

Writing effective AI prompts

A practical guide with two templates

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The idea

The quality of what an AI system gives you depends heavily on how you ask. A good prompt makes your **context**, your **task**, and your **expectations** explicit instead of leaving the model to guess. This page offers two templates:

- **Template 1 — the quick skeleton:** four fields for everyday use.
- **Template 2 — the meta-prompt:** a structured, iterative tool for when the output really matters (e.g. a complex analysis for your term paper).

The examples use Claude, but both templates work with any comparable assistant (ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot ...). Adapt the wording to the tool you use.

! A better prompt does not replace your judgement

A well-crafted prompt gets you a more useful *draft* — it does **not** make the output true. You must still verify every claim, check every citation, and revise the text into your own. **Keep your prompts:** you will need them for the “Prompt & iteration strategy” row of the [AI use disclosure template](#).

! Keep your prompts

You will need them for the “Prompt & iteration strategy” row of the [AI use disclosure template](#). Also, it is worth re-using good prompts and not always start from scratch. If you are a heavy AI user, it might be worth creating your own prompt repository.

How to read the templates

The templates use two kinds of placeholders:

- [...] — **replace this** with your own content.
- {} — an **instruction to the AI** describing what it should produce there.

Do not leave the literal brackets in your final prompt.

Template 1 — the quick skeleton

For most everyday requests, four fields are enough:

The section labels (**Context**, **Task**, **Format**, **Constraints**) stay as they are — they give the prompt its structure. Only the [...] placeholders get replaced.

```
## Context
I am a [role] working on [task/project]. The audience is [who],
and the relevant background is [key facts, constraints].

## Task
Please [action verb] a [deliverable] that [core goal].

## Format
Give the answer as [text / bullet points / a table / ...],
about [length], structured as [sections you want].

## Constraints
Focus on [scope]. Avoid [what to exclude].
If you are unsure of a fact, say so rather than guessing.
```

Worked example

```
## Context
I am a Master's student in International Management writing a term paper. My
reader is my course instructor. The paper analyses how institutional theory
explains the market entry of a mid-sized German firm into Southeast Asia.

## Task
Please help me draft a one-paragraph statement of my research question that is
specific and answerable with a single case study.

## Format
One paragraph, about 120 words, in academic English.
```

`## Constraints`

Focus only on institutional theory (not resource-based views). Do not invent sources. If a claim needs a citation, mark it [cite].

Template 2 — the meta-prompt (for demanding tasks)

When the stakes are higher, use the prompt below to make the AI **help you build a better prompt** through an iterative process. Paste it into a new chat, then describe what you want to accomplish.

You are a prompt-engineering assistant. Your goal is to help me create a highly effective prompt through an iterative process. When I describe what I want to accomplish, create a structured prompt using the framework below, then offer refinements and ask clarifying questions.

`## Prompt:`

{Create the most effective prompt based on my request, phrased in the first person as if I were directly asking the AI. Use the framework below, adapting sections to the specific use case:

`**Context**`

- I am a [role] working on [project/challenge].
- My audience is [stakeholders] with [expertise level] in [topic area].
- Relevant context: [domain, constraints, timeline, background].
- I want you to act as [AI role with specific expertise and perspective].

`**Task**`

Please help me [action verb] a [deliverable] that addresses [core question].

`**Success criteria**`

The response will be successful if it [measurable outcomes that matter to the audience].

`**Desired output**`

Format: [text/bullets/tables/...]

Structure:

1. [Section 1] (approx. X words) - [purpose]
2. [Section 2] (approx. X words) - [purpose]
3. [Section 3] (approx. X words) - [purpose]

`**Style & tone**`

```

- Use [formal/conversational/technical] language for [audience].
- Include [examples, data, frameworks, analogies ...].

**Constraints**
- Length: [word count or limits].
- Scope: focus only on [region/timeframe/domain].
- Exclude: [topics or approaches to avoid].

**Examples & references**
Here is the kind of content I am looking for: [brief example].
Please draw on: [methodologies, frameworks, or sources].

**Quality checks**
Before finalising, verify you have: [validation criteria], provided reasoning for
key recommendations, and addressed limitations.

**Uncertainty instruction**
If you are uncertain about facts, data, or domain practices, say so clearly
rather than making assumptions.}

## Possible Additions:
{Suggest three specific, actionable additions that could improve the prompt:
A. [...]
B. [...]
C. [...]}

## Questions:
{Ask three targeted questions whose answers would most improve the prompt:
1. [context/requirements]
2. [audience/stakeholder needs]
3. [depth/scope/methodology]}

## Instructions for next steps:
After I review your Prompt, Additions, and Questions, I will reply with the
additions I want and answers to your questions. Integrate my feedback while
preserving the working parts. We continue until the prompt fully meets my needs.

```

Quick reference — common output structures

Reuse these in the **Desired output** section:

- **Summary report:** Problem → Analysis → Recommendations → Next steps

- **Analytical document:** Situation → Options → Evaluation → Implementation plan
- **Action memo:** Context → Recommendation → Rationale → Required resources
- **Presentation outline:** Key message → Supporting evidence → Call to action
- **Tutorial/guide:** Overview → Step-by-step → Examples → Troubleshooting

To start Template 2, open a new chat, paste the block above, and answer the assistant's question:

What specific challenge, analysis, or deliverable would you like your prompt to address?