

AI PROMPTING / FIELD GUIDE

# THE PRACTICAL AI PROMPTING HANDBOOK

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## From first prompt to cinematic control

A hands-on guide to prompting ChatGPT, Claude, image generators and Veo-style video systems - written for complete beginners, but designed to take you into professional creative direction.

**NEW IN THIS EDITION** Step-by-step workflows, annotated production prompts, reverse-engineered image examples, underwater and wildlife prompting, luxury advertising, audio, consistency and troubleshooting.



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## How to use this handbook

- 1 Start simple** - Read the beginner examples first. Notice how a vague idea becomes a specific, controllable instruction.
- 2 Copy the structure** - Use the same sections - subject, environment, action, camera, light, physics and negatives - with your own idea.
- 3 Generate once** - Treat the first result as evidence, not a verdict. Identify one or two things that failed.
- 4 Refine surgically** - Change the smallest instruction that could fix the failure, rather than rewriting everything.

**THE CENTRAL IDEA** A prompt is a creative brief. The more clearly you define what happens, what the camera sees and what must remain consistent, the less the model has to guess.

# 01 THE PROMPTING MINDSET

Weak prompts describe an idea. Strong prompts direct an outcome. Start with what you want the viewer to experience, then add only the detail that helps the model build that experience.

## WEAK PROMPT

A fish swimming under the sea.

## BETTER PROMPT

A photorealistic emperor angelfish swimming through a shallow tropical coral reef, shafts of sunlight filtering through clear turquoise water, tiny suspended particles visible, gentle current moving the coral, camera tracking alongside the fish at eye level, realistic fin movement and buoyancy, natural colours, documentary-quality underwater photography, 16:9.

## DIRECTED PROMPT

Cinematic underwater wildlife sequence. A single emperor angelfish emerges from behind a branching coral formation and swims slowly towards camera through crystal-clear tropical water. Morning sunlight breaks through the surface in moving caustic patterns across the fish and reef. Fine plankton and micro-bubbles create depth without making the water murky. The fish's pectoral fins continuously stabilise its body; the tail beats gently and naturally against a mild lateral current. Camera begins 1 metre away on a 35 mm underwater-lens feel, tracks backwards at the fish's pace, then drifts slightly left to reveal a deep blue drop-off behind the reef. No divers, no aquarium glass, no fantasy fish, no exaggerated saturation. Natural-history realism, 4K, 16:9.

## Build a prompt in four passes

- 1 Name the subject** - Use a specific fish, person, product, vehicle or material rather than a generic category.
- 2 Give it physical behaviour** - Describe fin movement, cloth tension, tyre grip, water resistance, steam, dust, reflections or weight.
- 3 Place the camera** - Say where the camera starts, how close it is, and whether it tracks, orbits, pushes in or stays fixed.
- 4 Choose the finish** - Describe the final frame or final impression. A clean ending stops the generation from wandering.

**GOOD PROMPTING HABIT** Replace abstract praise - “epic”, “stunning”, “viral” - with visible instructions the model can actually render.

## 02 A PROMPT'S ANATOMY

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|                          |                                                                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. CORE CONCEPT</b>   | One sentence explaining the creative idea.                             |
| <b>2. SUBJECT</b>        | Identity, appearance, materials, wardrobe or product detail.           |
| <b>3. ENVIRONMENT</b>    | Place, time, weather, background and atmosphere.                       |
| <b>4. ACTION</b>         | What happens and in what order.                                        |
| <b>5. CAMERA</b>         | Framing, lens feel, movement, focus and viewpoint.                     |
| <b>6. LIGHT / COLOUR</b> | Source, direction, palette, contrast and transitions.                  |
| <b>7. PHYSICS</b>        | Water, cloth, hair, dust, reflections, weight, inertia and collisions. |
| <b>8. AUDIO</b>          | Dialogue, Foley, ambience, music or intentional silence.               |
| <b>9. NEGATIVES</b>      | A short list of specific unwanted interpretations.                     |
| <b>10. ENDING</b>        | The exact final image or moment.                                       |

### JSON or natural language?

Both can work. JSON is useful because it forces you to separate the moving parts. Natural language is faster for short jobs. The structure matters more than the brackets.

#### COMPACT JSON EXAMPLE

```
{  
  "subject": "silver koi fish",  
  "environment": "dark Japanese garden pond at night",  
  "action": "fish circles beneath floating cherry-blossom petals",  
  "camera": "top-down macro tracking shot",  
  "lighting": "moonlight plus warm lantern reflections",  
  "physics": "real ripples, refraction and drifting petals",  
  "ending": "koi passes directly beneath the camera"  
}
```

# 03 CHATGPT & CLAUDE

For language models, replace camera and lighting with audience, evidence, priorities, output format and quality checks.

## A four-step language-model workflow

- 1 State the job** - Say exactly what you want made, solved, compared or rewritten.
- 2 Supply context** - Give the model the facts it cannot safely infer.
- 3 Set constraints** - Length, tone, technology, UK English, things to avoid, and which priorities matter most.
- 4 Define the output** - Ask for the finished format - complete code, decision table, script, email, plan or checklist - and tell it what to verify.

### RESEARCH PROMPT

Act as a commercial researcher. Compare three practical ways a small UK business could use AI-generated video in paid social advertising. Audience: a business owner with no AI background. Separate established facts from recommendations. Use current sources where pricing or platform capability may have changed. For each approach give: likely use case, production difficulty, main risk, and a realistic example. Finish with a 100-word recommendation. Use UK English and avoid generic claims such as “AI is revolutionising everything”.

### CODING PROMPT

Audit this mobile-first landing page for scroll-snap, click interception and Safari-specific viewport problems. Preserve all existing working behaviour. First identify the likely regression in no more than five bullets. Then return the complete corrected file. Do not remove features simply to make the bug disappear. Check fixed overlays, pointer-events, 100vh/dvh behaviour, nested scroll containers and anchor interception before finishing.

### CREATIVE PROMPT

I have a seven-second luxury jewellery advert. Generate five genuinely different concepts, not five rewrites. Each must contain: a first-two-second visual hook, one impossible-but-believable transformation, a premium product reveal, a final macro beauty shot and no dialogue. Concept A should use nature; B architecture; C liquid; D fabric; E light. Keep each concept under 90 words.

**USEFUL FOLLOW-UPS** “Keep everything except the opening.” “Make the physics more believable.” “Reduce simultaneous actions.” “Preserve the face exactly.” “Give me three radically different strategies.”

# 04 IMAGE PROMPTING

A still-image prompt is an art-direction brief. Because nothing changes over time, composition, lighting and material detail do most of the work.

## Build the image step by step

- 1 Subject and pose** - Describe the main subject first. If it is a person, say what they are doing rather than only what they look like.
- 2 Environment and composition** - Place them somewhere specific. Decide foreground, background, negative space and camera height.
- 3 Light and lens** - Choose a motivated light source and a lens feel. 24 mm feels wide and spatial; 85-100 mm feels intimate and compressed.
- 4 Texture and exclusions** - Add real surfaces - pores, scratches, condensation, fabric weave, wet pavement - and a short negative list.

### PORTRAIT

Editorial portrait of a woman in her early thirties standing beside a rain-darkened concrete wall outside a city café at blue hour. She is laughing naturally at someone just off camera, not posing. Long auburn hair lifted slightly by wind, black tailored jacket over a white silk top, minimal jewellery. Waist-up composition with negative space to camera-right, 50 mm lens feel, shallow depth of field, soft shop-window key light and cool ambient sky fill. Real skin texture, flyaway hair, believable fabric, restrained colour grade, no excessive neon, no plastic skin, no text. 4:5.

### ARCHITECTURE

A brutalist concrete house embedded into a windswept Scottish cliff, photographed just after a storm. Wide 24 mm architectural perspective from slightly below entrance level; wet concrete, black-framed glazing, warm interior light, sea spray suspended in the distance. Low cloud breaks enough for one narrow shaft of late sunlight to strike the façade. No people, no fantasy geometry, believable structural engineering, restrained cinematic grade, 16:9.



# 05 REVERSE-ENGINEERING IMAGES

A powerful way to learn prompting is to look at an image and ask: what would I need to tell a model to recreate the same visual logic? You do not need to guess the original prompt. You need to identify its ingredients.

- 1 Identify the hero** - What does your eye notice first? That should appear near the start of the prompt.
- 2 Identify the camera** - Estimate angle, distance, lens feel and depth of field.
- 3 Identify the light** - Where is the key light coming from? Is it hard, soft, warm, cool, direct or reflected?
- 4 Identify the signature detail** - What makes the image memorable - colour, texture, scale, hybrid anatomy, environment or expression?



## OVERGROWN FUTURE CITY

Wide aerial cinematic view of an abandoned multi-lane motorway leading towards a ruined high-rise city reclaimed by dense forest. Golden-hour sun enters from the right, long warm shadows across cracked asphalt, vines and trees growing through road joints, distant concrete towers partially collapsed and covered in vegetation. High drone perspective, 24 mm wide-lens feel, deep focus, realistic atmospheric haze, natural greens and warm sunlight, post-human realism, no people, no moving cars, no text, 16:9.



## AGED KEYS MACRO

Extreme macro photograph of two antique brass and steel keys resting in an open human palm, attached to a dark oxidised ring and a cracked, frayed brown leather fob. Skin lines and fingerprints sharply resolved, tarnish and scratches visible on the metal, shallow depth of field, soft directional studio light from upper left, dark neutral background, 100 mm macro-lens feel, documentary realism, no jewellery, no extra keys, square composition.

# REVERSE-ENGINEERING: CREATURES & COLOUR

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## LION / LEOPARD HYBRID

Extreme close-up portrait of an impossible feline predator split organically down the centre: left side mature male lion with coarse tawny mane and amber eye; right side leopard with dense rosette pattern and pale green eye. Both anatomies merge seamlessly through the nose and jaw rather than appearing pasted together. Mouth open in a roar, real saliva sheen, whiskers, gums and worn canine teeth visible. Dark studio background, dramatic soft frontal key plus restrained rim light, 85 mm wildlife-portrait lens feel, razor-sharp eyes, photoreal fur, no cartoon styling, 4:5.



## EXPLOSION OF LIQUID COLOUR

Ultra-high-speed macro photograph of multiple saturated liquid paints colliding in mid-air - hot pink, scarlet, orange, yellow, lime, cyan, cobalt and violet. Sheets of paint fold through one another while thousands of droplets freeze at different depths, creating a tunnel-like explosion towards camera. Hard strobe lighting reveals glossy surface tension and tiny suspended beads, deep focus through the central collision, black barely visible behind the colour, energetic commercial photography, no container, no text, square crop.



# REVERSE-ENGINEERING: CHARACTER STYLE



## STYLISTED BLUE LEOPARD CUB

Whimsical but highly detailed baby leopard standing on a moss-covered fallen log in a lush tropical jungle. Fur is pale icy blue with deep navy rosettes; oversized glossy blue eyes and rounded ears create an intentionally cute character design while individual fur strands remain crisp. Warm morning sunlight filters through leaves behind the cub, soft volumetric glow, shallow depth of field, ferns and tiny blue flowers in foreground, centred portrait composition, storybook cinematic realism, 9:16.



## NATURAL PARK PORTRAIT

Natural outdoor portrait of a woman with long straight pink hair standing in an autumn park, looking slightly upward and to camera-right with a calm expression. Olive quilted jacket over a white lace top, visible ornamental neck tattoo, realistic skin texture and flyaway hair. Soft late-afternoon light, autumn trees and path rendered as warm bokeh, 50 mm portrait lens feel, chest-up framing, candid lifestyle photography, muted greens and golds, no glamour retouching, no text, 4:5.

**WHAT TO LEARN FROM THESE** The subject may be wildly different, but the same prompt skeleton keeps working: hero subject → environment → camera → light → surface detail → style → exclusions.

# 06 VIDEO & VEO PROMPTING

Video prompts must direct time. Think like an editor and cinematographer: what happens first, what changes, where is the camera, and what frame ends the shot?

## The four-beat structure

- 1 0-2s: Hook** - Begin with a visible event - impact, reveal, interruption, transformation, scale surprise or sudden motion.
- 2 2-5s: Escalate** - Show the consequence. Let the viewer understand what is changing.
- 3 5-8s: Payoff** - Deliver the biggest visual event or clearest product reveal.
- 4 Final beat: Exit** - Hold or land on a clean image. This gives the clip a professional finish and makes looping easier.

### UNDERWATER FISH VIDEO

8-second cinematic underwater sequence. 0-2s: camera pushes through waving sea grass and a large silver barracuda suddenly crosses inches from the lens, instantly revealing scale and speed. 2-5s: camera pivots and follows it into open blue water as a school of smaller fish parts around it. Real tail propulsion, subtle body flex and water resistance; sunlight caustics move across its skin. 5-7s: barracuda dives towards a reef wall while the camera cranes above it. 7-8s: hold a wide silhouette against deep blue water. Natural-history realism, no attack, no divers, no aquarium, no music; underwater ambience only.

### FASHION TRANSFORMATION

8-second high-fashion film in an empty marble gallery. 0-2s: model walks towards camera in a simple black slip dress; a sudden gust sends hundreds of crimson silk ribbons racing into frame. 2-5s: ribbons wrap around her while she continues walking, weaving into a structured couture gown without hiding her face. 5-7s: camera arcs 90 degrees as the completed train unfurls across the marble. 7-8s: she stops and turns her eyes directly to lens. Preserve her face and body throughout; realistic cloth tension, drag and gravity; no cuts, no text.

# 07 PREMIUM AD STRUCTURES

The strongest commercial prompts often use one simple transformation idea and execute it with very clear staging.

## Maserati: The Trident's Call - why it works

- 1 Establish mythology** - Deep ocean, ancient seabed, aquamarine trident glow. The setting already explains the brand symbol.
- 2 Give transformation logic** - A vortex sculpts water into the vehicle. The grille emblem appears before the full body, giving the model an intermediate state.
- 3 Move the camera with the event** - Glide → circle → spin with the vortex → chase upwards.
- 4 Finish with contrast** - Dark ocean becomes a bright twilight beach hero shot, giving the advert a satisfying visual release.

### CONDENSED PRODUCTION PROMPT

Cinematic 8K mythic automotive film. In the dark ocean abyss, an ancient bronze trident half-buried in sand ignites with aquamarine light. A violent underwater vortex forms around it, pulling sand, bubbles and luminous particles into a spiral. Inside the vortex, water is hydrodynamically sculpted into the aerodynamic form of a white Maserati MC20; the trident grille emblem materialises first, then the liquid body solidifies into metallic paint. The completed car rockets vertically through the water and breaches the ocean surface in spectacular slow motion, then lands perfectly on a wet black-sand beach at twilight. Camera: exploratory glide → orbit trident → rotate with vortex → chase upward → slow-motion breach → low wide hero frame. Mythic, elegant, hyper-real, no people, no city, no sunny documentary look.

## Cartier: Eternal Flame - why it works

- 1 Hook with one material** - A molten gold flame appears immediately in darkness.
- 2 Transform in stages** - Flame → diamond threads → bracelet. The model has a readable bridge between states.
- 3 Let the human subject support the product** - The woman's hand and hair add elegance without competing with the bracelet.
- 4 End macro** - A tight diamond shot turns the final second into a classic luxury beauty frame.

### CARTIER-STYLE PRODUCTION PROMPT

7-second ultra-luxury jewellery film. 0-2s: in a black velvet void, a spark erupts into a suspended flame of molten gold. 2-4s: the flame spirals inward and separates into hundreds of glowing diamond-studded threads, weaving into a refined bracelet. 4-6s: the bracelet settles seamlessly around the wrist of an elegant blonde woman in a deep-crimson silk gown as she raises her hand; her hair drifts slowly across frame. 6-7s: camera pushes into an ultra-tight macro of the diamonds catching warm golden rim light. Fast opening burst zoom → smooth orbit → elegant push-in → macro hold. No text overlay, no clutter, no obvious CG, one subject only.

# 08 DIALOGUE, AUDIO & ASMR

Audio deserves its own prompt structure. Separate spoken words from delivery, Foley, ambience and music.

## Build audio in four layers

- 1 Dialogue** - Write the exact line. Do not ask the model to invent important wording unless that is the goal.
- 2 Performance** - Describe pace, energy, eye-line, gesture and emotion separately.
- 3 Foley** - List the small sounds created by hands, objects, clothing, food, machinery or impacts.
- 4 Ambience / music** - Specify room tone, environment and whether music exists. “No music” is a useful creative instruction.

### ASMR MACRO

Extreme close-up, 85 mm macro lens, razor-thin depth of field. A young woman in a clean white studio lifts a chilled translucent lychee with black lacquered chopsticks towards a binaural microphone. UV-blue rim light catches condensation on the fruit. She gently taps the chopsticks twice, peels the thin skin with a soft wet tear, then bites once. AUDIO: lacquer taps, peel separation, quiet wet bite, controlled nasal exhale, extremely low room hum. No dialogue, no music. Keep peaks controlled; intimate binaural spatial detail. Clinical, hypnotic realism, 16:9.

### DIALOGUE SCENE

Handheld walking-tour shot inside a bright spaceship engine room. An expressive amphibian alien walks beside camera with energetic gestures and looks directly into lens. He reaches a glowing food synthesiser and says, conversationally: “You think it, this thing cooks it. Watch.” He taps the glass. A steaming pizza forms layer-by-layer inside the chamber. He looks at the pizza, then back to camera: “Still beats room service.” Keep lip sync natural, dialogue dry and quick, warm machine bounce light, soft shadows, no music, no subtitles.

# 09 CONSISTENCY & MULTI-SCENE WORK

For recurring characters, vehicles or locations, make a compact identity block and reuse it without rewriting it differently every time.

- 1 Create an identity lock** - Write only the details that must never change: face, age, eye colour, hair, body build, signature clothing or vehicle geometry.
- 2 Give the asset a name** - Use something like @MARA or @PROTOTYPE so scene prompts stay short.
- 3 Describe only the change** - In each new scene, focus on action, camera, lighting and wardrobe changes rather than redefining the person.
- 4 Repeat critical constraints** - If a model keeps changing the face or car, repeat the lock in the scene prompt and explicitly say “preserve”.

## CHARACTER LOCK

@MARA - woman, early 30s; long wavy dusty-pink hair fading to magenta at the ends; pale blue-grey eyes; warm tan skin; dark brows; small silver studs; thin necklace. Default wardrobe: worn charcoal mechanic coverall, sleeves rolled, white cropped top, leather tool belt, grease on hands and forearms. CONSISTENCY LOCK: preserve facial proportions, apparent age, eye colour, hair gradient and body build across every shot. Do not beautify, age or alter hairstyle unless explicitly instructed.

## SCENE PROMPT

@MARA stands alone inside an abandoned factory, three metres from @PROTOTYPE, silently studying it. Wide 35 mm composition, dusty late-afternoon light through broken clerestory windows. She takes two slow steps towards the front-left wheel and brushes dust from the carbon panel with the back of her fingers. Camera tracks laterally, preserving both her profile and the car silhouette. No dialogue. Preserve @MARA exactly.



# 10 TROUBLESHOOTING

| PROBLEM                        | DIRECT FIX                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main event is ignored          | Move it into sentence one and assign it a time: “Within the first second...”                                   |
| Too chaotic                    | Turn simultaneous actions into numbered or timed beats.                                                        |
| Character changes              | Shorten and repeat the identity lock; name exactly what cannot change.                                         |
| Morph looks bad                | Add intermediate material states: particles → framework → surface.                                             |
| Camera teleports               | Request one continuous camera move and define its path.                                                        |
| Underwater looks like aquarium | Specify open-ocean depth, current, suspended particles, caustics and no glass/tank.                            |
| Everything is neon             | Name one or two motivated light sources and request restrained colour.                                         |
| Skin or products look plastic  | Ask for pores, micro-scratches, fabric weave, imperfect reflections and natural highlight roll-off.            |
| Text appears                   | State “no text, no captions, no signage”.                                                                      |
| Video feels boring             | Add a visible change in the first two seconds: reveal, impact, interruption, transformation or scale surprise. |

**DEBUG ONE THING AT A TIME** If a clip has three problems, do not immediately rewrite the entire prompt. Fix the most important failure first, regenerate, then move to the next.

# 11 MASTER TEMPLATES & QUICK INDEX

## MASTER IMAGE TEMPLATE

Create a [STYLE] image of [SUBJECT] [ACTION/POSE] in [ENVIRONMENT]. Composition: [FRAMING / SUBJECT POSITION / FOREGROUND / BACKGROUND]. Camera: [LENS FEEL / HEIGHT / ANGLE / DEPTH OF FIELD]. Lighting: [KEY SOURCE / DIRECTION / FILL / TIME]. Physical detail: [SKIN / MATERIAL / WATER / DUST / FABRIC / REFLECTIONS]. Colour and mood: [PALETTE]. Preserve [IDENTITY RULES]. Avoid [SHORT VISUAL NEGATIVE LIST]. Output [ASPECT RATIO / REALISM / RESOLUTION INTENT].

## MASTER VEO-STYLE TEMPLATE

[DURATION]-second [STYLE] video. CORE CONCEPT: [ONE SENTENCE]. 0-2s HOOK: [IMMEDIATE VISIBLE EVENT]. 2-[X]s: [ESCALATION]. [X]-[Y]s: [MAIN PAYOFF / TRANSFORMATION]. FINAL BEAT: [CLEAN END FRAME]. SUBJECT: [IDENTITY / PRODUCT DETAILS]. ENVIRONMENT: [LOCATION / WEATHER / TIME / ATMOSPHERE]. CAMERA: [STARTING FRAME → MOVEMENT → FINAL FRAME]. PHYSICS: [WEIGHT / WATER / CLOTH / DUST / COLLISION / REFLECTION]. AUDIO: [DIALOGUE / FOLEY / AMBIENCE / MUSIC OR NONE]. CONSISTENCY: preserve [FEATURES]. NEGATIVES: [SHORT LIST]. FORMAT: [16:9 / 9:16 / QUALITY].

## MASTER CHATGPT / CLAUDE TEMPLATE

TASK: [WHAT YOU NEED].  
CONTEXT: [FACTS THE MODEL NEEDS].  
AUDIENCE: [WHO IT IS FOR].  
PRIORITIES: [WHAT MATTERS MOST, IN ORDER].  
CONSTRAINTS: [LENGTH / TONE / TECH / EXCLUSIONS / UK ENGLISH].  
OUTPUT: [EXACT FORMAT].  
QUALITY CHECK: Before finishing, verify [CHECKLIST]. If information is unknown, say so rather than inventing it.

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**FINAL PRINCIPLE** Direct, observe, diagnose, refine. A professional prompt is not necessarily long; it is deliberate. Every sentence should define the subject, make something happen, control how it is seen, or prevent a predictable failure.