Prompt Playbook

A good prompt gets you a better draft. **Checking** is what makes it trustworthy.

ANATOMY OF A STRONG PROMPT

1. Context	2. Task	3. Format	4. Limits	5. Check
Who you are and what this is for. *"I'm a 10th grader writing a lab report for physics."*	The one thing you want done. *"Explain why my results might differ from the textbook value."*	What the answer should look like. *"Three short bullet points, plain language."*	What to avoid, how long, what level. *"Don't write my conclusion for me. Under 100 words."*	How you'll know it's right. *"Tell me which claims I should verify, and where."*

Fill-in template

```
Context: [who I am, what this is for]
Task: [the one thing I want]
Format: [how the answer should look]
Limits: [what to avoid, length, level]
Check: [list the claims I should verify and say where you are unsure]
```

You won't need all five parts every time. A quick factual question needs only Task and Check. A big piece of work needs all five.

START WELL

Give it the context Use it: Any time the answer depends on your situation.

```
I'm a high school student preparing a 5-minute talk for a class that has not studied this topic. Explain how a recommendation algorithm works, at that level, with one everyday example.
```

Why: The model can only see what you tell it. A vague prompt gets an answer for nobody in particular.

Show an example Use it: When you want a particular style or format.

```
Here is a sample of the style I want:
[paste 2 or 3 lines]
Write three more in that style about [topic].
```

Why: An example beats a description. Use your own work or text you have permission to use.

One task at a time Use it: Big jobs with many parts.

```
I need to plan [project]. First list the steps in order and stop. I'll tell you which one to do next.
```

Why: Long, multi-part prompts are where instructions get dropped. Smaller steps are easier to check.

Compare with criteria Use it: Choosing between options.

```
Compare [A] and [B] on cost, time, and risk in a table. Mark anything you are guessing with a question mark.
```

Why: You choose the criteria, so the answer reflects what matters to you. Then check the facts in the table.

IMPROVE YOUR WORK

Critique, don't create Use it: After you've done a draft by hand.

```
Here is my draft:
[paste]
Don't rewrite it. Name the three weakest points and explain why each is weak.
```

Why: This keeps your thinking in the work. It matches the By Hand, Then With AI habit: you go first.

Argue the other side Use it: Testing a claim or an essay.

```
Here is my argument:
[paste]
Give the strongest case against it, and tell me which part of my argument it hurts most.
```

Why: If you can't answer the best objection, your argument isn't finished.

Quiz me Use it: Studying.

```
Quiz me on [topic], one question at a time. Wait for my answer before telling me if I'm right, then explain.
```

Why: Explaining and retrieving builds memory. Reading an AI summary mostly does not.

CHECK THE ANSWER

Ask what to verify Use it: Every time facts matter.

```
Answer, then list each factual claim I should verify and what kind of source would confirm it. Say where you are unsure.
```

Why: The model may still be wrong about its own doubts, so you still check. But the list gives you a place to start.

Ask what's missing Use it: Before you rely on an answer.

```
What important things might this answer be leaving out, and what questions should I ask before I trust it?
```

Why: A fluent answer hides gaps. This pulls them into view.

Open the source Use it: Whenever it gives a quote, number or citation.

Why: Find the actual page and find the claim in it. Fake citations look real. If you can't find it, treat it as made up.

Redo the number Use it: Math, dates, statistics.

Why: Recompute it yourself or with a calculator. Models are not calculators, and a wrong digit sounds as sure as a right one.

Ask a second way Use it: A surprising answer.

Why: Start a new chat and ask differently. If the answers disagree, one of them is wrong and you need a real source.

Check the date Use it: Anything that changes: laws, prices, who holds a job.

Why: A model's knowledge stops at a cutoff. Look up current facts in a source with a date on it.

WATCH OUT

Confident and wrong Use it: Always.

Why: Tone is not evidence. The more fluent and specific an answer is, the more tempting it is to skip checking. Don't.

Yes-man answers Use it: When you ask for feedback.

Why: Chatbots often agree with you or praise your work. Ask for flaws specifically, and be suspicious of pure praise.

Long chats drift Use it: Chats with many messages.

```
Summarize what we've decided so far in five bullets so I can start a fresh chat.
```

Why: Instructions from early in a chat get lost. Start fresh with a short summary.

Text can carry instructions Use it: Pasting web pages, emails or documents.

Why: Anything an AI reads can contain hidden instructions (prompt injection). Treat pasted material as untrusted, and never let a tool act on it without your review.

Don't paste private things Use it: Always.

Why: Keep names, addresses, passwords, grades and other people's information out of prompts unless your teacher has approved the tool for that.

Can you explain it? Use it: Before you turn anything in.

Why: If you can't explain it without the screen, it isn't yours yet, and in this class that is plagiarism. Log how you used AI.

The rule that goes with all of this. Use AI to learn, not to skip learning. Record what you used it for in your AI Use Log, including what you checked. If you can't explain it without the screen, it isn't yours yet.