

Claude Chat Export

February 26, 2026 | FORGE Method Summary

YOU

give me a detailed summary of this article: I use the FORGE method with Claude to turn rough ideas into finished work — here's how it works

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Here's a detailed summary of the Tom's Guide article by Amanda Caswell:

Overview

The article introduces the FORGE method, a five-stage framework the author developed after months of trial and error to help people use Claude (or any AI chatbot) as a thinking partner rather than just a writing machine. The core philosophy is that most AI-assisted writing fails because people outsource their thinking rather than using AI to sharpen it. FORGE stands for **Frame, Obstruct, Reconstruct, Generate, Edit**.

Stage 1 — Frame

The first stage forces you to clearly articulate what you're actually trying to say before you start writing. The author argues most ideas fail not because they're bad, but because they were never properly defined.

The prompt: Describe your rough idea in a few sentences (as messy as you like), then ask Claude to respond with only three clarifying questions — no suggestions yet. The rationale is that if Claude immediately develops your idea, it will develop *its* version, not yours. Answering three good questions forces your own thinking and often sharpens the idea more than an entire first draft would.

Stage 2 — Obstruct

This stage exposes weaknesses in your argument before your readers do. The author calls it the most skipped stage and the reason most first drafts are weak.

The prompt: Share your clarified idea and ask Claude to act as a smart, skeptical reader — not a kind one. Specifically ask: what's the weakest part, what am I assuming without proving, and what would a strong critic say? The phrase "Don't soften it" is deliberately included because it directs Claude to give genuinely uncomfortable feedback rather than polite, hedged observations.

Stage 3 — Reconstruct

After identifying weaknesses, you rebuild the idea's architecture. This stage is about structural strengthening, not writing.

The prompt: Based on the weaknesses from Stage 2, ask Claude to help reframe the central claim to be harder to argue with, identify what evidence or examples are needed, and suggest the most logical structure — but produce a *skeleton, not a draft*. That last instruction is critical because it keeps Claude from jumping ahead to Stage 4 before you're ready. The article emphasizes that Claude thrives when prompts build sequentially on each other.

Stage 4 — Generate

This is where the actual first draft outline is produced. By the time you reach this stage, you've already stress-tested the idea, so the output is much stronger than anything Claude would produce from a cold prompt.

The prompt: Ask Claude to write a structured outline based on the Stage 3 skeleton, in your specified tone and for your specific audience, with a note that you'll refine it in the next stage. The author's approach here is to use Claude's outline as a scaffold, then write the actual content yourself — so the ideas and voice remain yours.

Stage 5 — Edit

The final stage is where you paste your completed draft and ask Claude to interrogate it, not polish it.

The prompt: A three-pass edit structure:

- First pass: flag anything vague, generic, or that could have been written by anyone, and suggest specifics.
- Second pass: identify the single strongest sentence and explain why it works.
- Third pass: identify what's missing — what a reader would wish had been included. Then deliver a final version with only the first-pass changes incorporated.

The author notes that the "strongest sentence" exercise is particularly useful for building self-awareness about which of your instincts are working, and is practical for situations like writing competitions or pitching to agents.

The Takeaway

The article closes with the argument that FORGE keeps the human in the driver's seat at every stage. Claude handles the analysis, pressure-testing, structure-building, and outlining, but all the decisions about what you believe, what angle to take, and what voice to use remain the writer's own. The author reports that running a piece through all five stages takes about 40 minutes and consistently produces better results than twice the time spent using a single prompt.

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