# **Prompt Poetry**

# Transforming Questions for Deeper Insights

## 

## **Introduction**

Welcome to Poetic Prompting! This lesson focuses on transforming how we frame questions to AI systems to access deeper insights and patterns that standard approaches often miss. Don't worry - we're not trying to make our prompts sound like flowery verse or get AI to write poetry. Instead, we're borrowing powerful structural techniques from poetry to reveal connections, tensions, and dynamics that conventional questions can't access.

First let me hit you with the headline:

**Prompt Engineering** gives you the **“what”** and **“how much”**

**Prompt Poetry** gives you the **“why”** and **“now, so what”**

## **Key Concepts**

### **What Makes Poetic Prompting Different?**

Poetic prompting isn't about style - it's about substance. It's about employing specific language devices with LLMs that help us see connections, tensions and patterns that more direct questioning often misses. These techniques have been refined by poets over centuries to access deeper meaning, and they work remarkably well when applied to business challenges.

### **The Technical Foundation: Why LLMs Respond to Poetic Approaches**

To understand why poetic prompting works so effectively, it helps to understand how large language models (LLMs) actually function:

**LLMs as Pattern-Recognition Machines**

At their core, LLMs are massive pattern-recognition systems trained on billions of examples of human text. Unlike traditional computing systems that follow explicit rules, these models learn to detect and reproduce patterns in language.

Here's why this matters for poetic prompting:

1. **LLMs Learn from Real Human Communication**
   * These systems are trained on vast amounts of human writing—including literature, conversations, social media, and forums
   * This means they've absorbed countless examples of how humans naturally express emotions, describe experiences, and make meaning through metaphor
   * They've seen how people talk when they're being honest and authentic versus when they're being formal or technical
2. **The Power of Association Networks**
   * LLMs don't store facts in databases—they store complex webs of associations
   * When you use metaphoric or sensory language, you activate different parts of this association network than when you use literal, analytical language
   * Poetic language triggers rich, emotional, experiential associations that literal questioning simply doesn't access
3. **Accessing Implicit Knowledge**
   * LLMs have ingested millions of examples of human emotional experiences, cultural narratives, and psychological patterns
   * Standard prompting often only accesses explicit information
   * Poetic prompting activates this implicit knowledge about how humans actually feel and behave

**In Simple Terms:** When you ask a direct, analytical question, you get content from the model's "professional report writing" patterns. When you use poetic prompting, you activate the model's "human emotional experience" patterns—accessing the rich emotional knowledge embedded in the training data.

It's like the difference between asking someone for facts versus inviting them to tell you a story. The story will contain the facts, but also reveal the emotional context, tensions, and meaning that the facts alone would miss.

## **The Psychology Behind Poetic Prompting: Why It Works**

### **Accessing the True Drivers of Human Behavior**

Traditional "prompt engineering" often fails to generate deep insights because it operates primarily on a rational, logical level. But humans aren't primarily rational beings—we're emotional, sensory, and intuitive creatures who rationalize after the fact.

**Stop Being Data-Driven, Start Being Emotion-Driven**

We're in a data-driven world, but here's a fundamental truth that's often overlooked:

**All data is created by people's actions, and people are emotional beings.**

Think about it—every click, purchase, and action a customer takes is driven by a feeling:

* Fear of missing out
* Desire for status
* Joy in finding a solution
* Trust in a brand

**Data is simply a byproduct of these emotions.**

So why are we so obsessed with analyzing data, when what we should really be analyzing is the emotion behind the data?

* Data can tell you what happened, but it can't tell you why it happened
* Emotions drive behavior, and if you understand the emotions, you can predict what your customers will do next

**The CFTAR Model: Cause and Effect in Human Experience**

The CFTAR model (Circumstances → Feelings → Thoughts → Actions → Results) provides a powerful framework for understanding why poetic prompting works so effectively:

1. **Circumstances** - The environment and context we experience
2. **Feelings** - The emotions and sensations these circumstances trigger
3. **Thoughts** - The interpretations and narratives we create about our feelings
4. **Actions** - The behaviors we undertake based on our thoughts and feelings
5. **Results** - The outcomes of our actions

**The Critical Insight:** Most prompts and business questioning focuses only on the visible parts of this chain: Thoughts, Actions, and Results (the effects). But the true drivers—Circumstances and Feelings (the causes)—remain hidden.

**Poetic prompting works because it accesses the full CFTAR chain, particularly the often-ignored Circumstances and Feelings that drive everything else.**

### **The Heart-Gut-Head Connection**

Humans process experience through three centers:

* **Heart** (Emotional Intelligence) - Our feelings, values, and connections
* **Gut** (Instinctual Intelligence) - Our intuitions, physical sensations, and survival instincts
* **Head** (Analytical Intelligence) - Our logical analysis and rational thinking

Research in neuroscience and behavioral economics (from experts like Antonio Damasio and Daniel Kahneman) confirms that our decisions are primarily driven by emotion (heart) and instinct (gut), with logic (head) often serving to rationalize choices we've already made emotionally.

**Traditional prompt engineering speaks primarily to the head.**

**Poetic prompting engages the heart and gut—the true drivers of human decision-making.**

### **The Poet's Insight: Emotion as Truth**

Poets have long understood what neuroscience is now confirming: emotional truth is foundational to human experience. Poetry uses specific devices not for decorative purposes but to access emotional realities that logical language cannot reach.

When we apply these techniques to business questions, we're not making our inquiries more artistic—we're making them more accurate by accessing the emotional and sensory dimensions that drive behavior.

## **Four Key Poetic Techniques**

### **1. Metaphoric Thinking**

**What It Is:** Using metaphors to create frameworks that reveal relationships and dynamics.

**Standard Question:** "What are the main reasons users cancel their Headspace subscriptions?"

**Metaphoric Reframing:** "Examine the relationship between Headspace users and their meditation practice as a journey with various stages. Where along this journey do users lose their way? What initially promised pathways become dead ends? What bridges are missing between initial enthusiasm and sustained practice?"

**OR**

"Consider the Headspace experience as a relationship between the user and their mindfulness practice. Where does this relationship begin to strain? What unspoken expectations create disappointment? At what point does commitment waver? And what conversations aren't happening that might renew it?"

**The Difference:** Instead of getting a list of isolated problems, you get a rich mapping of the entire relational dynamic. You might discover how initial expectations set up later disappointment, how small frustrations accumulate into major dissatisfaction, or how the burden of maintenance falls unequally on the customer.

### **2. Symbolic Thinking**

**What It Is:** Accessing deeper emotional and cultural currents by identifying moments and interactions that carry symbolic weight.

**Standard Question:** "How do customers feel about Headspace's onboarding process?"

**Symbolic Reframing:** "What moments in the Headspace experience carry disproportionate emotional weight? What represents progress or accomplishment to a user? What signals to them that they're doing it right or doing it wrong? What interactions, however brief, might shape their entire perception of meditation's value?"

**The Difference:** This approach identifies pivotal moments and meanings that might not be explicitly stated in your data but powerfully shape how people experience your product. You discover the symbolic touchpoints that define the relationship.

### **3. Sensory Awareness**

**What It Is:** Accessing the embodied, physical experience of using products or services rather than just their technical or functional aspects.

**Standard Question:** "What aspects of the Headspace app design might be confusing to users?"

**Sensory Reframing:** "What creates cognitive friction in the Headspace experience? Where do users feel resistance or dissonance? What aspects feel jarring rather than soothing? How does the physical environment of the user interact with the audio guidance?"

**The Difference:** This approach reveals usability issues that more technical prompts miss because it taps into the physical, intuitive ways people experience digital products. It helps you understand the embodied experience, not just the functional one.

### **4. Exploring Absence and Silence**

**What It Is:** Paying attention to what's not said, not addressed, or missing from the conversation.

**Standard Question:** "What features do Headspace users want that we don't currently offer?"

**Absence Reframing:** "What's conspicuously absent from how Headspace users describe their experience? What do they never mention that we might expect them to? What aspects of meditation practice remain unaddressed by the app? What conversations about mindfulness happen outside the app that aren't supported within it?"

**The Difference:** This approach reveals overlooked opportunities and blind spots by focusing on patterns in what's missing rather than what's present. It helps identify gaps that users themselves might not explicitly request because they don't realize alternatives are possible.

## **Practical Applications Across Business Functions**

### **For Customer Retention Analysis**

**Instead of:** "What are the main reasons users stop using Headspace after the free trial?"

**Try:** "What tensions exist between what new meditators initially hope for and what they experience in their first weeks? Where does the relationship between the user and their practice begin to fray? What remains unspoken in the transition from trial to paid subscription?"

### **For Product Development**

**Instead of:** "What new meditation content should Headspace prioritize?"

**Try:** "What contradictions exist in how users engage with Headspace's meditation content? What do they say they want versus what their behavior suggests they need? What patterns emerge in the spaces between their explicit requests and their actual usage patterns?"

### **For Market Positioning**

**Instead of:** "How should Headspace differentiate from competitors like Calm?"

**Try:** "What unstated assumptions are shaping the meditation app conversation? What perspective remains missing from how competitors approach mindfulness? What truth about the meditation journey has yet to be acknowledged in the market?"

## **Side-by-Side Comparison: Standard vs. Poetic Prompts**

### **Standard Prompt:**

"What are the main factors affecting user engagement with Headspace's meditation content?"

**Typical Response:**

* Session length preferences
* Narrator voice quality
* Meditation type variety
* Time of day used
* Streaks/gamification features

### **Poetic Prompt:**

"What contradictions exist in how people approach their meditation practice through Headspace? Where do aspiration and reality collide? What tensions exist between mindfulness as an experience and mindfulness as an achievement? What remains unspoken in how users measure progress?"

**Potential Insights:**

* How users simultaneously crave both structure and freedom in their practice
* How achievement-oriented features can paradoxically create mindfulness-reducing anxiety
* How the solitary nature of the practice conflicts with human needs for connection
* How users struggle to reconcile traditional meditation values of non-judgment with their desire for measurable improvement

## **Creating Your Own Poetic Prompts**

### **Step 1: Identify Your Core Question**

Start with the business question you're trying to answer. Be clear about what you're trying to understand.

### **Step 2: Choose a Poetic Technique**

Select one or more of the techniques we've explored:

* Metaphoric thinking
* Symbolic thinking
* Sensory awareness
* Exploring absence

### **Step 3: Apply the Technique**

Transform your question using the technique. Consider:

* What metaphors might reframe this challenge?
* What symbolic meanings might be at play?
* What sensory experiences shape this interaction?
* What might be missing from the conversation?

### **Step 4: Test and Refine**

Try your poetic prompt and see what insights it generates. Refine based on the results.

## **Exercise: Transform These Questions**

Take these standard business questions and transform them using poetic techniques:

1. "What features should we add to our product?"
2. "Why are customers choosing our competitors?"
3. "How can we improve our customer service?"
4. "What content performs best on our social media?"
5. "How should we price our new service?"

## **Benefits of the Poetic Approach**

1. **Reveals systems and patterns, not just symptoms** Traditional approaches often identify isolated issues. Poetic approaches reveal the underlying systems, relationships, and patterns that connect these issues.
2. **Accessing emotional and cultural dimensions** Business isn't just logical - it's emotional, cultural, and psychological. Poetic approaches access these crucial dimensions that drive behavior.
3. **Uncovers unspoken needs and opportunities** By exploring what's not said and examining tensions, poetic approaches reveal opportunities that customers themselves might not explicitly request.
4. **Generates actionable yet nuanced insights** These approaches don't result in vague, abstract outputs. They generate concrete, actionable revelations about customer dynamics that standard prompts would likely miss.

## **Common Misconceptions**

1. **"This approach is too flowery or abstract for business."** Not true! The outputs remain completely business-relevant. Your stakeholders wouldn't look at these insights and think they're too abstract; they'd think they're surprisingly perceptive and useful.
2. **"We need data, not poetry."** This approach doesn't replace data analysis; it complements it. Data and prompt engineering tells you what is happening; poetic prompting helps you understand why it's happening and what it means.
3. **"This won't generate practical insights."** Actually, poetic prompting often generates more practical insights because it reveals the deeper dynamics driving behavior, leading to more effective strategies.

## **Key Takeaways**

1. **It's about perception, not decoration.** We're not using poetic techniques to make our prompts sound artistic. We're using them because they're sophisticated tools for accessing dimensions of understanding that more straightforward approaches often miss.
2. **It changes the questions you ask, not just the answers you get.** The beauty of the poetry layer is that it doesn't just change the answers you get; it changes the questions you think to ask. It expands what's explorable and addressable.
3. **It remains firmly grounded in business reality.** These approaches aren't taking you away from business realities; they're helping you see those realities more clearly and completely.
4. **It creates a competitive advantage.** In a competitive landscape, seeing what others miss is perhaps the greatest advantage there is.

## **Practice Assignment**

1. Choose a business or research question you're currently working with
2. Analyze where in the CFTAR model your current approach is focused
3. Craft at least four different poetic prompts, each designed to access the circumstances and feelings behind your challenge
4. Test them with an AI system and compare the results
5. Identify which technique(s) generated the most valuable insights for your specific challenge
6. Refine your favorite approach and incorporate it into your regular workflow

**"Poetic prompting isn't about making business more artistic; it's about making it more accurately human. Stop being data-driven. It's emotions, not data, that will drive business success."**

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# **Appendix**

# **🎭 25 Advanced Poetic Prompting Techniques**

## **Metaphor Techniques**

### **Journey Story**

**What it does:** Reframes experiences as meaningful journeys with stages, obstacles, and destinations

**Example:** "Imagine the customer's relationship with our product as a journey. What terrain do they cross? Where are the difficult passages? What vistas provide motivation to continue? Where might they lose their way, and what would guide them back to the path?"

### **Relationship Lens**

**What it does:** Explores experiences through the lens of human relationships and their dynamics

**Example:** "Consider our brand and customer as people in a long-term relationship. What unspoken expectations exist on both sides? Where are moments of connection and disconnection? What conversations aren't happening that should be? What would relationship counseling reveal about patterns of misunderstanding?"

### **Natural Elements**

**What it does:** Uses natural elements (water, fire, earth, air) to explore different aspects of experience

**Example:** "If our customer experience were water, where does it flow smoothly and where does it encounter obstacles? Where might it freeze or evaporate? How does it transform objects it touches? What sediment might it carry from previous interactions?"

### **Building Spaces**

**What it does:** Reimagines concepts as physical spaces to explore their structure and experience

**Example:** "Imagine our digital platform as a physical building. What's in the entryway that welcomes visitors? Where are the rooms difficult to navigate? What spaces feel cramped or expansive? Where might secret passages or locked doors exist? What views do the windows provide?"

### **Living Ecosystem**

**What it does:** Explores interconnections by viewing challenges as living ecosystems **Example:** "Consider our market as an ecosystem. What species (customer types) are thriving and which are endangered? What symbiotic relationships exist? What invasive elements have entered recently? What subtle changes in climate (cultural trends) are beginning to affect the system's balance?"

## **Tension Techniques**

### **Finding Contradictions**

**What it does:** Identifies and explores seemingly contradictory needs or desires

**Example:** "What contradictions exist in how customers approach our category? Where do they simultaneously want opposing things? What tensions exist between their stated values and actual behaviors? How might these contradictions reveal deeper truths about their needs?"

### **Challenging Questions**

**What it does:** Poses questions that seem impossible to answer directly, forcing lateral thinking

**Example:** "How might our product be both completely invisible and impossible to ignore? How could we become both more exclusive and more accessible? What would it mean to be both completely familiar and entirely novel?"

### **Opposing Desires**

**What it does:** Explores the dynamic tension between opposing desires

**Example:** "What is the relationship between our customers' desire for belonging and their desire for individuality? How do these opposing pulls create tension in how they engage with our brand? Where might a third way exist that honors both needs simultaneously?"

### **Blurring Boundaries**

**What it does:** Intentionally blurs categorical boundaries to reveal new possibilities

**Example:** "What if the boundary between consumer and creator in our category became completely permeable? What if our product and its packaging were indistinguishable? What if the distinction between our brand and our community disappeared entirely?"

### **Unexpected Outcomes**

**What it does:** Explores scenarios where intended outcomes create their opposite

**Example:** "Where might our efforts to simplify actually create complexity for customers? How could our sustainability initiatives inadvertently increase environmental impact? When might increased choice lead to decreased satisfaction?"

## **Sensory Techniques**

### **Sensory Translation**

**What it does:** Translates experiences across sensory modalities to reveal overlooked dimensions

**Example:** "If our customer interface were music, what would be its rhythm, melody, and harmony? Where would dissonance occur? What instruments would it feature? How might its sonic landscape reveal aspects of the experience words couldn't capture?"

### **Body Awareness**

**What it does:** Accesses embodied, tacit knowledge through physical metaphors

**Example:** "Where in their bodies do customers feel tension when using our service? What gestures naturally emerge during different stages of interaction? What physical memories might be triggered? How does the body know things about the experience that the mind doesn't articulate?"

### **Cross-Sensory Experience**

**What it does:** Intentionally crosses sensory modalities to reveal new dimensions

**Example:** "What is the taste of our brand identity? What color is our customer service? What texture is our online checkout process? What sounds accompany our packaging? What scent represents our loyalty program?"

### **Physical Surroundings**

**What it does:** Explores how physical environments shape perceptions and behaviors

**Example:** "How does the physical environment where customers typically use our product affect their experience? What atmospheric elements (lighting, sound, temperature, space) shape their feelings? What environmental contexts create friction or flow in the experience?"

### **Physical Reactions**

**What it does:** Charts emotional experiences through their physical manifestations

**Example:** "Map the physical sensations users experience throughout their journey with our product. Where do they feel openness or constriction? When do they lean in or pull back? What gestures accompany moments of delight or frustration? What physical states precede abandonment or deeper engagement?"

## **Absence Techniques**

### **What's Missing**

**What it does:** Explores what's missing or absent to reveal overlooked opportunities

**Example:** "What's conspicuously absent from how customers describe their experiences with our category? What's never mentioned in reviews that you might expect to be discussed? What remains unaddressed in our communications that might be significant?"

### **Unspoken Topics**

**What it does:** Examines subjects customers and companies avoid discussing

**Example:** "What conversations about our product category are customers reluctant to have? What aspects of the experience might be too uncomfortable, embarrassing, or vulnerable to discuss openly? What truth about the category remains unspoken but widely understood?"

### **Meaningful Silence**

**What it does:** Focuses on moments of silence or hesitation to uncover deeper meaning

**Example:** "When do customers fall silent or hesitate when discussing our products? What pauses in the conversation might contain important information? What questions do they seem reluctant to answer directly? What might these silences tell us that words don't?"

### **Hidden Work**

**What it does:** Uncovers unacknowledged work users perform to make products successful

**Example:** "What invisible labor do customers perform to make our product work for them that we never acknowledge? What adaptations, workarounds, or supporting activities enable the experience that remain hidden from our view? What effort do we take for granted?"

### **Forgotten Ideas**

**What it does:** Explores discarded or rejected ideas that might contain overlooked value

**Example:** "What approaches to this challenge has our industry attempted and abandoned? What solutions were tried briefly but discarded too quickly? What older ideas might deserve reconsideration in our current context? What paths were left unexplored for reasons that might no longer apply?"

## **Symbol and Culture Techniques**

### **Everyday Rituals**

**What it does:** Examines behaviors as meaningful rituals to uncover their symbolic significance

**Example:** "What rituals do customers perform around our product or service? What specific sequences of actions have symbolic importance beyond their practical function? What emotional states do these rituals produce? What deeper needs might these rituals fulfill?"

### **Meaningful Objects**

**What it does:** Focuses on objects with emotional significance beyond their utility

**Example:** "What objects within our customer experience carry disproportionate emotional weight? Which elements serve as symbols of status, belonging, accomplishment, or identity? What unexpected attachments do users form with seemingly mundane aspects of the experience?"

### **Story Patterns**

**What it does:** Applies classic narrative frameworks to reveal deeper patterns

**Example:** "If your customer's experience were a hero's journey, what would be the call to adventure? Who are the mentors, threshold guardians, and allies they encounter? What ordeal must they overcome? What elixir do they ultimately seek? What transformation occurs through this journey?"

### **Cultural Meanings**

**What it does:** Decodes implicit cultural meanings embedded in experiences

**Example:** "What cultural codes are embedded in our product design and communication? What unstated social rules, values, or assumptions might be invisible to us but significant to different user groups? How might these codes create belonging for some while excluding others?"

### **Character Types**

**What it does:** Uses universal character types to explore deeper motivations

**Example:** "What archetypal figures might represent different customer segments in relation to our product? The Hero? The Caregiver? The Explorer? The Sage? What deeper psychological needs and motivations does each archetype reveal about how different users engage with our offering?"

## **Master Poetic Prompting Template**

Use this template to generate customized poetic prompts for your specific business challenges. Fill in the sections below with your information to create prompts designed to access deeper emotional and experiential insights.

****I need to explore deeper human truths behind my business challenge using poetic prompting techniques.

Poetic prompting uses metaphor, sensory awareness, tension exploration, and attention to absence to reveal dimensions of human experience that direct questioning often misses. This isn't about flowery language—it's about accessing the emotional and experiential truth that drives behavior.

Examples of effective poetic prompts include:

"Imagine the customer's relationship with our product as a journey. What terrain do they cross? Where are the difficult passages? What vistas provide motivation to continue?"

"What contradictions exist in how customers approach our category? Where do they simultaneously want opposing things? What tensions exist between their stated values and actual behaviors?"

"What's conspicuously absent from how customers describe their experiences with our category? What's never mentioned in reviews that you might expect to be discussed?"

Please generate strategic poetic prompts based on the following information:

Business Context

[REPLACE WITH: Brief description of your industry, company, product/service, and target market. Include any relevant data points, emotional contexts, or experiential challenges]

Core Question

[REPLACE WITH: Specific question or challenge you're trying to understand at a deeper level. What emotional or experiential truth are you seeking?]

Current Understanding

[REPLACE WITH: What you currently know about the emotional or experiential dimensions of this challenge. What patterns have you already observed?]

Observed Tensions

[REPLACE WITH: Any contradictions, paradoxes, or tensions you've noticed in how people engage with your product/service/category]

Based on this information, please generate different poetic prompts across these categories:

Metaphoric framing (journey, relationship, element, space)

Tension and paradox exploration

Sensory and embodied experience

Absence and silence investigation

Symbol and cultural examination

For each prompt:

Make it specific to my business context and challenge

Focus on accessing emotional and experiential truths

Avoid technical or analytical framing

Encourage revelation rather than reporting

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### **Example Filled Out:**

I need to explore deeper human truths behind my business challenge using poetic prompting techniques.

### **Business Context**

We provide a meditation app targeting busy professionals who struggle with stress and sleep issues. Our users are primarily urban dwellers aged 28-45 who want to improve their wellbeing but struggle to maintain consistent practice. Our app offers guided meditations ranging from 5-30 minutes, sleep stories, and mindfulness exercises. While our initial download rates are strong, we see significant drop-off after 2-3 weeks of usage.

### **Core Question**

We want to understand the deeper emotional journey of meditation app users, particularly the gap between initial enthusiasm and the "practice plateau" where engagement often drops. What unspoken experiences, feelings, and tensions might explain why people abandon their meditation practice despite knowing its benefits?

### **Current Understanding**

We know users initially feel optimistic and motivated when downloading the app. Our surveys show they expect to feel calmer, more focused, and sleep better. Many report initial positive experiences but struggle with consistency. Exit surveys cite "lack of time" as the primary reason for discontinuing use, but we suspect deeper emotional factors may be at play.

### **Observed Tensions**

We've noticed users seem to approach meditation both as a productivity tool and as an escape from productivity pressure. They want measurable results but also know meditation is about being present without goals. They seek guidance but also want to feel self-sufficient. They want quick fixes but know meaningful change takes time.

Based on this information, please generate different poetic prompts that would help us access deeper insights about our users' emotional experience with meditation practice and our app.