truss Type
- Span
- Batch Size
- Labor Information
- Table Name

Sample Size Needed:

Minimum:	5-10 k
Good:	25-50 k
Excellent:	100k +

“Quality of data matters more than volume.”

The data collection can start today.
The analysis doesn't have to.

Lesson 5: Build Real Tools

A production manager wanted shift goals on a TV. No developer — just a conversation with AI and someone with good PC skills.

YOU “Show today’s shift goal vs. actual on a screen”

AI Drafts a working HTML dashboard

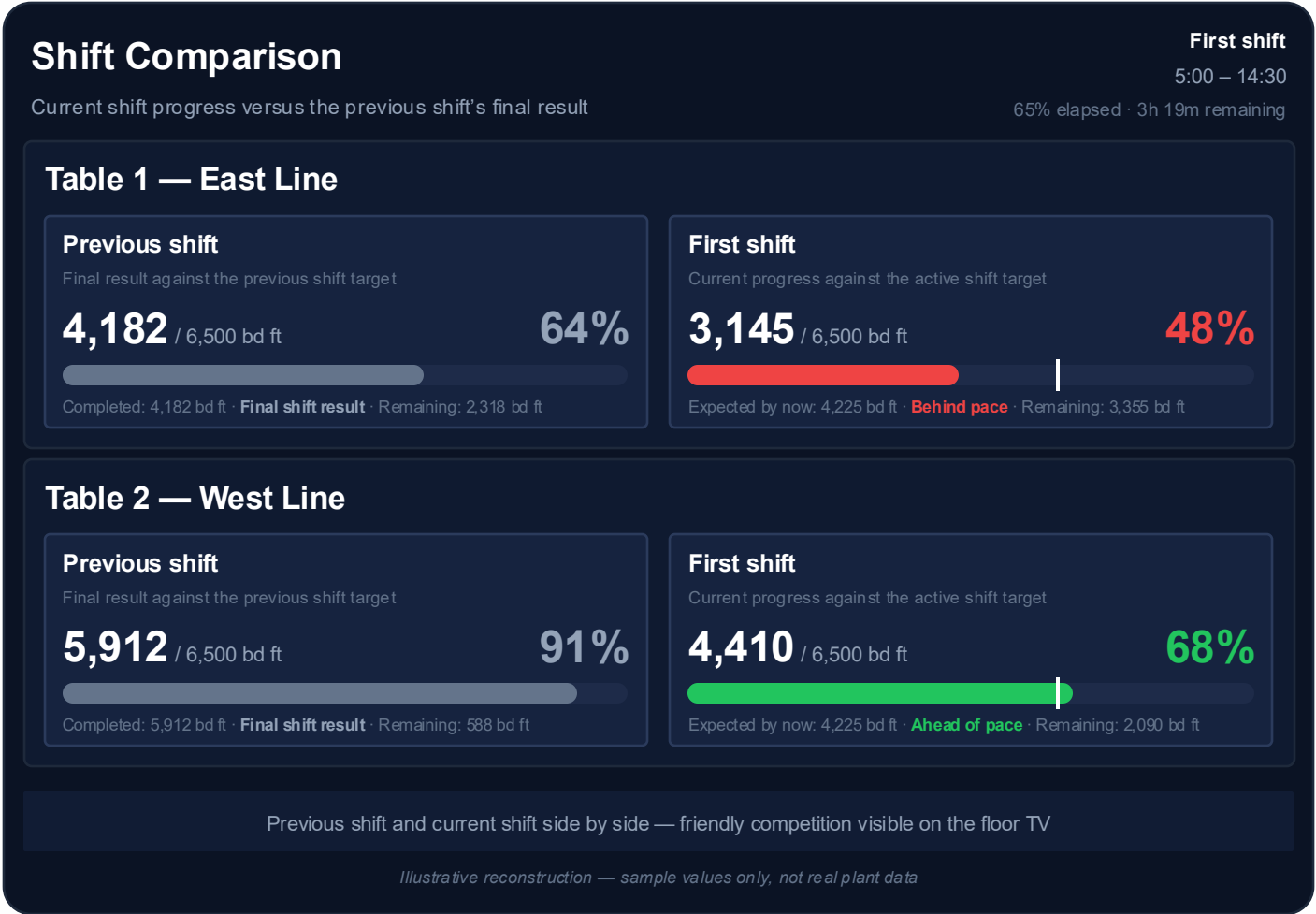
YOU “Pull live numbers from our shift-statistics API”

AI Generates the data-pull script — runs in **5 seconds**, refreshes every 5 min via Task Scheduler

YOU “Show morning vs. afternoon shift side-by-side for competition”

AI Adds per-table progress bars, pace marker, shift comparison

✓ After a couple hours with AI, we have a dashboard.



Your AI Roadmap: Getting Started

Five steps you can take next week — no technical background required

1

Pick one problem

Choose one production decision you already make every week. Start small — a scheduling choice, a batching question, a staging puzzle.



2

Describe it to AI in plain language

No jargon needed. Describe your plant, your crew, and the decision you're facing. Give context: size, shifts, equipment.



3

Continue the conversation

Organize, separate facts/assumptions, compare perspectives, identify tradeoffs, or design an experiment.



4

Validate the answer against your experience

Check AI's response against what you already know. Push back on anything that doesn't fit — your judgment is the filter.



5

Get started

Start having a conversation with AI today!



Questions?



Appendix: AI Assistants — Adoption & Cloud-File Access

Tool	Popularity	Best for	Access & price	OneDrive	Google Drive	CM plant fit
ChatGPT	5/5	General + code	Free; Plus \$20	R via SharePoint*	R/W via app*	Excellent starter
Gemini	4/5	Google + multimodal	Free; paid plans	No native	R; export new	Google shops
Microsoft Copilot	4/5	M365 + Excel/Teams	Free; M365 plans	R in M365 R/W in Office apps	R via connector	Microsoft shops
Claude	3/5	Long docs + reasoning	Free; Pro \$20	R/W via M365*	R via connector	Complex analysis
Abacus.AI	2/5	Models + agents/apps	\$10/mo	R/W via connector	R only	Advanced pilots
Carly AI	1/5	Email-first workflows	Free; agents \$35	R/W	R/W	Admin automation

Popularity is a directional 2026 adoption rating (5 = mainstream), not a quality score. R = read/search; W = create/update/manage. Admin, plan, or connector setup may be required. Sources: official product documentation and pricing; Similarweb and G2. Accessed Aug. 24, 2026.

Caution: Model features & pricing change often. This information could be outdated.

Appendix: What Are AI Agents?

Standard AI: responds to your question, then waits for you

You type a prompt → AI responds → you read it → you take action → you come back with the next question

AI Agent: can take actions and chain steps together automatically

You describe a goal → Agent plans steps → Agent uses tools (search, code, APIs) → Agent completes the task, then reports back

What agents can do

- › Browse the web and gather information
- › Write and run code automatically
- › Connect to APIs and databases
- › Complete multi-step workflows

Plant application example

An agent could pull your shift report, compare it to goals, flag tables running behind, and send a summary — automatically each morning.

Where things stand today

Agents exist today in tools like ChatGPT and Claude. They require more setup but are increasingly accessible — worth watching closely.

HOSTED AGENT COSTS:

Lean prototype: \$25–100/month
Small production: \$150–500/month
Enterprise multi-plant: \$500–2,000+/month

POSSIBLE HYBRID APPROACH:

Local app/tool created by AI on your PC

- AI Code Agent maintains, explains, and updates the tool over time.
- Avoids hosting cost.

Appendix: Tips for Effective Prompting

The skill is asking good questions — here's how

Do This

Be specific about your situation

Include information about how many SKUs you currently stock.

Give AI a role to play

Try: "Act as a lean manufacturing and inventory management consultant."

Ask AI to argue both sides

Tell it: "Argue both sides of the decision." This reveals the real tradeoffs.

Ask "What am I missing?"

One of the most powerful prompts. AI will surface considerations you hadn't thought of.

Example Prompt

Act as a lean manufacturing and inventory management consultant. Our component manufacturing plant currently stocks 45 truss plate SKUs. We are trying to determine whether reducing the number of SKUs would lower inventory costs and simplify operations, or whether the current assortment provides important engineering and production benefits.

Argue both sides of the decision. Identify the largest risks, opportunities, and operational impacts associated with changing our plate assortment.

Finally: what am I missing in how I've described this problem?

Appendix: Common Questions from Production Managers

Real questions, real answers

Q: Is my data safe with AI tools?

Major providers offer enterprise privacy options where your data is not used for training. Use the data security guidelines from this session: anonymize before sharing, use no-training modes when available, and keep sensitive details out entirely.

Q: Will AI replace production jobs?

No. AI helps you ask better questions and see tradeoffs more clearly — but your crew's skill and your judgment are exactly what make the AI response useful in a plant context. AI works best as an assistant, not a decision maker.

Q: What about AI in design software?

AI is being integrated into truss design and engineering tools — that's a separate and evolving story. This session focuses on production operations, where the decisions are already yours to make with your data and experience.

Q: What data formats does AI work with?

AI works with plain text descriptions, pasted data, CSV, Excel, and PDF files. Start by describing your situation in plain English — you don't need to export anything to get started today. File upload works well for structured data analysis.

Before you choose an AI tool for your company, understand their policies. Ask the provider directly—and expect written commitments in your contract or data-processing agreement.

1 HOW WILL OUR INFORMATION BE USED?

- **Are our prompts, files, and outputs used to train or improve your models?**
Is training opt-out, or disabled by default? Get this in writing.
- **Is usage data collected? What exactly, and for what purpose?**
Product telemetry (feature clicks, errors) is different from using your content. Understand both.
- **Is our data used only to provide and improve the service we subscribed to?**
Or is it used for other purposes? Any additional use should require clear notice and your agreement.

3 WHERE IS IT KEPT, AND FOR HOW LONG?

- **Where is our data stored and processed geographically?**
Relevant for regulatory compliance and data sovereignty requirements.
- **How long are prompts, files, chat history, and logs retained?**
Can we set retention periods or delete information on demand?
- **What happens to our data when we cancel the service?**
Confirm deletion timelines and whether you can export everything first.

2 WHO OWNS AND CAN ACCESS OUR DATA?

- **Does our company retain ownership of what we enter and what is generated?**
Confirm intellectual property ownership of prompts and outputs is yours.
- **Under what circumstances can provider staff access our information?**
Support, audits, legal requests—understand each scenario.
- **Which third parties or subprocessors handle our data?**
Request a current list and confirm each party's role and protections.

4 WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE AGREEMENT?

- **Are data-use and privacy commitments documented in the contract?**
Verbal assurances are not enough. Require a Data Processing Agreement (DPA).
- **How will the provider notify us of a security incident?**
Confirm notification timelines and what information they are required to provide.
- **Can we audit or verify compliance with these commitments?**
Ask about third-party certifications (SOC 2, ISO 27001) as evidence of independent review.

5 CAN WE CONTROL ACCESS?

- **Can we manage users centrally and remove access when someone leaves?**
Confirm offboarding is immediate and complete—not dependent on the employee.
- **Does the tool support multi-factor authentication or single sign-on?**
SSO ties access to your company's identity system—a strong control.
- **Are audit logs available showing who accessed, uploaded, or shared information?**
Logs are essential for security reviews and incident response.

7 IS THE SERVICE SECURE AND MANAGEABLE?

- **What independent security certifications does the provider maintain?**
Look for SOC 2 Type II or ISO 27001 as evidence of independent review.
- **Can we set company-wide rules for what employees may enter or connect?**
Admin policy controls prevent individual employees from bypassing your data guidelines.
- **Can we export our data if we decide to change tools?**
Avoid vendor lock-in. Confirm data portability before you sign.

6 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE CONNECT OTHER SYSTEMS?

- **When connecting Outlook, SharePoint, or ERP—what can the tool read, write, or share?**
Understand the full scope of access granted, not just what you intend to use.
- **Can we limit the connection to only the access it truly needs?**
Principle of least privilege: grant only what is necessary for the task.
- **Can we review, monitor, and revoke that access later?**
Connections should be visible and removable from your admin settings at any time.

8 THE CONSISTENCY TEST

- **Does the provider apply the same standards to your data that you apply to your customers?**
A responsible provider collects only what is needed, is transparent about it, and gives you control.
- **Can you explain plainly what data this tool receives and why?**
If you cannot explain it to your team, the tool is not ready for sensitive company information.
- **Have your IT and legal teams reviewed the agreement?**
This is a business decision with legal and operational implications—not just a software purchase.



The decision rule: Do not **ONLY** choose a tool based only on popularity or price. Also consider **what the provider contractually commits to do with your data**—and whether the tool gives your organization proper controls.

APPENDIX — Truss Optimization: How the Math Works

Column generation, LP bounds, and realistic stock lengths — for those who want to go deeper

COLUMN GENERATION IN PLAIN LANGUAGE:

- A "pattern" = one way to cut a stock board
 - Instead of generating ALL possible patterns, start with a few
 - Ask: is there one more pattern that would save money?
 - If yes, add that pattern. Repeat.
 - Stop when no better pattern can be found.
-
- **Master problem:** chooses how many of each known pattern to use
 - **Pricing problem:** looks for a new cost-saving pattern
 - **Integer rounding:** makes the answer usable in production

OPTIMIZER MATURITY — 5 STAGES:

- ① Truss-by-truss nesting (baseline)
- ② Windowed batching (2-truss, 3-truss, full job)
- ③ Realistic stock lengths (8–20 ft purchasable)
- ④ Cost objective (minimize \$ not just waste)
- ⑤ Column generation (proven optimal)

\$676.11

Linear Programming (LP) Bound (lower limit), theoretical minimum if you could buy fractional boards

"If the world were perfect and I could buy fractional boards, what is the absolute lowest cost possible?"

\$676.44

Integer Cost (actual result)

"Actual lumber lengths you might be able to buy"

\$0.33

Gap (how close to optimal)

"Shows the optimization algorithm was VERY efficient."

REAL PURCHASABLE LENGTHS:

8 ft · 10 ft · 12 ft · 14 ft · 16 ft · 18 ft · 20 ft

Appendix: Analyzing Production Data Files with AI

How to analyze shift data with AI in 5 steps:

1 Export your data

Shift statistics, schedule exports, board-feet-per-table reports as CSV or Excel

2 Paste or upload

2 Copy 2–4 weeks of data directly into the chat, or upload the file. ChatGPT and Claude both accept file uploads.

3 Ask plain-English questions

“Which tables had lowest efficiency?” · “Show days where we ran behind schedule”

4 Validate the answers

Cross-check AI’s observations against what you already know about those days and those tables.

5 Dig deeper with prompt patterns

“Why might Table 3 fall behind on Tuesdays?” — use patterns from the session to explore causes.

Sample questions for your shift data:

- › “Which 3 tables averaged the lowest board feet per shift?”
- › “On which days did we miss our daily goal? What was different?”
- › “Is there a pattern in which shift falls behind most?”
- › “Summarize any outlier days and what they had in common”
- › “Create a simple weekly summary I can share with my crew”

Remember: Always anonymize before sharing. Paste totals and averages, not raw records tied to specific customer jobs.

Q&A

Education Session
Evaluation

SCAN HERE





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