

The Ultimate AI Image Prompt Cheat Sheet: From Idea to Masterpiece

Introduction:

This cheat sheet empowers you to create stunning AI-generated images by mastering the art of prompting. Whether you're using **DALL-E** (within ChatGPT or **Microsoft Copilot**, these principles and techniques will help you turn your ideas into visual reality.

1. Foundational Principles:

Start with a Clear Description:

Begin with a concise, descriptive sentence outlining your desired image. Think of it as giving clear instructions to an artist.

- **Vague:** *"A dog."*
- **Clear:** *"A golden retriever puppy playing in a park."*
- **Detailed:** *"A golden retriever puppy with floppy ears chasing a bright red ball in a sunlit park with green grass and trees in the background."*

The PROMPT Framework:

Use this framework to structure your thinking and ensure comprehensive prompts:

- **P (Purpose):** Why are you creating this image? *(Blog post, social media, presentation, design project, personal use, etc.)*
 - **R (Role/Style):** What artistic style or look do you want? *(Photorealistic, cartoon, oil painting, etc. - see Section 3 for a detailed list)*
 - **O (Output):** What size and format do you need? *(Square for Instagram, 16:9 for a banner, high resolution for print, etc.)*
 - **M (Markers):** Mandatory Inclusions & Exclusions. What must be in the image? What must not be in the image? *(Specific objects, colors, details, styles to avoid)*
 - **P (Patterns):** Can you provide examples of style or aesthetic? *(Specific artist, art movement, photography style, etc.)*
 - **T (Tone):** What mood or emotion should the image convey? *(Happy, mysterious, dramatic, serene, whimsical, etc.)*
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2. Building Your Prompt: Key Elements

This section outlines the core building blocks of your image prompt:

- **Subject:** What is the main focus of your image? *(e.g., "a cat," "a spaceship," "a futuristic city")*

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- **Action:** What is the subject doing? (e.g., "sitting on a mat," "flying through space," "glowing with neon lights")
 - **Setting:** Where is the scene taking place? (e.g., "in a garden," "on a distant planet," "on a busy street")
 - **Details:** Add specific details to enhance your description (colors, textures, objects, etc.).
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3. Advanced Prompting Techniques (Your Toolbox):

A. Art Styles & Mediums:

Tell the AI what artistic style or medium to emulate.

General Styles:

- **Photorealistic:** Like a real photograph, with high detail and realism.
- **Hyperrealistic:** Extremely detailed and lifelike, often surpassing photographic quality.
- **Impressionistic:** Soft colors and brushstrokes, capturing the feeling of a scene (*think Monet*).
- **Cubist:** Objects broken up and reassembled in abstract forms (*think Picasso*).
- **Surrealist:** Dreamlike, strange, and unexpected combinations (*think Dali*).
- **Pop Art:** Bold, colorful, using imagery from popular culture (*think Warhol*).
- **Art Deco:** Geometric shapes, rich colors, luxurious feel (*1920s-30s style*).
- **Cyberpunk:** Futuristic, often dark, with neon lights and advanced technology.
- **Steampunk:** Victorian-era aesthetics combined with advanced, steam-powered technology.
- **Abstract Expressionism:** Focuses on emotion and feeling, with energetic brushstrokes.
- **Minimalism:** Simple, clean, and uncluttered. Focuses on essential elements.
- **Anime/Manga:** Japanese animation style, often with large eyes and vibrant colors.
- **Concept Art:** Illustrative style used for video games and movies, focusing on atmosphere.
- **Digital Painting:** Created using digital tools, often mimicking traditional painting styles.
- **Ukiyo-e:** Japanese woodblock prints, often featuring landscapes and scenes of everyday life.
- **Vaporwave:** Retro-futuristic, often with pastel colors, glitches, and 80s/90s aesthetics.
- **Low-Poly:** 3D models with a small number of polygons, creating a blocky, geometric look.

Mediums:

- **Oil Painting** – Traditional painting style with rich colors and textures.
- **Watercolor** – Soft, flowing colors and transparent washes.
- **Sketch** – A simple drawing, often in pencil or charcoal.
- **Cartoon** – Simplified, often exaggerated drawing style.
- **Pixel Art** – Images made up of small, square pixels (*retro video game style*).
- **3D Render** – A computer-generated image that appears three-dimensional.
- **Isometric** – A way of drawing 3D objects on a 2D surface (*often used in games*).
- **Chiaroscuro** – Strong contrasts between light and dark, creating dramatic effects.

B. Artist & Medium References:

Specify *"in the style of [Artist Name]"* or *"like a [Medium]."*

Examples:

- *"in the style of Van Gogh"*
 - *"in the style of Monet"*
 - *"in the style of Picasso"*
 - *"in the style of Dali"*
 - *"in the style of Warhol"*
 - *"in the style of Leonardo da Vinci"*
 - *"in the style of Pixar"*
 - *"in the style of Hayao Miyazaki"*
 - *"in the style of Georgia O'Keeffe"*
 - *"in the style of Norman Rockwell"*
 - *"like a photograph taken with a Polaroid camera"*
 - *"like a movie still from a film noir"*
 - *"like a page from a vintage comic book"*
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C. Aspect Ratios (Image Shape):

Define the proportions of your image (*width:height*).

- **1:1 (Square):** Profile pictures, Instagram posts.
 - **4:3 (Standard Photo):** Traditional photography.
 - **16:9 (Widescreen):** Banners, YouTube thumbnails, cinematic scenes.
 - **9:16 (Vertical):** Phone wallpapers, social media stories.
 - **Custom:** Specify exact pixel dimensions (*e.g., "800x600 pixels"*).
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D. Lighting:

Control the light source and mood.

- **Soft Lighting:** Gentle, diffused light, few harsh shadows.
 - **Golden Hour:** Warm, soft light after sunrise or before sunset.
 - **Dramatic Lighting:** Strong contrasts between light and shadow.
 - **Backlighting:** Light source behind the subject (*silhouette or glow*).
 - **Rim Lighting:** Light outlines the subject from behind.
 - **Studio Lighting:** Artificial lighting, often used for portraits.
 - **Neon Lighting:** Bright, colorful light (*often used in cyberpunk*).
 - **Ambient Lighting:** Natural, soft, even lighting.
 - **Volumetric Lighting (God Rays):** Visible shafts of light.
 - **Bioluminescent:** Glowing light emitted by living organisms.
 - **Rembrandt Lighting:** Portrait lighting with a characteristic triangle of light on one cheek.
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E. Composition:

Arrange the elements within your image.

- **Close-up:** Shows a subject in great detail.
 - **Wide Shot:** Shows a broad view of a scene.
 - **Bird's Eye View:** Looking down from directly above.
 - **Low Angle:** Looking up from below (*makes subject appear powerful*).
 - **Rule of Thirds:** Place key elements along imaginary lines dividing the image into thirds.
 - **Symmetry:** Balanced composition with mirrored elements.
 - **Rule of Odds:** Using an odd number of elements (*often more visually appealing*).
 - **Leading Lines:** Using lines to guide the viewer's eye.
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F. Camera Lenses (Perspective & Effects):

Simulate different camera lenses.

- **Wide-angle lens:** Captures a wider field of view.
 - **Telephoto lens:** Zooms in on distant objects.
 - **Macro lens:** Extreme close-ups, showing tiny details.
 - **Fisheye lens:** Creates a very wide, distorted, circular image.
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G. Detail & Rendering Style:

Control the level of detail and overall rendering.

- **Detailed:** Includes many fine details, emphasizing texture and realism.
 - **Minimalist:** Simple, clean, uncluttered, often with flat colors.
 - **Abstract:** Focuses on shapes, colors, and forms, not realistic representation.
 - **Stylized:** Not photorealistic, but not fully abstract; a deliberately designed aesthetic.
 - **High Resolution:** Suitable for printing or large displays.
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H. Color Palette:

Specify desired colors or color schemes.

- **Monochromatic:** Uses different shades of a single color.
 - **Complementary Colors:** Colors opposite each other on the color wheel.
 - **Analogous Colors:** Colors next to each other on the color wheel.
 - **Warm Colors:** Reds, oranges, yellows (*evoke warmth, energy*).
 - **Cool Colors:** Blues, greens, purples (*evoke calmness, peace*).
 - **Pastel Colors:** Light, soft colors.
 - **Vibrant Colors:** Bright, saturated colors.
 - **Specific Colors:** *"Use a color palette of teal, gold, and cream."*
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I. Texture:

Describe the surface qualities of objects.

- **Smooth:** Without bumps or roughness.
 - **Rough:** Uneven, coarse surface.
 - **Soft:** Yielding, fluffy texture.
 - **Glossy:** Shiny, reflective surface.
 - **Matte:** Non-reflective, dull surface.
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4. Negative Prompts (Avoiding the Undesired):

Tell the AI what you don't want in the image. Use `", without [element]"` or platform-specific syntax (see Section 6).

Examples:

- `", without text"`
- `", without people"`
- `", without buildings"`
- `", avoid blurry"`
- `", cartoonish, unrealistic"`

5. Advanced Techniques:

Prompt Weighting: Emphasize or de-emphasize certain terms. Syntax varies by platform:

- **General Syntax (may work in some tools):** `(term)` to increase weight, `[term]` to decrease weight.
Example: `A beautiful landscape, (epic scale:1.5), [blurry:0.5]`
 - **Multi-Prompting (Scene Layering):** Combine multiple prompts to create complex scenes.
Example: `"A cyberpunk city (background), a neon-lit hovercar (foreground), heavy rain (atmosphere)."`
 - **Referencing Images:** Some tools allow image references, either by image or by image description.
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6. Platform-Specific Tips:

DALL-E 3 (ChatGPT):

- DALL-E 3 is very good at understanding natural language, so be descriptive.
- You can specify text placement: `"Sign with 'OPEN' in bold, top-left."`

Copilot:

- Works well with natural language prompts.
 - Integrates seamlessly within **M365**.
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7. Troubleshooting:

- **Overcrowded Image:** Add "*minimalist,*" "*negative space,*" or "*focus on [subject].*"
 - **Unwanted Style:** Use **negative prompts** and specify your desired style more clearly.
 - **Low Quality:** Add "*ultra-detailed,*" "*8K,*" "*sharp focus,*" "*intricate textures,*" "*high resolution.*"
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8. Example Prompts (Putting It All Together):

- *"A hyperrealistic portrait of an elderly woman with deep wrinkles and wise eyes, soft lighting, close-up, 800x800 pixels."*
 - *"An impressionistic oil painting of a vase of sunflowers in the style of Van Gogh, 4:3 aspect ratio, golden hour lighting."*
 - *"A cyberpunk cityscape at night, neon lighting, rain-slicked streets, wide shot, 16:9 aspect ratio, detailed, volumetric lighting, in the style of Syd Mead, --no flying cars."*
 - *"A minimalist logo for a coffee shop, incorporating a stylized coffee bean, 1:1 aspect ratio, black and white, no text."*
 - *"A cartoon image of a playful puppy with large eyes, in the style of classic Disney animation, simple background, square image."*
 - *"Concept art of a fantasy forest with giant, glowing mushrooms, bioluminescent plants, and a hidden pathway, wide-angle lens, volumetric lighting, detailed, 16:9 aspect ratio."*
 - *"A stylized illustration of a futuristic city with clean lines and bold, complementary colors, isometric view, no people."*
 - *"A ukiyo-e print of Mount Fuji with cherry blossoms in the foreground, 4:3 aspect ratio, detailed, --no people."*
 - *"Create a series of 5 images that, when viewed sequentially, show a cat leaping from a table. Each image should depict a slightly different stage of the jump, suitable for creating a simple animation."*
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9. Pro Tips:

- **Iterate:** Don't settle for the first result. Refine your prompt and generate variations.
- **Experiment Relentlessly:** Try unexpected combinations of styles, techniques, and keywords. AI image generation is about discovery!
- **Be Specific:** The more detail you provide, the better the AI can understand your vision.
- **Combine Techniques:** Use a mix of **art styles, lighting, composition**, and other elements to create unique and compelling images.
- **Use Seed Values (if available):** For consistent results and controlled variations, use the same seed value with slightly modified prompts.
- **Cultural Nuance:** Be aware of the cultural context of symbols and styles to avoid unintentional appropriation or misrepresentation.
- **Ethical Use:** If using AI-generated images commercially or publicly, consider disclosing it to build trust.
- **Keep Learning:** New features and techniques are constantly being developed. Stay curious!

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