

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

The Skill-vs-Feature Test

A 3-question framework for telling which AI skills are worth your time, and which ones the next update will absorb for free.

INTRODUCTION

Not Every AI Skill Ages the Same

Every few months, a skill people spent real time learning quietly turns into a button. Prompt engineering courses taught careful phrasing tricks that most tools now handle automatically. Entire workflows built around chaining tools by hand got replaced by a single "agent" toggle. None of that time was wasted exactly, but it wasn't a durable investment either, it was a feature in disguise, and the tool eventually caught up.

The anxiety this creates is real: if you can't tell which skill is which in advance, every hour spent learning something new feels like a bet you might lose. This guide is a short test to run before you invest real time, so you can tell the difference between learning a durable capability and learning a workaround for something a tool will do for you next year anyway.

THE FRAMEWORK

Three Questions Before You Invest the Time

TEST • IS THIS A SKILL OR A FEATURE?

OBJECTIVE Would this still matter if the interface changed completely, a new tool, a new model, a voice interface instead of a chat window?

METRIC Does it require a judgment call a tool can't make on its own, what to prioritize, what "good" means for this specific case, when to stop?

BOUNDARY Is it something you'd still be doing by hand in 2 years, or is it the kind of repetitive step tools have historically absorbed within a release cycle or two?

A skill that survives all three tends to be durable: the underlying judgment doesn't go away just because the tool around it changes. A skill that fails even one, especially the second, tends to be a feature waiting to happen: useful today, quietly absorbed tomorrow.

SECTION 2

Applying the Test

SKILLS THAT TEND TO PASS Knowing what a good output actually looks like in your field, well enough to catch a wrong or shallow answer. Framing an ambiguous problem clearly enough that any tool, current or future, could act on it. Judging when AI-assisted work is ready to ship versus needs another pass, the call a client is actually paying you to make.	SKILLS THAT TEND TO FAIL Memorizing a specific tool's interface or exact prompt syntax, both change constantly. Manually chaining steps between separate tools, agent features are absorbing this fast. Formatting or structuring output by hand in a way a template or a one-line instruction could now do automatically.
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Notice the pattern: skills that pass are almost always about judgment, what's good, what's needed, when to stop. Skills that fail are almost always about mechanics, how to operate a specific interface. Mechanics get absorbed. Judgment doesn't, because judgment is exactly what a tool needs a human to supply.

PROMPT • RUN THE TEST ON A SPECIFIC SKILL

I'm deciding whether to invest real time learning [specific skill or tool]. Walk me through the 3-question test: would it survive an interface change, does it require judgment a tool can't make, and is it the kind of thing tools have historically absorbed. Give me an honest read, not just encouragement.

Ask for the honest read explicitly. Left unprompted, it's easy to get validated on a skill that feels exciting to learn rather than one that's actually durable.

*You don't need to predict every product update.
You need one question you ask before you spend the hours: is this judgment, or is this a
workaround?*

Judgment is the only part of the job the next release can't quietly take from you.

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