Prompt Writing for Any AI Tool

A prompt is the message we type into an AI tool. A short, vague message gets a vague answer, while a clear message gets a useful one. Five small parts make a prompt clear: role, context, task, format and limits. Each part answers one simple question, and the same five parts work in any AI tool. In this lesson, Omar, a finance director at a food distributor, shows how it works.

1. Role

The first part is the role. An AI tool can write as a lawyer, a teacher or an analyst, so we tell it which expert to be. The question is: who should the AI be? The role sets the vocabulary, the point of view and the level of detail. Without a role, the tool falls back on a general, middle-of-the-road voice.

Example: A student is preparing for a job interview. She uses the Role question: who should the AI be? She asks it to act as a friendly interviewer, and it replies with realistic questions, one at a time.

At work: Omar must review a supplier contract. He uses the Role question: who should the AI be? He asks it to act as a careful contracts analyst, so it flags risky clauses instead of giving a general summary.

2. Context

The second part is the context. The AI cannot see our office, our customers or our deadline, so we describe the situation in plain words. The question is: what is the situation? We say who the answer is for, what has happened and what matters most. A few useful details beat a page of background, and private facts stay out unless company rules allow them.

Example: A shop owner wants a poster. He uses the Context question: what is the situation? He explains that the shop sells school bags and that the sale starts in August, so the poster speaks to parents.

At work: Omar needs advice on a price rise. He uses the Context question: what is the situation? He explains that a main supplier raised its prices and that the board meets on Friday, so the advice fits his real deadline.

3. Task

The third part is the task. A task is one clear action, such as list, compare, draft or explain. The question is: what exactly should it do? A vague request, such as help me with suppliers, leaves the tool guessing, while a clear request, such as list three options and recommend one, gives it a target. When the job is large, we split it into smaller tasks and ask for them one at a time.

Example: A teacher is planning a lesson. She uses the Task question: what exactly should it do? Instead of asking for help with fractions, she asks for a short quiz on fractions with the answers, and gets exactly that.

At work: Omar faces the same price rise. He uses the Task question: what exactly should it do? He asks the AI to list three ways to absorb the cost and to recommend one, and it returns options with a clear recommendation.

4. Format

The fourth part is the format. The same facts can appear as a table, a short list, an email or a one-page brief. The question is: how should the answer look? We name the shape and the parts we need, such as a headline, three points and a recommendation. A clear format saves us the time of rebuilding the answer by hand.

Example: A manager wants notes from a meeting. She uses the Format question: how should the answer look? She asks for a simple table with the task, the owner and the deadline, so every action is easy to find.

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At work: Omar must show the options to the board. He uses the Format question: how should the answer look? He asks for a table with the option, the cost and the risk, and gets a page the board can read quickly.

5. Limits

The fifth part is the limits. Limits are what control the answer: its length, its tone, its reading level and what it must not include. The question is: how long, and in what tone? We can also forbid things, such as invented figures or technical jargon. Clear limits make the answer easier to check and ready to use.

Example: A team leader announces a new schedule. She uses the Limits question: how long, and in what tone? She asks for three short sentences in a warm tone, and the message is ready to send.

At work: Omar writes to the whole company. He uses the Limits question: how long, and in what tone? He asks for under two hundred words in plain language, with no invented figures, so the message is short and safe to share.

6. A Weak Prompt

Now a full case. Omar is the finance director of a food distributor. Third-quarter sales fell in two regions while costs rose, and the board meets on Friday. In a hurry, he types: write a report about our sales.

The answer is long and generic. It says that sales matter to every business and that many factors affect them. It names no region, no cause and no decision. Omar cannot show it to the board.

7. A Strong Prompt

Now Omar tries again, with all five parts. First, the role: you are the finance director of a food distributor. Second, the context: third-quarter sales fell in two regions while costs rose. Third, the task: write a board brief with the three biggest risks and one decision. Fourth, the format: one page, with a headline, three risks and one recommendation. Fifth, the limits: plain words, and under three hundred words.

This time the answer is one page. It has a clear headline, three risks and one decision. Late deliveries cost two key customers, fuel and packaging costs keep rising, and one supplier delivers most of the stock. The recommendation is to approve a second supplier this month. Omar can take it straight to the board.

8. What Changed

Let us look at what changed. The role gave the answer an expert point of view. The context gave it the real facts. The task gave it a target, the format gave it a shape, and the limits kept it short and plain.

Omar did not use special tricks. He simply answered five small questions before he pressed send. The same five questions work in every AI tool.

Conclusion

In summary, a good prompt tells the AI who it is, what is happening, what to do, how to answer and where to stop. Before sending any prompt, we can check the five parts one by one. With practice, the five parts become a habit.

Sources

- MIT Sloan Teaching & Learning Technologies: Effective Prompts for AI: The Essentials (context, persona, format, wording) – https://mitsloanedtech.mit.edu/ai/basics/effective-prompts/
- DAIR.AI: Prompt Engineering Guide, General Tips for Designing Prompts (be specific about the task, use a clear format) – https://www.promptingguide.ai/introduction/tips
- The five-part structure (role, context, task, format, limits) is our own teaching summary of common prompt-writing advice; examples and wording are original.

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