ScopeTreasure Courses

PROMPT ENGINEERING COURSES · LESSON PE.2 · CODE SCOPE SERIES

Writing Clear Instructions

Vague in, vague out. How to write instructions that are specific, complete and impossible to misunderstand.

Introduction

Most weak answers come from one cause: the instruction was vague. "Write something good about my shop" leaves everything open — good for whom, in what form, how long, for what purpose? The AI fills every gap with a guess, and five guesses in a row almost never match what you wanted.

Clear instructions are not long instructions. A clear prompt is usually **shorter** than a rambling one, because every word has a job. In this lesson you will learn the four checks that make any instruction clear: one task, concrete details, a defined output, and a stated limit.

(Roman Urdu: Zyada tar kamzor jawabon ki wajah aik hoti hai — hidayat ghair wazeh thi. Wazeh hidayat lambi nahi hoti, bas har lafz ka aik kaam hota hai.)

Key points

- **One task per prompt.** "Write a story, make MCQs and explain the chapter" is three jobs. The AI will do all three badly. Split it: one prompt, one job, then a second prompt for the next job.
- **Start with a verb.** "Explain", "List", "Compare", "Write", "Fix", "Summarise" — the verb tells the AI what kind of answer to build. A prompt without a verb is just a topic.
- **Replace vague words with concrete ones.** "Soon" becomes a date, "short" becomes a word count, "simple" becomes an audience ("for a class 8 student"), "good" becomes a standard ("polite, formal, no slang").
- **Name the output.** Say the shape: a table, bullet points, numbered steps, a paragraph, an email with a subject line. If you do not name it, the AI picks a shape at random.
- **State the limits.** Length ("under 150 words"), count ("exactly 5 points"), language ("simple English" or "Roman Urdu"), and what to avoid ("no difficult words", "no copied text").
- **Give the facts the AI cannot know.** Your class, your city, your deadline, your product, your budget — anything personal or current must come from you. The AI cannot invent your situation correctly.
- **Read your prompt once before sending.** Ask: could a stranger follow this exactly? If any sentence could mean two things, rewrite that sentence.
- **Order matters: task first, details second, limits last.** When the task comes first, the AI reads every detail as part of that job. When details come first, the task can get lost inside them.
- **Beginners get stuck on "how much detail is enough".** The test is simple: if removing a detail could change the answer, keep it. If removing it changes nothing, cut it. That rule keeps prompts short AND complete.

Examples

Example 1 — From vague to clear, step by step

Vague:

```
Help me with my assignment.
```

Still vague (verb, but no details):

```
Write my assignment on pollution.
```

Clear:

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Write a 200-word introduction for my class 10 assignment on air pollution in Lahore. Simple English, no difficult words. Start with one fact about smog, then two causes, then one solution. Do not write the whole assignment, only the introduction.
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Notice what changed: the task (introduction only), the audience (class 10), the place (Lahore), the length (200 words), the structure (fact, causes, solution), and the limit (not the whole assignment). Every addition removes one guess.

Example 2 — One vague word, three concrete fixes

Prompt: "Make it short."

- Short for what? A WhatsApp message (2 lines), a class answer (5 lines), or a speech (2 minutes) are all "short".
- Fix 1: "in under 50 words."
- Fix 2: "in exactly 3 bullet points."
- Fix 3: "in one paragraph of 4 sentences."

Pick the fix that matches your real need, and write it into the prompt. "Short" alone is a wish, not an instruction.

Example 3 — The stranger test

Before sending, read your prompt as if you were a stranger who knows nothing about you:

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Write an email to my teacher.
```

A stranger asks: which teacher, about what, what do you want from them, formal or friendly? The clear version answers all four:

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Write a polite, formal email to my maths teacher, Sir Ahmed, asking for one extra day to submit homework because I was ill yesterday. Keep it under 80 words, with a subject line.
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Example 4 — Before and after: asking for an explanation

Before:

```
Explain computers simply.
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After:

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Explain how a computer stores a photo, in simple English for a class 7 student, in 4 short steps. Use one example from a mobile phone. No technical words like "binary" without explaining them first.
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"Simply" is a wish. The after version defines simple (class 7, short steps, phone example, technical words explained). The AI no longer has to guess what simple means to you.

Example 5 — Before and after: asking for a comparison

Before:

```
Which is better, Android or iPhone?
```

After:

```
Compare Android and iPhone for a student in Pakistan with a budget of Rs 40000. Compare only: price, battery, camera, and storage. End with one recommendation and one reason. Under 150 words.
```

"Better" depends on budget, need and priorities. The after version fixes all three, so the answer can actually help you decide instead of listing general facts.

Example 6 — A vague word that hides three meanings

Prompt: "Explain it in detail."

Detail could mean longer (more words), deeper (harder ideas), or more examples. Pick the one you mean:

- Longer: "in about 300 words."
- Deeper: "including the reason behind each step."
- More examples: "with 3 daily-life examples."

Writing the real meaning saves a whole round of correction later.

Real-world case — Where this is actually used

A small shop owner in Multan posts a product message every week. His first prompt was "Write a good ad for my shirts" and the result was generic. His working prompt now is: "Write a Roman Urdu WhatsApp message for cotton shirts, Rs 850, sizes S to XL, shop timing 10am–9pm, under 40 words, end with reply YES to order." Same shop, same shirts — the clear instruction is why customers now reply. Office workers use the same rule for emails: audience, purpose, length, and subject line, in the prompt itself.

Quick recap

- One task per prompt, starting with a clear verb.
- Replace vague words with numbers, audiences and shapes.
- Name the output shape and state the limits.
- Give the personal facts only you know.
- Run the stranger test before sending.

Common mistakes

1. **Packing three tasks into one prompt** — the answer becomes a messy mix. Fix: split it into separate prompts, one job at a time.
2. **Using "short", "simple", "good" without defining them** — the AI's idea of short is not yours. Fix: give a number, an audience, or an example.
3. **Forgetting the facts only you know** — the AI then invents your class, city or deadline. Fix: write those facts into the prompt, in plain words.

1. **Giving the limit but not the unit** — "Keep it short" and even "Keep it brief" still leave the unit open. Fix: always give a number with a unit — words, points, steps, or minutes.
2. **Writing a polite request instead of an instruction** — "Could you maybe write something about..." sounds polite but hides the task. Fix: be polite AND direct — "Please write a 100-word paragraph on..." keeps both.

Practice

1. Rewrite this vague prompt three ways, each for a different real need: "Tell me about computers." (One version for a class 6 student, one for a shop owner who wants to buy one, one for a job interview answer.)
2. Take a prompt you used this week. Run the stranger test on it: list every question a stranger would ask, then rewrite the prompt so none of those questions remain.

1. Take the sentence "Tell me about health." Rewrite it for three real needs: a class 5 speech (2 minutes), a WhatsApp health tip (3 lines), and a doctor-visit question list (5 questions). Notice how the verb and limits change each time.
2. Find one instruction in your own prompt that a stranger could read two ways. Rewrite that one sentence only, so it has only one meaning.

3. Write a prompt for a job you actually need this week, then cut it to half its words without losing any fact the answer depends on. Send the shorter version and check the answer is still complete.

Practice quiz

1. Why should a prompt have only one task?

- AI tools reject multi-task prompts
- One prompt with three jobs gets all three done badly; split it, one job at a time
- Long prompts cost money
- The AI forgets the second task

Answer: One prompt with three jobs gets all three done badly; split it, one job at a time

2. Which is a concrete replacement for the vague word 'short'?

- 'Very short'
- 'In under 50 words' or 'in exactly 3 bullet points'
- 'Short please'
- 'As short as possible'

Answer: 'In under 50 words' or 'in exactly 3 bullet points'

3. What is the stranger test?

- Asking a stranger to write your prompt
- Reading your prompt as if you knew nothing about the writer, and rewriting any sentence that could mean two things
- Testing the prompt on a stranger's phone
- Sending the prompt to a stranger

Answer: Reading your prompt as if you knew nothing about the writer, and rewriting any sentence that could mean two things

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