

The Prompt Cheat Sheet

Six techniques for a better ask. The difference between a weak prompt and a strong one is a few sentences.

1. Provide context

Say the scope, audience and timeframe. Detail in, detail out.

BEFORE

"Tell me about our market."

AFTER

"I run a 30-person recruitment firm in Manchester. Which three hiring-market shifts since 2024 should change our pricing? One example each."

2. Show examples of what good looks like

One or two examples teach the pattern faster than any description.

BEFORE

"Rewrite this in plain English."

AFTER

"Rewrite this policy update in the style of these two past comms: [ex 1], [ex 2]. Same warmth, same length: [text]."

3. Specify output constraints

Say the length, format, sections and tone. Pin down the shape.

BEFORE

"Write me a board update."

AFTER

"One-page investor update. Sections: Wins, Risks, Cash, Asks. 100 words each, bullets, honest but confident. No jargon."

4. Break complex tasks into steps

Numbered steps guide the thinking and stop it skipping the hard parts.

BEFORE

"Analyse this quarter's sales."

AFTER

"Analyse the attached sales export step by step: 1) top five products, 2) versus last quarter, 3) anything unusual, 4) three likely causes. Show your working."

5. Ask it to think first

Give it room to reason and you get a considered answer, not a reflex.

TRY

"Before answering, think through our costs, churn risk and competitor pricing separately. Then recommend one option, and tell me what would change your mind."

6. Define the AI's role

A role sets the tone, depth and audience in one line.

TRY

"You're a fractional CFO. Walk me, a non-financial founder, through this P&L: what's healthy, what's worrying, what to ask my accountant."

The secret weapon: ask the AI to help you ask

"I'm trying to get you, Claude, to help me with [goal]. I'm not sure how to phrase my request for the best results. Ask me what you need to know, then write the prompt for me."

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