

Best Writing Practices – Putting Together a Structure of a Prompt

As you learned in the previous resources, effective prompts require setting a well-defined structure to ensure clarity, relevance, and focus in the responses generated by language models. This resource will help you practice putting together a structure, as well as tighten wording and formatting in your prompts.



Step 1: Establish the Task

Define the specific instruction or question that the language model should address. Focus on outlining the objective or desired outcome of the prompt in order to shape the response. To create a clear and effective task, keep the following in mind:

1. **Be specific and use precise language:** Clearly articulate the exact action or information you want the language model to provide. Use specific terms to guide the language model toward the desired output.

Instead of a vague prompt like "Describe a place," a more specific prompt like "Describe your favorite vacation destination in Hawaii" guides the language model to generate a response focused on a particular location.

2. **Avoid ambiguity:** Ensure the task is unambiguous, leaving no room for misinterpretation. Eliminate vague or ambiguous instructions that may confuse the language model or yield inconsistent responses.

"Tell me a story" leaves the topic and format open-ended, resulting in varied and unpredictable responses. Instead, a clearer prompt like "Write a short story about a magical adventure" provides a specific direction for the language model.

3. **Set boundaries to define scope and constraints:** Define any limitations or constraints that should be considered in the response. Clearly outline the scope of the prompt and any constraints to ensure the generated responses are within the intended context.

"Write a poem about nature in 10 lines or less" establishes both the theme (nature) and the constraint (10 lines), enabling the language model to generate a concise nature-themed poem.

Step 2: Consider the Target Audience and Set the Context

1. **Adapt the prompt's tone, vocabulary, and style** to ensure it resonates with the intended recipients to enhance engagement and generate more relevant responses. Whether the prompt is for general users, domain experts, or specific demographics, it should be approachable and relatable to the audience.

For example:

A prompt designed for children should use simple language and incorporate relatable themes and characters.

A prompt tailored for scientific researchers might involve technical language and require in-depth domain knowledge.

2. **Provide the necessary background information for the prompt.** Include details that are essential for understanding the task and generating an appropriate response. Set the scene or provide the necessary context to guide the language model's interpretation.

A prompt like "Describe a typical day in a bustling city like New York" provides the necessary context to shape the language model's response.

3. **Provide specificity and pertinent facts:** Include relevant facts, figures, or details to inform the language model about the context or topic.

A prompt like "Explain the impact of deforestation on biodiversity in the Amazon rainforest" provides specific information that guides the language model's response.

4. **Historical references:** Incorporate historical information to guide the language model's response when relevant to the prompt.

A prompt like "Describe the events leading up to the American Revolution" sets the historical context for the language model to generate a response based on that period.

Step 3: Watch Your Wording and Don't Forget to Format

The wording of a prompt plays a crucial role in conveying the task and context effectively. It should be clear, concise, and unambiguous. Well-chosen words can make a significant difference in the language model's comprehension of the prompt.

Here are some considerations for effective wording:

- **Use plain language:** Avoid jargon or complex terminology that might confuse the language model.
- **Be precise:** Choose words that precisely express the intended meaning, leaving no room for misinterpretation.
- **Maintain consistency:** Use consistent language throughout the prompt to avoid confusion or conflicting instructions.

Formatting refers to the visual presentation of the prompt. Although it may seem minor, proper formatting can enhance the clarity and readability of the prompt. Formatting choices such as capitalization, punctuation, and line breaks can influence the language model's interpretation of the prompt.

Consider the following tips for formatting your prompt:

- **Capitalization:** Use appropriate capitalization to emphasize key words or phrases, especially when they relate to specific entities or actions.
- **Punctuation:** Use punctuation marks effectively to clearly convey the structure and meaning of the prompt.
- **Line breaks and indentation:** Utilize line breaks and indentation to organize and separate different components or sections of the prompt, improving readability.

Let's put our knowledge into practice! Using the Chat-GPT text input box, craft a prompt that incorporates the structure we discussed. Ensure you consider the task, context, wording, and formatting elements. Share your prompt in the discussion forum and explain the rationale behind your choices.

By structuring your prompts with a clear task, relevant context, precise wording, and thoughtful formatting, you create a solid foundation for effective communication with language models. This structure allows the language model to better understand your intentions, leading to more accurate and tailored responses.

The Importance of Wording and Formatting: Examples of Prompts and Responses

Wording and formatting play a crucial role in effective prompt engineering. They shape how language models interpret and generate responses. Let's explore some examples of prompts and their corresponding responses to understand the impact of wording and formatting:

Prompt	Response
"Tell me about dogs."	"Dogs are incredible creatures. They come in various breeds and sizes, and they make loyal and loving pets."
"Describe the characteristics of a Golden Retriever."	"Golden Retrievers are known for their friendly and gentle nature. They are intelligent, loyal, and playful."

"What are some benefits of regular exercise?"	"Regular exercise has numerous benefits, including improved cardiovascular health, increased stamina, and..."
"Why is education important?"	"Education plays a vital role in personal growth, empowers individuals with knowledge and skills, and..."

As you can see from the examples, the wording and formatting of prompts can significantly influence the language model's response:

Wording: Well-chosen words in the prompts guide the language model to generate specific responses that align with the intended meaning. Clear and precise wording helps eliminate ambiguity and ensures a focused output.

Formatting: Proper formatting enhances the readability and structure of the prompt. It can also influence how the language model interprets the prompt by drawing attention to specific elements. Formatting choices such as capitalization, punctuation, and line breaks can add clarity and provide context.

For instance, let's consider the following example:

Prompt	Response
"TELL ME ABOUT DOGS."	"Dogs are incredible creatures. They come in various breeds and sizes, and they make loyal and loving pets."

In this example, the use of capitalization and bold font emphasizes the task, making it clear to the language model that it should focus on providing information about dogs.

Similarly, formatting can also influence the language model's response:

Prompt	Response
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"Why is education important?"	"Education is important because it broadens your knowledge, opens doors to new opportunities, and empowers..."
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In this case, the use of a question format in the prompt signals to the language model that it should respond with reasons or explanations.

Remember, wording and formatting go hand in hand to communicate effectively with language models. Well-crafted prompts that consider both aspects lead to more accurate and tailored responses.

Step 4: Test and Iterate

Prompt engineering is an iterative process. It's important to test and refine your prompts to improve their effectiveness. Consider the following strategies:

- **Experiment with variations:** Test different versions of prompts to observe how language models respond and refine them based on the results. For example, you can experiment with prompts that vary in complexity, specificity, or contextual information to identify the most effective approach.
- **Solicit feedback:** Seek input from users or peers to gain insight into the clarity, relevance, and effectiveness of your prompts. Feedback from others can provide valuable perspectives and help identify areas for improvement.
- **Learn from data:** Analyze the responses generated by language models and use that feedback to iterate and enhance your prompts. Pay attention to patterns, common errors, or areas where the responses may diverge from the intended outcome. Adjust and iterate the prompts accordingly to optimize their effectiveness.

Adhering to these best practices can create prompts that elicit more accurate, relevant, and reliable responses from language models.