

Simplest Guide to Effective Prompt Design

Prompt engineering is an essential skill for obtaining optimal results from AI models. Here is the simplest, clearest advice to help you get started quickly and efficiently.

1. Start Simple and Iterate

Begin with straightforward prompts. Gradually add complexity or additional context, and experiment regularly. AI playgrounds like those from OpenAI or Cohere are ideal for practicing.

Example of iteration:

- Initial Prompt: "Summarize this text."
- Improved Prompt: "Summarize this text into three concise bullet points."

2. Clearly State Instructions

Always give direct instructions at the beginning of your prompt. Use clear separators like `###` or triple quotes `"""` to distinguish between instructions and context.

Example:

```
### Instruction ###
Translate the following sentence into French:

Text: "Good morning!"

Output:
Bonjour!
```

3. Be Specific and Detailed

Specific prompts yield clearer, more accurate responses. Clearly articulate your desired outcome, style, length, or format.

General vs Specific Example:

- General Prompt: "Write about OpenAI."
- Specific Prompt: "Write a brief, inspiring paragraph about OpenAI's latest innovation, DALL-E, in a conversational tone."

4. Provide Examples for Output Formats

Illustrate exactly what you want the output to look like using examples within your prompt.

Example:

```
Extract company and person names from this text.
Desired format:
Company Names: Google, OpenAI
People Names: Sundar Pichai, Sam Altman

Text: {Your Text Here}
```

5. Avoid Negative Instructions

Rather than stating what the model should not do, clearly specify what it should do.

Less Effective: "Do NOT ask users for their personal information."

More Effective: "Only recommend movies from the top global trending list. If no recommendation is available, say: 'Sorry, couldn't find a movie to recommend today.'"

6. Move from Simple to Complex (Zero-shot to Few-shot)

Initially, try zero-shot prompts (no examples provided). If results aren't ideal, introduce few-shot prompts (giving examples). If you still need better precision, consider fine-tuning.

Zero-shot Example:

```
Extract keywords from the following text:  
Text: {Your Text Here}
```

Few-shot Example:

```
Extract keywords from the corresponding texts below.  
  
Text 1: "OpenAI develops powerful AI models."  
Keywords 1: OpenAI, AI models  
##  
Text 2: {Your Text Here}  
Keywords 2:
```

7. Reduce Fluff

Avoid vague or overly descriptive language.

Less Effective: "Describe this product briefly and clearly."

More Effective: "Describe this product in 2-3 concise sentences."

8. Leverage "Leading Words" for Code Generation

When prompting for code, use words like "import" for Python or "SELECT" for SQL to guide the model clearly toward the desired output.

Example for Python:

```
# Write a Python function converting miles to kilometers  
import
```

Conclusion

Prompt engineering is iterative and experimental. Keep instructions clear, specific, and straightforward. Use examples to guide output formatting, avoid negative instructions, and continually refine your prompts to achieve the best results.