

Chapter 13

Getting Better Results with AI



How to Ask Better Questions and Receive More Helpful Answers

Introduction

By now, you've learned that AI is like having a helpful assistant available whenever you need it. But just like talking to a person, the quality of the answer often depends on the way you ask the question.

Many people try AI once or twice, receive a disappointing answer, and decide it isn't very useful. The truth is that AI becomes much

more powerful when you learn how to guide it.

The good news is that you don't need to be a computer expert or learn any complicated commands. Simply asking clearer, more detailed questions can dramatically improve the quality of the responses you receive.

Think of AI as an enthusiastic helper. The more information you provide, the better it can help you.

Why Some AI Answers Are Better Than Others



Imagine asking a travel agent:

"Tell me about holidays."

You would probably receive a very general answer.

Now imagine saying:

"Please suggest a seven-day holiday in the Garden Route of South Africa for two retired people who enjoy nature, good food, and scenic drives, with a moderate budget."

Now the travel agent knows exactly what you're looking for.

AI works in much the same way.

The Five Ingredients of a Great Prompt

A helpful prompt usually includes five simple elements:

1. Tell AI What You Want

Start by clearly explaining your request.

Examples:

- Write a letter.
- Plan a holiday.
- Explain a topic.
- Create a shopping list.
- Summarise this article.

2. Give Some Background

Provide useful context.

For example:

- I am retired.
- I live in South Africa.
- I am new to computers.

- I have a small budget.
- I want something simple.

This helps AI tailor its response to your situation.

3. Be Specific

Instead of asking:

"Give me exercise ideas."

Try:

"Suggest a gentle 20-minute daily exercise routine suitable for a healthy 70-year-old beginner."

Specific questions almost always lead to more useful answers.

4. Ask for the Format You Want

AI can present information in many ways.

For example:

- Bullet points
- Numbered lists
- Tables
- Step-by-step instructions
- Checklists
- Short summaries
- Printable planners

Example:

"Create a weekly meal plan in table format."

5. Ask AI to Improve Its Answer

You don't have to settle for the first response.

You can ask:

- "Can you simplify that?"
- "Please explain it like I'm a beginner."
- "Give me more examples."
- "Make it shorter."
- "Turn it into a checklist."

Think of AI as a conversation rather than a one-time question.

Before and After Examples

Example 1

Basic Prompt

Tell me about gardening.

Improved Prompt

I have a small garden in South Africa. Please suggest easy vegetables for beginners and explain how to grow them.

Example 2

Basic Prompt

Help me save money.

Improved Prompt

I am retired and living on a fixed income. Please give me ten practical ways to reduce household expenses without affecting my quality of life.

Example 3

Basic Prompt

Write an email.

Improved Prompt

Write a friendly email thanking my neighbour for helping me while I was away on holiday.



Useful Words That Improve AI Responses

These simple words often lead to better results:

- Explain
- Compare
- Summarise

- Suggest
- List
- Plan
- Organise
- Rewrite
- Improve
- Simplify
- Translate
- Brainstorm
- Create
- Describe

Experiment with these words to discover how flexible AI can be.

Don't Be Afraid to Experiment

There is no perfect prompt.

If you don't get exactly what you wanted, simply ask again.

For example:

- "Please make it simpler."
- "Add more detail."
- "Give me three more ideas."
- "Can you write it in a friendlier tone?"
- "Please include examples."

Each follow-up helps AI understand what you're looking for.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Asking questions that are too vague.
- Expecting AI to know personal details you haven't shared.
- Giving up after the first answer.
- Forgetting to mention important information.

- Assuming AI always knows what you mean.

Remember: AI works best when you guide it.

Practical Exercise



Try improving each of these prompts.

Instead of:

"Help me cook."

Try:

"Suggest five easy, healthy dinners for two retirees using affordable ingredients."

Instead of:

"Help me travel."

Try:

"Plan a four-day holiday within South Africa for two retirees who enjoy wildlife and scenic drives."

Instead of:

"Write a letter."

Try:

"Write a polite letter thanking our church volunteers for organising last month's community event."

Quick Tips for Better Results

- ✓ Be clear.
- ✓ Add details.
- ✓ Mention your experience level.
- ✓ Ask for the format you want.
- ✓ Ask follow-up questions.
- ✓ Keep the conversation going.

Worksheet

My Better Prompt Builder

What do I want AI to help me with?

Who is this for?

What details should I include?

How would I like the answer presented?

- ☐ Bullet points
- ☐ Checklist
- ☐ Table
- ☐ Step-by-step guide
- ☐ Letter
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Summary
- ☐ Planner
- ☐ Other: _____

My First Improved Prompt

Practice Challenge

Choose one everyday task—such as planning meals, writing an email, organising your finances, or preparing for a trip—and write a

detailed prompt using the five ingredients from this chapter. Compare the response you receive with the answer from a shorter prompt and notice the difference.

Matt's Tip

Learning to ask better questions is one of the most valuable AI skills you can develop. You don't need perfect wording—just be clear about what you want, provide a little background, and keep the conversation going. The more you practise, the more AI will feel like a knowledgeable assistant who understands your needs.

Key Takeaways

- Better prompts lead to better answers.
- Give AI enough background to understand your situation.
- Be specific about what you want.
- Tell AI how you would like the answer presented.
- Continue the conversation by asking follow-up questions.
- Don't be afraid to experiment and refine your requests.