



A FREE GUIDE · NO JARGON, JUST
PRACTICE

Prompted

*A beginner's guide to using AI tools well — and
writing prompts that actually get you what you
want.*

UNDERSTAND IT · USE IT · GET BETTER RESULTS

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AI Isn't Magic. It's a Tool You Can Learn.

Most people's first conversation with an AI chatbot goes one of two ways: they type a single vague sentence and get a mediocre answer, or they expect it to read their mind. Neither gets you very far.

The truth is simpler and more useful: modern AI tools are remarkably capable, but they respond to how clearly you communicate — the same way a smart new colleague does. This guide has no hype and no jargon. It won't try to sell you a subscription or convince you AI will change your life overnight. It will teach you the small, practical skill of asking well, so you get useful answers instead of generic ones.



WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

The gap between people who get real value from AI tools and people who don't rarely comes down to which tool they use. It almost always comes down to how they ask.

CHAPTER 01

How AI Actually Works

*No math, no hype — just enough of a mental model to
use these tools well.*



A Very Good Guesser, Not a Mind Reader

At the core, today's AI chatbots are **language models**. They were trained on enormous amounts of text and learned to predict, one piece at a time, what word is most likely to come next given everything written so far — including your prompt.

That single idea explains almost everything about how to work with these tools well. A vague prompt gives the model very little to predict from, so it fills the gaps with generic, average answers. A specific, detailed prompt narrows the possibilities dramatically — which is why the exact same tool can feel "amazing" or "useless" depending entirely on how it's asked.

It also explains their biggest weakness: because the model is predicting plausible text, not looking facts up in real time by default, it can state something confidently wrong. This is usually called a **hallucination**, and we'll cover how to guard against it in Chapter 7.



THE TAKEAWAY

Think of AI less like a search engine and more like a brilliant collaborator who has read almost everything, but wasn't there for your specific situation — so you have to fill it in.

CHAPTER 02

The Anatomy of a Great Prompt

*Five simple parts. Once you see the pattern, you can't
unsee it.*



The C.T.F.C.E. Formula

Strong prompts tend to include some mix of these five ingredients. You won't need all five every time, but the more precision your task needs, the more of them help.

THE FIVE PARTS

Context

Task

Format

Constraints

Examples

Context — who you are, what situation this is for. **Task** — the specific thing you want done, stated as an action. **Format** — how you want the output shaped: a list, a table, a short paragraph. **Constraints** — length, tone, things to avoid. **Examples** — a sample of what "good" looks like, when it's easy to show but hard to describe.

WEAK VS. STRONG

"Write me a work email."

"I'm a project manager (**context**). Write a short email (**format**) to my team letting them know Friday's deadline moved to Monday (**task**). Keep it under 80 words and friendly, not apologetic (**constraints**)."

CHAPTER 03

Five Techniques That Actually Work

*Small tweaks to how you ask that noticeably change
what you get back.*



Techniques Worth Knowing



Role prompting

"Act as an experienced editor" shifts the tone and depth of the whole response.



Give an example

Show one sample of the style or format you want ("few-shot prompting") instead of only describing it.



Think step by step

Asking the model to reason through a problem before answering improves accuracy on anything logical.



Iterate, don't restart

"Make it punchier" or "cut this in half" gets better results than a fresh prompt from zero.



Set the format upfront

Ask for a table, bullet list, or specific structure before it starts writing, not after.



Say what to avoid

"No corporate jargon" or "skip the intro paragraph" often works better than only saying what you want.

CHAPTER 04

Ready-to-Use Prompt Templates

Copy these, swap in your details, and adjust from there.



Templates for Everyday Use

FOR WRITING

"Draft a [type of message] to [audience] about [topic]. Tone: [e.g. warm but direct]. Length: under [X] words. Include: [key points]. Avoid: [things to skip]."

FOR LEARNING SOMETHING NEW

"Explain [topic] like I'm a smart beginner with no background in it. Use one real-world analogy. Then give me 3 questions to check my understanding."

FOR SUMMARIZING

"Summarize this in [X] bullet points, focused on [what matters to you — decisions, risks, action items]. Skip background I already know: [context]."

FOR BRAINSTORMING

"Give me 10 ideas for [goal]. Push for variety — include at least 2 unconventional ones. For each, one line on why it could work."

CHAPTER 05

Mistakes Almost Every Beginner Makes

Six easy-to-fix habits that quietly limit what you get back.



Six Habits Quietly Limiting Your Results

- ☐ **Treating it like a search bar.** Keywords give you keyword-shaped answers. Full sentences with context give you tailored ones.
- ☐ **Accepting the first answer.** The second draft, after "make this more specific" or "try again but shorter," is often dramatically better than the first.
- ☐ **Not saying who it's for.** The same explanation should look different for a 10-year-old, a beginner, and an expert — say which one you need.
- ☐ **Starting a new chat every time.** Within one conversation, the model remembers earlier context — use that instead of re-explaining everything.
- ☐ **Never giving feedback.** "That's too formal" or "closer, but shorter" teaches the model your preferences in real time.
- ☐ **Trusting confident answers blindly.** Fluent, certain-sounding text is not the same as correct text. More on this next.

CHAPTER 06

Trust, but Verify

The honest limits of these tools — and how to work around them.



Where to Keep Your Guard Up

Being good at prompting doesn't remove the need for judgment. A few habits keep you safe as you rely on these tools more.

- ☐ **Verify facts, figures, and citations.** Treat specific numbers, quotes, dates, and sources as claims to check, not settled facts — especially for anything important.
- ☐ **Don't paste in sensitive information.** Avoid sharing passwords, medical details, or confidential work data unless you know exactly how that tool handles data.
- ☐ **Use it to draft, not to decide.** AI is excellent at a first pass — an outline, a rough draft, a starting point. Final judgment calls, especially with real consequences, are still yours.
- ☐ **Watch for confident-sounding nonsense.** If an answer feels oddly specific about something obscure, that's exactly when to double-check it.



A USEFUL RULE OF THUMB

The more a mistake would cost you — money, relationships, your reputation — the more that output deserves a second, human check before you act on it.

CHAPTER 07

Your 7-Day AI Starter Challenge

One small, low-pressure habit each day. By day 7, prompting feels natural.



Seven Days, Seven Small Reps

Day 1

Rewrite one real message you need to send using the C.T.F.C.E. formula from Chapter 2.

Day 2

Ask it to explain something you're fuzzy on, specifying your exact level of background knowledge.

Day 3

Take one AI answer and iterate on it three times with feedback instead of starting over.

Day 4

Try role prompting — ask the same question twice with two different expert roles and compare.

Day 5

Use it to brainstorm 10 options for a real decision you're facing, then pick with your own judgment.

Day 6

Fact-check one specific claim from an AI answer against a real source.

Day 7

Write your own go-to template for the task you'll use AI for most often.

The Quick-Reference Cheat Sheet

DO

- Give context: who it's for, what it's for
- State the format you want upfront
- Give one example when style matters
- Iterate with feedback, not restarts
- Say what to avoid, not just what to include
- Fact-check anything specific and important

AVOID

- Single vague sentences as prompts
- Assuming it knows your situation
- Accepting the first draft by default
- Pasting in sensitive personal data
- Treating confident tone as proof
- Using it for high-stakes final decisions alone

REMEMBER THE FORMULA

Context

Task

Format

Constraints

Examples



Now Go Prompt Something.

This guide is free to keep, free to share, and worth revisiting anytime a prompt isn't landing the way you hoped.

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