# How to Prompt AI Image Generators (Step by Step)

AI Image & Design · about 18 minutes · 2026-11-11

A fully illustrated 30-step guide to prompting AI image generators: define the shot, build a layered prompt, control composition, iterate deliberately, then polish and use the result.

## Phase 1 — Define the Image Before the Prompt

1. **State the image's job in one line**
   State the image's job in one line.
2. **Name the one main subject**
   Name the one main subject.
3. **List what must appear**
   List what must appear.
4. **List what must stay out**
   List what must stay out.
5. **Pick one medium and commit**
   Pick one medium and commit.
6. **Describe the light source**
   Describe the light source.
7. **Set a limited colour palette**
   Set a limited colour palette.
8. **Find one to two reference images**
   Find one to two reference images.

## Phase 2 — Build a Layered Prompt

9. **Lead with the subject and action**
   Lead with the subject and action.
10. **Add the setting and props next**
    Add the setting and props next.
11. **Finish with style and lighting**
    Finish with style and lighting.
12. **Write one clean, comma-separated line**
    Write one clean, comma-separated line.
13. **Specify the shot size**
    Specify the shot size.
14. **State the camera angle and lens**
    State the camera angle and lens.
15. **Set the aspect ratio**
    Set the aspect ratio.

### 16. Reserve space where text will go

Reserve space where text will go.

## Phase 3 — Generate and Iterate Deliberately

### 17. Generate four options from one prompt

Generate four options from one prompt.

### 18. Hold the seed steady

Hold the seed steady.

### 19. Change one variable per pass

Change one variable per pass.

### 20. Use negative prompts for recurring flaws

Use negative prompts for recurring flaws.

### 21. Inpaint hands and small details

Inpaint hands and small details.

### 22. Replace garbled text entirely

Replace garbled text entirely.

### 23. Correct perspective on architecture

Correct perspective on architecture.

## Phase 4 — Refine, Export and Use Responsibly

### 24. Upscale to your delivery size

Upscale to your delivery size.

### 25. Match colour to the surrounding design

Match colour to the surrounding design.

### 26. Crop for the final placement

Crop for the final placement.

### 27. Read the platform's commercial terms

Read the platform's commercial terms.

### 28. Avoid protected logos and living artists' names

Avoid protected logos and living artists' names.

### 29. Disclose AI-generated imagery when relevant

Disclose AI-generated imagery when relevant.

### 30. Archive the prompt chain with the file

Archive the prompt chain with the file.

## Sources


1. Anthropic — AI research and documentation
   https://www.anthropic.com/
2. NIST — AI Risk Management Framework
   https://www.nist.gov/
3. Mozilla — web and browser resources
   https://www.mozilla.org/

4. TED — talks and ideas
   https://www.ted.com/

Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/How-to-Prompt-AI-Image-Generators. Corrections: https://www.howcompass.c