A Guide to Writing Prompts for Microsoft Copilot

The quality of the response you get from Copilot is directly related to the quality of your prompt. A well-crafted prompt gives Copilot the information it needs to provide a useful, tailored, and accurate response. Think of it as a conversation with a smart assistant; the more details you provide, the better it can help you.

In the context of writing effective prompts for an AI like Microsoft Copilot, the "Goal, Context, Expectation, and Source" framework is a powerful method for providing the AI with all the necessary information to generate a high-quality, tailored response.

Here is a breakdown of each component:

1. The Goal

- **What it is:** This is the primary task you want the AI to accomplish. It defines the core action or purpose of your request.

- **Why it's important:** It tells the AI exactly what you want to achieve. A clear goal prevents the AI from providing a general or irrelevant response.

- **Example:** "Write a press release." (This is a clear goal.)

2. The Context

- **What it is:** This is the background information and reasoning behind your request. It helps the AI understand the purpose and significance of the task.

- **Why it's important:** Context allows the AI to make more informed decisions about the content, tone, and focus of its output. It tells the AI "why" you are asking for something.

- **Example:** "The press release is to announce our company's new partnership with a non-profit organization focused on environmental sustainability. This is a major corporate social responsibility initiative."

3. The Source

- **What it is:** This is the specific data or documents the AI should reference to inform its response. This is particularly useful in Copilot, which can ground its responses in your company's data.

- **Why it's important:** Providing a source ensures the AI's response is accurate, factually correct, and consistent with your specific information. It prevents the AI from making up information or using generic data.

- **Example:** "Please use the key details from the 'Partnership Agreement Q2 2025' document to get the correct names, dates, and mission statements."

4. The Expectation

- **What it is:** This defines the specific requirements for the final output. It covers the format, tone, length, and any other structural or stylistic details.

- **Why it's important:** It ensures the AI's response meets your exact needs, minimizing the need for extensive edits and revisions. It tells the AI "how" you want the response to look and feel.

- **Example:** "The press release should be professional and inspiring. It must be no more than 400 words and should include a quote from our CEO and a quote from the non-profit's director. It should be formatted with a clear headline and subheadings."

By combining all four elements, you create a complete and effective prompt:

Combined Prompt: "Write a press release to announce our company's new partnership with a non-profit organization focused on environmental sustainability. The press release should be professional and inspiring, no more than 400 words, and include a quote from our CEO and a quote from the non-profit's director. Please use the key details from the 'Partnership Agreement Q2 2025' document to ensure all facts are accurate."

Tips for Getting the Best Results

Writing an effective prompt is the key to getting the best possible results from an AI like Microsoft Copilot. A well-crafted prompt gives the AI clear instructions, context, and constraints, ensuring a relevant and high-quality response.

Here are the best practices for writing prompts, combining a core framework with additional tips for success.

1. Use the "G–C–S–E" Framework

This is the foundational model for every great prompt. Ensure you include these four elements whenever possible.

- **Goal:** State the primary task you want the AI to accomplish. **(e.g., "Write a blog post…")**

- **Context:** Provide the background information. **(…for an internal company newsletter about our new work policy.")**

- **Source:** Direct the AI to a specific document or data set to reference. **("…Please use the attached PDF 'Hybrid Work Policy 2024' as a source.")**

- **Expectation:** Define the format, tone, and specific requirements for the output. **(…The tone should be encouraging and professional, no more than 500 words, and structured with an intro, three main points, and a conclusion.")**

2. Be Specific and Detailed

Vague prompts lead to vague answers. The more specific you are, the better the AI can tailor its response. Avoid open-ended requests that lack clear direction.

- **Instead of:** "Write about customer service."

- **Try:** "Write a 300-word article on how to handle difficult customer service calls, focusing on active listening and de-escalation techniques. The audience is new call center employees."

3. Use Positive Instructions

Tell the AI what "to do" rather than what "not to do." This is more effective as it gives the AI a clear path to follow.

- **Instead of:** "Do not mention our competitors in the press release."
- **Try:** "Focus the press release exclusively on our product's unique features."

4. Break Down Complex Tasks

For multi-step or highly complex requests, it's often more effective to use a series of prompts. Start with a broad request and then refine the output with follow-up prompts.

- **Step 1:** "Generate an outline for a sales training manual on objection handling."
- **Step 2:** "Expand the section on 'common objections' and provide three example scripts for each."
- **Step 3:** "Rewrite the introduction to be more inspiring and motivational."

5. Specify a Persona or Role

Assigning a persona to the AI helps it adopt the appropriate voice and perspective for the task.

- **Instead of:** "Explain a new marketing strategy."
- **Try:** "Act as a senior marketing director and explain the new product launch strategy to a team of junior managers."

6. Provide Examples

If you have a specific style or format in mind, include an example in your prompt. This gives the AI a template to follow.

- **Prompt:** "Write a product description for our new laptop. Here is an example of the style I like: 'The new Stellar-X drone is sleek, powerful, and ready for adventure. Capture stunning aerial footage with its 4K camera and fly for up to 30 minutes on a single charge.'"

7. Iterate and Refine

The first response may not be perfect. Use a conversational approach to refine the output. Think of it as a collaboration.

- "This is a good start, but can you make the tone more formal?"

- "Expand on the second bullet point and provide more detail."

- "Please shorten this paragraph to two sentences."