

## How to ask better questions and get more useful responses from ChatGPT

A prompt is the instruction you give ChatGPT. It can be a question, a task, a draft, a file, a set of notes, or a request for help. Good prompting does not require technical expertise. It requires clarity. The more clearly you explain what you need, who the work is for, and how the answer should be organized, the more useful the response is likely to be.

This guide provides practical prompting methods and examples for everyday System Office work.

### Quick takeaway

Start with the outcome, add context, request the format you want, and refine the response through follow-up prompts.

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## 1. The Basic Prompt Formula

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Use this structure when you are not sure how to begin:

### Prompt formula

Task: What do you want ChatGPT to do?

Audience: Who is the output for?

Purpose: Why do you need it?

Context: What background should ChatGPT know?

Format: How should the answer be organized?

Tone: How should it sound?

### Template

#### Template

I need help with [task]. The audience is [audience]. The purpose is [purpose]. Please use a [tone] tone and format the response as [format]. Here is the context: [context].

### Example

#### Example

I need help creating a short explanation of ChatGPT for System Office employees who are new to AI. The purpose is to reduce confusion and help them understand safe first uses. Please use a clear, professional, plain-language tone and format the response with headings and bullet points.

## 2. Start With the Outcome

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Before writing a prompt, ask yourself: What do I want at the end?

### Do you want

- A summary?
- A draft?
- A checklist?
- A table?
- A comparison?
- A set of options?

- A revised version of text?
- A list of risks?
- A meeting agenda?
- A plain-language explanation?

When you know the output you want, say so directly.

## Weak prompt

### Weak prompt

Help me with these notes.

## Better prompt

### Better prompt

Turn these notes into a meeting summary with four sections: overview, decisions, action items, and open questions.

## 3. Give ChatGPT a Role, But Keep It Practical

You can ask ChatGPT to approach the task from a certain perspective. This can help shape the output.

### Examples

#### Examples

Act as a plain-language editor. Rewrite this message so it is easier to understand.

Act as a project coordinator. Turn this information into a task list with owners, deadlines, and dependencies.

Act as a meeting facilitator. Create discussion questions for a 30-minute planning meeting.

Avoid asking ChatGPT to act as a final authority in areas that require official review.

### For example, do not rely on it as

- A lawyer
- A compliance officer
- A security approver
- A policy owner

- A final decision-maker

It can help organize questions or draft language, but official decisions and approvals must follow the appropriate process.

## 4. Provide Context

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ChatGPT does not automatically know your situation. Context helps it produce a better answer.

### Useful context can include

- The audience
- The purpose
- The deadline
- The desired tone
- The current draft
- The decision being considered
- Known constraints
- Background information
- What has already been tried
- What should be avoided

### Example without enough context

#### Example without enough context

Draft a message about training.

### Example with useful context

#### Example with useful context

Draft a short internal email inviting System Office employees to a 45-minute introductory ChatGPT training. The audience includes employees with different levels of comfort using AI. The tone should be professional, encouraging, and not overly promotional. Include a subject line and a clear registration call to action.

## 5. Specify the Format

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ChatGPT can organize information in many ways. If you want a specific format, ask for it.

### Useful formats include

- Bullet points
- Numbered list

- Table
- Checklist
- Email draft
- Executive summary
- FAQ
- Agenda
- Timeline
- Pros and cons
- Talking points
- One-page brief
- Step-by-step guide

## Example

### Example

Format the response as a table with columns for task, description, owner, timing, and notes.

## Example

### Example

Give me a one-page brief with these sections: purpose, background, key points, risks, and recommended next steps.

## 6. Ask for the Right Level of Detail

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ChatGPT may give too much or too little information unless you guide it.

### Examples

#### Examples

Keep this under 250 words.

Provide a detailed version suitable for a planning document.

Give me a short version first, then a more detailed version.

Explain this in plain language for someone unfamiliar with the topic.

Provide three levels: brief summary, standard explanation, and detailed explanation.

## 7. Ask for Revisions

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The first answer does not need to be final. ChatGPT is useful because you can refine the output.

### Useful follow-up prompts

#### Useful follow-up prompts

Make this more concise.

Make this warmer and less formal.

Make this more direct.

Remove jargon.

Add a short introduction.

Make this easier to scan.

Turn this into a checklist.

Create a version for senior leadership.

Create a version for staff who are new to the topic.

Identify what is missing.

Suggest a better structure.

## 8. Ask ChatGPT to Help You Think, Not Just Write

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ChatGPT can be helpful before drafting begins. It can help you frame the work.

### Examples

#### Examples

Before drafting, ask me five questions that would help clarify the purpose, audience, and constraints.

What assumptions should I check before moving forward with this plan?

What are three possible ways to organize this information?

What risks or misunderstandings should I consider before sharing this?

What information would make this request easier to answer accurately?

## 9. Prompt Templates by Task

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### Email Draft

Email Draft

Draft an email about [topic]. The audience is [audience]. The goal is [goal]. Use a [tone] tone. Include a subject line, a short opening, the key message, and a clear next step.

## Email Revision

### Email Revision

Rewrite the following email so it is clearer, more concise, and appropriate for [audience]. Keep the meaning the same. Improve tone, structure, and readability.

## Summary

### Summary

Summarize the following text in [number] bullet points. Then list action items, deadlines, decisions, and open questions separately.

## Meeting Agenda

### Meeting Agenda

Create a [length]-minute meeting agenda for [topic]. Include objectives, discussion sections, estimated timing, and desired outcomes.

## Meeting Notes

### Meeting Notes

Turn these notes into a meeting summary with sections for overview, decisions, action items, owners, deadlines, and open questions.

## Checklist

### Checklist

Create a checklist for [task]. Organize it by phase and include any common mistakes or risks to watch for.

## Briefing Document

### Briefing Document

Create a one-page briefing document on [topic]. Include background, key points, risks, options, and recommended next steps. Use a professional tone.

## Plain-Language Explanation

### Plain-Language Explanation

Explain [topic] in plain language for someone who is new to it. Avoid jargon. Include an example and a short summary.

## Comparison

### Comparison

Compare [option A] and [option B] in a table. Include strengths, limitations, risks, and best use cases. Do not make a final recommendation until after the comparison.

## Review for Clarity

### Review for Clarity

Review the following draft for clarity, structure, tone, missing assumptions, and possible confusion. First provide observations. Then suggest improvements.

## Review for Risk

### Review for Risk

Review the following draft for possible risk, ambiguity, unsupported claims, or language that may need approval. Do not rewrite it yet.

## 10. Before-and-After Prompt Examples

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### Example 1: Drafting

#### Weak prompt

#### Weak prompt

Write something about ChatGPT training.

## Better prompt

### Better prompt

Draft a short internal announcement for System Office employees about an introductory ChatGPT training session. The tone should be professional, welcoming, and practical. Include a subject line, a short explanation of who should attend, and a registration reminder.

## Example 2: Summarizing

### Weak prompt

#### Weak prompt

Summarize this.

### Better prompt

#### Better prompt

Summarize the following document for a busy executive. Include a five-bullet summary, key decisions, action items, risks, and any questions that need follow-up.

## Example 3: Planning

### Weak prompt

#### Weak prompt

Help me plan this project.

### Better prompt

#### Better prompt

Create a project plan for building a WordPress resource page with downloadable PDF guides. Organize the plan into phases, list major tasks, identify dependencies, and include a review checklist.

## 11. How to Handle Sensitive or Unclear Information

Do not include sensitive, restricted, regulated, or unnecessary personal information in prompts unless the use is approved and appropriate.

## Before entering or uploading information, ask

- Does this include personally identifiable information?
- Does this include student, employee, financial, legal, health, security, or contractual information?
- Is this information public, internal, sensitive, restricted, or regulated?
- Is ChatGPT the appropriate tool for this task?
- Can I generalize or remove details?
- Should I ask for guidance first?

When in doubt, do not enter or upload the information.

## 12. Prompting Checklist

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### Before submitting a prompt, check

- Did I clearly state the task?
- Did I describe the audience?
- Did I explain the purpose?
- Did I provide necessary context?
- Did I request a format?
- Did I specify tone or length?
- Did I avoid entering inappropriate data?
- Did I plan to review the answer before using it?

## 13. Final Reminder

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Better prompts lead to better outputs. Start simple, provide context, ask for the format you need, and revise the response through follow-up prompts.

ChatGPT works best when you stay in control of the task.

### Final reminder

ChatGPT works best when you stay in control of the task.