

Understand the Machine

A COPY-AND-PASTE TOOLKIT

50 ChatGPT Prompts for Everyday Tasks

Fifty ready-to-use prompts for email, money, travel, health questions, letters, learning, and more. Copy, paste, and adjust to fit your life.

Free AI literacy for everyone — no tech background needed

understandthemachine.org

A "prompt" is just what you type into ChatGPT (or Gemini, or Claude). The better your prompt, the better the answer. This toolkit gives you 50 that already work — copy one, paste it in, and change the details in **[brackets]** to fit your situation.

New to ChatGPT? Start Here in 5 Minutes

1. Open your web browser and go to **chatgpt.com** (or download the free ChatGPT app for iPhone or Android).
2. Click **Sign up** and create a free account with your email, Google, or Apple ID. (You can even try it without an account.)
3. You'll see a text box. Type a request, press Enter, and read the reply.
4. Not quite right? Just reply with what to change — "make it shorter," "more casual." It's a conversation.

The free plan is genuinely free and handles everything in this toolkit. The same prompts also work in Google Gemini and Claude — see the tool comparison at the end.

Four Habits of a Great Prompt

1. Be specific

"A simple 30-minute chicken stir-fry recipe" beats "tell me about cooking."

2. Give context

Say who it's for and why. "Explain inflation like I'm in high school."

3. Ask for a format

"As a numbered list," "as a short email," "in three bullet points."

4. Then adjust

Not right? Reply "make it shorter" or "simpler." It's a conversation, not a search box.

ONE SAFETY RULE

AI sometimes sounds confident but gets things wrong ("hallucinations"). Double-check anything that matters — especially health, legal, money, or facts you'll share — and never paste passwords or private information you wouldn't post in public.

Email & Messages

1. Turn rough notes into a polished email

Write a clear, friendly email from these notes: [paste your notes]. Keep it under 150 words and end with a polite call to action.

Why it works: gives raw material, a length limit, and a goal, so the reply is usable as-is.

2. Reply to a difficult message calmly

Help me write a calm, professional reply to this message: [paste message]. I feel frustrated, but I want to sound respectful and keep the relationship positive.

Why it works: naming your emotion and your goal steers the tone away from anything you'd regret sending.

3. Ask your landlord for a repair

Write a polite but firm email to my landlord asking to fix [problem]. It has been [time] and I've mentioned it once before.

Why it works: the history and specifics make the request concrete and hard to brush off.

4. Decline an invitation gracefully

Help me say no to [invitation] warmly, without a long excuse, and leave the door open for next time.

Why it works: defines the exact balance — kind, brief, no over-explaining.

5. Shorten a message you already wrote

Make this half as long without losing the main point or sounding rude: [paste your draft].

Why it works: editing your own words keeps your voice while fixing the length.

6. Follow up without nagging

Write a short, friendly follow-up to [person] about [topic]. It's been a week with no reply. Don't sound impatient.

Why it works: the tone constraint prevents the passive-aggressive edge follow-ups often have.

7. Write a thank-you note

Help me write a warm, casual thank-you note to [name] for [what they did]. Two or three sentences, sincere, not formal.

Why it works: specifying length and register avoids a stiff, greeting-card result.

Money & Budgeting

8. Build a simple monthly budget

Help me make a simple monthly budget. My take-home pay is [amount]. My fixed costs are [rent, bills, etc.]. Suggest a breakdown and where I could save.

Why it works: real numbers turn generic advice into a plan you can actually follow.

9. Understand a financial term

Explain the difference between a Roth IRA and a traditional IRA like I'm 25 and just starting to save. Use a simple example.

Why it works: asking for an example forces a concrete, memorable explanation.

10. Make a plan to pay off debt

I have these debts: [list amounts and interest rates]. Explain the "avalanche" and "snowball" payoff methods and which fits my situation.

Why it works: it teaches you the options instead of just handing over one answer to trust blindly.

11. Plan a week of cheap, healthy dinners

Suggest a week of simple, healthy dinners for a family of [number]. Budget: [amount]. Include a shopping list grouped by store section.

Why it works: the grouped shopping list makes the plan practical, not just aspirational.

12. Compare two big purchases

Help me compare [option A] and [option B]. List pros and cons for cost, quality, and long-term value in a table.

Why it works: a table makes trade-offs easy to scan side by side.

13. Draft a message to dispute a charge

Write a clear, polite message to [company] disputing a charge of [amount] on [date] that I didn't authorize. Ask for a refund and a reply within 10 days.

Why it works: a firm deadline and specifics make the request businesslike and actionable.

Travel & Planning

14. Plan a trip on a budget

Plan a [number]-day trip to [place] for [number] adults. Budget: [amount] not including flights. We like [interests]. Give a day-by-day outline.

Why it works: interests plus a budget produce a realistic itinerary, not a generic tourist list.

15. Build a packing list

Make a packing list for [number] days in [place] in [month]. It will be [weather]. I'm traveling [carry-on only / with a checked bag].

Why it works: weather and bag limits tailor the list to your actual trip.

16. Find things to do near you

Suggest 5 low-cost things to do in [area] this weekend for [who: kids, a couple, etc.]. Mix indoor and outdoor options.

Why it works: constraints (cost, audience, indoor/outdoor) narrow it to genuinely useful ideas.

17. Translate key travel phrases

Give me 15 essential [language] phrases for travel, with simple pronunciation spelled out. Group them by situation (restaurant, directions, emergencies).

Why it works: grouping and phonetic spelling make the phrases usable on the spot.

18. Compare travel options

I'm deciding between [option A] and [option B] for a trip. Compare travel time, cost, and hassle, and recommend one for a relaxed pace.

Why it works: naming your priority ("relaxed pace") gives it a basis for a real recommendation.

19. Prepare questions before you go

I'm visiting [place] for the first time. What are 10 things first-time visitors often wish they'd known?

Why it works: the "wish they'd known" framing surfaces practical tips guidebooks skip.

Health & Wellness Questions

Important: AI is not a doctor and doesn't know your history. Use these to *understand* and *prepare questions* — then talk to a real professional for decisions.

20. Understand a diagnosis or term

Explain what [medical term] means in plain language. What questions should I ask my doctor about it at my next visit?

Why it works: it turns a scary word into understanding plus a checklist for your appointment.

21. Prepare for a doctor's appointment

I have a [type] appointment about [concern]. Help me write down my symptoms clearly and list the questions I should ask.

Why it works: organizing symptoms beforehand means you won't forget anything under pressure.

22. Build a simple, realistic exercise plan

Suggest a beginner exercise routine I can do at home with no equipment, [number] days a week, [time] per session. I'm [age] and haven't exercised in a while.

Why it works: honest constraints produce a plan you'll actually keep, not an athlete's schedule.

23. Decode nutrition advice

Explain the difference between [term A] and [term B] on food labels in simple terms, with examples of foods for each.

Why it works: examples make abstract label jargon concrete at the grocery store.

24. Build better sleep habits

I struggle to fall asleep. Suggest 5 evidence-based habits to try, explain why each helps, and how to start small.

Why it works: "why each helps" lets you judge the advice instead of following it on faith.

25. Support someone else

A friend is going through [situation]. Suggest kind, practical ways I can support them and a few things to avoid saying.

Why it works: the "avoid saying" half is where most of us need the help.

Letters & Important Documents

26. Write a cover letter

Write a cover letter for a [job title] role at [company]. Here's my experience: [paste]. Match the tone to the job description: [paste].

Why it works: feeding it the posting lets it mirror the employer's own language.

27. Polish your résumé bullet points

Rewrite these résumé bullets to start with strong action verbs and show results with numbers where possible: [paste bullets].

Why it works: a clear editing rule (verbs + numbers) yields consistently stronger lines.

28. Draft a letter of complaint

Write a firm but professional complaint letter to [company] about [problem]. State what happened, how it affected me, and exactly what I want them to do.

Why it works: the three-part structure is what makes complaints get resolved.

29. Write a recommendation or reference

Help me write a recommendation for [name], who [relationship and time known], for [purpose]. Their strengths are [list]. Warm and specific, about 200 words.

Why it works: specific strengths prevent the vague, forgettable reference letter.

30. Understand a contract before you sign

Explain this section of a [type] agreement in plain English and flag anything I should ask about before signing: [paste section].

Why it works: "flag anything to ask about" gives you a starting point — then confirm with a professional.

31. Fill in an official form's wording

I need to write a short statement for [form/purpose] explaining [situation].
Help me say it clearly and completely in a few sentences.

Why it works: official forms reward clarity and completeness — exactly what a focused prompt produces.

Learning & Explaining

32. Explain anything simply

Explain [topic] in simple terms that anyone could understand. Use an everyday analogy and keep it under 200 words.

Why it works: the analogy request is what turns a definition into real understanding.

33. Learn at three levels

Explain [topic] three times: once for a child, once for a teenager, and once for an adult who wants the details.

Why it works: the three passes let you stop at whichever depth clicks for you.

34. Get quizzed on a subject

Quiz me on [subject]. Ask 10 questions one at a time, wait for my answer, tell me if I'm right, and explain the ones I miss.

Why it works: one-at-a-time with feedback turns a flat list into active practice.

35. Summarize something long

Summarize the main points of this in 5 bullet points, then add one sentence on why it matters: [paste text].

Why it works: the "why it matters" line pulls out the takeaway, not just the facts.

36. Practice a language

Be my [language] conversation partner at a beginner level. Chat about [topic], keep sentences short, and gently correct my mistakes.

Why it works: setting the level and correction style makes it a patient tutor, not an overwhelming one.

37. Understand both sides of a debate

Give me the strongest arguments on both sides of [issue], fairly and without taking a side. Then list what the two sides actually agree on.

Why it works: asking for common ground counters the tool's pull toward one tidy answer.

38. Make a study or reading plan

I want to learn [skill] in [time], spending [hours] a week. Give me a realistic week-by-week plan with free resources.

Why it works: your real time budget keeps the plan from being wishful.

Home & Everyday Life

39. Fix something around the house

My [item] is [problem]. Walk me through how to diagnose and fix it step by step, and tell me when I should call a professional instead.

Why it works: the "when to call a pro" line keeps a small job from becoming a costly one.

40. Use up what's in your fridge

I have [list ingredients]. Suggest 3 simple meals I can make using mostly these, with quick instructions.

Why it works: starting from what you have cuts waste and a grocery run.

41. Plan and declutter a space

Help me declutter my [room] in [time]. Give me a step-by-step order to work in so I don't get overwhelmed.

Why it works: a defined order is the difference between finishing and stalling halfway.

42. Write a toast or short speech

Help me write a [length] toast for [occasion] for [name]. Here are a few memories and qualities: [list]. Warm, a little funny, not cheesy.

Why it works: real memories make it personal; the tone note keeps it from going corny.

43. Settle a decision

I'm deciding between [A] and [B]. Ask me 5 questions to understand what I value, then help me weigh the options.

Why it works: letting it ask first means the advice fits you, not a generic person.

44. Plan an event or gathering

Help me plan a [event] for [number] people with a [budget]. Give me a checklist and a simple timeline leading up to the day.

Why it works: a checklist plus timeline covers both "what" and "when."

Work & Career

45. Prepare for a job interview

Act as an interviewer for a [job title] role. Ask me common questions one at a time, then give feedback on my answers.

Why it works: live practice with feedback beats reading a list of questions.

46. Ask for a raise

Help me prepare to ask for a raise. My role is [title], I've [accomplishments]. Help me plan what to say and anticipate my manager's questions.

Why it works: anticipating pushback is what makes you feel — and sound — prepared.

47. Write a clear meeting agenda

Turn these goals into a focused 30-minute meeting agenda with time blocks and a clear outcome for each item: [paste goals].

Why it works: time blocks and outcomes are what keep meetings from drifting.

48. Give difficult feedback kindly

Help me give [person] feedback about [issue]. I want to be honest and specific but kind, and end with a clear next step.

Why it works: the honest-but-kind balance plus a next step is the whole skill of feedback.

49. Break a big project into steps

I need to [big goal] by [date]. Break it into clear steps with rough deadlines, and flag which steps depend on others.

Why it works: spotting dependencies stops you from getting blocked late in the project.

50. Learn a new work tool

Explain how to do [task] in [software] step by step, as if I've never used it. Note any common mistakes beginners make.

Why it works: the "common mistakes" note saves you from the errors everyone hits first.

Which AI Tool Should You Use?

These prompts work in any of the big free chatbots. A quick guide:

	ChatGPT	Google Gemini	Claude
Made by	OpenAI	Google	Anthropic
Free plan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Best for	General tasks, most tutorials	Research, Google apps	Long documents, careful writing
Reads images	Yes	Yes	Yes

Rule of thumb: if you live in Gmail and Google Docs, Gemini feels familiar. For long documents or carefully worded writing, try Claude. For everything else — or the tool your friends know — ChatGPT is a safe first choice. All three are free, so trying costs nothing.

Sources & further reading

- OpenAI Help Center — official ChatGPT guides, help.openai.com
- Anthropic — prompt-engineering documentation, docs.claude.com
- Original prompts written and tested by Understand the Machine

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