Crafting effective and detailed image prompts

Created by Daniel Zaldaña
https://x.com/ZaldanaDaniel

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Introduction: Why Prompt Crafting Matters

Text-to-image models rely heavily on the quality of their prompts. A well-crafted prompt can mean the difference between a generic, lackluster image and a stunning, highly specific visual. By learning how to detail concepts, specify styles, and guide the model with the right textual cues, you gain more control over the images produced—just like a skilled painter who chooses the perfect palette and brushstroke technique for each piece.

1 Prompt Basics

1.1 Key Components of a Prompt

- **Subject:** The main focus of your image
  Example: *"a red bicycle"*

- **Context/Environment:** Where and how the subject is placed
  Example: *"parked by a cobblestone street"*

- **Details/Attributes:** Specific characteristics to emphasize
  Example: *"with worn leather seat, in soft morning light"*

- **Artistic/Stylistic Notes:** Style, medium, or artistic influence
  Example: *"oil painting, in the style of Claude Monet"*

- **Additional Guidance:** Lighting, camera angles, mood, or color palettes

1.2 A Simple Prompt Structure

[Subject] + [Environment/Context] + [Details/Attributes] + [Style/Medium/Influence] + [Additional Guidance]

Example Prompt

"A young woman wearing a red dress, standing in a wheat field at sunset, with wind gently blowing her hair, painted in the style of 19th-century Impressionism."

2 From Vague to Detailed Prompts

2.1 Step-by-Step Enhancement

1. Base: *"A cat sitting in a garden."*

2. Add subject detail: *"A fluffy orange tabby cat sitting in a lush, flower-filled garden."*

3. Add environment: *"A fluffy orange tabby cat sitting in a lush, flower-filled garden at dawn."*

4. Add atmosphere: *"A fluffy orange tabby cat sitting in a lush, flower-filled garden at dawn, soft rays of morning light illuminating dewy petals."*

5. Add style: *"A fluffy orange tabby cat sitting in a lush, flower-filled garden at dawn, soft rays of morning light illuminating dewy petals, in the style of a watercolor painting."*

3 Specifying Artistic Styles and Mediums

3.1 Common Styles and Mediums

Painting Styles: Impressionist, Surrealist, Cubist, Photorealistic, Oil painting, Watercolor, Acrylic, Ink drawing
Influences: Vincent van Gogh, Frida Kahlo, Art Nouveau, Pop Art, Bauhaus
Modern Digital: 3D render, vector illustration, isometric pixel art, matte painting, concept art

Example Prompt

"A portrait of a noblewoman, with intricate lace clothing and a warm smile, in the style of a Dutch Golden Age oil painting."
"A futuristic cityscape, towering glass spires reflecting neon lights, in a cyberpunk concept art style."
"A magical forest scene, gnarled trees and glowing mushrooms, illustrated as a detailed ink drawing with subtle watercolor washes."

4 Controlling Lighting and Mood

4.1 Lighting Types

- **Natural Lighting:** Sunrise, sunset, twilight, overcast, moonlit night

- **Artificial Lighting:** Neon lights, candlelight, lamplight, studio lighting

- **Directional Lighting:** Backlit, sidelighted, spotlight

4.2 Mood and Atmosphere

Emotional Mood: Mysterious, serene, haunting, joyful, melancholic
Color Palettes: Pastel tones, vivid primaries, muted earth tones, monochrome, duotone

Example Prompt

"A wooden cabin in a dense forest, bathed in dappled sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating a calm and serene atmosphere."
"A violinist performing on a city street corner, illuminated by a single, warm streetlamp on a quiet, misty night."

5 Camera Angles, Perspectives, and Composition

5.1 Common Perspectives

- **Close-up:** Focus on a face, object detail, or texture

- **Medium Shot:** Subject and partial environment

- **Wide Shot:** Subject in a larger environment, landscape, or cityscape

- **Low Angle:** Looking up at the subject, making it appear grand or imposing

- **High Angle:** Looking down on the subject, making it appear smaller or more vulnerable

5.2 Composition Keywords

- **Rule of Thirds:** Balanced framing

- **Symmetrical Composition:** Perfectly centered and balanced

- **Leading Lines:** Elements that guide the viewer's eye

- **Depth of Field:** Blurred background, sharp focus on the subject

Example Prompt

"A close-up portrait of an elderly man's face, every wrinkle visible, with soft window light from the left."
"A wide shot of a grand cathedral interior, the camera placed low to the ground, looking up at towering columns and stained-glass windows."

6 Working with Themes and Narratives

6.1 Story-Driven Prompts

Add narrative elements that suggest a story or character motivation. This helps produce images that feel more alive and meaningful.

Example Prompt

"A lone adventurer stands at the edge of a mossy cliff, overlooking a mist-shrouded valley where tiny villages glow with lanterns, as if anticipating a long journey ahead."
"A young scientist in a cluttered workshop, tinkering with an odd mechanical bird, surrounded by blueprints and old books, as if on the verge of a groundbreaking discovery."

6.2 Cultural and Historical Context

Example Prompt

"A street market in 14th-century Cairo, bustling with merchants, camels, and colorful spices, painted like an old manuscript illustration."
"A Victorian-era study room, dimly lit by gas lamps, stacked with leather-bound volumes, as if Sherlock Holmes himself might appear."

7 Beginners' Troubleshooting and Quick Tips

If Your Image is Too Generic

- Add more adjectives, specify details
- Mention an art style or medium
- Specify lighting or mood

If Your Image is Too Chaotic

- Simplify the scene; remove conflicting styles
- Limit the prompt to one main subject and environment
- Use more descriptive, coherent narrative flow

If Your Image Lacks Desired Style

- Be explicit: "in the style of a ukiyo-e woodblock print"
- Include well-known stylistic elements

8 Advanced Techniques

8.1 Using Reference Images

If your image generation tool allows, you can provide a reference image URL and then a textual prompt. Combine references with text for more precise outcomes.

Example Prompt

"As a continuation of this reference image, produce a snowy forest scene with similar color palettes and brushstroke textures."

8.2 Negative Prompts

Some advanced models allow specifying what you don't want:

Example Prompt

"A serene mountain lake at sunset (no boats, no people, no buildings)."

8.3   Multi-Concept Blending

Example Prompt

"A portrait of a regal lioness wearing a crown, in the style of Art Nouveau, combined with Renaissance portrait techniques, and lit by a single candle."

9   Working with Themes, Genres, and Special Effects

9.1   Fantasy and Sci-Fi

Example Prompt

"A steampunk airship floating above a Victorian-era city, gears and pipes visible, illuminated by the warm glow of lamplight."

9.2   Surreal and Conceptual Art

Invoke dreamlike or abstract terms: "impossible shapes," "floating islands," "upside-down trees," "melting clocks."

Example Prompt

"A deserted shoreline with giant, upside-down jellyfish hovering in the sky, painted in a surrealist style."

10   Putting It All Together – A Master Prompt Example

Goal: A stylized, story-rich image of a character in a specific environment, with detailed lighting, mood, and artistic influences.

Example Prompt

"A proud, silver-haired knight stands before the crumbling ruins of an ancient castle, dressed in intricately etched armor that catches the last rays of a golden sunset. Behind him, rolling green hills fade into distant purple mountains, and a gentle breeze stirs the tall grass at his feet. He holds his sword lightly at his side, as if at peace after a long journey. The scene is rendered in the style of a romantic oil painting, with warm, painterly brushstrokes and a soft, diffused glow that bathes the landscape in quiet majesty."