

Putting AI to Work

# 8

## Prompt Characteristics

# Learning Objectives

- Define clear, specific instructions to guide the AI's focus and distinguish between vague and well-structured prompts
- Adjust the tone, voice, and structure by applying stylistic cues that influence how the AI responds
- Assign roles or identities to the AI and shape its responses by modifying perspective, tone, or expertise through prompt design
- Anchor your prompts by providing background information, examples, or constraints that clarify expectations and improve relevance

# Module 8.1: Prompt Content

- Content clarity is the foundation of effective prompts.
- Clear instructions state exactly what you want the AI to do.
- Vague prompts lead to irrelevant, inconsistent, or unhelpful AI responses.
- Strong prompts specify the topic, task, audience, and format.
- Common pitfalls:
  - Being too vague
  - Omitting details
  - Failing to name the output type
- Example weak prompt: "Write about climate"
- Example strong prompt: "Write a persuasive paragraph arguing that cities should invest more in climate-resilient infrastructure."

# Module 8.1: Ethics in Action

- Vague prompts can unintentionally lead to biased, misleading, or incomplete responses.
- Biased questions like "Why is one group better than another?" produce unethical answers.
- Use content-specific prompts that are respectful, neutral, and clear.
- Users bear responsibility for the quality and fairness of their prompts.

# Module 8.1: Techie Dive

- LLMs use natural language understanding to detect intent when parsing prompts.
- The content section of a prompt helps the AI determine the task type (for example, summarize, generate, or list) and the topic.
- Clear content signals narrow the AI's probability space for token selection.
- More specific instructions result in more relevant completions.

# Module 8.1: Business Lens

- Poor prompt content wastes time and resources in business settings.
- Unclear prompts lead to inaccurate messaging or an inconsistent brand voice.
- Teams trained in clear prompts benefit from AI with fewer revisions.
- Quality control and prompt standardization improve efficiency.

# Module 8.2: Prompt Styles

- AI responds to how you say it, not just what you say.
- Key style dimensions:
  - Tone (serious, playful, urgent, friendly, sarcastic)
  - Formality (formal business letter, casual text message, neutral explanation)
  - Structure (bullet list, essay, tweet, outline, step-by-step guide)
  - Voice (first-person, second-person, third-person narration)
  - Vocabulary (simple, advanced, industry-specific, slang-filled)

## Module 8.2: Ethics in Action

- Changing the tone influences how trustworthy or authoritative AI content appears.
  - Using an informal tone in serious situations (medical, legal) could mislead readers.
- Always choose a style that fits the context and respects your audience.
- Style choices carry ethical weight and can cause confusion or harm.



## Module 8.2: Techie Dive

- Style control relies on token weighting and language conditioning.
- Models interpret stylistic instructions as part of the prompt's context.
- Pre-trained models use vast datasets with multiple tones and genres.
- Parameters like "temperature" affect the creativity and formality of outputs.

## Module 8.2: Business Lens

- Tone and voice matter significantly in branding.
- The same product can sound luxurious, fun, or eco-conscious depending on the style used.
- Consistency in style builds brand trust for entrepreneurs.
- Prompting with style maintains consistency across emails, ads, and social posts.

# Module 8.3: Prompt Personas

- Assigning a persona tells the AI to adopt a specific role or point of view.
- Persona cues dramatically change responses even with the same prompt content.
- Examples:
  - "You are a nutritionist."
  - "As a startup advisor,..."
  - "Imagine you're a poet."
- Personas shape the vocabulary, tone, and depth of AI responses.
- Use personas for expert-style responses, role-playing, and audience alignment.
- Common pitfalls:
  - Vague personas
  - Conflicting tone and persona
  - Unclear expectations

## Module 8.3: Ethics in Action

- Assigning personas can be powerful but also risky.
- Misusing personas (for example, pretending to be a doctor/lawyer) may mislead users about the accuracy of the AI's output.
- Make it clear that AI is simulating a role and is not replacing certified professionals.
- Transparency about AI limitations is essential when using personas.

## Module 8.3: Techie Dive

- Persona prompting modifies the AI's system message or pre-context layer.
- Using phrases such as "You are a..." anchor the tone, terminology, and focus to match that role.
- AI uses training data patterns to mimic professional communication styles.
- System messages create persistent behavioral context throughout a conversation.

## Module 8.3: Business Lens

- A business improves its brand voice by assigning an appropriate persona.
- Use cases:
  - "Friendly advisor" tone in chatbots
  - "Technical analyst" tone in reports
- Personas ensure consistency across departments and platforms.
- Strategic persona assignment strengthens brand identity and customer trust.

# Module 8.4: Prompt Context

- Context provides the AI with background: the who, what, why, and how.
- Without context, AI delivers vague, generic, or incorrect answers.
- Types of context:
  - Purpose/use case
  - Audience
  - Structure/format
  - Examples
  - Constraints
- Context clarifies expectations and improves the relevance of AI outputs.
- Common pitfalls:
  - Too much irrelevant context
  - Contradictory clues
  - Unclear time references
- Additional pitfalls:
  - Assuming AI has memory
  - Using poorly chosen examples

## Module 8.4: Ethics in Action

- The wrong context can reinforce harmful biases or spread misinformation.
- Referencing misleading articles causes the AI to echo problematic assumptions.
- Responsible prompting uses context that is factually sound, balanced, and fair.
- Consider how the information provided may shape the AI's output.



## Module 8.4: Techie Dive

- AI systems don't remember previous messages unless explicitly included.
- Context helps the AI infer relationships and intent using language conditioning.
- Language conditioning shapes the output based on nearby phrasing.
- Transformer models may weigh earlier parts of input more heavily.

## Module 8.4: Business Lens

- Poor prompting leads to poor business decisions.
- Vague or complex prompts generate responses that confuse teams or mislead stakeholders.
- Teams that document and test prompts generate more reliable results.
- Prompts are a type of business communication that requires clarity in order to achieve organizational success.

# Key Takeaways

- Content, style, persona, and context are the four core characteristics that determine the AI output's quality.
- Content clarity is foundational: Specific instructions dramatically improve results.
- Style cues shape how the AI responses are perceived and received.
- Personas allow the AI to adopt specific roles that influence vocabulary and expertise.
- Context provides essential background for producing relevant outputs.
- Common pitfalls include vague prompts, conflicting instructions, and unclear references.
- Ethical prompting requires attention to bias, transparency, and responsible use.
- Business applications benefit from standardized prompts that maintain brand consistency.
- Technical understanding helps users optimize prompting strategies.
- Mastering prompt characteristics empowers reliable and purposeful AI results.