

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 in the approved ChatGPT Edu workspace.

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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For System Office work, use the approved ChatGPT Edu workspace. OpenAI is the company and platform provider; ChatGPT is the AI assistant; ChatGPT Edu is the organizational education workspace. Available models, tools, file features, and other capabilities may vary based on workspace settings, role-based access, and administrative configuration.

1. The Basic Prompt Formula

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

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

ChatGPT does not automatically know your situation, your local process, or System Office context unless you provide appropriate information. 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OpenAI states that, by default, ChatGPT Edu inputs and outputs are not used to train or improve OpenAI models. This privacy protection does not replace System Office data handling requirements, approval workflows, or professional judgment.

Use the least amount of information needed for the task. Do not include restricted, regulated, confidential, sensitive, or unclear information unless that use has been approved. When possible, generalize details, use roles instead of names, or ask ChatGPT to help you structure the work without exposing the underlying data.

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

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

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.