

ABC OF **PROMPTING** **FOR ASPIRING** **GENAI** **EXPERTS**

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PROMPTING FOR ASPIRING GENAI EXPERTS

A guide aimed at:

- Understanding how AI chatbots work
- Understanding the nature of prompting (and its benefits)
- Discovering different prompting methods
- Detailing such methods using examples
- Knowing when to use which method

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BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

Artificial intelligence is booming, and chatbots like ChatGPT are radically transforming the way we interact with digital tools, changing the way we work. This guide aims to introduce you to the art of 'prompting', a key skill for engaging effectively with these artificial intelligence tools and making the most of their potential.

WHY YOU SHOULD LEARN PROMPTING

Imagine you're researching a topic on the web: if you merely type in a simple key phrase, the result may not be very compelling. On the other hand, if you structure your search well (using the right keywords and organizing them with logical operators and inverted commas), you'll get more relevant answers.

And so it goes with artificial intelligence tools like chatbots or digital assistants. The way you ask them questions or give them instructions is conducive to more or less convincing results. Thus, to obtain relevant answers, you must define your requirement properly. This is what is called 'prompting', i.e., the art of formulating clear and precise instructions to guide the work of artificial intelligence models.

In essence, a well-structured prompt is like a well-formulated search query. When done properly, it shall provide relevant results.

PROMPTING IS CODING

A prompt is a natural language text-based command, a simpler way of formulating one's query. Prompting makes it possible to interact with a language model and sends

instructions formulated in plain English (or any other language it understands). Prompt engineering is the practice of designing and optimizing prompts to make full use of GenAI language models.

While programming, you give precise instructions to a computer to obtain a specific result. With prompts, it's very similar: you give instructions to an artificial intelligence engine to generate the desired response. The more your prompts are structured, the better the outcome.

THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PROMPTING

There is no one-size-fits-all prompt methodology, as use cases differ from one user to another. However, we recommend you use one of these three methods based on your needs.

FOR QUICK RESULTS	FOR SIMPLE QUESTIONS YET MORE ACCURATE RESULTS	FOR MORE CLEAR- CUT QUESTIONS AND MORE EXTENSIVE RESULTS
RTF Role task Format	CRAFT Context Role Action Format Tone of voice	COAT SITES Context Objective Acumen (expertise) Task Specimen (example) Impediments Tone of voice Encoding (format) Scrutiny (checking)

1.

QUICK RESULTS - USE CASES AND EXAMPLES

Now you understand the key principles of prompting, let's move on to their practical application using the straightforward RTF method and its associated examples.

RTF METHOD INSTRUCTIONS

1. Role: "You are..."

=> Indicate who the AI bot should impersonate (e.g., expert, assistant, writer...). This provides a contextual framework allowing better results.

2. Task: "You must..." => Detailed instructions.

=> Describe precisely the action or problem to be solved (e.g., write a text, answer a question...). This guides the AI towards the expected objective.

3. Format: "Your answer must..." Specify the type and structure of the outcome.

=> Specify the type and structure of the required result (e.g., list, paragraph, table). This guarantees a clear and immediately usable

“THE MORE YOUR PROMPTS ARE STRUCTURED, THE BETTER THE OUTCOME.”

CREATING A CATCHY HEADLINE	REPHRASING A SENTENCE
(R)ole: You are an SEO copywriter; you are deft at attracting the attention of online readers.	(R)ole: You are an academic specialising in making science accessible to all; you are used to making complex concepts understandable.
(T)ask: Suggest a catchy title for an article on [subject].	(T)ask: Rewrite this technical description so that a 12-year-old child can understand it.
(F)ormat: Title shall not exceed 10 words.	(F)ormat: Write short, simple sentences.

FIND OUT ABOUT A SUBJECT	ANALYSING DATA
(R)ole: You are an expert in reliable and concise information retrieval.	(R)ole: You're an expert in statistics and an analyst who excels at interpreting data.
(T)ask: What are the main issues surrounding [subject] and provide the necessary background?	(T)ask: Explain the key trends in this diagram representing monthly sales.
(F)ormat: Provide a structured response in three parts: definition, context, issues.	(F)ormat: Deliver a straightforward three-sentence analysis.

2.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS - USE CASES AND EXAMPLES

Now you understand how prompting works, let's find out how to get better results with a simple method and examples.

CRAFT METHOD INSTRUCTIONS

1. Context: "I'm in charge of..."

=> Describe the overall situation or requirement (e.g., write an article for a blog). This helps GenAI understand the context and your overall expectations.

2. Role: "You are..." => Indicates the role that AI should play

=> Indicate the role the AI should enact (e.g., teacher, journalist, consultant). This adapts the answers to the style or expertise required.

3. Action: "You have to..."

=> Specify what AI must do (e.g., summarize, analyze, write). This directs the LLM to deliver a compliant result.

4. Format: "Your answer should include...such as" => Provide examples/details.

=> Provide examples or details of the expected result (e.g., “start with a concise introduction”). This clarifies the final expectations.

5. Tone of Voice: “Choose the following tone of voice...” => Specifies the style of the outcome.

=> Specify the expected style or category (e.g., formal, playful, accessible). This aims to align the tone of voice of your response with your objective and audience.

CLARIFYING A DIFFICULT CONCEPT	PREPARING FOR A MEETING
(C)ontext: I have to explain [concept] to an eager, non-expert audience.	(C)ontext: I'm preparing a brainstorm session with my team to come up with innovative ideas around [topic].
(R)ole: Act as a tech-savvy lecturer, skilled at making complex topics accessible.	(R)ole: You are an expert in collaborative workshops and group facilitation.
(A)ction: Provide a clear and simple explanation of this concept using down-to-earth examples and metaphors.	(A)ction: Propose a detailed facilitation plan for this session, with activities tailored to maximize creativity and participants' commitment.
(F)ormat: Include items such as • A short, clear definition. • An analogy or real-life example to illustrate the concept. • A step-by-step explanation of how it works.	(F)ormat: Includes suggestions such as • AN icebreaker to build team confidence. • Ideation method. • A phrase in which ideas are prioritized • A motivating conclusion with clear next steps.
(T)one of voice: Educational, engaging tone that is suitable for beginners, without being simplistic.	(T)one of voice: Use a professional, clear and inspiring tone to convey easy-to-follow instructions.

3.

ADVANCED USE CASES AND EXAMPLES

For more convoluted questions, we suggest a more astute method for obtaining highly relevant answers, which is nevertheless very accessible.

3-1. INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE COAT-SITES METHODS

1. Context: "I'm in charge of..." => Describe context or overall situation.

=> Describe the context and overall situation (e.g., a presentation for students). This helps AI models contextualize their results.

2. Objective: "The aim is to..."

=> Indicate expected result (e.g., inform, convince, entertain...). This ensures the response is relevant.

3. Acumen (expertise): "You are..." => Specify the level of expertise.

=> Specify the level of expertise or detail expected (e.g., beginner, expert...). Fine-tunes the depth of the results.

4. Task: "You must..." => Clearly state the action that needs to be taken.

=> Clearly indicate the action or work expected from the AI model (e.g., summarize, analyze, list various items...). This will state precisely what the AI models must deliver.

5. Specimen (examples): "The deliverable should look like..."

=> Provide illustrations or models of the expected response (e.g., 'a table with two columns'), thereby clarifying your expectations.

6. Impediments: "You must not..."

=> Add specific restrictions (e.g., "no more than 100 words"). This narrows down the answer so that it suits your objective.

7. Tone of voice: "The tone should be..." => Specify the style or tone of voice.

=> Specify the desired style (e.g., serious, motivational). This will make your result directly usable.

8. Encoding (format): "Output format should be..."

=> Define output format (e.g., list plain text, computer code...). This will make your results in sync with your objective.

9. Scrutiny: "Check that your answer complies with all of the above instructions and provisos."

=> A proper sanity check can help you ensure that the result complies with your requirements.

3-2. SAMPLE USES OF THE COAT-SITES METHODOLOGY

DESIGN EXCEL SPREADSHEET TO COMPUTE OVERTIME HOURS AUTOMATICALLY	DRAFT A SALES PITCH FOR A NEW OFFER
(C)ontext: I'm in the process of designing an Excel spreadsheet to automatically compute employee overtime.	(C)ontext: I must write up a sales pitch for a new online coaching service for entrepreneurs that offers custom support to help entrepreneurs grow their business.
(O)bjective: I aim to create a table that reckons the amount of overtime for each employee based on their arrival and departure times.	(O)bjective: The aim is to create a convincing sales pitch that highlights the benefits of the service and encourages prospects to sign up.
(A)cumen: You are an experienced admin assistant, versed in Excel formulas.	(A)cumen: You're marketing expert specializing in selling services to entrepreneurs.
(T)ask: You must create an Excel spreadsheet with the following columns: employee name, arrival time, departure time, hours worked, and overtime. You need to propose a formula for calculating the hours worked (start time-arrival time) and a formula for calculating overtime hours (if the hours worked are more than 8 hours a day, then hours worked - 8, otherwise 0).	(T)ask: Prepare a sales pitch for a new online coaching service. It should include: a punchy tagline, a presentation of the benefits of the service (time saving, increased turnover, stress relief), a description of its features (one-to-one coaching, weekly sessions, access to exclusive resources), a value proposition (what differentiates this service from other offerings on the market), a CTA (e.g., sign up for a free trial session).

DESIGN EXCEL SPREADSHEET TO COMPUTE OVERTIME HOURS AUTOMATICALLY	DRAFT A SALES PITCH FOR A NEW OFFER
(S)pecimen: Here is an example of a formula to calculate the hours worked in cell D2=C2-B2'. Here is an example of formula for calculating overtime in cell E2: '=IF(D2>8; D2-8;0)'.	(S)pecimen: Here's a sample tagline: 'Are you an entrepreneur feeling overwhelmed? Grow your business while preserving your work/life balance. Sample CTA: 'Sign up now for a free trial and transform your business with our coaching sessions'
(I)mpediments: Keep your Excel formulas simple. Don't forget column headings either.	(I)mpediments: Avoid buzzwords and false or impractical promises.
(T)one of voice: Your tone of voice should be clear and informative.	(T)one of voice: Be clear and informative.
(E)ncoding: You are required to list the column headings as well as provide the Excel formulas for each calculation.	(E)ncoding: Your sales pitch structure should comprise: introduction, client benefits, features, value prop and CTA. Write for your audience using their vocabulary.
(S)crutiny: Check carefully that your answer complies with all the above instructions and provisos.	(S)crutiny: Check that your answer complies with all the above instructions and provisos.

3-3. ADVANCED USE CASES AND EXAMPLES

This method could appear a bit daunting, as it's a bit involved. Experts call this a mega-prompt. To help you with its implementation, we suggest you use the following sequence to direct the chatbot to assist you in the chatbot's prompt window.

Cheat sheet for the coat-sites method

I am a beginner, and I am learning to use chatbots and generative AI. I want to learn how to write structured prompts using the COAT-SITES method (Context, Objective, Acumen, Task, Specimen, Impediments, Tone of Voice, Encoding, Scrutiny as described below) to get the best possible results.

The aim is to write a complete and structured prompt following the steps of the COAT-SITES method to guide the GenAI chatbot in achieving the desired task.

You are an expert in artificial intelligence language models, with extensive experience in teaching new technologies of the COAT-SITES prompting method.

Your job is to guide me step-by-step through writing of a prompt using the COAT-SITES method. For each step in the method, you must:

1. Explain clearly what I must do for each step.
2. Ask me specific questions to help me specify all that's needed for each step.
3. Provide down-to-earth examples to illustrate what you're writing.

You need to help me design a prompt for the following task: [Insert task description here].

Don't give me all the answers upfront. Ask me questions so that I can describe each step myself. Don't use technical jargon. Don't forget to explain each stage of the COAT-SITES method.

The Tone of voice should be educational, encouraging, clear and accessible. You should use the following headings every step of the way.

Context: Will enjoin me to define the surrounding factors for my prompt.

Objective: Will prompt me to describe the overall aim of what I'm trying to achieve.

Acumen: Will ask me to describe what role and skills you should impersonate while building my prompt.

Task: Will be the opportunity for me to enter an example that you can take inspiration from.

Specimen: Will prompt me to enter an example that you can take inspiration from.

Impediments: Will ask me to describe all the constraints, provisos, do's and don'ts.

Tone of Voice: Will urge me to describe the tonality in which the prompts should be executed.

Encoding: Will ask me to define the output format of the expected result.

Scrutiny: Will prompt me to enter instructions for a proper sanity check that ensures the end result will comply with my requirements.

Use bulleted lists to structure the resulting prompt once I've entered all my cues. All significant instructions in the resulting prompt should be stressed in bold typeface. Ensure you are following all the above instructions and Provisos.

4.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Now that you know how chatbots work and understand out three prompting methodologies, it's time to make the rubber meet the road. Getting to grips with GenAI chatbots can be confusing, so we suggest you follow our advice and learn one step at a time.

FIRST STEPS WITH AI CHATBOT USAGE

1. Sign in to one of the mainstream chatbots (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, Grok...).
2. Enter the first few questions that come to your mind in the prompt window and see how it works and get a feel for its replies (e.g., "Whats quantum computing all about?").
3. Think of more specific questions (*linked* to your job or personal interests) and try resorting to the 'RTF' method to derive more relevant answers.
4. Delve deeper into your daily tasks and more specific requirements and use the 'CARTS' method to enhance the quality of the chatbot's answers.
5. Select a specific topic or tricky task and use the 'COAT-SITES' method for a more in-depth response – you'll see how powerful mega-prompts can be.
6. Use the mega-prompt generator for ease of use.

WORTHY OF NOTE

One question at a time: don't pile up requests into one single prompt.

Select relevant keywords: proper key phrases will help you get better answers.

Order AI around: make use of verbs like 'explain', 'define', 'compare', or 'create' to direct the model properly.

Avoid ambiguous expressions: be clear and straightforward.

Be fussy: don't make do with half-baked answers; be bossy and ask the AI chatbot to try harder (only works once per thread, though).

Break down large tasks: split complex requests into stages or mini prompts.

Test and tweak: try again if the initial answer doesn't fit your need.

Open-ended questions: 'How', 'Why', 'What'... will trigger more creative and in-depth answers.

Extra questions: urge the AI chatbot to dig deeper or clarify its replies by asking for more detail.

Use competition to your advantage: Ask AI chatbots to critique each other and suggest improvements.

Build your own prompt library and keep adding to it as you go.



Photo by antimuseum.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frédéric Cavazza is a French digital transformation expert, consultant, and speaker with over 25 years of experience in web projects and digital strategy. He is also a prolific blogger and author, known for his insights on digital marketing, mobile technologies, and social media.