

AI REFERENCE

The Prompt Engineering Cheatsheet

A one-page mental model for prompts that get you past the generic answer.

A one-page mental model for writing prompts that get you **one degree beyond** the generic answer. Works with Claude, ChatGPT, or anything else.

THE ANATOMY OF A STRONG PROMPT

- R** **Role**
Tell the model who to be. *"You are a staff engineer who values readability."*

- C** **Context**
Give it the situation and constraints it can't guess. The more specific, the better the output.

- T** **Task**
One clear ask. If you need five things, number them.

- F** **Format**
Say exactly how you want the answer: length, structure, tone, "as a table," "line-level notes only."

- E** **Examples**
Show one good example of what you want. Examples beat adjectives every time.

PATTERNS WORTH MEMORISING

- ①** **Ask before answering**
"Before you write anything, ask me the questions you need." Kills vague output instantly.

- ②** **Steelman / red-team**
"Argue the strongest case against this." Use it on every decision and draft.

- ③** **Rank, don't dump**
"Give me the top 3 ranked by likelihood/impact," not a wall of options.

- ④** **Constrain the scope**
"Don't rewrite – give before/after edits." Keeps your voice and your code intact.

- ⑤** **Make it teach you**
"Explain the 20% that covers 80%, and the 3 things people get wrong."

COMMON FIXES

- Output too generic?** Add a role + a real constraint. Generic in, generic out.
 - Too long / rambly?** Specify a word or bullet count and a format.
 - Missing your context?** Paste the actual code/copy/data — don't describe it.
 - Confidently wrong?** Ask for its reasoning and the one thing that would change its mind.
 - Lost your voice?** Ask for edits, not rewrites.
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THE ONE-DEGREE MOVE

Anyone can ask a question. The leverage is in the **follow-up** — “why,” “what did you miss,” “make it sharper.” Treat the first answer as a draft, never the deliverable.

Tip • Save prompts that work into a personal file. Your own tested library beats any list you download — including this one.

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