

By Ethan Lawrie

Session 4 - Prompting Fundamentals

PRACTICAL AI LITERACY FOR WORK



Learning Outcomes Overview

KEY SKILLS TO ACHIEVE BY SESSION END

- Make prompts ready for tasks
- Locate and use the best prompt patterns for a problem
- Write good, enforceable contracts for outputs
- Try to minimise wrong answers by using controls at prompt levels
- Evaluate and improve the systematically
- Chain prompts for reliability
- Document prompts for reuse

Agenda Overview

PRE-QUIZ

LEARNING 1

ACTIVITY 1



Agenda Overview Cont.

LEARNING 2

ACTIVITY 2

LEARNING 3

POST QUIZ



Pre Quiz

*This quiz is to gauge your current understanding of AI,
high correct rates are not expected*



Pre Quiz - Question 1

**YOU PASTE A 12-PAGE MEETING
TRANSCRIPT INTO A MODEL AND ASK
“SUMMARISE.” WHAT IS THE MAIN RISK?**

- A) The model might keep timestamps in the answer
- B) The model might ignore who spoke
- C) The model might miss stuff because it can't read unlimited text in one go
- D) The model might output in British spelling instead of Australian spelling

Pre Quiz - Question 1

**YOU PASTE A 12-PAGE MEETING
TRANSCRIPT INTO A MODEL AND ASK
“SUMMARISE.” WHAT IS THE MAIN RISK?**

- C) The model might miss stuff because it can't read unlimited text in one go



Pre Quiz - Question 2

WHICH VERSION BEST DEFINES THE TASK IN A WORK PROMPT?

- A) “Help with this”
- B) “Summarise this for the exec team in 4 bullets:
what happened, impact, next action, owner”
- C) “Make it clearer and shorter overall”
- D) “Write something professional for me”



Pre Quiz - Question 2

**WHICH VERSION BEST DEFINES THE
TASK IN A WORK PROMPT?**

- B) “Summarise this for the exec team in 4 bullets:
what happened, impact, next action, owner”



Pre Quiz - Question 3

WHY DO WE SPECIFY AN OUTPUT CONTRACT LIKE A JSON SCHEMA OR FIXED BULLET STRUCTURE?

- A) To make the answer sound more confident
- B) So the model can improvise style each time
- C) So the output can be dropped straight into a report, tracker, or handoff without reformatting
- D) To reduce token usage



Pre Quiz - Question 3

WHY DO WE SPECIFY AN OUTPUT CONTRACT LIKE A JSON SCHEMA OR FIXED BULLET STRUCTURE?

- C) So the output can be dropped straight into a report, tracker, or handoff without reformatting

Pre Quiz - Question 4

WHICH PROMPT PROPERLY HANDLES MISSING INFO?

- A) “Answer fully. If details aren’t given, make your best guess”
- B) “Invent realistic placeholders and keep going”
- C) “If a field is unclear, leave it blank and move on”
- D) “If the input doesn’t contain the fact, say ‘cannot determine’ for that field”



Pre Quiz - Question 4

WHICH PROMPT PROPERLY HANDLES MISSING INFO?

- D) “If the input doesn’t contain the fact, say ‘cannot determine’ for that field”



Pre Quiz - Question 5

WHICH OF THESE IS THE BEST DESCRIPTION OF “INPUTS” IN A PROMPT?

- A) The general topic of the conversation
- B) All information the model has been trained on
- C) The exact documents, text snippets, IDs, and data you are explicitly allowing it to use for this task
- D) Any data the model can search for online



Pre Quiz - Question 5

WHICH OF THESE IS THE BEST DESCRIPTION OF “INPUTS” IN A PROMPT?

- A) The general topic of the conversation
- B) The exact documents, text snippets, IDs, and data you are explicitly allowing it to use for this task
- C) All information the model has been trained on
- D) Any data the model can search for online



Pre Quiz - Question 5

**WHICH OF THESE IS THE BEST
DESCRIPTION OF “INPUTS” IN A PROMPT?**

- B) The exact documents, text snippets, IDs, and data you are explicitly allowing it to use for this task

Pre Quiz - Question 6

**WHICH LINE MOST IMPROVES AUDITABILITY
AND SAFETY IN A WORK PROMPT?**

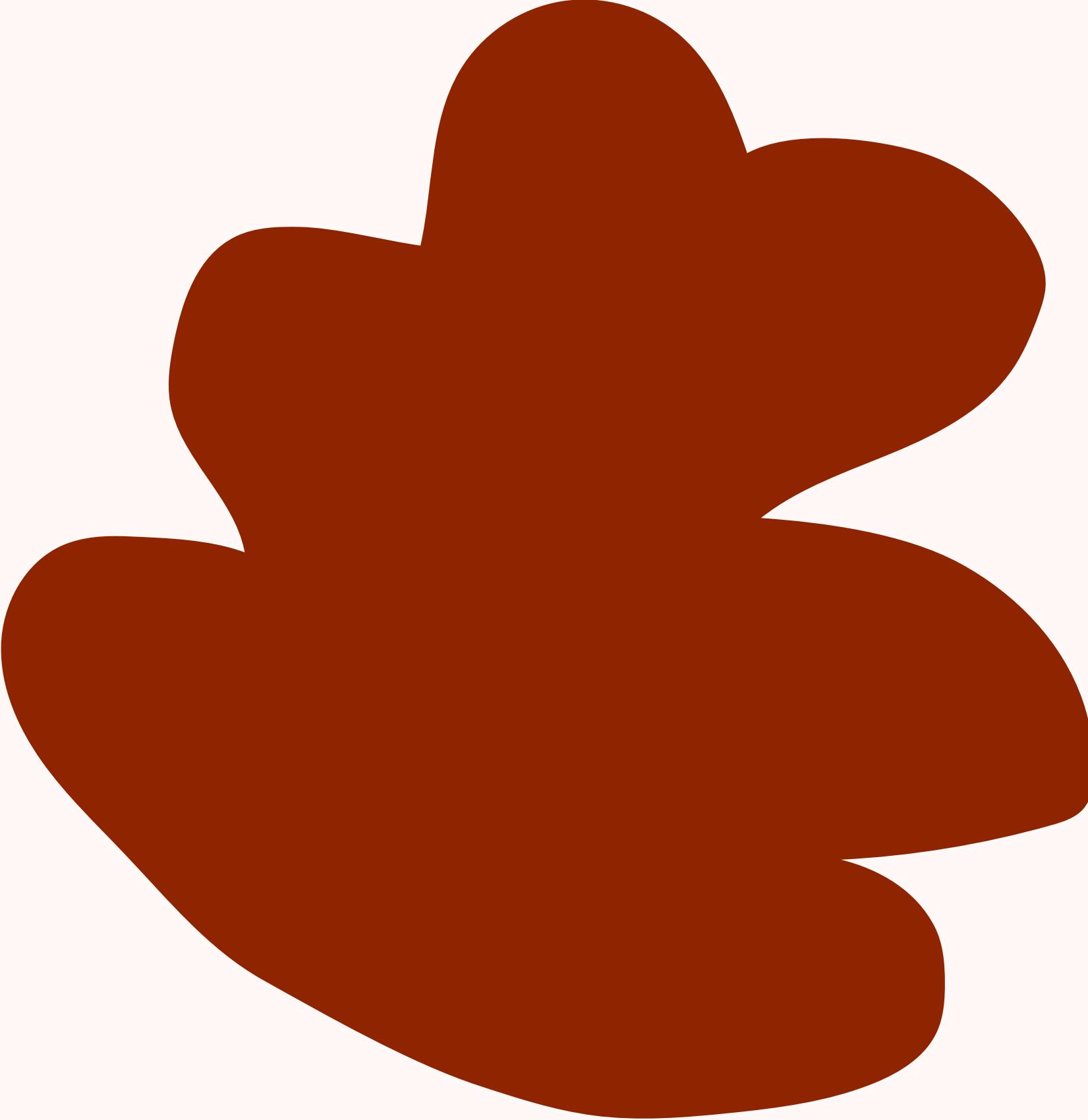
- A) “Give page citations for each claim”
- B) “Sound confident in the answer”
- C) “Use natural tone”
- D) “Make this fast, I’m busy”

Pre Quiz - Question 6

**WHICH LINE MOST IMPROVES AUDITABILITY
AND SAFETY IN A WORK PROMPT?**

- A) “Give page citations for each claim”





Transferable Prompting Basics

What a good prompt always includes

1	Consumer + Purpose Who would be using the actual output of the task and why they are. What decision or action would it drive.
2	Scoped Inputs What inputs exactly that the AI model would have access to and use. This can be done by pasting the text or referencing the file names that it can access. Make sure that anything outside of the intended scope is named
3	Task Verb + Success Criteria What action is the AI doing (eg summarising, extracting). Defining what criteria would lead to success in measurable terms.
4	Output Contract The exact format that is expected for the output/ person receiving it. Eg fields, units, table schema etc.
5	Constraints The constraints set for the model in its response. Eg length limiting, the tone of the response, allowed values

What a good prompt always includes - cont.

6	Evidence Rules Having rules for evidence of the content. Eg requiring snippets that are quoted from the original source, having a “cannot determine” when inputs are insufficient.
7	Safety & Privacy Making sure that sensitive data in the input is redacted or masked, and external/public tool access can be prevented.
8	Assumptions and Non-Goals State things that the model should already assume going in to have more context of the task, and outline what parts are not relevant and in scope.
9	Validation and Handoff Get the AI model to check its output against the contract, and then output a final result. If possible state where the output would go.
10	Fallbacks If the inputs are missing or not suitable get the model to stop and list the blockers and things that it needs to be able to continue with the task.

Inputs and Context Windows

Inputs

- Make sure to prioritise needed inputs over nice to have inputs
- Give the model chunks of input (labelled) to stay within context.
- Compress longer inputs with summaries that still encapsulate the problem context.
- Use models with retrieval for long context tasks - source IDs + dates.
- In a model chat, make sure to try carrying forward just the decisions made and outputted schemas, leaving behind raw history that isn't useful
- Do a recall check by getting the AI to list any required facts that are missing or unclear

Fit the window

- The context window means the limit the model will read up to, so treat it like a token/word budget for input
- For models limited by chat message counts, having multi turn prompts will spend budget as well.
- If the input is over the length, it will be truncated/prevented from being inputted. Try to stick to what is needed

Prepare inputs

- Build a pack for evidence inputs to help with planning: task brief → key facts → quoted snippets with IDs to show where they are from.
- Paste exact text or reference precise doc/section IDs.
- Remove unneeded boilerplate text that the model can infer, and also duplicate points.
- Redact non-essential personal or confidential data.
- Make sure that all of the units are normalised (and dates) for the model

Format-first Prompting



FORMAT: JSON only. No prose.

FIELDS (in order):

- summary: string ≤240
 - risk_level: enum[low|medium|high]
 - actions: array[string], ≤5
 - due_date: YYYY-MM-DD
 - sources: array[{id, page, date}]
- On unknown field use null.

Pick the structure

- JSON format is good for automation. Table are good for quick reading. Bullet points for briefs.
- Make sure to tell the AI the customer or system that will be using the output.

Write the output contract

- Fields with type and fixed order
- Allowed values, the length caps and defaulting to null.
- Evidence slots - source id, page, date.

Enforce it at generation

- Say: “Return only valid JSON matching the contract.”
- Self-check: “If any check fails, respond Invalid: <reason> and stop.”
- In chat, restate the contract before each new run.

Its About The Tasks, Not The Tools

Focus on the job, not the product

- Write prompts around the verbs and outcomes that you want: summarise, extract, decide, plan.
- Specify inputs, output contract, constraints, and evidence
- The tools and models used can change. The task specification should stay the same

Make prompts portable

- Describe the exact product you need
- Include unsupported case handling: “If impossible, state the things that are blocking”
- Keep redaction, citation, and format rules inside the prompt for future portability to other AI tools.





Activity: Prompt Surgery

Work in pairs. Time: 20 minutes.

The Core Pattern Set

The following section will cover some core patterns that can be applied to various tasks



The Core Pattern Set

Summarise-to-Spec

When

- Turn long inputs into brief, uniform outputs for handoff.

How

- State audience and purpose.
- Fix the number of bullets/fields and length caps.
- Ban new facts and require quotes for claims that the AI makes

Prompt Skeleton



Using ONLY the INPUT, produce N bullets for <consumer>. Each bullet: {what happened, why it matters, next action, owner, due_date}. Caps: 25 words/bullet. No new facts. If missing facts → "cannot determine". Cite [doc_id p# date] for any claim. INPUT: <>paste or doc IDs>>

Output Contract



```
[{"event": "", "impact": "", "action": "",  
"owner": "", "due_date": "YYYY-MM-DD", "sources":  
[{"id": "", "page": "", "date": ""}]}
```

The Core Pattern Set

Extract-Structure

Prompt Skeleton



Extract the schema below from INPUT. Return JSON only.

Schema:

```
invoice_id: string, regex ^INV-\d{6}$  
amount_total: number  
currency: enum[USD,EUR,GBP,AUD]  
due_date: YYYY-MM-DD  
vendor_name: string
```

Rules: Use null if not present; do not infer.

INPUT: <<text>>

When

- Pull fields from semi-structured text (emails, invoices, tickets).

How

- Give a strict schema with types and allowed values.
- Include value sets or even regex if you know it.
- On uncertainty, return null.

Validator Clause



If any field violates type/regex/enum, respond Invalid: <reason> and stop.

The Core Pattern Set

Rewrite-for-Audience

When

- Reframe a draft for a target reader or channel..

How

- Lock tone, length, reading level, and forbidden terms.
- Preserve facts, no new commitments.

Prompt Skeleton



Rewrite the DRAFT for <audience> to achieve <goal>. Tone: concise, neutral. Length: ≤120 words. Reading level: Year 9. Keep all factual claims; do not add promises or pricing. Forbidden: "industry-leading", "guarantee". Output: 3 paragraphs: {context, key points, clear ask}. DRAFT: <>

Validator Clause



"List any removed/added facts. If any new facts were required, stop and say what's missing."

The Core Pattern Set

Compare-and-Decide *(evidence-backed)*

When

- Choose among options using explicit criteria and proof.

How

- Provide options with attributes.
- Provide criteria with weights.
- Require quoted evidence and allow “cannot decide” if ties or missing data.

Prompt Skeleton



```
Decide among OPTIONS using CRITERIA.  
OPTIONS: [{id, price, SLA, features, notes,  
sources?}]  
CRITERIA (weights sum to 100): price 30, SLA 25,  
fit 25, risk 20.  
Output:  
  table: [{id, score_0_100, rationale, evidence:  
  [{quote, source_id, page, date}]}]  
    winner: <id or "cannot decide"> with reason.  
Rules: Use only given evidence. If any criterion  
lacks evidence, mark as "insufficient".
```

Decision Contract



```
Scores must show weighted math. Winner must match  
top score or explain tie.
```

The Core Pattern Set

Critique-Then-Revise

When

- Improve quality under a rubric you control.

How

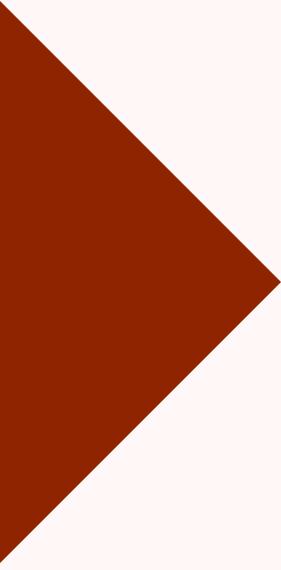
- Two passes:
 - 1) Critique against rubric,
 - 2) Revise.
- Return the checklist for audit.

Prompt Skeleton

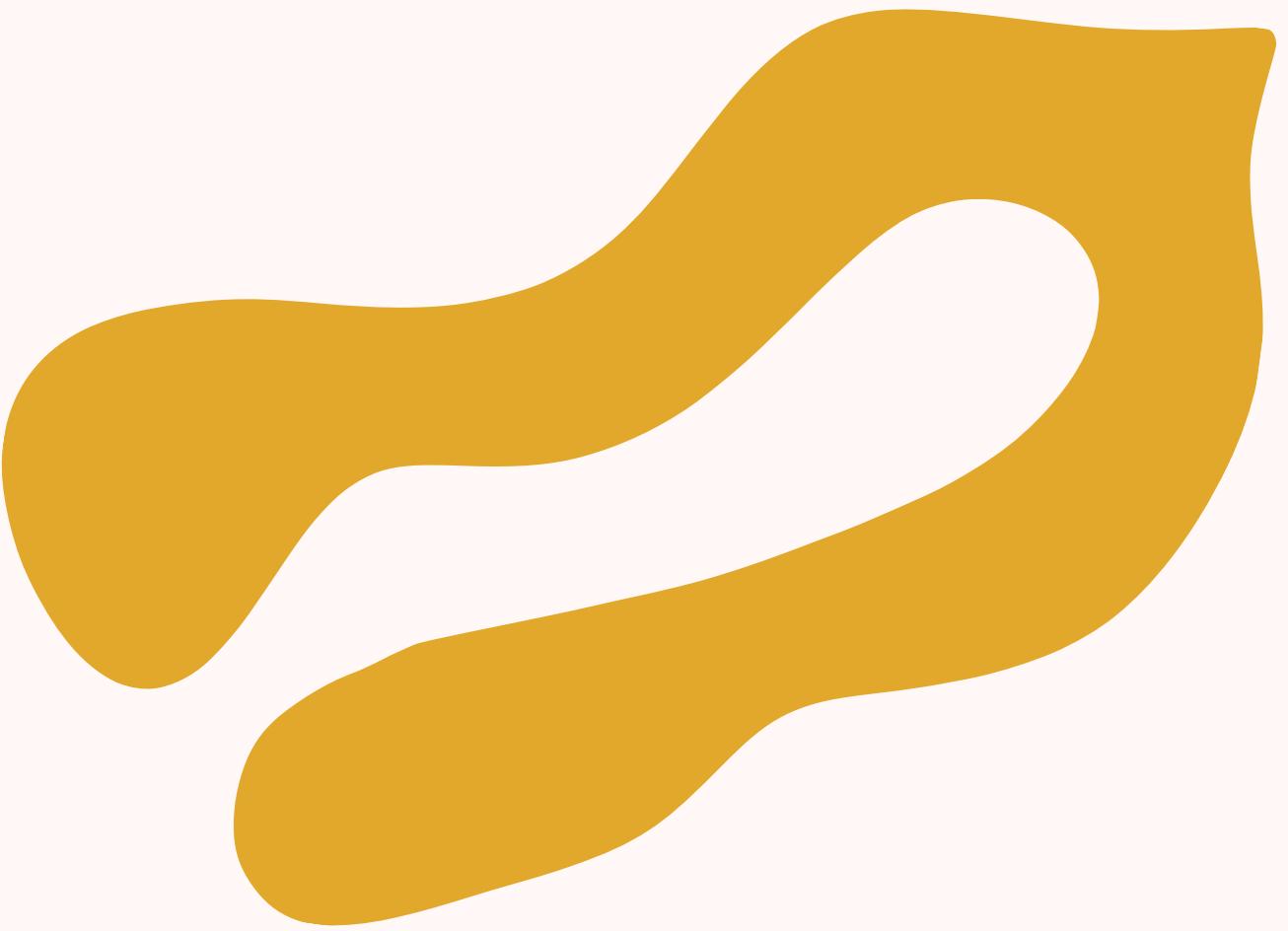
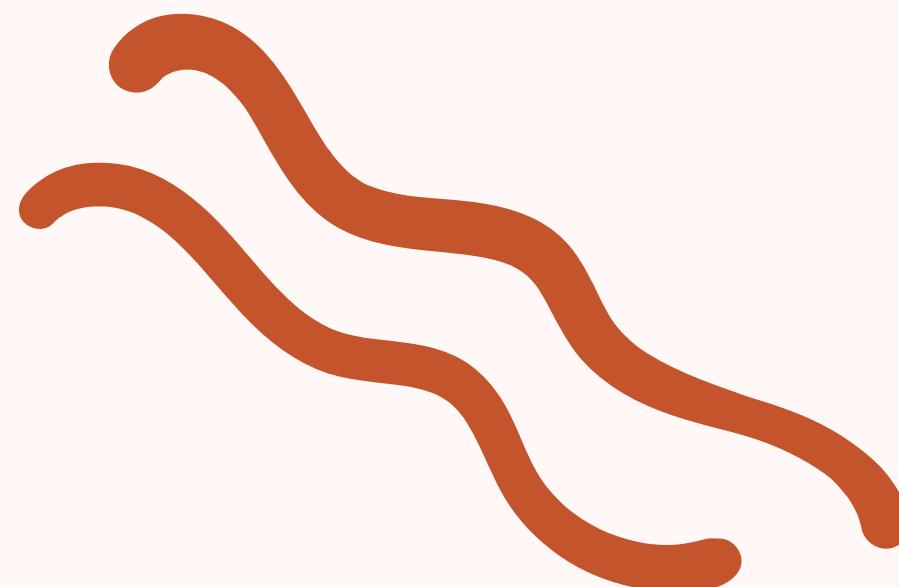
```
● ● ●  
Task: Critique then revise the DRAFT.  
Rubric (0-3 each): accuracy, clarity, compliance, completeness.  
Step 1: Produce a checklist table with scores and 1-line fixes.  
Step 2: Produce a revised version that addresses each item.  
Constraints: keep original facts; cite if claims depend on sources.  
Output:  
  checklist: [{criterion, score, fix}]  
  revised: "<text>"  
DRAFT: <<text>>
```

Validator Clause

```
● ● ●  
"If accuracy <3, highlight missing inputs and stop before revision."
```

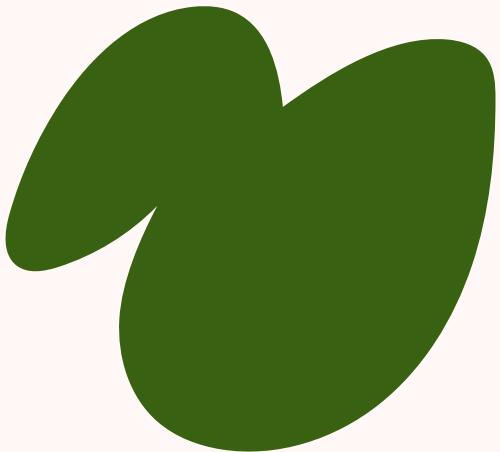


Activity 2: Pattern Draft & Swap



Are my prompts pilotable at work?

Strategies to identify a prompt's usefulness at work



01 - Clear Owner

Who is the person who is getting and acting on the output from the AI. If there is not a specific person or team, then it is not ready to be pilotable yet.

02 - Clear Input Source

If you can find and point to the specific point of input data that the prompt will run on then it is good. Make sure that it isn't guessing or just using what it knows.

03 - Clear Output Format

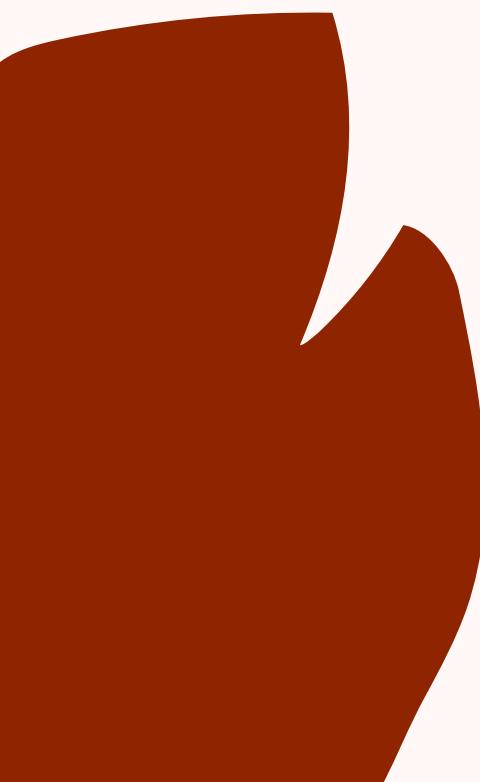
If the prompt has a clear designated output contract (eg bullets) with fixed fields for what you want, then it is good. This means that the output format will be useful for whoever is down the line using the output (perhaps they are pasting the exact output into a report)

04 - Measurable Win

You can define and know what 'better' is measurable with metrics. Eg the time it took to make a weekly summary went from 30 minutes to 5 minutes with no drop in accuracy or quality.

05 - Small Surface Area

Make sure that the task is narrow and defined. Have it do one task for one audience, not just generally asking it to make your job easier



Judging Prompt Quality



Manual Spot-check

Get some real inputs (5-10 cases) and run the prompt on them. Assess the outputs on:

- factual accuracy
- policy/compliance fit
- clarity/usable format
- time saved vs doing it manually



Red flag conditions

- It is just filling gaps with guesses and inventing facts/hallucinating
- It is not staying to the tone that was set
- The output is not in the correct form or paste ready (eg some fields are missing)
- You still have to rewrite every result by hand

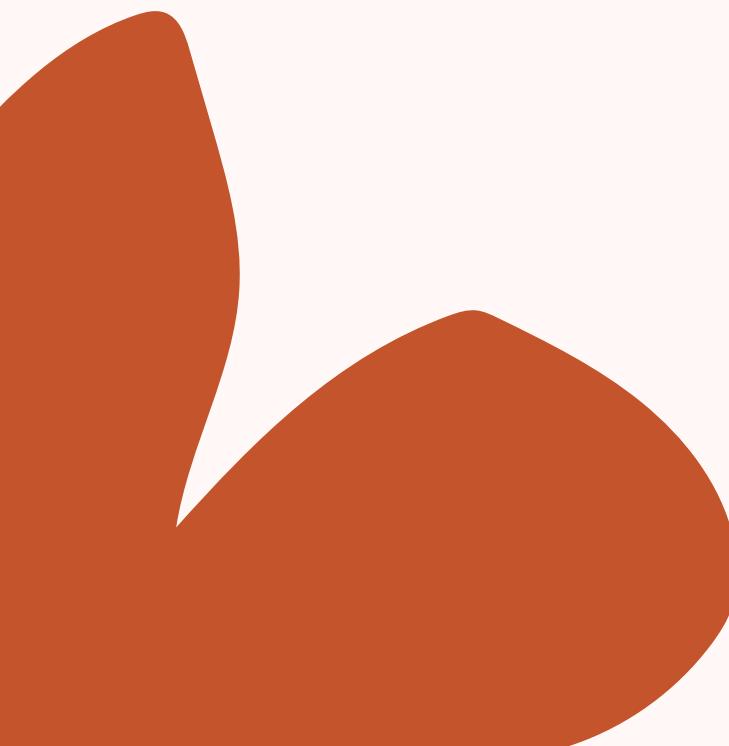


Pass conditions

- Output is able to drop straight into where it needs to be (eg email draft)
- Every claim by the AI can be backed up with a source or “cannot determine”
- Another person can repeat the process and get similar quality

Post Quiz

This quiz is to see your learning progress over this session



Post Quiz - Question 1

YOU WRITE A PROMPT THAT SAYS:

- WHO THE OUTPUT IS FOR
- EXACTLY WHICH NOTES AND TICKETS TO USE
- ONE TASK (“EXTRACT INCIDENT DETAILS”) WITH SUCCESS CRITERIA
- A JSON SCHEMA WITH FIXED FIELDS AND ALLOWED VALUES
- A RULE TO SAY “CANNOT DETERMINE” INSTEAD OF GUESSING

WHAT IS STILL MISSING BEFORE THIS IS SAFE TO HAND OFF?

- A) A requirement to write in Australian English
- B) A redaction rule for names, emails, or dollar amounts
- C) A joke or informal tone so it's friendlier
- D) A note asking for emojis in the summary

Post Quiz - Question 1

YOU WRITE A PROMPT THAT SAYS:

- WHO THE OUTPUT IS FOR
- EXACTLY WHICH NOTES AND TICKETS TO USE
- ONE TASK (“EXTRACT INCIDENT DETAILS”) WITH SUCCESS CRITERIA
- A JSON SCHEMA WITH FIXED FIELDS AND ALLOWED VALUES
- A RULE TO SAY “CANNOT DETERMINE” INSTEAD OF GUESSING

WHAT IS STILL MISSING BEFORE THIS IS SAFE TO HAND OFF?

- B) A redaction rule for names, emails, or dollar amounts

Post Quiz - Question 2

WHICH LINE IS THE BEST VALIDATION INSTRUCTION?

- A) “Send me the result”
- B) “Write your answer and a creative alternative”
- C) “Check your output against the contract. If it fails, reply Invalid: and stop”
- D) “Format it nicely”



Post Quiz - Question 2

**WHICH LINE IS THE BEST VALIDATION
INSTRUCTION?**

- C) “Check your output against the contract. If it fails, reply Invalid: and stop”

Post Quiz - Question 3

YOU'RE COMPARING TWO VENDORS. WHICH PROMPT SPEC IS STRONGEST?

- A) “Pick the better vendor overall”
- B) “Rank them and make it sound positive”
- C) “Score each option against weighted criteria.
Give evidence quotes with source_id/page/date. If evidence is missing or tied, say ‘cannot decide’”
- D) “Choose fast so I can report it”



Post Quiz - Question 3

YOU'RE COMPARING TWO VENDORS. WHICH PROMPT SPEC IS STRONGEST?

C) “Score each option against weighted criteria.
Give evidence quotes with source_id/page/date. If
evidence is missing or tied, say ‘cannot decide’”



Post Quiz - Question 4

**YOU'RE REWRITING AN ANNOUNCEMENT FOR STAFF.
THE DRAFT SAYS “THIS CHANGE WON’T ADD EXTRA
WORK FOR ANYONE.” WHAT SHOULD THE PROMPT DO?**

- A) Keep that promise so morale stays high
- B) Block unapproved promises and set forbidden phrases
- C) Add emojis for tone
- D) Expand the claim to sound more confident



Post Quiz - Question 4

**YOU'RE REWRITING AN ANNOUNCEMENT FOR STAFF.
THE DRAFT SAYS “THIS CHANGE WON’T ADD EXTRA
WORK FOR ANYONE.” WHAT SHOULD THE PROMPT DO?**

- B) Block unapproved promises and set forbidden phrases



Post Quiz - Question 5

YOU TEST A PROMPT ON 10 REAL EXAMPLES. OUTPUTS ARE STRUCTURED TO SPEC IN 9/10 CASES, ALL CLAIMS HAVE SOURCES OR “CANNOT DETERMINE,” AND EACH RESULT TOOK 4 MIN INSTEAD OF 12. WHAT DOES THAT SIGNAL?

- A) It's still too inconsistent to use
- B) It failed because it wasn't instant
- C) It's ready for a small controlled pilot
- D) It should roll out to the whole company now

Post Quiz - Question 5

YOU TEST A PROMPT ON 10 REAL EXAMPLES. OUTPUTS ARE STRUCTURED TO SPEC IN 9/10 CASES, ALL CLAIMS HAVE SOURCES OR “CANNOT DETERMINE,” AND EACH RESULT TOOK 4 MIN INSTEAD OF 12. WHAT DOES THAT SIGNAL?

- C) It's ready for a small controlled pilot

Post Quiz - Question 6

WHICH CASE MEANS “DO NOT SOLVE THIS WITH PROMPTING, ESCALATE TO A HUMAN”?

- A) You’re missing two meeting dates
- B) You’re summarising a public policy PDF for your team
- C) You’re asked to generate performance feedback about a named employee using HR notes
- D) You’re turning a changelog CSV into bullet release notes



Post Quiz - Question 6

WHICH CASE MEANS “DO NOT SOLVE THIS WITH PROMPTING, ESCALATE TO A HUMAN”?

- C) You’re asked to generate performance feedback about a named employee using HR notes

Next Steps

SESSION 5

Operationalising With Workflows

SESSION 6

Staying Current