How to Write Effective AI Prompts (Step by Step)

Artificial Intelligence · about 16 minutes · 2026-11-11

A fully illustrated 28-step guide to writing AI prompts that get reliable answers: define the outcome, supply context and constraints, shape the exact format, then test and refine until the result is repeatable.

Phase 1 — Define the Task Before You Type

1. **Write the desired result in one sentence**
   Write the desired result in one sentence.
2. **Choose the right model and mode**
   Choose the right model and mode.
3. **Name the task type explicitly**
   Name the task type explicitly.
4. **Decide the audience and the voice**
   Decide the audience and the voice.
5. **Assign one specific expert role**
   Assign one specific expert role.
6. **State what that role should not do**
   State what that role should not do.
7. **Set the scenario in a single line**
   Set the scenario in a single line.

Phase 2 — Add Context, Limits and Examples

8. **Paste the source material it must use**
   Paste the source material it must use.
9. **Define any specialist terms**
   Define any specialist terms.
10. **List the hard constraints**
    List the hard constraints.
11. **Say what to do when a fact is missing**
    Say what to do when a fact is missing.
12. **Show one answer you would be happy with**
    Show one answer you would be happy with.
13. **Show one answer to avoid**
    Show one answer to avoid.
14. **Mark the exact pattern to copy**
    Mark the exact pattern to copy.

Phase 3 — Specify the Output and Behaviour

15. Name the exact output format

Name the exact output format.

16. Set the length and structure

Set the length and structure.

17. Choose the level of detail

Choose the level of detail.

18. Ask for sources or a short rationale

Ask for sources or a short rationale.

19. Ask it to ask clarifying questions first

Ask it to ask clarifying questions first.

20. Request a draft before the final version

Request a draft before the final version.

21. Tell it to flag uncertainty

Tell it to flag uncertainty.

Phase 4 — Test, Fix and Reuse

22. Run a short test before the real job

Run a short test before the real job.

23. Check it against written success criteria

Check it against written success criteria.

24. Change only one variable at a time

Change only one variable at a time.

25. Replace the vague word that failed

Replace the vague word that failed.

26. Add the single missing constraint

Add the single missing constraint.

27. Save the working prompt as a template

Save the working prompt as a template.

28. Build a small prompt library

Build a small prompt library.

Sources

1. Anthropic — AI research and documentation
   https://www.anthropic.com/
2. NIST — AI Risk Management Framework
   https://www.nist.gov/
3. Microsoft Learn
   https://learn.microsoft.com/
4. Mozilla — web and browser resources
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