Before You Hit Send

A Prompt Checklist | All parts of the series

You don’t need a perfect prompt. You need enough information that AI doesn’t have to invent half the project.

Give it context

☐ What am I working on?

☐ Who is this for?

☐ What does AI need to know about what already exists?

Explain the goal

☐ What exactly do I want it to do?

☐ What should the finished result look like?

☐ Have I included an example, screenshot, or reference if one would help?

Set the boundaries

☐ What must stay unchanged?

☐ What limits matter - time, budget, tools, length, or style?

☐ Am I asking it to plan, investigate, write, or make changes?

☐ Are any actions off-limits, such as publishing or changing live data?

Tell it how to respond

☐ Do I want a checklist, draft, table, plan, or finished file?

☐ How much detail do I need?

☐ Should it explain things in plain English?

Handle the unknowns

☐ Have I told it to identify assumptions?

☐ Should it ask questions if missing information would change the result?

Define “done”

☐ What would make this result correct and useful?

☐ If something is being changed, how should it be checked?

☐ What should AI report if it cannot verify the result?

Put It Together

Use this structure to turn your answers into a clear prompt.

Context

I’m working on [project] for [audience]. Here’s what already exists: [background].

Task

I need you to [specific action].

Desired result

The finished result should [describe success].

Boundaries

Follow [requirements]. Keep [existing behavior or content] unchanged. Do not [excluded actions].

Response format

Give me [format] with [level of detail and tone].

Unknowns

Identify assumptions. Ask questions before proceeding if missing information would materially change the result.

Verification

Check the result by [review or test]. Explain anything you could not verify.

Final gut check

Could someone who knows nothing about my project understand what I’m asking?

If not, add the missing context. AI is helpful. It is not psychic.