

# The AI Data Stoplight

A 5-second rule for deciding what is safe to type into a general AI tool (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, etc.).

## THE ONE RULE

If it identifies a real person tied to your services, it is **RED**. It does not go in.

<b>GREEN</b> Go ahead	<b>YELLOW</b> Pause / get approval	<b>RED</b> Never in a general tool
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public marketing copy</li> <li>• General how-to questions</li> <li>• Made-up / example data</li> <li>• Your own published website text</li> <li>• Brainstorming with no real names</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal operating notes</li> <li>• Aggregate stats with no names</li> <li>• Draft donor letters with names removed</li> <li>• Vendor or budget info (no people)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any client name or detail</li> <li>• Anything medical or sensitive</li> <li>• Donor names, emails, addresses</li> <li>• Passwords or logins</li> <li>• A client's story that could identify them</li> <li>• Spreadsheets / exports of people</li> </ul>

## “But I changed the name” is not enough

Swapping a name does not make a story safe. The details can still point to a real person. “A 19-year-old college athlete in [small town] expecting twins” identifies someone even with a fake name.

Real de-identifying means changing the scenery, not just the name: change the age, the place, the situation, so it no longer maps to anyone real. If you can't do that, leave it out.

## Quick gut-checks before you hit enter

- Would I be okay if this showed up in a screenshot I do not control? If no, it is not green.
- Am I uploading a file? A file sends everything inside it, not just the part you care about.
- Did I only change the name? Then it's still yellow at best - change the scenery too.
- If in doubt, leave it out, or ask the person who owns your AI policy.

## Why this matters

The moment you hit enter, a copy of what you typed leaves your building to be processed. That is normal and unavoidable for any cloud AI tool. The stoplight keeps the sensitive stuff from ever making that trip.

*For general staff guidance only. Not legal advice. For client or medical information, talk to your leadership and advisors. When in doubt, leave it out.*