

25

The 25 Prompts Busy People Actually Use

Copy a prompt, fill in the parts in [square brackets], and paste it into ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or Copilot. The more real detail you add, the better the answer. Treat the first reply as a draft, then ask for changes in plain words, the way you would with a colleague.

More tips every week at aiblueprints.org

Email

1 Reply to a long email thread

You've been added to a thread with 20 messages and need to respond without reading it all twice.

Here's an email thread I need to reply to:

[paste the thread]

First, summarize in three bullets what's being asked of me specifically and any deadlines. Then draft a reply that answers each ask, in under 120 words, in a [friendly / neutral / formal] tone. If something in the thread is unclear or contradictory, list it so I can check before sending.

2 Make my email shorter

Your draft is accurate but long, and you know nobody will read past the second paragraph.

Cut this email to under [100] words without losing any request, date or decision. Put the main ask in the first two sentences. Keep my tone. Then tell me what you removed so I can check nothing important went.

[paste your draft]

3 Follow up when nobody replied

You sent something a week ago, heard nothing, and don't want to sound annoyed.

I emailed [who, and their role] on [date] asking for [what you asked for]. I haven't heard back. I need it by [date] because [reason].

Write a short, friendly follow-up (under 70 words) that makes it easy to reply in one line. Offer a simple option, like a yes/no or a choice of two. Don't use "just checking in" or "circling back".

4 Say no to a request politely

Someone asks for your time or help and you need to decline without burning the relationship.

Someone has asked me to [describe the request]. I need to say no because [your real reason, briefly]. Our relationship: [for example, a peer in another team / a senior leader / a client].

Write a short reply that says no clearly in the first two sentences, gives a brief honest reason, and offers one alternative if I have one: [alternative, or "none"]. Warm but firm. No over-apologizing.

5 Ask a busy person for something

You need a decision, approval or input from someone senior who skims their inbox.

I need [what you need: a decision, sign-off, five minutes of input] from [their role] by [date].

Background they need: [two or three facts]

What happens if they don't respond: [the consequence]

Write an email they can act on in 30 seconds. Subject line that states the ask. First line is the ask. Then the minimum background as bullets. End with the exact reply I need, like "Reply 'approved' and I'll proceed."

Meetings

6 Build an agenda from a goal

You've booked a meeting and need an agenda that keeps it on track.

I'm running a [length]-minute meeting with [who's attending]. By the end, I want us to have [the outcome: a decision, a plan, agreement on X].

Write an agenda with timed items, each with a clear purpose (inform, discuss or decide). Put the decision early, not at the end. Add one line I can paste in the invite to tell people what to prepare.

7 Get ready for a meeting you don't fully understand

You've been invited to a meeting on a topic outside your area and want to show up prepared.

I'm attending a meeting about [topic]. My role in it is [why you're there]. Here's the invite and any documents shared:
[paste them]

Explain the background in plain language in five bullets. Tell me what decisions are likely to come up, what I might be asked, and three good questions I could ask. Flag any terms I should look up.

8 Decide whether this meeting needs to happen

A recurring meeting feels pointless, or you're about to book one that could be an email.

Here's a meeting I'm thinking about [booking / keeping / canceling]:

Purpose: [purpose]

Attendees: [number and roles]

Length and frequency: [details]

What usually happens in it: [honest description]

Tell me whether it should be a meeting, a shorter meeting, an async update or nothing at all, and why. If it should change, write the short message I'd send to attendees explaining the change.

9 Give a short spoken update

You have two minutes to update a group in a meeting and tend to ramble.

Turn these notes into an update I can say out loud in under 90 seconds:

[paste notes]

Structure it as: where things stand, the one thing that changed, and what I need from the group, if anything. Short sentences that are easy to say. No slide-speak.

10 Run a quick team retrospective

A project just finished, or a week went badly, and you want the team to learn from it without blame.

I'm running a [30]-minute retrospective with [team size and type] about [the project or period]. What I know went well and badly: [notes].

Give me a simple format with timings, three open questions to get people talking, a way to make sure quieter people contribute, and how to turn the discussion into no more than three actions with owners. Keep the focus on the process, not on individuals.

Writing & documents

11 Rewrite this so it's clearer

You've written something and it's technically right but hard to follow.

Rewrite this so a [describe the reader, for example a new team member / a senior leader / a customer] can understand it on the first read:

[paste text]

Use shorter sentences, plain words and a clear order. Keep every fact. Don't add anything new. Then list any sentence where you weren't sure what I meant.

12 Change the tone without changing the message

Your draft sounds too blunt, too stiff or too casual for the person reading it.

Here's something I wrote:

[paste text]

It sounds [too blunt / too formal / too casual / too apologetic]. Rewrite it to sound [the tone you want] for [who's reading it]. Keep the meaning and any requests exactly the same, and keep it about the same length.

13 Summarize a long document for a busy reader

You need to brief someone on a report, policy or proposal they won't read.

Summarize this document for [who it's for], who needs to [what they'll do with it, for example decide whether to approve it].

[paste document]

Give me a three-sentence summary, then the five points that matter most to this reader, then anything that needs their action or attention. Quote the document where precision matters. Don't add opinions or facts that aren't in it.

14 Turn rough notes into a first draft

You have the ideas in bullet form and need a proper document, fast.

Turn these notes into a first draft of a [type of document: proposal, announcement, update, guide] for [audience]:

[paste notes]

Aim for about [length]. Use headings if it's longer than a page. Keep my points and my order unless a different order is clearly better, and tell me if you change it. Mark anywhere you had to fill a gap with [CHECK].

15 Proofread without rewriting

You want typos and grammar fixed but don't want your writing turned into something generic.

Proofread this. Fix spelling, grammar, punctuation and obvious word errors only. Don't change my style, tone or word choices otherwise. Use US spelling.

[paste text]

Give me the corrected text, then a short list of each change you made so I can review them.

Thinking & planning

16 Break a big project into steps

You've been handed something large and vague and don't know where to start.

I need to [describe the project or goal] by [deadline]. Resources I have: [people, budget, tools]. Constraints: [anything fixed].

Break this into phases and concrete steps, each small enough to finish in a day or less. Show which steps depend on others. Tell me the first three things I should do this week. Ask me questions first if the goal is too vague to plan.

17 Prioritize my to-do list

Everything feels urgent and you need to decide what to do first.

Here's my to-do list, with deadlines where I know them:
[paste list]

My most important goals right now are [goals]. I have about [hours] of focused time this week.

Sort the list into do today, do this week, delegate or ask about, and drop or postpone. Explain each choice in a few words. Point out anything that looks urgent but doesn't connect to my goals.

18 Run a pre-mortem on a plan

You're about to launch something and want to catch problems before they happen.

Imagine it's six months from now and this plan has failed:
[describe the plan]

List the eight most likely reasons it failed, from most to least likely. For each, give an early warning sign I could watch for and one thing I could do now to make it less likely. Be realistic, not dramatic.

19 Think through a decision

You're stuck between options and going in circles.

I'm deciding between [option A] and [option B] (and [option C], if there is one).

What matters most to me here: [criteria]

What I'm worried about: [concerns]

Deadline for deciding: [date]

Lay out the trade-offs of each option against my criteria in a short table. Then ask me the three questions that would most help me decide. Don't tell me what to choose until I've answered them.

20 Argue against my own idea

You like your idea a bit too much and want to hear the strongest objections before others raise them.

Here's an idea I'm about to propose:

[describe the idea and why you think it's good]

Act as a thoughtful skeptic who wants the team to succeed. Give me the five strongest objections someone could raise, in order of how serious they are. For each, suggest how I could address it or what evidence would answer it.

Learning & research

21 Explain it like I'm new here

Someone used a concept you're expected to know and you don't.

Explain [concept] to me as if I'm smart but new to [the field it comes from]. Start with a one-sentence definition, then an everyday example from office work, then why it matters in my job as a [your role]. Keep it under 200 words. End by asking me a question to check I understood.

22 Decode the jargon in a document

You've been sent something full of acronyms and terms you half know.

Here's a document full of terms I don't fully understand:

[paste text]

List every acronym and technical term in it, with a plain one-line explanation of what it means in this context. Then rewrite the hardest paragraph in plain language. If a term could mean different things, tell me which meaning fits here and how sure you are.

23 Quiz me on what I just read

You've read something important and want to know if you actually took it in.

I just read this:

[paste text or describe the topic]

Ask me five questions, one at a time, that test whether I understood the main ideas, not just the details. Wait for my answer each time. Tell me what I got right, what I missed, and point me to the part to reread.

24 Find the gaps in my understanding

You think you understand a topic but want to check before you explain it to someone else.

Here's my explanation of [topic], in my own words:

[write your explanation]

Tell me what I got right, what's wrong or oversimplified, and what important pieces I left out. Be direct. Then suggest the one thing I should learn next.

25 Prepare questions for an expert

You've got 30 minutes with someone who knows a topic well and want to use it wisely.

I'm meeting [the expert's role] for [length] to learn about [topic]. What I already know: [summary]. What I'm trying to do with this knowledge: [goal].

Write ten questions in order, from basics to the things only an experienced person would know. Mark the three most important in case we run short on time. Avoid questions I could answer with a quick search.