How to Ask AI Better Questions:

A Practical Guide with Good and Bad Examples

This document explains how people often assume AI understands vague or incomplete instructions, contrasted with how AI actually interprets requests. It also provides clear examples of weak prompts and strong, well-structured prompts suitable for academic, government, and professional use.

1. How People Assume AI Works

Many users assume AI can 'read their minds,' infer context automatically, or understand intentions that are not stated. This leads to vague or underspecified prompts such as:

• "Write this better."

• "Fix this."

• "You know what I mean—just finish it."

AI does not have access to the user's internal intent, background assumptions, or hidden expectations. Without clear structure, the AI has to guess—often leading to results that miss the target.

2. How AI Actually Prefers Instructions

AI produces the best results when instructions are explicit, structured, and contextual. Clear prompts include information about:

• Purpose of the content

• Audience

• Tone or style

• Length requirements

• What to avoid or emphasize

• Format (bullet points, essay, technical brief, etc.)

3. Bad Examples of Prompts (Common Mistakes)

Below are examples of ineffective or unclear prompts and why they fail:

• "Explain this." — No subject, no context, no direction.

• "Make this sound nicer." — Undefined: nicer could mean formal, casual, simpler, more technical, etc.

• "Tell me the important parts." — Doesn't define the audience or purpose of the summary.

• "Fix this paragraph." — AI doesn't know what 'fix' means: grammar? tone? clarity? structure?

• "Write something about AI." — Far too broad; could be anything from ethics to neural networks.

4. Good Examples of Prompts (Clear & Effective)

Here are strong, structured prompts and explanations of why they work:

• "Rewrite this paragraph for a government agency audience. Maintain a formal tone and remove any marketing language." — Defines audience, tone, and constraints.

• "Summarize this document into 150 words for a technical briefing." — Defines length, purpose, and format.

• "Turn these bullet points into a friendly, conversational paragraph suitable for a public-facing newsletter." — Defines tone, audience, and format.

• "Provide three design ideas for a product that dries reusable bags. Keep ideas low-cost and feasible for 3D printing." — Gives constraints and domain details.

• "Explain this concept in simple language for a classroom of 8th-grade students." — Specifies clarity level and audience expertise.

5. Recommended Structure When Asking AI

A reliable structure for high-quality questions:

• 1. Purpose — Why you need the output.

• 2. Audience — Who will read or use it.

• 3. Format — Paragraph, bullet points, academic tone, policy memo, etc.

• 4. Constraints — Length, tone, required inclusions/exclusions.

• 5. Examples — Optional but extremely effective.