

What is Prompt Engineering

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Prompt engineering is the art of formulating inputs that guide AI systems toward the desired output. The input to an AI system is called a 'prompt'. Prompt engineering therefore means: creating the best prompt to obtain the desired output. A prompt can range from a simple question to a complex instruction, depending on the task and the AI system.

By [Frank Dumon](#)

An everyday example

Suppose a colleague asks you to write an email, but he doesn't tell you for whom, about what subject, or in what tone. You have to guess, and chances are you'll get it wrong. If he had given you clear instructions, you would have written exactly what he wanted.

An AI example: a colleague asks you to write an email, but he doesn't tell you for whom, about what subject, or in what tone. You have to guess, and chances are you'll get it wrong. If he had given you clear instructions, you would have written exactly what he wanted. An AI tool works exactly the same way: if you give vague instructions, you get an undesirable result. If you give a well-defined prompt, you get a clear output.

Whether you use AI for generating text, images, music, or solving complex problems: a well-designed prompt ensures that the AI understands the task, leading to output that meets your expectations. In recent years, prompt engineering has evolved significantly, and it will remain of vital importance for AI models in the coming years.

Prompt Engineering in practice



Creating effective prompts is both an art and a science. It starts with a clear picture of the desired result and a thorough knowledge of the AI's capabilities. An effective prompt is clear, concise, and specific, avoiding ambiguities that could mislead the AI.

10 practical tips to get started

1. Understand the AI model – Know what the model can and cannot do. For example: GPT-3.5 has data up to April 2023, but newer versions (GPT-4 Turbo) can retrieve more current information via browsing.
2. Start with a clear goal – Know exactly what you want the AI to do.
3. Be specific – Vague instructions lead to unpredictable results.
4. Provide all necessary context – Help the AI understand the bigger picture; don't assume the model knows your context.
5. Break down complex questions – Divide a difficult question into smaller, step-by-step tasks. This effectively guides the AI to the desired answer.
6. Rephrase your prompts – Not getting the answer you wanted? Change your wording or perspective. A small adjustment can make a big difference.

7. Use instructions or examples – For example: start with "Write a short summary of..." or provide an example of the desired style.
8. Think about ethics – Avoid prompts that could lead to harmful, biased, or sensitive content.
9. Test and experiment – Try different prompts and use the AI's responses to refine your prompts.
10. Be careful with processing unreliable user input in your prompts.

Example: bad prompt vs. good prompt

Goal	Bad prompt	Good prompt
Recipe	"Give a recipe"	"Give a vegetarian pasta recipe for 4 people, with a preparation time of maximum 30 minutes. Use everyday ingredients."
Blog post	"Write about dogs"	"Write an enthusiastic 300-word blog post about why labradors are good family dogs. Mention three benefits (e.g., friendly, patient, easy to train)."
Summary	"Summarize this article"	"Summarize the article below in 5 key sentences. Use a neutral tone and avoid jargon."

As you can see, it pays to be specific. The more you practice and experiment with different types of prompts, the better you will become at getting the answers you need.

The role of a prompt engineer



A prompt engineer combines knowledge of AI with strong communication skills. The goal is to create effective prompts that guide AI systems to the desired results. This role is becoming increasingly important in organizations that use AI.

Essential skills for a prompt engineer:

- In-depth knowledge of AI and machine learning models
- Strong writing and communication skills
- Ability to analyze and interpret AI results
- Creative problem-solving skills

Challenges and ethical considerations

- Ambiguity and misinterpretation – The complexity and subtlety of human language can lead to incorrect interpretations by the AI.
- Model limitations – AI models are limited by training data and architecture; this determines the boundaries of what they can do.
- Unintended bias – The language and structure of prompts can contain bias, which influences the output.

- Overly specific prompts – Too detailed prompts can reduce the flexibility of the AI, making the output unusable in other contexts.

Ethical considerations

- Fairness and inclusivity – A prompt engineer must actively avoid and limit biases in AI output.
- Transparency and accountability – AI systems must have verifiable decision-making processes; these are partly determined by prompt design.
- Privacy and security – Ensure that AI interactions respect user privacy, especially with sensitive data.
- Content moderation – Prevent AI from generating harmful, offensive, or inappropriate information.

Common mistakes (and how to avoid them)

Mistake	Solution
Too vague prompt ("Tell me about AI")	Add goal, target audience, and length ("Explain to a beginner what AI is in 100 words")
Not assigning a role	Start with "You are an experienced..." (e.g., "You are a historian")

Mistake	Solution
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Forgetting to specify output length	Ask for "maximum 200 words" or "three paragraphs"
Not asking follow-up questions	Use a dialogue: ask a follow-up question to refine the answer

Resources and further reading

- [DAIR AI Prompt Engineering Guide](#) (GitHub) – One of the most comprehensive, free collections on prompt engineering.
- [YouTube channel on prompt engineering](#) – Practical videos and tutorials by Elvis Saravia.

As AI continues to evolve, prompt engineering will grow with it. People who can communicate effectively with AI systems are crucial in shaping the future of human-AI interactions. Whether you are just starting out or already experienced: keep experimenting, learning, and refining your prompts. The time you invest in prompt engineering pays off double in better AI results.