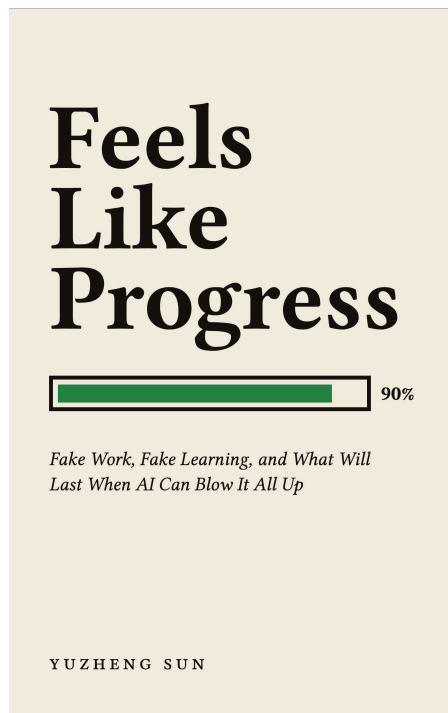


# Feels Like Progress

*Fake Work, Fake Learning, and What Will Last When AI Can Blow It All Up*

YUZHENG SUN



## About the book

Fake work produces the evidence of work. Fake learning produces the evidence of learning. AI can now produce both in a minute or two. Sun asks what keeps its value: work that could fail, questions worth asking, craft, and work that compounds.

A book of ideas about fake work, fake learning, and what will last when AI can blow it all up.

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## About the author

Yuzheng Sun, PhD, is the founder of Superlinear Academy, where more than 20,000 people learn to build with AI and have shared more than 700 projects. He teaches its AI Builders course, which has taught more than three thousand paying students and is rated 5.0 out of 5 on Maven. After a doctorate in economics at Cornell University, he worked as an economist at Amazon, a data scientist at Meta, and a vice director of data and AI at Tencent's games group, where he led a team of about thirty, and was an early member of Statsig, the team later acquired by OpenAI. Since 2020, under the name Kedaibiao Lizheng, he has hosted more than two hundred long conversations, with guests including a Databricks cofounder, Gen's Chief AI & Innovation Officer, OpenAI's CTO of Applications, and the hosts of Acquired. His channels have more than 400,000 followers. He coauthored Growth Data Analytics Playbook, on the Wall Street Journal's 2025 CIO Journal reading list, and wrote a book in Chinese, Real Stuff. He lives in Seattle with his wife and son. His website is [lizheng.ai](https://lizheng.ai).

## What the book argues

- **Fake work and fake learning.** Fake work produces the evidence of work. Fake learning produces the evidence of learning. Both feel like progress, which is why they last so long.
- **AI can blow it all up.** AI can now produce that evidence in a minute or two. Sun predicts it will first inflate fake work, then, over a decade or two and unevenly, destroy much of what that evidence was worth.
- **Real work can fail.** What makes work real isn't that it succeeds. It's that it could fail, at something that matters to someone who depends on it. Fake work never has to lose; it only has to survive inside the story.
- **What can't be written down.** Nouns are what you can list: tools, titles, frameworks. Verbs are what you can do. Most of what we're paid for is craft: it has no correct answer, but it has better and worse, and it is learned by doing real work and learning from people who know more. AI is extraordinary at nouns. Verbs grow slowly, in the person who does the work.
- **Make what lasts.** Choose the question, then choose work that compounds: work whose result today raises the return on every step after it.
- **Good students, wrong game.** An exam is the one place where every question has a correct answer. School trains capable people to find it and to please whoever is grading, and they carry the habit into work, where there is no answer key. Years of fake work deepen it, until a senior title comes with no clear answer to a simple question: what can you actually make happen?

## Questions to ask

1. What is fake work, and why is the most dangerous kind diligent rather than lazy?
2. You once wrote a thirty-six-page analysis that nobody could act on. What did it teach you?
3. A team you supported hit both of its goals and was cleared out anyway. What does that say about metrics?
4. Why do you expect AI to inflate fake work before it destroys its value?
5. Why do you say AI's most characteristic failure isn't being wrong, but being correct but not right?
6. Why does silence at work score zero, when most of us act as if it scores ninety?
7. What happened at that McDonald's sign in 2022?
8. Why does choosing the question matter more as AI gets better at answering?
9. You say the things most worth learning can't be written down. How does anyone learn them?
10. What would you tell a manager who wants a team to use AI without drowning in polished output?
11. What does "make what lasts" mean for someone early in their career?

## Lines from the book

- | *At work, silence scores zero, but we act as if it scores ninety.*
- | *When work-shaped output costs almost nothing, the shape of the work stops proving much.*
- | *You get good at whatever feedback loop you live in.*
- | *The feeling of progress is cheap now, and getting cheaper.*

Advance reader copies (PDF) and a free sample are available on request.