

Cochise College Center for Lifelong Learning

A.I. Power Prompting

Getting More From Every AI Conversation

George Self
Spring 2026

Email me at: contact@georgeteaches.com
Visit: georgeteaches.com
Visit: cochiseai.com

Introduction

Welcome to **A.I. Power Prompting**.¹ If you have used AI before, you already know the basics: type a question, read the answer. That works. But it is a bit like having a conversation with a brilliant expert and only ever asking yes-or-no questions.

Today is about learning to have the real conversation. The difference between a casual AI user and a confident one is not which tool they use. It is how they write their prompts. A well-constructed prompt can take an answer from generic and barely useful to specific, polished, and ready to use.

This class will give you a repeatable framework, a set of advanced techniques, and practice applying both to things you actually need to get done.

What You Need

Everything we do today runs in a web browser. Go to <https://chatgpt.com>. No account is required — you can use ChatGPT for free without signing in. If you do sign in with a free account (Google and Microsoft accounts work), you get a few extras: your conversation history is saved, you can pick up where you left off, and the responses are sometimes a bit longer. Either way, all of the exercises in this class work fine.

Learning Goals

By the end of this session, you will:

- Use the 4-D framework to write prompts that get consistently useful results
- Apply advanced techniques including chain-of-thought, few-shot examples, and the iteration loop
- Recognize and fix the most common prompting mistakes
- Apply power prompting to real tasks from your own work and daily life

Big Idea

A vague prompt produces a vague answer. Everything else in this class is a variation on that single truth.

¹Written by George Self with assistance from Claude and ChatGPT. It was formatted with \LaTeX .

Module 1: The 4-D Framework

Most people write prompts the way they write internet search queries: short, keyword-heavy, and light on context. That approach was designed for search engines that infer what you want. AI assistants work differently. They take your prompt literally and build their entire response from exactly what you gave them.

The 4-D framework structures a prompt around four elements that, together, give AI everything it needs to produce a result that is actually useful to you.

Before and After: The Same Request, Two Ways

Read these two prompts and consider what each one is likely to produce.

Without 4-D:

Write an email about the meeting.

With 4-D:

You are a professional business writer. I manage a small landscaping company in Sierra Vista, Arizona with six employees. I need to reschedule a Monday morning team meeting because of a supplier appointment that came up unexpectedly. Write a brief email to my crew letting them know the meeting is moved to Wednesday at 7:00 AM. Keep the tone friendly and direct. No more than three short paragraphs. Do not include a subject line or signature since I will add those myself.

The second prompt will produce something you can send with minimal editing. The first will produce something generic that requires rewriting from scratch. The only difference is the information you provided.

The Four Elements

Define: Tell AI What Role to Play

Start by telling the AI who it is for this task. This one sentence sets the tone, vocabulary, and level of expertise for everything that follows.

Weak: *(no role given)*

Strong: "You are an experienced HR manager."

Strong: "You are a plain-language financial advisor explaining concepts to a non-expert."

Strong: "You are a marketing copywriter who specializes in small local businesses."

Strong: "You are a compassionate nurse explaining a diagnosis in terms a patient can understand."

Role framing is not about pretending or fiction. It is a signal that calibrates the AI's response toward a specific type of expertise and communication style. A "plain-language financial advisor" will explain compound interest very differently than a "financial analyst writing for institutional investors."

Describe: Give Context About Your Situation

This is where most prompts fall short. Tell the AI the specific situation: who you are, who your audience is, what has already happened, and anything else that makes this task yours rather than a generic request.

Weak: "I have a difficult employee."

Strong: "I manage a team of eight at a small nonprofit. One employee has been consistently late to Monday morning meetings for the past month. I have spoken with her informally once, but the behavior has continued. I want to address it more formally now without damaging the working relationship."

The more specific the context, the more specific — and useful — the output. You are not limited to one sentence. Give AI as much background as it needs.

Direct: State the Specific Task

Now tell the AI exactly what you want it to produce. Use a specific action verb and be precise about the goal.

Weak: "Help me with this." / "Tell me about this."

Strong: "Write a one-page memo." / "List five talking points." / "Summarize this in three bullet points." / "Draft a script for a two-minute phone call."

Action verbs that produce results: Write, Draft, List, Summarize, Compare, Explain, Outline, Analyze, Rewrite, Translate, Critique, Suggest, Create, Identify, Simplify.

Deliver: Specify the Format and Tone

Finally, tell AI how you want the answer delivered. Without this, the AI makes its own formatting choices, which may or may not match what you need.

Length: "No more than 150 words." / "One short paragraph." / "A single page."

Format: "Use bullet points." / "Write in paragraph form." / "Use a table." / "Number each step."

Tone: "Professional but warm." / "Conversational, not formal." / "Direct and matter-of-fact."

Reading level: "Plain English, no jargon." / "Write for someone with no technical background."

Exclusions: "Do not include a salutation." / "Avoid bullet points." / "Do not suggest consulting a lawyer."

You Do Not Always Need All Four

For simple, low-stakes requests, a full 4-D prompt is overkill. "Give me five ideas for a birthday dinner in Tucson" does not need a role or format instruction. Use the full framework when the output actually matters — professional communications, important decisions, anything you plan to use or share.

Activity 1.1: Spot the Missing D

Each prompt below is missing one of the four elements. Identify which D is absent and explain what you would add.

1. Write a thank-you note for a donation to my charity golf tournament. Keep it under 100 words and use a warm, personal tone.
2. You are a plain-language healthcare writer. Write a brief explanation of what a deductible is and how it works.
3. You are a career coach helping a mid-career professional. I am 52 years old and have spent 20 years in retail management. I am considering a career change into corporate training. Summarize the transferable skills I likely already have and what gaps I might need to address.

Activity 1.2: Upgrade a Weak Prompt

Take each weak prompt below and rewrite it using all four elements of the 4-D framework. Work individually, then compare your version with a neighbor.

1. Write a bio for my website.
2. Explain Medicare to me.
3. Help me respond to a bad review online.

After writing your upgraded prompts, try one of them in ChatGPT and evaluate the result. Does the output reflect the context you provided?

Activity 1.3: Build One From Scratch

Think of a real task you need to get done this week — at work, at home, or in your personal life. Using the 4-D framework, write a complete prompt for it. Try it in ChatGPT.

- **Define:** Who should the AI be?
- **Describe:** What is your specific situation?
- **Direct:** What exactly do you want it to produce?
- **Deliver:** How should it be formatted?

Module 1 Checklist

1. Identified the four elements of the 4-D framework
2. Compared a weak prompt and a strong prompt side by side
3. Identified the missing element in at least two example prompts
4. Rewrote at least one weak prompt using the full framework
5. Tested a complete 4-D prompt in ChatGPT and evaluated the result

Module 2: Advanced Techniques

The 4-D framework gives you a strong foundation. The techniques in this module let you go further: getting better answers to complex questions, matching a specific tone, and refining output through conversation rather than starting over every time.

Chain-of-Thought: Show Your Work

For simple tasks, AI can answer directly. For complex ones — decisions, planning, multi-step problems — adding a chain-of-thought instruction produces a more thorough and reliable response.

```
Think through this step by step before giving me your answer.
```

This works because it prompts the AI to reason through the problem rather than jump to a conclusion. It is especially effective for:

- Planning decisions ("Should I take this contract?")
- Process questions ("How should I approach this conversation?")
- Anything where logic and sequence matter

- Situations where you want to see the reasoning, not just the result

Activity 2.1: Chain-of-Thought Planning

Try this prompt in ChatGPT:

```
You are a practical business advisor. I run a small bookkeeping service with three clients. A fourth client has asked me to take on their account, but it would require about ten additional hours per week. I am already working close to capacity. Think through this step by step before giving me your answer. what questions should I ask myself before deciding whether to take on the new client, and what are the key trade-offs?
```

Few-Shot Examples: Show AI What You Want

Sometimes the easiest way to describe what you want is to show it. A few-shot prompt gives the AI one or two examples before making your request, so it can match your style, tone, or format exactly.

Basic structure:

1. Show an example of the style or format you want
2. Then make your request

Activity 2.2: Tone Matching With Examples

Try this prompt in ChatGPT:

```
Here is an example of the tone I use in my customer emails: "Hi Maria, just a quick note to say your quarterly report is ready. Nothing alarming in there - a few items worth talking through at our next meeting. Let me know if you want to chat before then." Using that same tone, write a follow-up email to a client who missed our scheduled phone call this morning.
```

Notice how the AI adapts to the example rather than using its default professional tone. This is one of the fastest ways to get output that actually sounds like you.

Negative Constraints: Tell AI What Not to Do

Just as useful as telling AI what you want is telling it what you do *not* want. Negative constraints prevent the most common formatting and tone problems before they

happen.

"Do not use bullet points."

"Do not start any sentence with the word I."

"Avoid jargon and technical terms."

"Do not suggest that I consult a professional — I just want a plain-language explanation."

"Do not include a closing paragraph that summarizes what you just said."

"Do not make the response longer than it needs to be."

You can combine these freely with the rest of the 4-D framework. They belong in the Deliver step.

The Iteration Loop: Treat the First Answer as a Draft

This may be the single most practical shift in how you use AI. Most people read the first response, decide it is not quite right, and either give up or start over with a completely new prompt. There is a better way.

The iteration loop:

1. Send your prompt and read the response
2. Identify specifically what is not right about it
3. Tell the AI what to change — in plain language
4. Repeat until you have what you need

Every follow-up message in a conversation builds on everything that came before. You do not need to repeat your context. You can simply say:

"Make it shorter."

"The second paragraph is too formal. Rewrite it."

"Add a sentence about our return policy."

"Give me three alternative versions of the opening line."

"What is missing from this that I should consider?"

"Now rewrite this for an audience that has never used the product before."

The Conversation Is the Context

Everything you say in a session accumulates. By the middle of a productive AI conversation, the AI has rich context about your situation, your

preferences, and your goals. Use it. You can say: "Take everything we have discussed and write a one-page summary I can share with my team."

Activity 2.3: The Iteration Game

Start with this deliberately weak prompt in ChatGPT:

```
Write a short bio about me for my business website.
```

Read the response. Without starting a new conversation, use follow-up messages to improve the output. You might say things like:

- "Make it more personal and less corporate-sounding."
- "I have been in this business for 22 years. Add that."
- "Cut it to three sentences."
- "What's missing that a strong bio usually includes?"

The goal: get to a result you would actually use, using only follow-up messages — no rewriting the original prompt.

Module 2 Checklist

1. Used chain-of-thought prompting and compared it to a direct answer
2. Used a few-shot example to match a specific tone or style
3. Applied at least two negative constraints in a prompt
4. Used the iteration loop to improve a response through follow-up messages

Module 3: Power Prompting in Action

The best way to make the 4-D framework stick is to apply it to something you actually care about. This module offers scenarios drawn from common work and personal situations. Work through one or two that are relevant to you, then bring it back to something from your own life.

Professional Communication

Activity 3.1: Handle a Difficult Situation by Email

1. Build a 4-D prompt for this scenario (or one from your own work):
A vendor has delivered a project two weeks late and the result has quality problems. You need to address the issue in writing without destroying the business relationship, but you also need to make clear that this cannot happen again.
Your:
 - **Define:** a professional business communicator
 - **Describe:** the situation specifically
 - **Direct:** write an email
 - **Deliver:** firm but professional tone, under 200 words, no threats, no apologies for the vendor's behavior
2. Try it in ChatGPT.
3. Iterate: use at least two follow-up messages to improve the result.

Business Content and Marketing

Activity 3.2: Write Content for Your Business

1. Think of a real content need for your business or organization: a social media post, a short newsletter item, a description for your website, or an announcement for an event.
2. Build a full 4-D prompt. Be specific in the Describe step: your organization, your audience, and what you want them to feel or do after reading.
3. Try it in ChatGPT.
4. Follow up:
Now give me two alternative versions: one that is slightly more formal and one that is slightly more casual.

Personal Life and Health

Activity 3.3: Prepare for a Doctor's Appointment

1. Ask:

You are a plain-language health educator. My doctor recently told me I have pre-diabetes. I have my next appointment in two weeks. Explain in plain language what pre-diabetes means, what the most important lifestyle factors are for managing it, and give me a list of ten specific questions I should ask my doctor at the next appointment.

2. Follow up:

Which of those questions are most important if I only have time for five?

Remember: Use AI to prepare and understand, not to replace your physician's advice.

Module 3 Checklist

1. Applied the 4-D framework to at least two scenarios from this module
2. Used chain-of-thought prompting in at least one multi-step conversation
3. Used iteration to refine a response rather than starting over
4. Identified at least two tasks from your own work or life you will apply this to this week

Wrap-Up

You now have a complete framework for getting consistently useful results from AI. The core idea is simple: the quality of the answer depends almost entirely on the quality of the prompt.

When a response misses the mark, return to the four elements:

- **Define** — Did you give the AI a role and expertise to draw from?
- **Describe** — Did you provide enough context about your situation?
- **Direct** — Did you state clearly what you want?
- **Deliver** — Did you specify the format, length, and tone?

The best way to improve is to experiment. Try the same request with and without a role. Add context you would normally leave out. Ask for a different format. Each experiment teaches you something about how AI responds to language — and that knowledge compounds quickly.

AI will not replace your judgment, your relationships, or your expertise. What it can do is handle the drafting, organizing, and research so that your time and attention go toward the parts only you can do.

Start with one real task. Write a 4-D prompt. See what happens.

Appendices

Instructor Demonstration Guide

Demonstrated on the instructor's laptop using Claude (claude.ai) with a Pro account.

- **Projects** — A workspace with pre-set instructions and uploaded files that carry into every conversation. Demo: the instructor's "Linux Desktop Computer" project vs. a standard session — show how the project's pre-loaded context shapes the response without rewriting the Define and Describe steps each time. For repeated tasks, Projects mean you never start from scratch.
- **Memory** — Claude remembers your name, business, and preferences across all future sessions. Demo: add a fact, then show how a new conversation reflects it automatically.
- **Document Upload** — Upload PDFs, Word docs, spreadsheets, or images and ask Claude to summarize, analyze, or answer questions. Handles very long documents in a single session. Demo: upload the *Medicare & You* handbook and ask: "Summarize this in five bullet points for someone who just turned 65 and is enrolling in Medicare for the first time."
- **Artifacts** — Structured output (documents, tables, forms) appears in a separate panel alongside the chat, ready to copy or download. To open the artifact panel, ask Claude to return the result as an HTML page. Demo prompt: "Create a one-page client intake form for a small accounting firm with sections for contact info, current software, pain points, and goals. Return it as an HTML page." Then follow up: "Add a section for referral source."
- **Web Search (Pro)** — Claude searches the web for current information and cites its sources. Demo prompt: "What is the recent budget fight in Arizona?" Show the citations in the response.
- **Skills** — Saved, reusable instructions that activate with a single command. A Skill works like a Project that launches instantly — all the Define and Describe steps are already written. Demo: use the Plain-Language Editor Skill with the sample

paragraph below, then show the same request to a standard session without the Skill to contrast the results.

Sample paragraph for the Plain-Language Editor demo:

The implementation of the revised procurement protocols will necessitate a comprehensive reevaluation of our existing vendor engagement frameworks to ensure alignment with the updated compliance requirements promulgated by the oversight committee. Stakeholders are advised to facilitate the transition by coordinating with departmental representatives to effectuate the requisite modifications to operational procedures prior to the end of the fiscal quarter.

- **Connectors** — Direct links to Google Drive, GitHub, and other services so Claude can read files already stored there without manual uploads. Demo: connect to Google Drive and summarize `grant_proposal.pdf` found there.

Popular AI Models

The 4-D framework works with any AI. Different tools have different strengths — choosing the right one for a task often improves results.

- **ChatGPT (OpenAI)** — The most widely known AI and a reliable all-rounder. Strong at creative writing, complex reasoning, and a large library of user-created specialty tools. Best for general brainstorming and draft generation.
- **Claude (Anthropic)** — Known for natural, human-sounding writing and a very long context window, meaning it can read and analyze entire books or large document sets in one session. Best for summarizing long reports and professional writing.
- **Gemini (Google)** — Built into the Google ecosystem with real-time web search and direct access to Google Docs, Drive, and Gmail. Best for researching current events and working with files already stored in Google Drive.
- **Microsoft Copilot** — Embedded in Windows and the Microsoft Office suite. Best for drafting Word documents, summarizing Outlook email threads, and analyzing data in Excel.

Quick Reference: The 4-D Framework

The Template

Copy and adapt this structure for any important prompt:

Define: You are a [role with relevant expertise and appropriate tone].

Describe: [Describe your specific situation, audience, and relevant background details.]

Direct: [Action verb] + [specific thing to produce] + [goal or purpose].

Deliver: [Length] + [format] + [tone] + [any exclusions].

Useful Action Verbs

Create: Write, Draft, Design, Compose, Generate, Create, Develop

Analyze: Summarize, Analyze, Compare, Evaluate, Critique, Identify, Assess

Transform: Rewrite, Simplify, Translate, Condense, Expand, Rephrase, Convert

Plan: Outline, List, Suggest, Recommend, Organize, Prioritize, Plan

Explain: Explain, Describe, Clarify, Define, Illustrate, Walk me through

Weak vs. Strong: Side-by-Side

Weak: Write me a cover letter.

Strong: You are an experienced career coach specializing in mid-career transitions. I am a 55-year-old retail manager applying for a corporate training coordinator position. I have 20 years of team leadership experience but no formal training credentials. Write a one-page cover letter that emphasizes my leadership experience as a direct foundation for a training role. Professional but warm tone. Do not mention my age or use phrases like "seasoned professional."

Advanced Technique Quick Reference

Chain-of-thought: Add "Think through this step by step before answering" to any complex prompt.

Few-shot: Start with "Here is an example of what I want: [example]. Now do the same for..."

Iterate: Use follow-up messages: "Make it shorter." / "The second paragraph is too formal." / "Add a sentence about..."

Self-critique: Ask "What is weak or missing in this response?" after any important answer.

Negative constraints: Tell AI what not to do: "Do not use jargon." / "Avoid bullet points." / "No more than three paragraphs."

Reframe for audience: "Now rewrite this for someone who has never used this product before."