Prompt Basics

Learn the building blocks of clear, useful prompts

Estimated reading time: 5 minutes

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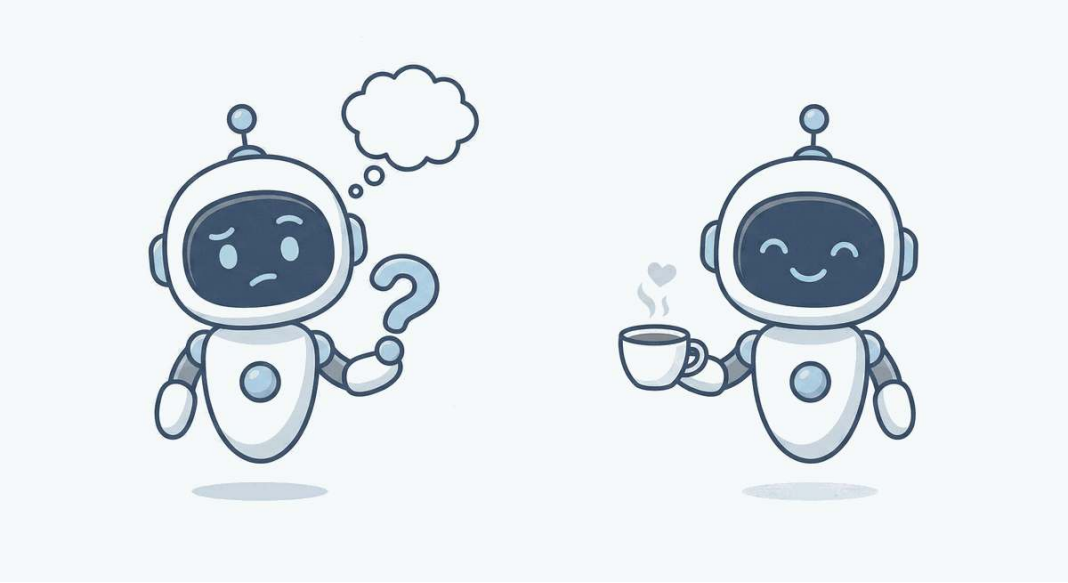
1. Why prompting matters

Imagine walking into a coffee shop and saying only, 'Coffee.'

You might get an espresso, a cold brew, or a decaf latte. If you want something specific, you have to say so. AI works the same way: it is capable, but it cannot guess your intent.

Prompting is the skill of asking clearly for what you want. It is not coding. It is just good communication.



2. How AI reads instructions

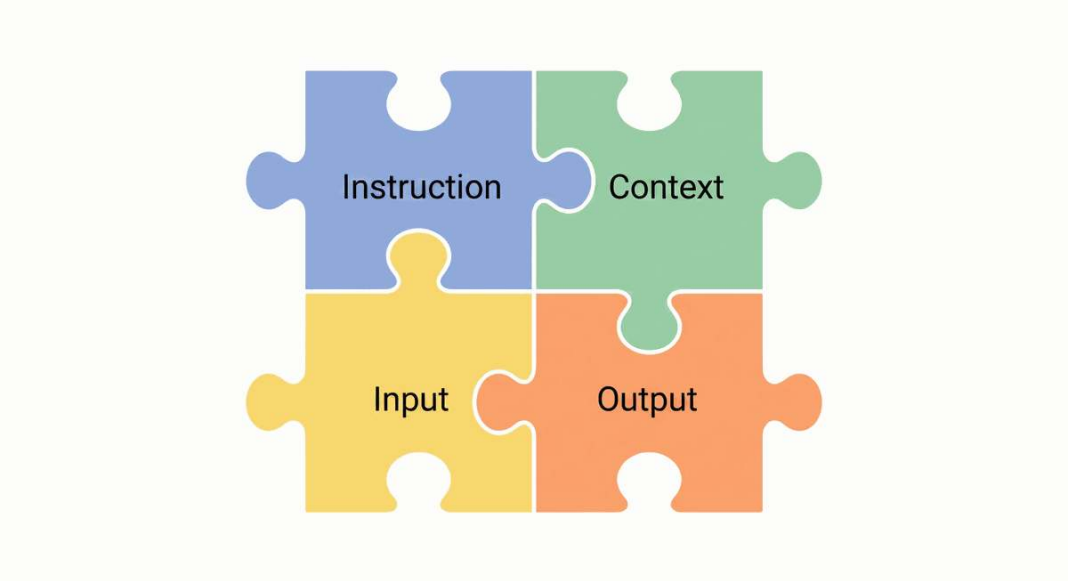
A useful way to think about AI is as a fast, eager intern. It knows a lot, but it does not know your exact situation until you explain it.

The model looks at your words, finds patterns, and predicts the most likely response. Better instructions lead to better output.

> **Tip: Write as if you are briefing a helpful teammate who has not seen your project yet.**

3. The four building blocks

Strong prompts usually include four ingredients. You do not need all of them every time, but they are a reliable checklist.



1. Instruction

What should the AI do? Start with a clear action.

- Examples: Write, summarize, translate, calculate.

2. Context

What background does the AI need?

- Examples: For a beginner audience, I am a busy parent, this is for a formal email.

3. Input

What source material should it use?

- Examples: A pasted email, a list of ingredients, a messy report.

4. Output

What should the answer look like?

- Examples: A bulleted list, a short paragraph, a table.

4. Good vs. bad examples

A few extra details can completely change the quality of the result.

Scenario: Planning a workout

Weak example:

Example prompt

```
Give me a workout plan.
```

Why it fails: it is too vague. The AI does not know your level, equipment, or goal.

Strong example:

Example prompt

```
Create a 30-minute workout plan for a beginner.
I have no equipment and want to focus on cardio.
Format this as a numbered list of exercises.
```

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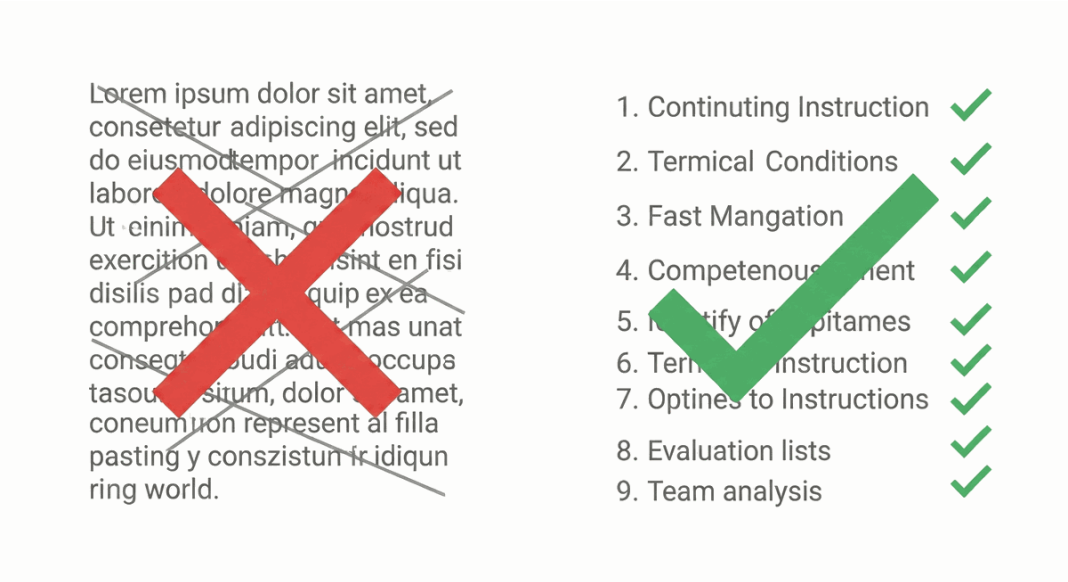
Why it works: it gives the model enough context to make useful choices.



5. Simple templates

You do not have to start from zero. Templates make it easier to get moving.

The explainer template

Use this when you are learning something new.

Example prompt

```
Explain [Topic] to me like I am [Audience/Age]. Use an analogy to help
me understand.
```

The editor template

Use this when you want to improve your writing.

Example prompt

```
Proofread this text for [Goal, e.g. clarity/grammar]. Keep the tone
[Tone, e.g. professional/friendly].
```

The ideator template

Use this when you feel stuck.

Example prompt

```
Give me 10 ideas for [Project]. Focus on ideas that are [Constraint, e.g. cheap/fast].
```

6. Practice exercises

Try these in your app right away.

Exercise 1: Email polish

Paste a rough email draft and ask:

Example prompt

```
Rewrite this email to be more polite and concise.
```

Exercise 2: Dinner planner

List three ingredients you already have and ask:

Example prompt

```
Suggest a recipe using chicken, rice, and lemons that takes under 30 minutes.
```

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7. Quick checklist

Before you send your next prompt, check these three things:

- ■ Is it specific?
- ■ Did I give enough context?
- ■ Did I ask for a format?