

Chapter 3

The Secret to Getting Great Answers from ChatGPT



It's All About Asking the Right Questions

Have you ever asked someone for directions but didn't explain exactly where you wanted to go?

The answer you received was probably confusing—not because the person didn't want to help, but because they didn't have enough information.

ChatGPT works in much the same way.

The clearer your question, the better the answer.

This is called **prompting**.

Don't let the word sound intimidating.

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

You have been using prompts your whole life whenever you've asked someone for help.

Think of ChatGPT as a Helpful Assistant

Imagine you've just hired a personal assistant.

On the first day you say:

"Do something."

Your assistant wouldn't know where to begin.

But if you said:

"Please write a shopping list for two people using healthy foods for the next five days."

Your assistant would know exactly what you wanted.

ChatGPT works in exactly the same way.

The more clearly you explain your request, the better the result.

Compare These Two Questions



Example 1

Too Vague

Tell me about gardening.

You might receive a very general answer covering dozens of topics.

Better Prompt

I live in South Africa. I have a small sunny garden. What vegetables are easy for beginners to grow during spring?

Notice how much more information ChatGPT has to work with.

The answer becomes far more useful.

Another Example

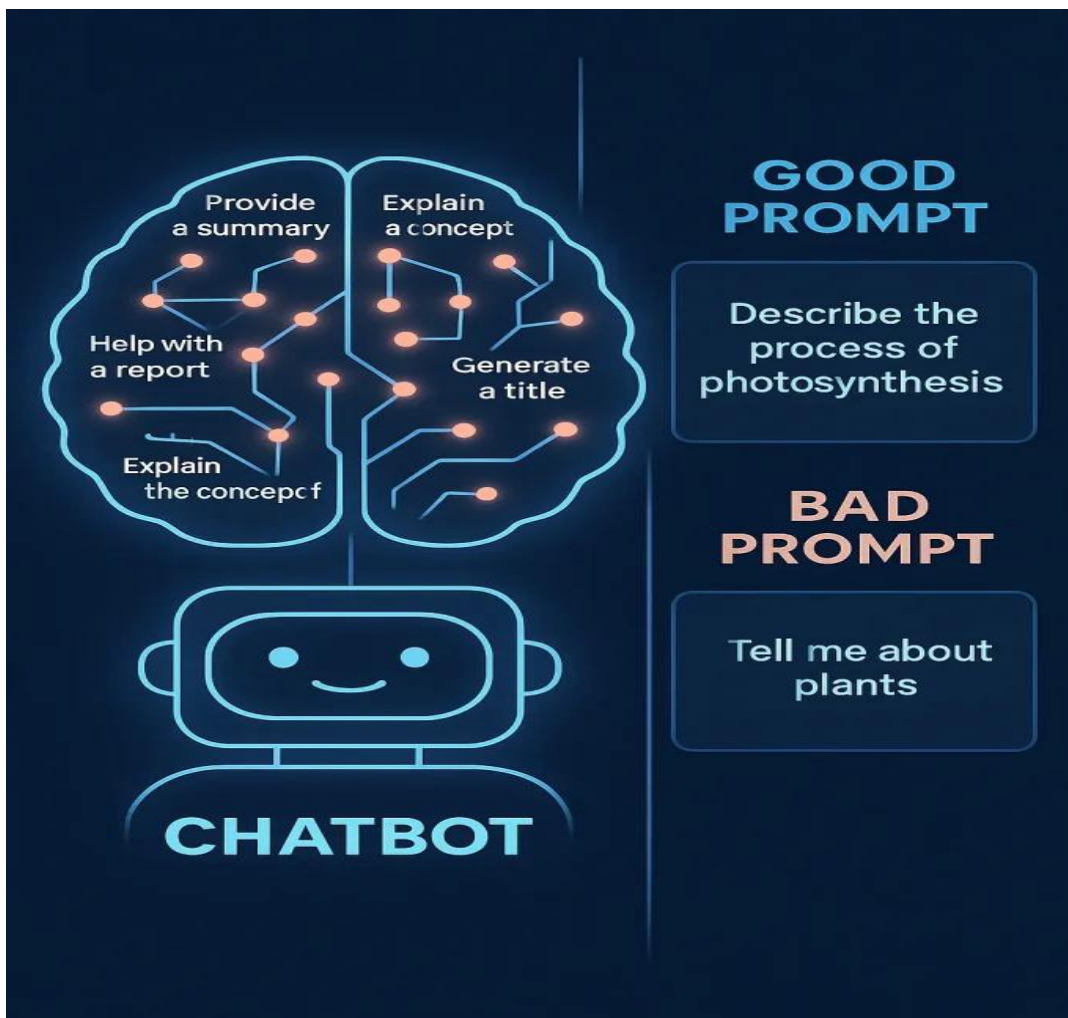
Instead of asking:

Write a letter.

Try asking:

Please write a friendly thank-you letter to my neighbour for helping me during the past month. Keep it warm, sincere, and no longer than one page.

The result is likely to be exactly what you need.



The Five Ingredients of a Great Prompt

Whenever you ask ChatGPT for help, try including these five ingredients.

1. Explain What You Want

Start by telling ChatGPT exactly what you need.

Examples:

- Write
- Explain
- Summarise
- Compare
- Translate
- Create
- Suggest
- Plan

2. Provide Some Background

Give a little context.

Instead of saying:

Suggest meals.

Say:

Suggest healthy meals for a retired couple on a budget.

A little extra information makes a big difference.

3. Be Specific

Tell ChatGPT exactly what you're looking for.

For example:

1. Keep it simple.
2. Use plain English.
3. Make it suitable for beginners.
4. Limit it to one page.
5. Give five ideas.
6. Explain step by step.

4. Mention Your Audience

If you're writing something, explain who it is for.

Examples:

- For children
- For grandparents
- For beginners
- For customers
- For church members
- For neighbours

This helps ChatGPT choose the right tone.

5. Ask for Changes

Here's one of ChatGPT's greatest strengths.

You don't have to accept the first answer.

You can simply ask:

Make it shorter.

Or:

Add more examples.

Or:

Explain that more simply.

Or:

Rewrite it in a friendlier tone.

Think of it as working together with ChatGPT until you're happy.

The Magic of Follow-Up Questions

Many beginners make one mistake.

They ask one question.

Read the answer.

Then start a completely new conversation.

Instead, continue talking.

For example:

You ask:

Suggest five hobbies for retirees.

ChatGPT answers.

You then ask:

Which of those hobbies costs the least money?

Next:

Which one would also help me earn extra income?

Notice how the conversation naturally develops.

Each question builds on the last.

Use Everyday Language

You don't need fancy words.

You don't need technical language.

Simply write as if you were talking to a helpful friend.

For example:

I'm planning a family braai this weekend. Can you suggest a menu for eight adults and two children that won't cost too much?

That works perfectly.

Natural language is exactly what ChatGPT understands best.

A Handy Prompt Formula

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

I want you to...

For...

Please include...

Keep it...

Here's an example:

I want you to write a shopping list for two people.

The meals should be healthy and affordable.

Please include breakfast, lunch, and supper.

Keep everything simple.

This easy formula will help you create clear prompts every time.

Don't Be Afraid to Experiment

One of the best ways to learn is to play.

Ask unusual questions.

Try different wording.

Request examples.

Ask for tables.

Ask for stories.

Ask for checklists.

There is no penalty for trying.

The more you experiment, the better you'll become.

Practice Exercise

Try improving these prompts.

Instead of:

Tell me about retirement.

Try:

What are five enjoyable hobbies that retirees can start with very little money?

Instead of:

Help me with money.

Try:

Suggest ten practical ways a retired person can reduce monthly household expenses.

Instead of:

Write a letter.

Try:

Write a polite letter thanking my doctor for excellent care during the past year.

Notice how each improved prompt gives ChatGPT much more information.

Chapter Challenge

Today, practise writing better prompts.

Ask ChatGPT to help you with three different tasks.

For each one, include:

- ✓ What you want
- ✓ Background information
- ✓ Specific details
- ✓ The audience
- ✓ The style or tone

Then compare your answers with the results from a short, vague question.

You'll quickly see how much better the detailed prompt performs.

Matt's Tip

When I first started using ChatGPT, I discovered that I didn't have to get my prompt perfect the first time. If the answer wasn't quite right, I simply added another sentence or asked a follow-up question. Before long, I realised that using AI is much more like having a conversation than typing commands into a computer. Don't aim for perfection—just keep the conversation going.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ A prompt is simply the question or instruction you give ChatGPT.
- ✓ The clearer your prompt, the better the answer.
- ✓ Include background information whenever possible.
- ✓ Ask follow-up questions to improve the results.
- ✓ Use everyday language—there's no need for technical jargon.
- ✓ Think of ChatGPT as a helpful assistant you can work with until you're satisfied.

