

THE PROMPT MAKEOVER- SWIPE FILE

25 Before-and-After Prompts That Turn Generic AI Replies

Into Expert-Level Responses

Why a Few Words Change Everything

Most people blame the AI when they get a bland, generic answer. In reality, the model did exactly what it was asked — the instruction was simply too vague to produce anything better. A large language model doesn't read your mind; it predicts the most likely response based on the words you give it. Change the words, and you change the result.

That's the entire idea behind this swipe file. Every page pairs a weak "before" prompt with a stronger "after" version, then explains in one line exactly which levers were pulled to improve it. Over 25 examples, you'll start to recognize the same handful of moves repeating — and that pattern-recognition is what makes prompt writing feel effortless.

How to use this file

You don't need to read it cover to cover. Treat it like a swipe file — a reference you dip into when you're about to write a prompt and want a proven pattern to copy.

- **Jump to your use case.** The makeovers are grouped into six categories, from copywriting to code review. Find the one closest to your task.
- Read the ***before***, then the ***after***. Notice what was added — not just that it got longer, but what kind of detail was supplied.
- **Study the "Why it works" line.** This names the specific technique so you can reuse it on a completely different task.

- **Adapt, don't copy verbatim.** Swap in your own topic, audience, and constraints.

The structure is the reusable part.

Anywhere you see a placeholder like ""[PASTE CODE HERE]"" , that's where you'd drop in your own material when you actually run the prompt.

The Anatomy of a Makeover

Before diving into the examples, it helps to know what you're looking for. Almost every strong prompt in this file pulls on some combination of the same six levers. You rarely need all six at once — two or three, chosen well, are usually enough to transform an answer.

Keep these in mind as you read. When an “after” prompt clicks, it's because one or more of these was added:

The Six Levers

Context. The background and situation. What's going on, and why are you asking?

Without it, the model guesses.

Role. The perspective you want the AI to adopt — “act as an SEO strategist,” “as a management consultant.” This shifts vocabulary, depth, and priorities.

Audience. Who the output is for. “Explain to a beginner” and “explain to a CTO” produce very different answers.

Format. The shape of the response — a table, a checklist, five bullets, a 60-word blurb, Markdown. This alone eliminates most editing.

Constraints. The boundaries: length, tone, reading level, number of examples, what to avoid. Constraints focus the model and reduce revisions.

Examples. One or two samples of what “good” looks like (few-shot prompting). The fastest way to lock in a style or structure.

As you go through the 25 makeovers, try to name the levers yourself before reading the explanation. Once spotting them becomes automatic, you’ll write strong prompts on the first try instead of the third.

The 25 Makeovers

Each makeover shows a weak prompt, a rebuilt version, and the reasoning behind the change. Read them in order, or skip straight to the category you need.

CONTENT & COPYWRITING

Makeover #1 The blog post

BEFORE

Write a blog about remote work.

AFTER

Act as a content strategist writing for a workplace-productivity blog. Write a 1,200-word post titled “How to Stay Productive While Working Remotely” for mid-level managers newly leading distributed teams. Use a practical, encouraging tone. Include an intro, five actionable sections with subheadings, one real-world example per section, and a closing list of five takeaways.

Why it works: Adds a role, an audience, a format, and constraints — turning an open topic into a publish-ready brief the model can execute precisely.

Makeover #2 The product description

BEFORE

Write a product description for headphones.

AFTER

Write a 60-word product description for noise-cancelling wireless headphones aimed at frequent travelers. Lead with the main benefit, mention the 30-hour battery life and all-day comfort, keep a confident but warm tone, and end with a short call to action.

Why it works: A length cap, a clear audience, and concrete product details give the model real material to work with instead of inventing filler.

Makeover #3 The LinkedIn announcement

BEFORE

Write a LinkedIn post about my promotion.

AFTER

Write a LinkedIn post announcing my promotion to Senior Product Manager. Keep it under 150 words, sound genuine rather than boastful, thank my team, share one lesson I learned along the way, and end on a forward-looking line. Add three relevant hashtags.

Why it works: Tone guidance plus a word limit and a required structure prevent the generic “thrilled to announce” template most posts fall into.

Makeover #4 The ad variations**BEFORE**

Write ad copy for a fitness app.

AFTER

Write five Facebook ad headlines (under 8 words each) with a matching one-sentence description for a fitness app that builds custom home-workout plans.

Target busy parents with no time for the gym. Vary the emotional angle across the five: time-saving, results, convenience, motivation, and affordability.

Why it works: Asking for variations across defined angles gives you options to A/B test rather than one flat result you then have to rework.

Makeover #5 The creative hook

BEFORE

Write a short story opening.

AFTER

Write the opening 150 words of a suspense short story set in a small coastal town during a storm. Establish an uneasy mood, introduce one protagonist through action rather than description, and end on a line that raises a question the reader wants answered.

Why it works: A word count, a setting, and a craft instruction (“show, don’t tell”) shape the creative direction instead of leaving it to chance.

EMAIL & COMMUNICATION

Makeover #6 The delay notice

BEFORE

Write an email about a delay.

AFTER

Write a professional email to a client explaining that their website launch will be delayed by four days due to additional accessibility testing. Keep a reassuring tone, take ownership without over-apologizing, give a firm new launch date, and offer a quick call if they have concerns.

Why it works: The situation, the tone, and the specific actions you want remove ambiguity and produce a send-ready draft in one pass.

Makeover #7 The apology with an offer

BEFORE

Write an apology email.

AFTER

Write a short apology email (under 120 words) to a customer whose order arrived damaged. Apologize sincerely, explain that a replacement is already shipping and will arrive in two days, offer 15% off their next order, and close warmly.

Why it works: Concrete facts and a length cap keep the message specific and human rather than a hollow template.

Makeover #8 The cold outreach

BEFORE

Write a sales email.

AFTER

Write a cold outreach email (under 100 words) to a marketing director at a mid-sized SaaS company. I sell an analytics tool that cuts reporting time in half. Open with a relevant observation rather than a pitch, state one clear benefit with a number, and end with a low-pressure ask for a 15-minute call.

Why it works: A named audience, a “no hard pitch” constraint, and a quantified benefit make the email read as personal instead of spam.

Makeover #9 The follow-up

BEFORE

Write a follow-up email.

AFTER

Write a polite follow-up to a prospect who hasn't replied in a week after a demo. Reference the demo, add one new piece of value (a relevant case study), keep it to three short sentences, and make it easy to reply yes or no.

Why it works: Adding "new value" and a length limit turns a nagging reminder into a genuine reason to re-engage.

MARKETING & SEO

Makeover #10 The keyword brief

BEFORE

Give me keywords for a blog about coffee.

AFTER

Act as an SEO strategist. Suggest 10 long-tail keywords for a blog about home espresso for beginners. For each, note the search intent (informational, commercial, or transactional) and a suggested article title. Present it as a table.

Why it works: A role, a table format, and the extra "intent" column make the output something you can plan an entire content calendar around.

Makeover #11 The meta description

BEFORE

Write a meta description.

AFTER

Write a meta description under 155 characters for a post titled “10 Beginner Yoga Poses for Better Sleep.” Include the primary keyword “beginner yoga poses,” a clear benefit, and a subtle call to action.

Why it works: The character limit and keyword requirement match exactly how the copy will be used, so no trimming is needed afterward.

Makeover #12 The content calendar

BEFORE

Make a content calendar.

AFTER

Create a one-month social media calendar for a small bakery, assuming three posts per week across Instagram and Facebook. For each post give the date, platform, theme, a caption idea, and a suggested visual. Present it as a table and rotate themes across promotions, behind-the-scenes, and customer stories.

Why it works: Cadence, channels, and required columns convert a vague ask into a structured plan you can hand to a designer.

Makeover #13 The buyer persona

BEFORE

Describe my target customer.

AFTER

Create a detailed buyer persona for a subscription meal-kit service targeting working professionals aged 28–40. Include demographics, goals, frustrations, buying triggers, and preferred content channels. Use labeled sections and keep each to two or three sentences.

Why it works: Naming the segment and the exact fields produces a persona you can act on, not a vague sketch of “busy people.”

HR & OPERATIONS

Makeover #14 The onboarding checklist

BEFORE

Create an onboarding checklist.

AFTER

Create a 30-day onboarding checklist for a new remote software engineer at a 200-person tech company. Organize it into four phases: pre-start, day one, first week, and first month. Under each phase, list tasks separately for the manager, IT, and the new hire.

Why it works: Phases plus role-based grouping make the checklist assignable in real life rather than a loose to-do dump.

Makeover #15 The job description

BEFORE

Write a job description for a designer.

AFTER

Write a job description for a mid-level UX Designer at a fintech startup. Include a two-sentence company intro, a role summary, six key responsibilities, five required skills, three nice-to-haves, and a short inclusive-hiring statement. Keep the tone welcoming, not corporate.

Why it works: Listing the exact sections and counts prevents the missing-pieces problem that plagues one-line JD prompts.

Makeover #16 The policy summary

BEFORE

Summarize this leave policy.

AFTER

Summarize the leave policy below into a one-page, employee-friendly overview. Use plain language, group it under “Types of leave,” “How to apply,” and “Approval timelines,” and add a short FAQ of three common questions. ""[PASTE POLICY HERE]""

Why it works: A delimiter isolates the source text from your instructions, and the requested grouping makes the summary genuinely usable for staff.

Makeover #17 The interview questions

BEFORE

Give me interview questions.

AFTER

Generate eight interview questions for hiring a Customer Success Manager. Mix behavioral and situational questions, and for each one, add a single line explaining what a strong answer would demonstrate.

Why it works: Specifying the role, the question types, and an evaluation note makes the set ready to drop into a real hiring panel.

SOFTWARE & TECHNICAL

Makeover #18 The code review

BEFORE

Review my code.

AFTER

Review the Python function below for readability, performance, and security. For each issue, explain the problem, why it matters, and show the corrected code. Assume it runs in production handling untrusted user input. """[PASTE CODE HERE]"""

Why it works: Naming the review dimensions and the production context focuses the feedback on what actually matters instead of surface style notes.

Makeover #19 The bug diagnosis

BEFORE

Why isn't my code working?

AFTER

I'm getting "TypeError: cannot read property 'map' of undefined" in the React component below. Explain the likely cause in plain terms, show the fix, and suggest one way to prevent this class of error in future. ""[PASTE COMPONENT HERE]""

Why it works: The exact error, the framework, and a request for prevention turn guesswork into a targeted diagnosis you learn from.

Makeover #20 The documentation

BEFORE

Write documentation for this function.

AFTER

Write developer documentation for the function below. Include a one-line summary, parameters with their types, the return value, one usage example, and any edge cases to watch for. Format it as a Markdown docstring. ""[PASTE FUNCTION HERE]""

Why it works: Required fields plus a Markdown format produce documentation that drops straight into a codebase with no cleanup.

Makeover #21 The test suite

BEFORE

Write tests for my function.

AFTER

Write unit tests for the JavaScript function below using Jest. Cover the happy path, at least two edge cases, and one invalid-input case. Add a short comment above each test explaining what it verifies. ""[PASTE FUNCTION HERE]""

Why it works: Specifying the framework and the required coverage ensures meaningful tests rather than one trivial assertion.

ANALYSIS & STRATEGY

Makeover #22 The SWOT analysis

BEFORE

Do a SWOT analysis for my business.

AFTER

Act as a management consultant. Prepare a SWOT analysis for a local independent bookstore facing competition from online retailers. Give three to four specific points per quadrant, then follow with two concrete strategic recommendations drawn from the analysis.

Why it works: A role, specificity, and a “so what” recommendation step move the output from a generic grid to advice you can act on.

Makeover #23 The data read-out

BEFORE

What does this data mean?

AFTER

Analyze the monthly sales data below. Identify the strongest trend, one anomaly worth investigating, and two possible explanations for it. State your assumptions and present the findings as short bullets a manager could scan in 30 seconds.

""[PASTE DATA HERE]""

Why it works: Asking for assumptions and a scannable format produces analysis you can trust and act on quickly.

Makeover #24 The decision comparison

BEFORE

Should I use option A or B?

AFTER

Compare two project-management tools, Asana and Trello, for a 15-person marketing team. Evaluate them on ease of use, reporting, integrations, and price. Present a comparison table, then give a recommendation with a one-paragraph justification.

Why it works: Defined criteria, a table, and a reasoned recommendation give you a decision — not just two descriptions to compare yourself.

Makeover #25 The step-by-step reasoning

BEFORE

How should I price my product?

AFTER

Help me set a price for a new SaaS product. Walk through it step by step: outline the main pricing models, weigh the pros and cons of each for a B2B tool with \$50/month competitors, factor in our goal of fast market-share growth, and recommend a starting price with justification.

Why it works: Requesting explicit step-by-step reasoning surfaces the logic and leads to a far more defensible conclusion.

The Pre-Send Checklist

Before you hit enter on any important prompt, run it through this quick check. You won't need every item every time — but if the answer keeps coming back generic, one of these is almost always missing.

- ☐ Did I give the AI context about my situation and why I'm asking?
- ☐ Did I assign a role or perspective ("act as...")?
- ☐ Did I name the audience the output is for?
- ☐ Did I specify the output format (table, list, word count, Markdown)?
- ☐ Did I set constraints — length, tone, and reading level?
- ☐ Did I include one or two examples where style or structure matters?
- ☐ Did I state the goal or desired outcome clearly?
- ☐ Did I use delimiters ("" or ###) to separate instructions from source text?
- ☐ Did I ask for reasoning or justification on analytical tasks?
- ☐ Am I ready to refine with a follow-up if the first result isn't quite right?

Prompting is rarely one-and-done. If the first answer is 80% there, don't start over — tell the AI what to adjust ("make it shorter," "more formal," "add a data point"). Iteration is part of the technique, not a sign the prompt failed.

Common “Before” Mistakes at a Glance

Nearly every weak prompt in this file failed for one of six reasons. Here they are side by side, with the fix. Think of it as the diagnostic key: when an answer disappoints, match the symptom to a row.

The mistake	What it causes	The fix
No context	Generic, off-target output	Add the situation and the purpose behind your request
No audience	Wrong reading level or tone	Name exactly who the output is for
No format	A shapeless wall of text	Specify the structure you want — table, list, word count
No constraints	Bloated or vague replies	Set length, tone, and any limits up front
No examples	Inconsistent style	Add one or two samples of what “good” looks like
Everything at once	Muddled, shallow output	Break the request into smaller, sequential prompts

The pattern across all six is the same: vagueness in, vagueness out. Every fix is really just one instruction — be more specific about what you actually want.

READY TO GO BEYOND THE SWIPE FILE?

Turn these techniques into a credential.

This swipe file gives you the patterns. A structured program gives you the depth — the frameworks, the theory, and the hands-on practice that turn prompting from a handy trick into a professional skill you can put on your résumé.

The GSDC Certified Prompt Engineering Certification is built for exactly that. Whether you're a marketer, developer, HR professional, educator, or business leader, it takes you from the fundamentals through advanced techniques and real-world application.

What the certification covers:

- Fundamentals of prompt engineering and how large language models interpret instructions
- Prompt design techniques, including role prompting and few-shot and zero-shot prompting
- Chain-of-thought prompting for complex reasoning and analysis
- AI ethics and the responsible, safe use of generative AI
- Industry-specific applications across marketing, HR, software, and business strategy

- Hands-on practice with real-world scenarios and repeatable workflows

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