How to Read an AI Screenshot

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Why this matters

A screenshot of an AI chatbot agreeing with a claim is not evidence that the claim is true. It shows only what the model said at the end of one conversation, and that conversation can be steered.

AI models tend to tell users what they want to hear, a habit researchers call sycophancy. A UNESCO–University College London report released at COP31 in November 2026 found that models' accuracy on climate facts fell by more than 30 percentage points when users pushed back. Most of the time a model gave way, it did so at the first sign of disagreement. Claiming to be a climate scientist made models even more likely to cave.

This means a determined user can get almost any model to "admit" almost anything, then crop the screen and share it as independent confirmation. The questions below will help you tell whether you are looking at evidence or at a manufactured confession.

Five questions to ask

1. **Can I see the whole conversation?** A single reply tells you nothing about what came before it. If the person sharing it won't show the full exchange, or a shareable link to it, treat the screenshot as unverified.
2. **What was the first answer?** If the model began by stating the scientific consensus and changed its position later, the change is the story. Look for what moved it.
3. **Did new evidence change its mind, or did pressure?** A legitimate change of position follows a new study, dataset or argument. A reversal that follows repeated objection, frustration or flattery reflects the model's training, not the facts.
4. **Who did the user claim to be?** "As a climate scientist…" or "I work in energy policy…" cannot be checked in a chat window. These claims measurably push models toward agreement.
5. **Does the claim stand without the AI?** Ask what reputable sources say: IPCC assessments, national science academies, peer-reviewed research. If the only support for a claim is that a chatbot agreed, there is no support.

Red flags

- **A leading question.** "Isn't it true that CO_2 isn't the main driver?" invites agreement. A neutral question asks "What is the main driver of climate change?"
- **Cropping.** The screenshot starts mid-conversation, or the user's earlier messages are cut off.
- **Apology language.** Phrases like "You're right, I apologise" or "Good point, I was mistaken" often mark a model giving way to pressure rather than correcting a real error.
- **Claimed credentials.** Any appeal to the user's own expertise that the model had no way to check.
- **A suspiciously quotable line.** A short, confident sentence that sounds made for sharing, especially one that reverses the scientific consensus.
- **No sources.** The model's "admission" cites nothing, or cites studies you cannot find.

Check it yourself

1. **Start a fresh conversation.** Earlier messages shape later answers, so begin with a clean slate.
2. **Ask the question neutrally.** Don't hint at the answer you expect.
3. **Ask for the strongest case on each side.** Then ask the model where the scientific consensus lies and how confident it is.
4. **Ask for sources, then check them.** Models can invent citations. Open the source and confirm it says what the model claims.
5. **Test the reversal.** If the screenshot shows the model changing its mind, push back on the new answer. A model that flips again under the same kind of pressure was never reasoning from evidence.

The bottom line

An AI agreeing with you is not evidence. It may only show that the model was trained to please. A chatbot "admission" carries about as much weight as a stranger online saying "good point": it may be sincere, but it settles nothing about the facts.

When you see one shared as proof, ask for the full conversation, ask what changed the model's mind, and ask what the science says without it.

Sources

- AI systems are easy to pressure into giving false climate information, UCL News, November 2026
- AI models abandon climate facts at the first sign of user push-back, Down To Earth, November 2026