

Comprehensive Briefing: Becoming a Power User of ChatGPT

A 7-feature deep dive into ChatGPT for students across the Free, Go, and Plus tiers.

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Executive Summary

The second AI Vols meeting moved past the novelty of ChatGPT and into the features that make it a durable daily tool. The workshop targeted the gap between casual use (typing a question into the chat box) and power use (building reusable AI workflows anchored to the student's actual coursework).

Key takeaways:

- **Personalization first.** Custom Instructions set the tone, format, and audience for every chat. Setting them once removes hours of repeated prompting.
- **Custom GPTs and Projects are the real unlock.** They convert one-off chats into persistent tools tied to a specific class, role, or outcome.
- **Tier differences are smaller than the pricing suggests.** For most student workflows, the Free and Go tiers are sufficient; the upgrade to Plus is justified only by image generation, Advanced Data Analysis, and Custom GPT creation.

The Seven Power-User Features

The workshop was structured around seven features — each demonstrated live and reinforced with a student use case.

1. Personalization

- **Custom Instructions** encode the user's major, learning style, and preferred response format.
- **Where:** Settings → Personalization → Custom Instructions.
- **Why it matters:** every subsequent chat inherits the profile, eliminating repeated context-setting.

2. Custom GPTs

- Reusable AI tools with their own system prompt, knowledge files, and voice.
- Student examples: a class-specific study buddy, a resume reviewer, an email drafter.
- Accessible on Plus and Team tiers; shareable via link.

3. Prompting Fundamentals

- **Be specific** — request format (bullets, tables, steps) and length.
- **Give context** — state the role, audience, and constraints up front.
- **Assign a role** — "You are a marketing professor reviewing my pitch deck."

- **Iterate** — treat the first response as a draft, not an answer.

4. Projects

- Persistent workspaces with file uploads and carried-over context.
- Upload a syllabus, lecture notes, and past exams — every chat inside the project references them.
- Effectively a lightweight RAG system with no setup cost.

5. Connectors

- Direct links to Google Drive, Outlook, GitHub, and other sources.
- Pull files and data into a chat without copy-paste.
- Connectors are MCPs (Model Context Protocol) under the hood — covered in depth in Meeting #3.

6. Canvas

- A side-by-side writing and coding surface built into ChatGPT.
- Highlight a section, ask for edits, and watch the document update in place.
- Closest analog: Google Docs with an AI co-author.

7. Tier Comparison

- **Free** — GPT-4o mini with limited GPT-4o access. Sufficient for most student work.
- **Go (\$20/mo)** — more GPT-4o, no image generation.
- **Plus (\$20/mo)** — GPT-4o, DALL-E, Advanced Data Analysis, and Custom GPT creation.

Student Resources Distributed

- Google One AI Premium — 12–15 months free via .edu verification.
- Microsoft 365 + LinkedIn Premium — 12 months free for students.
- Figma Education and Notion Education — free while enrolled.
- GitHub Student Developer Pack — free while enrolled.

Strategic Takeaways

- **Treat ChatGPT as a platform, not a chat box.** The features that compound — Custom GPTs, Projects, Connectors — are the ones with persistent context.
- **Invest in prompting as a skill, not a trick.** Clear instructions are the single highest-leverage change a student can make.
- **Don't pay until you need to.** The Free tier is enough for personalization, projects, and connectors; upgrade only when a specific feature gates real work.