

AICADEMY · Course 3 · Free

Prompting Fundamentals.

*Ask clearly, and get useful answers on the first
or second try*

With the AICADEMY Team

6 lessons · About 45 minutes · Certificate of completion

*Same skill works in
ChatGPT, Claude, and
Claude Code.*

Independent course. Not affiliated with any AI company. · Content checked Oct 2026

How this course works

Learn it, then use it on real prompts

Watch

Six short lessons, with real before-and-after examples.

Rewrite

Turn three weak prompts into strong ones and compare the answers.

Quiz

Ten questions. Score 8 or more to pass. Retake as often as you need.

Certificate

Ready the moment you pass, with a link anyone can verify.

You need Your free ChatGPT and Claude accounts from Course 2. Every example works on the free plans.

By the end of this course

Five things you'll be able to do

1 Spot a vague prompt

And say what's missing from it

2 Use the four parts

What, where, limits, and done when

3 Give useful context

Paste the text, show an example, name the audience

4 Ask before it acts

"Explain first", options, and plans

5 Fix and reuse

Rescue a weak answer, and save prompts that work

LESSON 1 OF 6

Vague in, *vague out*

The AI can only work with what you give it.

The coffee-shop test

Would a person know exactly what you want?

"A coffee, please."

You'll get something. Hot or iced? What size? Milk? The barista has to guess.

"A large iced latte with oat milk, please."

You get exactly what you wanted, first time, with no back-and-forth.

If a helpful stranger would need to ask questions, add the answers to your prompt.

Side by side

Same goal, very different results

Weak	Strong
"Summarize this."	"Summarize this article in five bullet points for a busy manager. Keep each point under 15 words."
"Write an email."	"Write a short, polite email to my landlord asking to fix a leaking kitchen tap this week."
"Help with my essay."	"Read my essay intro below. Point out the two weakest sentences and explain why. Don't rewrite it."
"Make it better."	"Make this paragraph clearer for 12-year-olds. Keep it under 80 words."

Notice Every strong version says what to do, what it's about, a limit, and what a good result looks like.

Why specific works

Less guessing, better predictions

It narrows the guess

Each detail rules out answers you didn't want.

It saves time

One clear prompt beats five rounds of "no, not like that".

It's not about length

Clear beats long. One precise sentence can beat a whole paragraph.

Remember There are no magic words or secret codes. Just say what you need, the way you'd tell a capable new colleague.

LESSON 2 OF 6

The four *parts*

What, where, limits, and done when.

The four parts

Four questions behind every strong prompt

What

The task, as an action

"Summarize", "draft",
"compare", "explain"

Where

What it's about, or which text

"this article", "my email below", "for a café menu"

Limits

Length, tone, what not to change

"under 100 words", "friendly",
"don't change the title"

Done when

What a good result looks like

"five bullets", "a table with three columns", "ends with a question"

Shortcut You don't need all four every time. For anything that matters, check each one.

Build one, step by step

From weak to strong in four moves

1 Start
"Write a post about our book swap."

2 + What and where
"Write a social media post announcing our Community Book Swap at the City Library garden."

3 + Limits
"...Friendly tone, under 60 words, no hashtags."

4 + Done when
"...End with the date, Saturday at 10 AM, and a one-line call to action."

Limits are the most forgotten part

Say what to keep, and what to avoid

Length

"Under 100 words", "three bullets",
"one paragraph"

Tone

"Friendly", "formal", "simple words for
beginners"

Don't touch

"Keep my opening line", "don't change
the facts", "don't rewrite, just
comment"

An AI tries to be helpful. Without limits, "helpful" can mean "changed everything".

LESSON 3 OF 6

Give it something *to work with*

Text, examples, and an audience beat guesswork.

Three kinds of context

Hand over the material, not a description of it

Paste the text

Don't say "my email". Paste the email.
Most tools also let you attach a file.

Show an example

"Write it in the style of this one."
Examples beat long descriptions.

Name the audience

"For first-year students", "for my grandmother", "for a busy manager".

Careful Remove names, phone numbers, and private details before you paste. More on this in Course 4.

Examples are powerful

Show one, get more like it

Write three short product descriptions for a café menu, in the same style as this one:
"Blueberry Muffin. Baked every morning, bursting with berries. A perfect partner for your coffee."
Items: banana bread, cheese croissant, iced tea.

Banana Bread. Moist, golden, and made with ripe bananas. Lovely with a warm drink.
Cheese Croissant. Flaky layers and melted cheese, fresh from the oven...

Why it works The example shows the length, the rhythm, and the tone all at once, without you having to describe them.

Same facts, different audience

Who it's for changes everything

For a 10-year-old

"Plants make their own food using sunlight, like tiny solar-powered kitchens."

For a high-school student

"Plants turn light, water, and carbon dioxide into sugar and oxygen through photosynthesis."

For a biology teacher

"Light reactions in the thylakoid produce ATP and NADPH, which drive carbon fixation in the Calvin cycle."

Try it Ask "Explain photosynthesis" with three different audiences, and compare.

LESSON 4 OF 6

Ask it to *explain first*

Understand before you act.

Three thinking-first prompts

Look before you leap

Explain first

"Explain what this paragraph is saying. Don't change anything yet."

Give options

"Suggest three ways to start this speech, with one line on each."

Make a plan

"Before writing, list the steps you'd follow. I'll approve them."

Magic words "Don't change anything yet." · "Ask me if anything is unclear." · "Give me options."

Let it ask you questions

The AI can find the gaps in your request

I want to plan a small birthday party for my mother. Before you suggest anything, ask me the questions you need answered.

Happy to help! A few questions first: 1. How many guests? 2. Indoors or outdoors? 3. Your budget? 4. Any food she loves, or can't eat? 5. A surprise, or does she know?

Not sure what to include? Let the AI ask you.

Why plans help

Catch problems before the work is done

Without a plan	With a plan
A long answer arrives, and it went the wrong way from the start	You see the approach in five lines, and fix it before any writing
You start over, and lose time	You say "skip step 3, add a budget", and it continues
You're not sure what it assumed	Its assumptions are written down, where you can check them

Use it for Anything long or important: a report, a study plan, a trip, a speech, or a piece of code.

LESSON 5 OF 6

Fix a *weak answer*

Nudge it, question it, or start fresh.

Good follow-up nudges

Say what to change, not just "try again"

Too long "Cut it to half the length. Keep the main point."

Too formal "Make it sound like a friendly message to a coworker."

Too vague "Add one concrete example to each point."

Wrong focus "Focus on cost, not features."

Wrong format "Turn this into a table with three columns."

Almost right "Keep everything, but change the last line to a question."

"Try again" is a coin toss. "Shorter, friendlier, with an example" is a direction.

Ask what it's unsure about

Make the guesses visible

Ask for doubts

"Which parts of your answer are you least sure about?"

Ask for sources

"Where could I check these facts?"
Then actually check them.

Ask for assumptions

"What did you assume about my situation?"

Remember Course 1

It can sound sure and still be wrong. These questions help, but your three checks still matter: source, second opinion, common sense.

When to start fresh

Sometimes a clean start is fastest

Signs it's time

You've corrected the same thing twice. It keeps repeating an old mistake. The chat has drifted into a different topic.

How to restart well

Open a new chat. Write a better first prompt, using what you learned: "Write X. Avoid Y. It should look like Z."

Rule of two Corrected it twice and it's still wrong? Start fresh with a stronger prompt. This rule works in Claude Code too.

LESSON 6 OF 6

Reusable *prompts*

Write it well once, and use it again and again.

Three starter templates

Copy them, fill the blanks, reuse them

Summary

Summarize [text below] in [5] bullet points for [a busy manager]. Each under [15] words. End with one action I should take.

Email

Write a [polite, short] email to [my landlord] about [a leaking tap]. Keep it under [100] words. End by asking for [a date].

Study notes

Turn [these notes] into a study sheet for [a first-year student]: key terms, a short summary, and [5] practice questions with answers.

Notice Each template already has the four parts. You only change what's in the brackets.

Where to keep them

Somewhere you'll actually find them

A notes app

A single note called "My prompts", with a heading for each one.

Projects and instructions

Both ChatGPT and Claude let you save standing instructions, so you don't repeat yourself.

Keep improving

When a prompt gives a great answer, update your saved copy.

Check the settings Look for features named projects, custom instructions, or personal preferences. Names change over time.

Your activity · about 15 minutes

Rewrite three weak prompts

Weak prompt	Your job
"Make it better." (with a short paragraph you wrote)	Add what, limits, and done when. Try it in both tools.
"Summarize this." (with a news article)	Add the audience, a length, and a format.
"Help with my essay." (with a practice paragraph)	Ask for feedback only. Add a "don't rewrite" limit.

1 • Before

Send the weak prompt. Save the answer.

2 • After

Send your strong version. Compare the two answers.

3 • Record

Rate both. Note which part made the biggest difference.

Quiz and certificate

Ten questions. Eight to pass.

The quiz

Ten multiple-choice questions on all six lessons. About ten minutes.

Pass mark

Score 8 or more. Missed it? Review the lesson, wait ten minutes, and try again.

Your certificate

Ready the moment you pass, with your name, the date, and a link anyone can verify.

Starter Path

Three of four done after this one. Finish Course 4 for the Starter Path certificate, plus 20% off the Claude Code course.

Cheat card · screenshot this

Prompting on one card

Vague in Vague out. Would a stranger need to ask questions?

Context Paste the text, show an example, name the audience

Think first "Explain first, don't change anything yet"

Rule of two Corrected twice? Start fresh, with a better prompt

Four parts What · where · limits · done when

Limits Length, tone, and what not to change

Nudge Say what to change, not "try again"

Reuse Save prompts that work as templates

Next · Course 4

Responsible and Safe AI

Never paste

Passwords, IDs, and other people's data

Honest use

AI in school and work, and saying so

Bias and copyright

Fairness, and who owns what

Deepfakes and scams

Check before you share or pay

Continue to Course 4

The last step to your Starter Path certificate.