

AI as an Adaptive Learning Coach: Lessons from Building a WordPress Website

1. The Challenge

My goal was to design a website using WordPress's block editor. Although numerous tutorials and online courses were available, many no longer matched the current version or assumed knowledge I did not yet have as a rank beginner. I often spent more time searching for answers than making progress on my website.

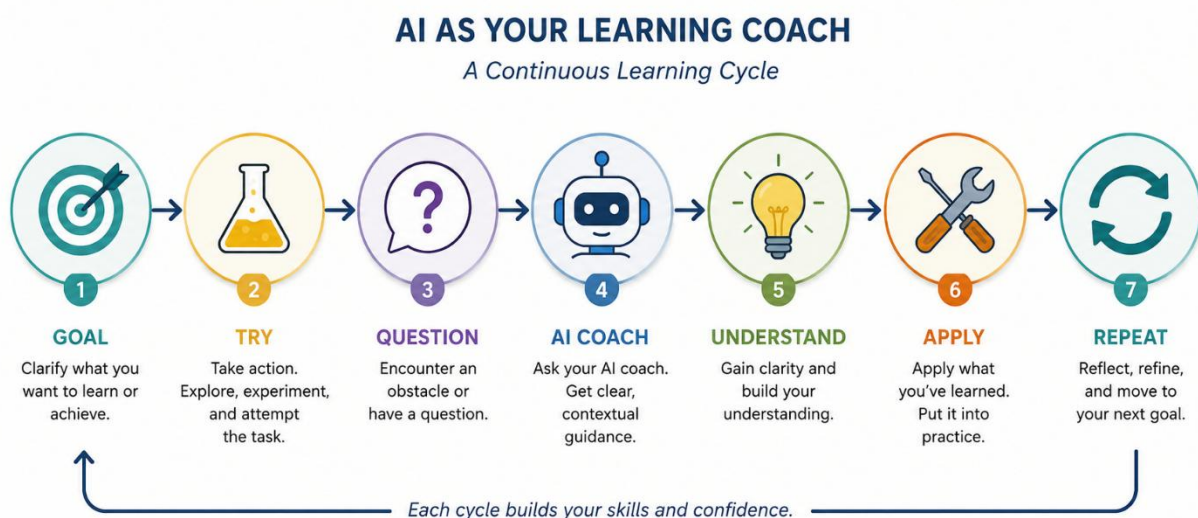
2. The Learning Problem

Rapidly evolving software presents a challenge for traditional instructional materials. Courses and videos are static, while software interfaces, features, and workflows change frequently. Learners often need contextual, just-in-time guidance rather than sequential instruction.

3. My Solution

Rather than following a fixed tutorial, I used AI as an adaptive learning coach. Each question was driven by my immediate goal, allowing explanations, troubleshooting, and next steps to evolve as my understanding grew. Instead of memorizing procedures, I learned by solving authentic problems in real time.

4. Learning Framework



5. Learning Principles

Learning Principle	Example
Authentic task	Build a real website
Immediate application	Apply each answer immediately
Scaffolding	AI adjusts support to current understanding while gradually encouraging greater independence
Reflection	Review what worked before moving on
Self-direction	Learner controls goals, pace, and learning priorities

A Note on Scaffolding

One of the most valuable aspects of AI coaching is its ability to provide support at the precise moment it is needed. However, effective learning also requires that this support gradually fades. As learners gain experience, they should rely less on AI for step-by-step instructions and more on their own growing understanding, using AI primarily to verify decisions, explore alternatives, or troubleshoot unfamiliar problems.

The pace at which this transition occurs will vary from learner to learner, but reducing dependence on AI should be viewed as an intentional part of the learning process.

6. Results

By using AI as an adaptive learning coach, I successfully designed my website while developing confidence with WordPress's Site Editor, Global Styles, navigation blocks, patterns, and responsive design. More importantly, I developed a repeatable approach for learning unfamiliar technologies that can be applied across a wide range of software platforms.

7. Design Implications

This experience suggests that AI is most effective as a personalized learning coach when learners are working toward an authentic goal. Rather than replacing formal instruction, AI complements it by providing contextual support, reducing unnecessary friction, and helping learners maintain momentum as software evolves.

At the same time, this experience highlighted an important limitation. During one stage of development, I encountered technical problems with my website while simultaneously losing access to my primary AI chat because of usage limits. I continued working by using new conversation threads and eventually consulting a different AI chat until the issue was resolved. Although the website was ultimately repaired, the experience served as an important reminder that AI should not become a learner's only source of support.

Instructional designs that incorporate AI should therefore encourage learners to develop multiple problem-solving strategies, including consulting official documentation, experimenting independently, seeking community resources, and drawing upon their own prior knowledge. AI is most valuable as one resource within a broader learning ecosystem rather than as a replacement for independent thinking or traditional reference materials.

Conclusion

The long-term goal of AI-supported learning is not greater dependence on AI, but greater independence. Effective AI coaching provides intensive support during the early stages of skill acquisition and gradually shifts responsibility to the learner as confidence and competence increase. When used in this way, AI becomes a powerful scaffold that accelerates learning while still promoting autonomy, resilience, and lifelong learning.