

Prompt Design Reference

Patterns for writing requests that produce checkable, repeatable output. A vague request gets you a fluent-sounding answer you can't verify. A specific one gets you something you can check line by line.

Five parts of a request you can actually check

1

Role

Who should it act as, or what expertise should it apply? Optional, but it sets the tone.

2

Task

The specific action. One task per request, stated plainly.

3

Context

The actual material it needs — paste it in directly, don't just describe it.

4

Format

How you want it structured: bullets, a table, a length, a section order.

5

Constraints

What to leave out: no invented facts, no unstated numbers, flag anything uncertain.

A vague request produces a fluent-sounding answer you can't check. A specific request produces something you can verify line by line.

Before / after

Before

Write me a summary of this.

After

Summarize the shift report below in 5 bullet points, one per patient, using only the information provided. If anything is unclear or missing, say so instead of guessing.

[paste the report]

Reusable patterns and verification

Four patterns worth reusing

Constrain to source

Using only the information below, do [task]. Do not add outside information or fill gaps with assumptions. [paste material]

Use when accuracy matters more than completeness — you'd rather it say "not stated" than guess.

Ask for uncertainty flagged

...and mark anything you are not fully confident about, rather than presenting it with the same certainty as the rest.

Add this line to any prompt where a confident-sounding wrong answer would be costly.

Iterative narrowing

First pass: broad request. Second pass: "Now do the same thing, but only for [narrower case]." Refine instead of starting over.

Cheaper than trying to write the perfect prompt on the first attempt.

Save a working prompt as a template

Once a prompt structure works, keep it. Reuse it with new pasted material instead of rewriting it from scratch each time.

Two checklists

BEFORE YOU SEND IT

- Did I paste the actual material, not just describe it?
- Did I say what format I want back?
- Did I say what not to do — invent, assume, guess?
- Can I check the answer against something I already know?

AFTER YOU GET A RESPONSE

- Does every fact or number trace back to what I gave it?
- If I changed one detail, would the answer change to match?
- Would I trust this same prompt again next week?