

Chapter 8

How to Ask AI Better Questions (The Secret to Better Answers)

Introduction



Have you ever asked someone a vague question and received an answer that wasn't very helpful?

Artificial Intelligence works much the same way.

The better your question, the better the answer is likely to be.

This isn't because AI is trying to be difficult—it's because AI relies on the information you provide. Clear instructions help AI understand exactly what you're looking for.

The good news is that you don't need to be a computer expert to write good prompts. By following a few simple principles, you'll receive clearer, more useful, and more accurate responses.

This chapter will teach you one of the most valuable AI skills: **how to communicate effectively with AI.**

What Is a Prompt?

A **prompt** is simply the question or instruction you give to AI.

Examples include:

- "Write a birthday message."
- "Explain investing in simple language."
- "Create a shopping list."
- "Plan a week's healthy meals."

Every conversation with AI begins with a prompt.

Good Prompts vs Poor Prompts

Poor Prompt

Tell me about gardening.

This is too broad.

AI doesn't know:

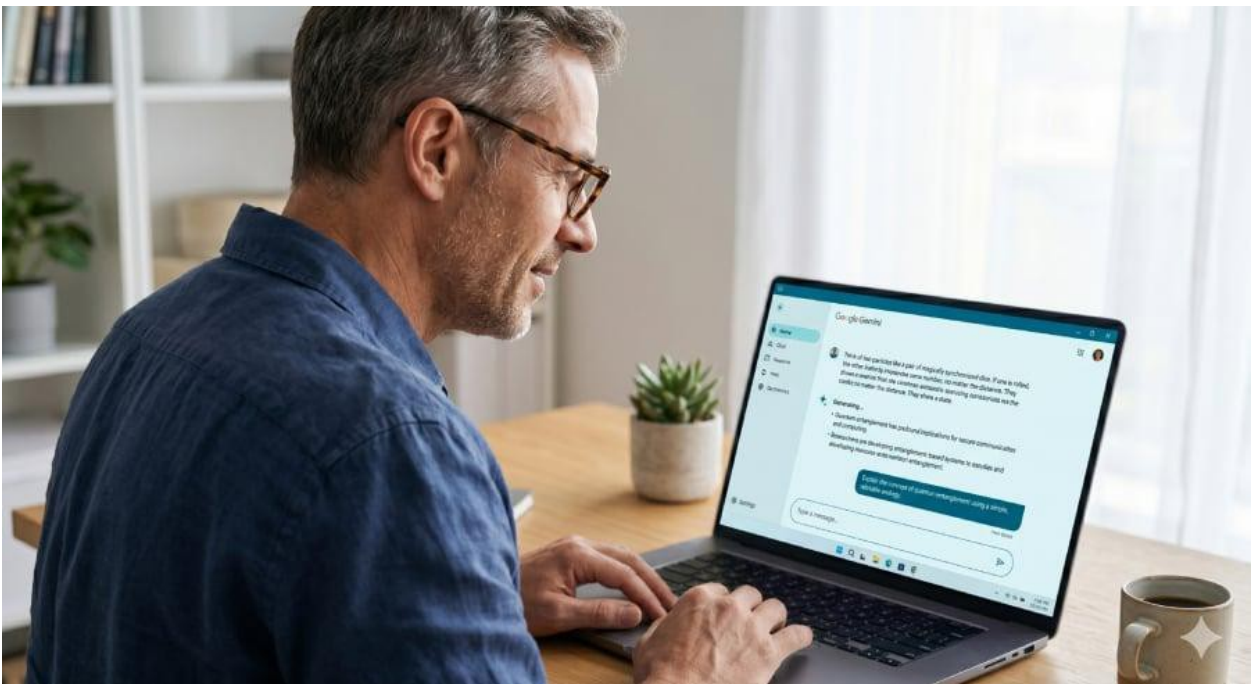
- What type of gardening?
- Your experience?
- Your climate?
- Whether you want vegetables or flowers?

Better Prompt

Explain how a beginner in South Africa can start a small vegetable garden using inexpensive materials.

Notice how much more information AI has to work with.

The Five Parts of a Great Prompt



A useful prompt often includes these five elements.

1. Tell AI What You Want

Start with an action word.

Examples:

- Explain
- Create
- Write
- Summarise
- Compare

- Plan
- List

2. Give Some Background

Tell AI why you need the information.

For example:

I'm retired and want to start growing vegetables to reduce my grocery bill.

This extra context helps AI tailor its answer.

3. Describe Your Audience

If you're creating content, tell AI who it's for.

Examples:

- Complete beginners
- Children
- Retirees
- Church members
- Small business owners

4. Specify the Style

You can ask AI to make the response:

- Simple
- Friendly
- Professional
- Humorous
- Short
- Detailed
- Step-by-step

5. Ask for the Format

Tell AI how you'd like the answer presented.

Examples:

- Bullet points
- Checklist
- Table
- Letter
- Email
- Blog post
- Lesson
- Worksheet

Before and After Examples



Example 1

Before

Write about retirement.

After

Write a friendly 500-word article explaining five enjoyable hobbies that retirees can start on a limited budget.

Example 2

Before

Help with budgeting.

After

Create a simple monthly budget for a retired couple living on a fixed income.

Example 3

Before

Tell me about AI.

After

Explain Artificial Intelligence in simple language for someone over 60 who has never used it before.

Ask Follow-Up Questions

One of AI's greatest strengths is conversation.

You don't have to stop after the first answer.

You can ask:

- Explain that differently.
- Give another example.
- Make it shorter.
- Add more detail.
- Simplify this.
- Rewrite it for beginners.
- Turn this into a checklist.
- Convert this into a blog post.

Each follow-up improves the result.

Don't Be Afraid to Experiment



There is no perfect prompt.

If the answer isn't what you expected, simply ask again.

For example:

That was helpful, but could you make it easier to understand?

or

Please give me more practical examples.

AI is designed to work with you, not judge you.

Prompt Templates You Can Use

Learning

Explain _____ in simple language for a beginner.

Writing

Write a friendly email about _____.

Planning

Create a step-by-step plan for _____.

Comparing

Compare _____ and _____ using a simple table.

Brainstorming

Give me ten ideas for _____.

Organising

Create a checklist for _____.

Common Mistakes to Avoid



- ✗ Asking questions that are too vague.
- ✗ Forgetting to provide important details.
- ✗ Expecting AI to know your personal situation.
- ✗ Accepting the first answer without asking follow-up questions.
- ✗ Believing AI is always correct—always verify important facts.

Practice Exercise

Improve these prompts.

Prompt 1

Help me save money.

Rewrite:

Prompt 2

Write a letter.

Rewrite:

Prompt 3

Plan my holiday.

Rewrite:

Prompt Formula

Whenever you're unsure what to ask, remember this simple formula:

Action + Topic + Background + Audience + Format

For example:

Create a one-week healthy meal plan for two retired adults living in South Africa. Present it as a table with breakfast, lunch and dinner.

This simple structure will often produce far better results than a short or vague request.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter you learned:

- ✓ What a prompt is.
- ✓ Why clear prompts produce better answers.
- ✓ The five ingredients of a great prompt.
- ✓ How to improve AI responses with follow-up questions.
- ✓ Why experimenting is part of learning.
- ✓ A simple formula you can use for almost every AI conversation.

Remember, AI is like having a knowledgeable assistant. The more clearly you explain what you need, the more useful and relevant the answers will become.

Practical Challenge

For the next week, try rewriting every prompt you give AI using the formula:

Action + Topic + Background + Audience + Format

Compare the answers with your earlier prompts. You'll quickly notice how much more helpful and personalised the responses become.



Looking ahead

This chapter sets up the rest of the handbook beautifully. A natural next step would be:

Chapter 9: The 25 Most Useful AI Prompts Every Retiree Should Know