

01 · Prompting

A Guide to Writing a Clear Prompt

A practical method for prompts that produce usable results: objective, audience, context, inputs, constraints, format, quality criteria and iteration, plus a fillable prompt canvas.

For: Anyone who uses AI tools in daily work and wants more precise results with fewer rounds of editing. Level: Beginner

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Why a prompt deserves ten minutes of your time

Most frustration with AI tools does not come from a weak tool. It comes from a short prompt that leaves the model to guess everything: who is writing, for whom, why, and at what length. The result is text that is "correct" but generic, and you spend a quarter of an hour fixing it by hand. A clear prompt flips the equation: two extra minutes of writing save long rounds of correction.

This guide does not teach "magic words". It teaches a stable way of thinking that works with any chat tool, today and after the tools change: give the model what any new colleague would need to do the job well.

The core rule: a language model does not "know" the truth; it predicts the most likely text based on what you gave it. The clearer your input, the less room for guessing and the better the result. This is also why it can be confident and wrong at the same time.

What happens when you write a prompt

Three facts are enough to understand why the method below works:

- **The model is not a search engine.** It produces text that sounds convincing and may invent a number, a name or a reference. Every number, name and source gets checked before use.
- **Whatever you leave out gets filled with the average.** No audience means writing for everyone. No tone means a neutral tone. A generic prompt produces a generic result.
- **Long conversations blur the context.** As a conversation grows, the model may "forget" early details or mix different tasks. A new task deserves a new conversation.

The method: the five-part framework and what completes it

At the heart of the method is the **five-part framework**: role, context, task, constraints, format. We add three elements that make a prompt ready for real work: the **objective and audience** before you write, the **inputs** the model works from, and the **quality criteria** you will judge the result by, followed by **iteration**.

You do not need every element every time; a quick request needs three, an important task deserves all eight.

1. **Objective:** what will you do with the result once you have it?
2. **Audience:** who will read or see the final output?
3. **Role:** what expertise should the model work with?
4. **Context:** what does the model not know about the situation?
5. **Inputs:** what material must it rely on?
6. **Task:** one clear verb.
7. **Constraints and format:** length, language, tone, what to avoid, and the shape of the output.
8. **Quality criteria, then iteration:** how you will judge the result, and how you will improve it.

1. Objective: start from the use, not the request

Before writing a word, answer: *what decision or action comes after this result?* "I want a post" is not an objective. "I want a post that gets neighbourhood customers to try the new bread this week" is. The objective shapes everything after it: length, tone and the kind of call to action. If you cannot write the objective in one sentence, the problem is not the tool yet; you have not decided what you want.

2. Audience: who is the final output for?

A summary for the manager is not a summary for the team, and a message to a long-standing client is not a letter to a public body. Describe the reader in one line: rough age or position, what they already know, what they care about. For example: "owners of small shops in Tripoli who do not know technical terms and care about time and cost".

3. Role: who is the model?

The role steers vocabulary and depth. "You are a meticulous copy editor" produces something different from "you are a social media copywriter". Make the role specific and tied to the task, without inflating it: phrases like "the best expert in the world" add no information.

4. Context: what do you know that the model does not?

The model does not know your project or what happened yesterday. In two or three sentences: who you are, what the project is, where things stand now and what has already been tried. Good context is short and specific; do not paste the company's whole history, only what affects this task.

5. Inputs: give it the material instead of letting it invent

If the task is summarising minutes, rewriting a text or analysing a table, paste the material itself and separate it clearly from the instructions, for instance between markers such as `"""` or under a heading "Text:". Then say explicitly: "Rely only on the material provided; if something is missing, write: not stated." That one line cuts invention considerably.

Before pasting, remove names, phone numbers and any personal or confidential data about clients, patients or staff, unless your tool is an organisational one approved for that use.

6. Task: one clear verb

Write, summarise, analyse, compare, propose, rewrite, extract. One verb per prompt where possible. If you need several, put them as numbered steps inside the prompt or split them across consecutive prompts. "Write a full marketing plan, design posts for it and analyse competitors" is three tasks that deserve three prompts.

7. Constraints and format: the edges of the field and the shape of the ball

Constraints are what the model must respect: length (words or sentences), language or dialect, tone, what must be included and what must be avoided (promises, exaggeration, foreign jargon, numbers not in the material). **Format** is the shape of the output: a table with named columns, bullet points, an email with a subject line, three alternatives, numbered steps. Name the columns when you ask for a table; it saves you rearranging later.

8. Quality criteria: how will you know the result is good?

This is the most neglected element and the one with the most impact. Write two or three criteria you will use to judge the result, and put them inside the prompt: "the reader must understand the offer from the first sentence", "every number must come from the attached material", "no sentence longer than 20 words". You can also ask the model to check its output against these criteria before delivering it, or to say where it could not meet them.

9. Iteration: the first prompt is a draft

Do not expect perfection on the first try, and do not start from scratch after every disappointment. Improve the result with short, specific follow-ups: "cut it by half", "make the tone friendly but professional", "give me three substantially different alternatives", "the second paragraph is too generic; add an example from our context". Changing one element at a time teaches you what actually moves the result.

A working rule: do not adopt an important result before two or three rounds of improvement, and do not publish any text before a person has read it.

Four techniques that lift quality immediately

- **Ask me before you start:** end the prompt with "If anything is unclear, ask me up to five questions before writing." Very useful when you do not know what is missing.
- **One example beats a paragraph of explanation:** if you want a particular voice, paste a paragraph of your own writing and say "match this style without copying its phrases".
- **Self-check:** after the result, ask "Review your answer: which claims are you unsure of? Mark them [unverified]." It does not replace your own checking, but it points to the risky spots.
- **The strict critic:** "Review the text below and list three weaknesses, most serious first, with a specific fix for each. Do not flatter." Use it on your own writing too.

The prompt canvas: blank template

Copy the template, fill the brackets and delete what you do not need. Save the completed versions that worked in one file; over time it becomes your personal library.

Prompt canvas

Objective: I will use the result to [the next decision or action].

Audience: the output is for [who, what they know, what they care about].

You are [role: specific expertise tied to the task].

Context: [two or three sentences: who we are, the project, where things stand, what has been tried].

Inputs:

""

[paste the text, data or notes here after removing sensitive data]

""

Rely only on the inputs above. If something is missing, write: not stated.

Task: [one clear verb: write / summarise / analyse / propose / extract].

Constraints:

- Length: [number of words or sentences]
- Language and tone: [plain / formal / friendly / dialect]
- Must include: [...]
- Avoid: [promises, superlatives, numbers not in the inputs, ...]

Format: [table with columns: ... / bullets / email with subject / 3 options].

Quality criteria: before delivering, check that [criterion 1],
[criterion 2] and [criterion 3].

If anything is unclear, ask me one question before you start.

Objective: what action comes after the result?

Audience: who will read the result and what do they care about?

Role and context: who is the model, and what must it know?

Inputs: what will I paste, and what must I remove first?

Task: the one clear verb

Constraints and format

Quality criteria: three criteria I will judge the result by

Three examples: from weak to better

Example one: an apology message to a patient

Illustrative example

Weak prompt: "Write an apology message to a patient."

Why it is weak: we do not know what we are apologising for, who is sending it, through which channel, or what we are offering the patient. The result will be a generic courtesy paragraph that fits everything and nothing.

Better prompt:

"You are the patient relations officer at **Nabd Clinic**, a small dental clinic in Tripoli. Context: a patient's appointment this morning was cancelled an hour before it was due because the dentist had to be absent, and the patient had taken leave from work to attend. Task: write a WhatsApp message that apologises clearly without long justifications and offers two alternative slots this week (Wednesday 4 pm or Thursday 10 am) with booking priority. Constraints: five sentences at most, plain

and warm Arabic, no promises we cannot keep and no details about why the dentist was absent. Format: the message text only, then a second shorter version. Quality criterion: the patient knows exactly what to reply with in a single message."

What changed: we added the role and context (the patient's real inconvenience), a specific task with a concrete offer, constraints that prevent exaggeration and protect privacy, and a criterion to judge by. The expected result is a short message that acknowledges the inconvenience, offers two options and asks for a one-word reply.

Example two: a post for a new product

Illustrative example

Weak prompt: "Write a post about the new bread."

Why it is weak: no platform, no audience, no specific feature, no call to action. You will get a post full of "delicious" and "fresh" that looks like every bakery post.

Better prompt:

"Objective: get neighbourhood residents to visit this week and try a new product. You are a social media writer for a local shop. Context: **Al Zaytouna Bakery** in Tripoli has launched a whole-wheat za'atar loaf, baked twice daily (7 am and 4 pm), with free tasting on Friday and Saturday. Audience: local families and commuters passing by in the morning. Task: write an Instagram post. Constraints: 60 words maximum, light and approachable Arabic, open with an attention-grabbing line that is not a worn-out question, do not use 'best' or 'most delicious', and make no health claims. Format: three alternatives with different angles (the morning smell, the free tasting, the school lunchbox), each ending with one call to action. Quality criterion: someone scrolling fast knows what is new and when to come within three seconds."

What changed: the objective set the type of call to action, the real details (times, free tasting) gave the model material instead of invented adjectives, and asking for three angles gives a real choice rather than three wordings of one idea. Banning health claims protects you from a promise you cannot substantiate.

Example three: summarising a messy meeting

Illustrative example

Weak prompt: "Summarise this," followed by pasted meeting notes.

Why it is weak: we do not know who the summary is for or its shape. It will likely return a narrative paragraph that repeats the notes, and it may "complete" an owner or a deadline that was never mentioned.

Better prompt:

"You are a meticulous administrative coordinator at **Darb Al Khair Association** (a small community association). Audience: board members who did not attend and have two minutes. Inputs: the notes from the planning meeting for the school-bag distribution campaign, between the markers below. Task: turn the notes into three sections: (1) decisions taken, (2) a task table with columns Task | Owner | Deadline | Notes, (3) open questions. Constraints: rely only on the notes; if an owner or deadline is not mentioned, write 'not specified' and do not guess. No more than 200 words outside the table. Quality criterion: an absent member can tell what is expected of them without asking anyone. At the end, point out any two tasks that seem to conflict or are unclear."

What changed: the specific format turned a summary into a working tool, "do not guess" prevented invented owners and dates, and asking for conflicting tasks made the model surface the meeting's gaps instead of smoothing them over.

Ready-made follow-up prompts

After the first result, use one of these short prompts instead of rewriting everything:

Problem with the result	Follow-up prompt
Long and padded	"Cut it by half without removing any essential information."
Generic, does not sound like us	"The second paragraph is generic; rewrite it with a detail from the context I gave you."
Wrong tone	"Make the tone friendly but professional, as if writing to a client you have known for years."
Alternatives too similar	"Give me three versions that differ in substance, not wording, and say who each suits."
Meaning changed during editing	"Improve the style only without changing any information, and list your edits."
Doubtful numbers or names	"Which claims here are not in the inputs? Remove them or mark them [unverified]."

When is a short prompt enough?

Not every request needs the full canvas. A quick question ("what is the difference between vision and mission in a business plan?") or a small edit ("fix spelling mistakes only") needs one line. Use the full canvas when you will publish or send the result, base a decision on it, or repeat the task every week. In that last case, save the prompt as a template; it is one of the best investments of your time.

Limits and responsibility

- The model suggests; you are responsible. Every output is reviewed by a person before it reaches another person.
- Do not put personal or confidential data into public tools; anonymise first or use a tool your organisation approves.

- Every number, reference or quotation gets its source opened and checked, ideally against a second independent source for sensitive figures.
- Tool capabilities change constantly (this guide was written in September 2026), but the principles of clarity here do not depend on any particular tool.

Common mistakes

- **Mistake:** a one-line prompt for an important task. **Fix:** ask yourself where the role, the context and the constraints are, and add what is missing.
- **Mistake:** pasting the whole company history "so it understands better". **Fix:** good context is only what affects this task; two or three sentences usually suffice.
- **Mistake:** several big tasks in one prompt. **Fix:** split them into consecutive prompts or numbered steps, and review each step before the next.
- **Mistake:** accepting the first result or throwing it all away. **Fix:** improve with short follow-ups, changing one element at a time.
- **Mistake:** trusting numbers and references because they look precise. **Fix:** attach "where from?" to every number and ask for "not stated" instead of guesses.
- **Mistake:** asking to "improve" a text and getting a changed meaning. **Fix:** ask to "improve the style without changing any information" and request a list of edits.
- **Mistake:** running different tasks in the same conversation for hours. **Fix:** a new conversation for each new task, pasting only the context it needs.

Checklist before you send

- ☐ I know what I will do with the result and wrote the objective in one sentence.
- ☐ I defined the final audience: who they are and what they care about.
- ☐ I gave the model a specific role tied to the task.
- ☐ I wrote the context it does not know, without padding.
- ☐ I pasted the inputs, separated them from the instructions and removed sensitive data.
- ☐ The task is one clear verb or a set of numbered steps.
- ☐ I set the length, language, tone and what to avoid.
- ☐ I specified the output shape (table with columns, bullets, alternatives...).
- ☐ I wrote two or three quality criteria inside the prompt.
- ☐ I will review and improve the result before using it, and check every number and source.

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