

The AI Prompt Handbook

A field guide to better answers from AI, from the LeonLink AI series

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1. What a prompt really is

A prompt is a job brief. The model can't see your screen, your goals or your past conversations unless you write them down. A vague brief gets a generic answer; a clear brief gets a useful one. Think of briefing a brilliant new hire on day one: smart, fast, and with zero context.

2. The six-part recipe

Part	What to write
Role	Who the AI should act as. "You are a patient math tutor."
Task	The exact job, starting with a verb: Explain, Draft, Compare.
Context	Background facts, audience, what you've already tried.
Format	Length, structure, tone. "5 bullets, plain English."
Examples	One or two samples of what good looks like.
Finish line	How you'll know it's done. "End with one next step."

3. Weak vs strong

Weak:

Write something about our new coffee shop.

Strong:

You are a friendly local copywriter. Write a 60-word Instagram caption announcing our coffee shop opening Saturday at 7 AM on Main St. Audience: commuters in a hurry. Tone: warm, a little playful. Mention the free first drip coffee. End with a call to visit.

4. Ten techniques that work

1. Ask for steps. "Think step by step" measurably improves reasoning on math and logic (Wei et al., 2022; Kojima et al., 2022).

2. Give examples. A few worked examples teach format and style faster than descriptions (Brown et al., 2020).

3. Key facts first and last. Models read the start and end of long text more carefully than the middle (Liu et al., 2024).

4. Set constraints. Word limits, reading level and off-limits topics keep answers on target.

- 5. Name the audience.** "For a 10-year-old" and "for a CFO" give very different answers.
- 6. Ask it to ask you.** "Before answering, ask me up to 3 questions."
- 7. Split big jobs.** Outline first, then draft each section.
- 8. Request a self-check.** "Review your answer for errors and list your assumptions."
- 9. Iterate, don't restart.** Say what to change: "Shorter, and drop the jargon."
- 10. Verify facts.** AI can sound sure and be wrong. Check numbers, quotes and sources.

5. Copy-and-use templates

Explain anything

You are an expert teacher. Explain [topic] to [audience] in [length]. Use one everyday analogy, then a short example. Finish with a one-sentence summary.

Write for business

You are a professional copywriter. Write a [email/post/ad] for [business] aimed at [audience]. Goal: [goal]. Tone: [tone]. Must include: [facts]. Max [N] words.

Plan a project

Act as a project manager. Break [project] into phases with tasks, owners and rough time estimates. Flag the 3 biggest risks. Output as a table.

Review my work

Act as a tough but fair editor. Review the text below for clarity, errors and tone. List the top 5 fixes in order, then give a revised version.

Brainstorm

Give me 10 distinct ideas for [goal]: 3 safe, 4 bold, 3 unusual. One line each, then pick your favorite and say why.

Debug code

You are a senior [language] developer. Here is my code and the error. Explain the cause in plain English, then give the smallest fix.

6. Common mistakes

Mistake	Fix
Too vague	Add audience, length and goal.
Too many asks at once	One job per prompt, or number them.
No examples	Paste one sample of what you want.
Trusting every fact	Ask for sources, then check them.
Starting over	Refine the answer you got.

7. Why clear prompts save power

Every word an AI reads or writes runs on chips in data centres that use real electricity and cooling water. A vague prompt that takes five tries costs roughly five times the energy of one clear prompt. Good prompting is good manners for the power grid.

Sources

Brown et al. (2020), Language Models are Few-Shot Learners, NeurIPS. Wei et al. (2022), Chain-of-Thought Prompting, NeurIPS. Kojima et al. (2022), Large Language Models are Zero-Shot Reasoners, NeurIPS. Liu et al. (2024), Lost in the Middle, TACL.

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