

AI Prompt Engineering For Beginners



For today's blog, I would like to open with two ChatGPT prompts and their respective answers.

Prompt: ChatGPT, give a one-sentence summary of the importance of prompt engineering.

“Prompt engineering is crucial because it enables precise communication with AI systems, unlocking their full potential to deliver accurate, efficient, and impactful results.

Prompt: ChatGPT, give me a one-sentence summary of why prompt engineering is important in today's workplace, backed up with cited statistics.

“Prompt engineering is crucial in today's workplace because it allows professionals to effectively harness the potential of generative AI, which is projected to contribute up to \$4.4 trillion annually to the global economy by automating tasks that occupy up to 70% of employees' time. ([McKinsey and Company](#))”

Thanks, ChatGPT!

These are two responses, and I bet you'd pick the second one to put in a PowerPoint, a report, or simply for communication with a manager or coworker. Notice that the bolded prompts are roughly the same, but a few small tweaks make a world of difference. This is **prompt engineering** – basically, making better prompts to ask generative AI for better answers. With AI, you get out what you put in – so why not learn the best things to put in?

No one can currently predict what generative artificial intelligence (AI) will do for the workforce, but currently AI seems like a better tool *for* employees than a replacement for them.¹ See my previous AI blogs [here](#) and [here](#) for more information. However, you should **not** neglect the potential of AI in your work and everyday life. Even if AI won't replace your job, someone who uses AI to complement their work absolutely could.

Thus, it is a great idea to learn prompt engineering. With great prompt engineering, you can expect more concise, intelligent guidance to maximize your life, work, and learning. In this blog, I cover the basics of prompt engineering and how to use it in your life and career.

It should be noted that prompt engineering is not a scientific skill. While advanced AI technology has long been locked behind computer expertise, generative AI requires only ingenuity and a strong command of written English – ubiquitous skills in today’s workforce. Here are four pillars of prompt engineering to consider:

#1 – Be Specific!

Refer to my first prompt for an example of requesting specific details and numbers from an AI engine. In any given job, you have to ask specific questions anyways. At a doctor’s visit, your doctor does not ask, “Are you sick?” Rather, they would inquire about your symptoms, where you feel pain, how long you have felt unwell, et cetera. Treat AI the same way by asking specific questions, especially since models like ChatGPT tend to produce general summaries over specific evidence or facts.

However, as you can see above, you can also prompt the AI to cite specific sources. While you should **always** check the sources AI provides (in my case, simply clicking on the McKinsey link in the second answer), AI can usually pull pre-existing research from the Internet and use it effectively in an argument. Asking your AI to cite specific, confirmable evidence not only makes it easier to verify (AI can be wrong, after all) but also produces better answers, especially if you are trying to use its content to convince other people of an argument.

#2 – Provide Context.

Context is easily AI’s biggest weakness. Large-language models (AI bots capable of producing written output, such as ChatGPT) cannot consider data that has not been given to them. In our daily lives, we do the same things in different ways when considering context. Consider, for example, a manager using ChatGPT to draft an email to a junior associate who was late to work:

Prompt: draft a brief email to an employee who was late to work.

“I wanted to touch base regarding your late arrival today and kindly remind you of the importance of adhering to our scheduled start times; please let me know if there’s anything preventing you from arriving on time.”

This is a polite and effective email, but it best suits a first-time violation. What if the employee is habitually late? The tone of the email will read differently and will require a different prompt.

Prompt: draft a brief email to an employee who has been late to work several times.

“I’ve noticed a pattern of your late arrivals to work recently, and I’d like to discuss how we can address this to ensure it doesn’t impact your work; please let me know a good time to talk.”

If you sent the second email to an employee who was only late once or sent the first email to a habitually late employee, you may not get the right point across. The AI has no way of knowing the situation, so spell it out, and you will save time and resources by getting more appropriate responses!

#3 – Use Constraints.

Using constraints is applicable in all business environments, and AI is no different. For all the managers here, I am sure you have asked an employee for a report and promptly received five pages of overly detailed writing when all you really needed was a brief summary (or vice versa). Regurgitating content verbatim is not hard, but summarizing it concisely is definitely a vital skill.

As such, specifically constraining generative AI answers helps to produce better content. Notice how all of my example prompts ask ChatGPT to be “brief” or use only one sentence: otherwise, I learned, the engine might pump out three paragraphs, which wastes your time and my page space. The engine is perfectly capable of

producing succinct answers instead. So make your life easier by requesting shorter answers (unless you want long ones).

This strategy is necessary with any model. Asking AI to generate audio or images requires you to constrain it: you may have to ask the engine to keep the video short, or keep the image small, or to have a blank background. Any data analysis software requires a specified range of numbers or figures to sort. With AI now, all you have to do is verbally request certain restraints.

#4 – Play Around (Realistically)!

Perhaps this sentiment sounds strange paired with the very precise idea of “engineering.” But all engineering comes from creativity and free thought. Above all, do not be afraid to push AI to its limits. AI [tools](#) like ChatGPT and others are remarkably capable and creative, and they are either low-cost or free. They will take any feedback you have and usually process as many prompts as you can write.

Take this leeway and use it to your advantage! Ask your AI assistants how to develop schedules, how to learn new skills, how to curate music playlists, how to maximize your time at work, and how to make art and music. The only caveat, as I mentioned earlier, is that you should always verify your sources to ensure correct information and guidance. Once you have done that, there are no limits besides your own ingenuity and creativity.

To Conclude.

As artificial intelligence enters a new era of capability, it is a great idea to at least test its capabilities. High-quality prompt engineering enables you to maximize the output of any AI assistant. Use this blog and any other independent research to guide your own usage of AI, whether professionally or personally.

Just remember: be specific, provide context, use suitable constraints, play around, and above all – keep your AI honest by verifying the information it provides.

Happy AI-ing!

Sources:

1. “Will AI Augment Or Replace Workers?”: [Forbes](#).

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