

from basic to brilliant

SIMPLE INSTRUCTIONS THAT GET RESULTS EVERY TIME

WHY PROMPTS MATTER

(And Why You're Already Good at This)

Good news: You already know prompt engineering. Every time you text a friend "Dinner at 6?" you've engineered a prompt. AI just needs the same clear communication you already use every day.

Think of it like ordering at a restaurant. A vague request — "just bring me something" — might get you anything. But a specific one — "I'd like the grilled salmon, dressing on the side, extra lemon" — gets you exactly what you want. Prompts work exactly the same way. The more clearly you communicate, the better the result.

The Golden Rule:

DIFFERENT AI TASKS NEED DIFFERENT LEVELS OF DETAIL. EMAILS CAN BE SHORT AND SIMPLE. HYPER-REALISTIC IMAGES NEED PRECISE DESCRIPTIONS. THIS GUIDE TEACHES YOU EXACTLY HOW MUCH DETAIL EACH TASK REQUIRES.

The Three-Level System at a Glance

LEVEL	BEST FOR	DETAIL NEEDED	AI TOOLS
1 — Basic	Emails, lists, writing, simple summaries	Minimal — 1 sentence	ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity
2 — Medium	Images, social posts, planning & scheduling	Moderate — style + constraints	Canva AI, Gemini Images, ChatGPT
3 — Advanced	Hyper-realistic images, video, complex creations	High — full formula required	Midjourney, Leonardo.ai, Synthesia

Start Here

READ THROUGH LEVEL 1 TODAY, TRY ONE PROMPT, AND BUILD FROM THERE. CONFIDENCE COMES FROM DOING — NOT JUST READING.

LEVEL I: BASIC PROMPTS — EMAIL, LISTS & WRITING

Heading

CONTEXT + TASK + TONE | SHORT. SIMPLE. GETS THE JOB DONE 90% OF THE TIME.

Basic prompts are your everyday workhorses. You're not trying to generate art or plan a road trip — you just need something written, rewritten, organized, or summarized. The AI already knows a huge amount about tone, grammar, and format, so you barely need to guide it at all.

What Makes a Good Basic Prompt?

- Context: What is the situation? (e.g. "I'm cancelling a cable subscription")
- Task: What do you want the AI to do? (e.g. "Write a polite script")
- Tone: How should it sound? (e.g. "friendly," "professional," "direct but kind")

EXAMPLES — WITH EXPLANATIONS

1. Rewriting an email

Prompt: Rewrite this email to sound friendly and professional. Keep it under 100 words. [Paste your email here]

Why it works: You've told the AI the goal (rewrite), the tone (friendly + professional), and set a word limit. The AI fills in the rest automatically.

2. Turning a grocery list into dinner ideas

Prompt: Turn my grocery list into 3 dinner ideas that cost under \$50 total. List ingredients needed for each. My groceries: chicken breasts, canned tomatoes, pasta, broccoli, garlic, olive oil

Why it works: You gave a real list, set a budget, and asked for a useful extra detail (ingredients per meal). The AI can now do real planning instead of guessing.

3. Writing a cancellation script

Prompt: Write a polite but firm phone script I can use to cancel my cable subscription. I want to avoid upsells. Keep it under 90 seconds of speaking.

Why it works: "Polite but firm" gives it two competing tones that are both important. Adding "avoid upsells" prevents a common frustration. Word count anchored to speaking time is a smart trick.

4. Summarizing an article

Prompt: Summarize this article in 4 bullet points. Focus on the most practical advice, not background info. [Paste article here]

Why it works: Telling the AI what to focus on (practical advice) and what to skip (background info) dramatically improves relevance.

5. Comparing products

Prompt: Compare these 3 air fryers for a family of 4: [Brand A], [Brand B], [Brand C]. Focus on capacity, ease of cleaning, and value for money. Format as a simple table.

Why it works: Naming specific criteria cuts out generic filler. Asking for a table gets you something you can actually use at a glance.

Quick Upgrade Tip

ONCE YOUR BASIC PROMPT WORKS, ADD ONE DETAIL AT A TIME. "UNDER 50 WORDS" → "FOR A BUSY PARENT" → "WHO IS UNFAMILIAR WITH TECH." EACH ADDITION SHARPENS THE RESULT.

LEVEL 2: MEDIUM PROMPTS — IMAGES, SOCIAL & PLANNING

The Formula

CONTEXT + TASK + STYLE/FORMAT + DETAILS | A FEW EXTRA WORDS
UNLOCK DRAMATICALLY BETTER RESULTS.

Medium prompts are where AI starts to feel like a creative partner. Instead of just completing a task, you're guiding the style, mood, and format. Think of yourself as a director giving notes to a talented crew — you don't need to do the work, but your direction shapes the whole outcome.

Image Prompts — The Style Trick

The single most powerful upgrade to an image prompt is naming an art style or visual reference. Compare these two:

✗ VAGUE	✓ SPECIFIC
A coffee shop in the morning	Cozy corner coffee shop, watercolor painting style, soft morning sunlight through large windows, warm amber tones, potted plants in the foreground

IMAGE EXAMPLES — WITH EXPLANATIONS

1. Cozy coffee shop painting

Prompt: Create a cozy corner coffee shop scene in watercolor painting style. Morning light streams through large windows. Warm amber and golden tones. Potted plants visible in the foreground. Inviting and peaceful mood.

Why it works: Each sentence adds a layer — style, lighting, color palette, composition, mood. The AI now has a complete visual brief, not just a scene description.

2. Recipe card design

Prompt: Design a clean, modern recipe card for classic lasagna. White background. Use a simple two-column layout with ingredients on the left and numbered steps on the right. Accent color: terracotta red. Include a small icon area for a food photo at the top.

Why it works: Layout instructions (two columns, icon area) tell the AI exactly how to organize space — this is the difference between a usable card and a decorative mess.

3. Book cover design

Prompt: Modern book cover for a psychological thriller. Dark navy and charcoal background. A single silhouette of a woman reflected in broken glass. Elegant serif font for the title at the top. Minimal, unsettling mood. No text in the image itself.

Why it works: Specifying "no text in the image" is a common trick that prevents AI image tools from generating garbled fake letters inside the artwork.

PLANNING PROMPTS — SET YOUR CONSTRAINTS

Planning prompts work best when you give the AI real constraints to work within — budget, time, number of people, dietary needs. Without constraints, you get generic suggestions. With them, you get a plan you can actually use.

1. Weekly meal plan

Prompt: Create a 7-day meal plan for 2 adults. Main ingredients to use: chicken, rice, seasonal vegetables, canned beans. Each meal should take 30 minutes or less to prepare. Include one batch-cook item that can be used across multiple days. Approximate cost per day: under \$12.

Why it works: The batch-cook instruction is a powerful real-world detail that the AI can incorporate logically, turning a generic meal plan into an efficient one.

2. Weekend trip planning

Prompt: Plan a 3-day weekend trip from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, keeping total budget under \$400 per person including transport, accommodation, and food. Suggest one free activity and one paid activity per day. I prefer outdoor scenery over cities. Format as a day-by-day itinerary with estimated costs.

Why it works: Breaking the budget down (transport + accommodation + food) and specifying format (day-by-day itinerary with costs) tells the AI to structure the output for real planning, not just brainstorming.

Key Insight

The difference between a basic and medium prompt is usually just one or two specifics: a style name, a color palette, a budget, a time limit. You're not writing an essay — you're adding one focused detail that makes the output genuinely useful.

LEVEL 3: ADVANCED PROMPTS — HYPER-REALISTIC IMAGES & VIDEO

The Formula

SUBJECT + STYLE + LIGHTING + COMPOSITION + MOOD + TECHNICAL SPECS | EVERY DETAIL YOU ADD IS A LEVER THAT PULLS THE OUTPUT CLOSER TO PROFESSIONAL QUALITY.

THE HYPER-REALISTIC PHOTO FORMULA--BROKEN DOWN

"Photorealistic [subject], [lighting type], [camera angle], [environment], [mood/atmosphere], [lens type], ultra-detailed, 8k"

Here's what each piece does:

ELEMENT	WHAT TO WRITE	EXAMPLES
Subject	Who/what is the focus	Portrait of a 40-year-old woman; coffee cup on a table; golden retriever puppy
Lighting	How the scene is lit	Golden hour sunlight; dramatic side lighting; soft diffused window light; studio softbox
Angle	Camera position	Eye-level; slight low angle; bird's eye view; three-quarter profile
Environment	What's in the background	Modern kitchen; outdoor forest clearing; neutral grey backdrop; blurred city street
Mood	Emotional tone	Warm and inviting; melancholy; energetic; serene; mysterious
Lens/Technical	Camera simulation	85mm portrait lens; wide-angle 24mm; shallow depth of field; ultra-detailed; 8k

HYPHER-REALISTIC PHOTO EXAMPLES — FULLY ANNOTATED

1. Portrait — confident professional woman

Photorealistic portrait of a confident 45-year-old woman with short silver hair, golden hour sunlight coming from the left, slight Mona Lisa smile, modern glass-walled office blurred in background, warm amber tones, professional but approachable mood, 85mm lens, shallow depth of field, ultra-detailed, 8k

Breakdown: Subject

(45-year-old woman, silver hair) →

Lighting (golden hour from left) →

Mood (slight smile, warm tones) →

Background (modern office, blurred) →

Lens (85mm, shallow depth of field) →

Quality (ultra-detailed, 8k)

2. Still life — morning coffee scene

Hyper-realistic coffee cup on a weathered oak table, early morning window light casting long shadows, wisps of steam rising, cozy kitchen background with soft bokeh, earthy cream and brown tones, nostalgic and peaceful mood, shallow depth of field, 50mm macro lens, ultra-detailed, 8k

Breakdown:

"Weathered oak" and "wisps of steam" add texture and life.

"Bokeh" is a photography term meaning blurred background — AI tools understand this and apply it correctly.

3. Animal portrait — puppy in nature

Photorealistic German Shepherd puppy sitting in a sunlit meadow, soft natural backlighting creating a warm glow around the fur, curious alert expression, head tilted slightly, green grass and wildflowers in background, detailed fur texture showing individual hairs, joyful and energetic mood, 85mm portrait lens, ultra-detailed, 8k

Breakdown:

"Head tilted slightly" is a tiny detail that makes AI portraits feel alive rather than posed.

Small physical specifics (posture, expression micro-details) consistently improve animal and portrait realism.

VIDEO PROMPT FORMULA — BROKEN DOWN

"[Scene description], [camera movement], [duration in seconds], [visual style], [audio direction], smooth transitions"

Camera movement vocabulary to use in video prompts:

- *Slow pan left/right*: Camera slides horizontally — good for revealing a wide scene
- *Dolly in/out*: Camera physically moves toward or away from the subject — creates intimacy or distance
- *Overhead/bird's eye*: Camera looks straight down — great for cooking, product, or flat-lay scenes
- *Tracking shot*: Camera follows the subject — feels active and dynamic
- *Static wide shot*: Camera doesn't move — shows the whole environment, feels grounded

Video Example — Product demo

Close-up of a handcrafted ceramic mug being filled with hot coffee, slow dolly-in toward steam rising from the surface, 8 seconds, cinematic style with warm amber color grading, soft instrumental music building gently, smooth transitions

Why it works: Specifying duration (8 seconds) keeps the scene focused. "Color grading" is a professional video term AI tools respond to well. Adding an audio direction (soft instrumental) gives the output a complete sensory brief.

Your 50 Copy-Paste Prompt Templates

These are ready to use. Just replace the [bracketed] parts with your specifics. Grouped by type and complexity.

10 BASIC WRITING PROMPTS

1	"Rewrite [paste text] to sound [tone: friendly/professional/direct] and under [word count] words."
2	"Create a [type: email/letter/social post] for [purpose]. Tone: [tone]. Include: [key point 1], [key point 2]."
3	"Turn this list into a [format: numbered steps/comparison table/short paragraph]: [paste list]"
4	"Summarize [article/text] in [number] sentences. Focus only on [key theme]. Avoid background or history."
5	"Compare [item A] vs [item B] vs [item C] on [criteria 1], [criteria 2], and [criteria 3]. Format as a table."

6	"Write a [type: thank-you note/apology/follow-up] to [recipient]. Context: [brief situation]. Keep it under 80 words."
7	"Turn this rough draft into polished writing. Keep my voice but fix clarity and flow: [paste draft]"
8	"Write 5 subject line options for this email. Goal: get the recipient to open it. Topic: [topic]"
9	"Explain [complex topic] to someone who has never heard of it. Use an everyday analogy. Max 3 sentences."
10	"Create a FAQ with 5 questions and answers about [topic] for [audience: beginners/seniors/busy parents]."

10 BASIC IMAGE PROMPTS

1	"[Art style: watercolor/pencil sketch/digital art] of [subject], [mood/color tone], [lighting]."
2	"Modern flat-lay photo of [items], [surface: marble/wood/white], clean minimal background, top-down angle."
3	"[Style: vintage/minimalist/bold] book cover for [genre], [color palette], room for title text at the top."
4	"Recipe card template for [dish]. Color scheme: [colors]. Include space for photo, ingredients, and 5 steps."
5	"Social media graphic advertising [service/product]. Target audience: [audience]. Style: [modern/playful/elegant]."
6	"Logo concept for [business type] called [name]. Style: [minimal/handcrafted/tech]. Colors: [palette]."

7	"Illustrated character: [age/gender/personality], [clothing], [setting], [art style: cartoon/anime/realistic sketch]."
8	"[Holiday/season] greeting card. Theme: [theme]. Warm and festive. Include space for personalized message."
9	"Infographic layout showing [topic] with [number] steps. Clean, modern, [color palette]. Icons for each step."
10	"[Interior style: Scandinavian/boho/modern] living room, [time of day] lighting, [color palette], cozy atmosphere."

10 MEDIUM PLANNING PROMPTS

1	"Create a [number]-day [meal/workout/study] plan for [audience]. Constraints: [budget/time/equipment/diet]."
2	"Packing list for [trip type: beach/hiking/conference], [duration] days, [weather]. Separate into: essentials, clothing, extras."
3	"Weekly schedule to achieve [goal] in [timeframe]. Max [X] minutes per day. Include rest days."
4	"Grocery list for [number] people for [number] days. Diet: [restrictions]. Budget: \$[amount]. Format by store section."
5	"30-day declutter plan for a [home type]. One small task per day. Start with the easiest wins."
6	"Event planning checklist for [event type] for [number] people. Budget: \$[amount]. Timeline: [weeks] out. Include day-of tasks."
7	"Create a morning routine for [lifestyle: busy parent/remote worker/retiree]. Duration: [X] minutes. Include [priorities]."

8	"Social media content calendar for [month]. Platform: [Instagram/Facebook/TikTok]. Goal: [awareness/sales/engagement]. 3 posts/week."
9	"Study plan to learn [skill/topic] in [timeframe]. I have [X hours/week]. I'm a complete beginner. Include free resources."
10	"Weekend itinerary for [city/region] for [traveler type: couple/family/solo]. Budget: \$[amount]. Interests: [list]."

10 ADVANCED IMAGE PROMPTS

1	"Photorealistic [subject], [lighting: golden hour/studio/window light], [angle], [background], [mood], ultra-detailed, 8k"
2	"Cinematic [scene], [camera movement: slow pan/dolly-in], [time of day], [lens: 24mm wide/85mm portrait], dramatic lighting, 8k"
3	"Studio product photo of [item], [lighting: three-point/rim light/softbox], [surface], perfect reflections, commercial quality, 8k"
4	"[Fine art style: oil painting/watercolor/impressionist] masterpiece of [subject], [color palette], museum quality, gallery lighting, 8k"
5	"Hyperrealistic portrait, [age/gender], [expression], [lighting], [clothing style], [backdrop], 85mm lens, shallow depth of field, 8k"
6	"Aerial drone view of [landscape/city], [time: sunrise/sunset/blue hour], [weather: misty/clear/dramatic clouds], ultra-detailed, 8k"
7	"Macro photography of [small subject: flower/insect/water drop], extreme close-up, [background color], studio lighting, ultra-detailed, 8k"
8	"Architectural visualization of [building type], [style: modern/Victorian/mid-century], [exterior/interior], [lighting], photorealistic, 8k"

9	"Fashion editorial: [clothing style], [model description], [location], [photographer style: Helmut Newton/Annie Leibovitz], editorial lighting"
10	"Food photography: [dish], overhead flat-lay, [props: linen/wooden boards/ceramic], [color palette], natural window light, editorial quality"

10 ADVANCED VIDEO PROMPTS

1	"[Scene description], slow pan [direction], [X] seconds, cinematic color grading, [ambient sound description], smooth transitions"
2	"Product demo: [item + key features], slow 360-degree rotation, [X] seconds, clean white background, professional lighting, no voiceover"
3	"Tutorial: [topic] in 3 steps, screen-recording style with numbered captions appearing on screen, 45 seconds, upbeat background music"
4	"Before/after transformation of [subject], dramatic split-screen reveal, 20 seconds, cinematic music building to a crescendo"
5	"Day-in-the-life of [profession/lifestyle], golden-hour time-lapse transitions, 60 seconds, warm color grading, no talking"
6	"Social media ad for [product], hook in first 3 seconds, feature highlights as text overlays, 15 seconds, upbeat pop music"
7	"Nature scene: [landscape], camera starts wide then slowly pushes in toward [focal point], sunrise lighting, 30 seconds, no music"
8	"Testimonial-style video: one speaker facing camera, warm indoor background, natural lighting, 60 seconds, authentic tone"
9	"Recipe video: [dish], overhead bird's-eye angle throughout, hands-only visible, 45 seconds, each step labeled as text, upbeat acoustic music"

10	"Event highlight reel: [event type], fast-cut montage style, 30 seconds, black and white with occasional color pop, dramatic orchestral music"
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The Non-Techie Prompt Cheat Sheet




TASK	LEVEL	EXAMPLE STARTER	KEY ADD-ON TO UPGRADE IT
Email Writing	1 — Basic	"Rewrite to sound friendly"	Add: "under 75 words" or "for a corporate audience"
Grocery / Meal Planning	1 — Basic	"3 dinners from this list"	Add: "budget \$50" or "30-min max per meal"
Social Media Caption	1 — Basic	"Write a caption for this photo"	Add: "casual tone" or "include a question to drive comments"
Simple Images	2 — Medium	"Watercolor coffee shop"	Add: "morning light, warm amber tones, cozy mood"
Event Flyer / Graphic	2 — Medium	"Design a flyer for [event]"	Add: "modern layout, bold fonts, [color palette]"
Meal / Trip Planning	2 — Medium	"Plan 3 days in [city]"	Add: "budget \$X, prefer outdoor activities, format as itinerary"
Product Photos	3 — Advanced	"Photorealistic mug, 8k"	Add: "morning window light, shallow depth of field, 85mm lens"

Portrait / Headshot	3 — Advanced	"Realistic portrait, professional"	Add: "golden hour, warm tones, confident expression, blurred office background"
Video Explainer	3 — Advanced	"Tutorial, numbered steps"	Add: "45 seconds, text overlays appear on each step, upbeat music"
Brand / Product Video	3 — Advanced	"Product demo, 30 seconds"	Add: "360 rotation, white background, clean lighting, no voiceover"

Quick Test: Which Level Are You Ready For?

Copy this prompt right now and try it in any AI tool:

<p>Rewrite this sentence to sound warm and professional:</p> <p>[paste any sentence you've written recently]</p>
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<p> It worked — great!</p>	<p>You're ready for Level 1. Spend a week with basic prompts until they feel natural.</p>
<p> Add "under 25 words"</p>	<p>Notice how adding a constraint sharpens the output? That's Level 2 thinking.</p>
<p> Add "for a busy mom over 40 who is skeptical of change"</p>	<p>See how adding a specific audience makes the tone and word choice completely different? That's the power of Level 3 detail.</p>