

# Guide to Effective Prompting

A prompt is the instruction or question you give an AI tool. Use everyday language and give it enough information to help.

## Start simple

Try: "Summarize these meeting notes in five bullets and list the action items." Paste or attach the notes. Add details when you need a more specific result.

## Anatomy of a strong prompt

These five parts help you give clear direction. You do not need all five every time, and they can appear in any order. A role or perspective is optional.

### ONE COMPLETE PROMPT

### WHAT EACH PART DOES

Turn the meeting notes below into a concise recap.

#### 1. Task

What should the AI do?

The recap is for colleagues who missed our campus workshop planning meeting.

#### 2. Context

What background or audience matters?

Use only the notes. Do not invent names or deadlines. Mark missing details as "not specified."

#### 3. Constraints

What requirements or limits apply?

Use three headings: Decisions, Action Items, and Open Questions. Put action items in a table.

#### 4. Output format

How should the answer be organized?

Write from the perspective of a project coordinator who needs clear next steps.

#### 5. Role or perspective

What viewpoint would help? (Optional)

Then paste the meeting notes below the prompt, or attach the file.

## Six best practices

1. State the task clearly.
2. Supply relevant context and source material.
3. Describe the desired result; add an example when useful.
4. Review and refine the response.
5. Verify important information.
6. Invite clarification: "Ask me any clarifying questions needed."

# Improve the Response

Read the first response, decide what needs to change, and continue in the same conversation. You can refine your request as you go.

## Show the AI what you want

A **zero-shot prompt** is a prompt without an example. A **one-shot prompt** is a prompt with one example to show the desired tone, format, or kind of answer you want.

### NO EXAMPLE (ZERO-SHOT)

Write a friendly, two-sentence reminder that workshop registration closes Friday.

### ONE EXAMPLE (ONE-SHOT)

Write a friendly, two-sentence reminder that workshop registration closes Friday. Match this style: "Library books are due Monday. Please return yours so others can use them."

Several examples are called few-shot prompting. Use examples you want the AI to follow.

## If the answer is not quite right, add a follow-up

|                        |                                                               |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Too general</b>     | "Add two concrete examples relevant to university staff."     |
| <b>Too long</b>        | "Cut this to 150 words and keep the key decisions."           |
| <b>Wrong tone</b>      | "Use a professional, conversational tone and plain language." |
| <b>Wrong format</b>    | "Put this in a table with task, owner, and deadline columns." |
| <b>Missing context</b> | "Ask me three questions that would help you improve this."    |

## For complex tasks, work in stages

Review each result before moving to the next stage. For example:

- 1. Plan:** "Propose an outline for the guide. Wait for my feedback."
- 2. Refine:** "Revise the outline using these changes: [your changes]."
- 3. Draft:** "Write the guide using the approved outline."

### Before you finish the conversation, ask:

"What have I left out?"

"What assumptions are we making?"

"What else should I consider?"

"What should I verify?"

Check important facts, calculations, and sources yourself. AI can sometimes make mistakes.