Getting the Most Out of AI: A Practical Guide to Better Prompting

Have you ever asked ChatGPT, Claude, or another AI model for help, only to get a response that's vague, too long, or just off the mark? The good news is that you have more control over the outcome than you might think!

This guide is all about prompt engineering—the art of giving AI clear, structured instructions so it delivers the results you actually want. Instead of quick tricks, we'll cover a practical framework used by industry leaders like OpenAI, Anthropic, Google, and Meta to improve AI responses.

Why Good Prompting Matters

AI models are powerful but literal. Ask, 'Tell me about innovation,' and you'll get a broad, meandering answer. But tweak it to 'Summarize the top 3 innovations in renewable energy since 2020 in under 75 words, focusing on solar breakthroughs,' and suddenly, you get a focused, useful response.

So what makes a good prompt?
- ✔ Efficiency – Less back-and-forth to clarify what you need
- ✔ Accuracy – More relevant answers, fewer "hallucinations"
- ✔ Consistency – Well-structured prompts lead to better, repeatable results

A Simple Formula for Great Prompts

Most AI companies recommend a similar structure for prompts. These six elements will give you better responses every time:

1 Define the Role

Tell the AI who it should be:
- ✔ 'You are a cybersecurity consultant.'
- ✔ 'You are an expert resume coach.'

This helps shape the AI's tone and expertise. That said, newer reasoning models (like OpenAI's o1 Pro) often don't need this step—you can just jump to the task.

2 Be Clear About the Task

Spell out exactly what you want:
- ✔ 'Summarize this article in 3 bullet points.'
- ✔ 'Translate this paragraph into Spanish.'

If a task is complex, break it into smaller steps. AI is flexible, but it thrives on clear direction.

3 Provide Context

Give the AI key details so it doesn't guess:

✔ 'Here's the user's resume…'

✔ 'Below is a summary of my company's policies…'

Without context, AI will fill in the gaps, sometimes inaccurately.

4 Specify the Format

Want bullet points? A table? A short paragraph? Tell it:

✔ 'List 3 key takeaways in bullet points.'

✔ 'Summarize the data in a table.'

Without this, AI might ramble or bury key info in long paragraphs.

5 Show an Example (Optional)

AI learns from examples:

✔ 'Here's a good summary format: [example]. Use the same style.'

This works great for structured tasks, but if you want creative variety, test prompts with and without examples.

6 Set Constraints

Limit word count, complexity, or scope:

✔ 'Explain in 5th-grade language.'

✔ 'Keep the response under 50 words.'

Too many rules, though, can confuse AI—so use constraints wisely.

Common Prompting Mistakes (And Fixes)

❌ Vague Request → 'Tell me about education.'

✅ Better: 'Summarize how public education changed in the U.S. between 1900 and 1950, in under 200 words.'

❌ Too Many Requests at Once → 'Summarize, analyze, format as a table, and make it funny.'

✅ Better: Break it into steps.

❌ No Format Guidance → 'Analyze this resume.'

✅ Better: 'List the top 5 skills from this resume as bullet points.'

Advanced Techniques

✔ Few-Shot Prompting → Show a few input/output examples so the AI learns a pattern.

✔ Chain-of-Thought (Carefully) → If you need step-by-step reasoning, ask for it ('Explain in 3 bullet points'), but don't overuse it, as some models perform worse when forced to spell everything out.

✔ Iterative Prompting → Instead of one big ask, break it into steps:
  1. 'First, outline key topics.'
  2. 'Now expand on each section.'

Debugging a Bad Response

If an AI answer isn't great, try tweaking your prompt:
  - Too long-winded? → Set a word limit.
  - Unstructured? → Request bullet points or a table.
  - Misses the point? → Rephrase your goal explicitly.
  - Too vague? → Add more context.

Why This Matters

Good prompting isn't just about better AI responses—it makes AI a real tool that works for you.

✔ Saves time – Less back-and-forth means faster results.
✔ Gives you control – AI outputs exactly what you need.
✔ Empowers everyone – You don't need to be technical to write great prompts!

Final Thoughts

At its core, prompt engineering is just clear communication—telling AI who you are, what you want, and how you want it.

Want to get better at it?
  - Experiment – Try different wording until you get the perfect response.
  - Use Templates – Save prompts for tasks you repeat often.
  - Learn from the Best – AI providers like OpenAI, Google, and Anthropic publish great best practices.

With these techniques, you'll get way more out of AI—whether you're automating work, summarizing research, or just making life easier.

Happy prompting!