WRITING EFFECTIVE PROMPTS FOR GENERATIVE AI

What Is a Prompt and Why Does It Matter?

Definition: A prompt is the input you give to an AI tool—a question, instruction, or topic.

Purpose: To tell the AI what kind of work to perform and how to shape the output.

Why Good Prompts Matter

- **Save Time:** Strong prompts reduce trial and error.
- **Improve Accuracy:** Clear Prompts yield more relevant, focused responses.
- **Support Research:** In academic and creative settings, clarity supports better AI-generated insights

Four Elements of an Effective Prompt

Element	Description	Example
Task	Use clear action verbs: *create, compare, analyze, summarize, translate.*	Summarize the arguments of an editorial.
Format	Specify the output form: *list, report, paragraph, script, table, chart.*	Present your answer as a comparison table
Voice	Indicate tone: *formal, neutral, persuasive, humorous, student-friendly.*	Use an academic tone suitable for a college research paper.
Context	Provide background, goals, examples, constraints, or rubrics as needed.	Assume the reader is a middle school student unfamiliar with the topic.

Prompt Comparison

Poor prompt: "Write about the French Revolution."

Why it's ineffective: Too vague; lacks task, format, tone, and context

Improved prompt: Create a bulleted list summarizing the key socioeconomic causes of the French Revolution. Use an informative, textbook-like tone. Include brief mention of modern parallels. Assume the reader has basic knowledge of European history.

Improving Your Prompt

Ask yourself: "Did the AI understand my request?":

- Is any critical information missing?
- Is the tone or depth appropriate?
- Does it align with my audience or context?

If the output didn't meet your expectations, identify where the breakdown happened, such as being too vague, the wrong format, or an unclear audience.

Adapt your prompt:

- Use relevant keywords or phrases from the AI's response in follow-up prompts.
- Exclude concepts or topics that the AI misrepresented.
- Adjust structure: switch to bullet points, reframe the task, or shift the voice.

Sample Prompt Iteration

Prompt 1: "What are the best strategies for improving student engagement in high school classrooms?"

Problem: Output was a general list that was mostly tech-heavy and not context-specific.

Prompt 2 (Revised Prompt): "What are some recent (post-2020), research-based strategies to boost student engagement in rural 9th grade English classrooms with limited tech access? Please list and explain each strategy in a teacher-friendly paragraph."

Final Thoughts

Writing effective prompts is an *iterative process*. Clarity, specificity, and structure are key. With each revision, you're teaching the AI to better serve your purpose. Make each word count.

Adapted From

Georgetown University Libraries. (2025). *Guides: Artificial intelligence (generative) resources: How to craft prompts.* How to Craft Prompts - Artificial Intelligence (Generative) Resources - Guides at Georgetown University. https://guides.library.georgetown.edu/ai/prompts

University of Texas - Rio Grande Valley. (2025). *Center for Online Learning and Teaching Technology.* Writing Effective Prompts for Generative AI. https://www.utrgv.edu/online/teaching-online/elearning-topics/edutech-ai/prompts/index.htm