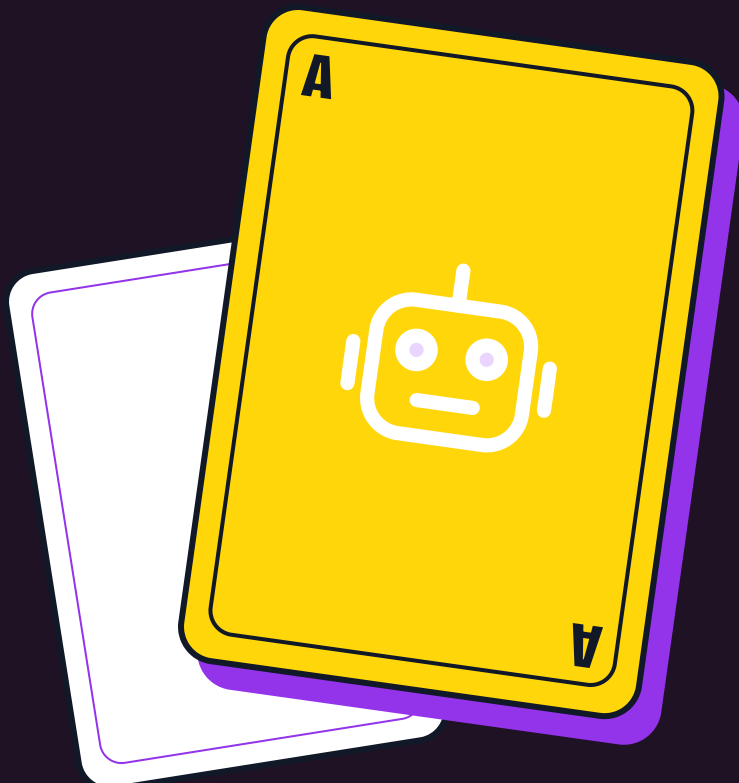


STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · AI

HOW TO PROMPT AI EFFECTIVELY (THE **CAWR FORMULA**)

Most disappointing AI answers come from short, vague prompts. Give the AI what a new member of staff would need: context, a clear job, what to watch out for and what the finished thing should look like. That's the CAWR formula we teach at our workshops, and it works in ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot and Claude alike.

By **Jack Easterbrook** 8 steps 9 min read Updated September 2026



BEFORE YOU START

- ☐ An AI chat tool: ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot or Claude
- ☐ A real task you'd like help with this week
- ☐ Anything the AI needs to read: notes, examples, a web page
- ☐ About 10 minutes to practise

Good to know: On a free or personal account? Turn off using your chats for training in the settings, and never paste in customer details. Our "AI is a tool, not a replacement" guide explains how.

THE STEPS TICK EACH ONE OFF AS YOU GO

PART 1 THE CAWR FORMULA

1

C is for Context: who, what and why

AI knows nothing about your business unless you tell it. Say what you do, where, who your customers are and what you're trying to achieve. Using the same details every time? Save them in your tool's custom instructions, a project or a Gem so you don't have to repeat yourself.

☐
DONE

2

A is for Action: one clear job

Start with a verb and be specific. "Write three subject lines for our spring newsletter" beats "help with email". Big jobs work better in stages: outline first, then draft, then polish.

☐
DONE

3

W is for Warnings: what to watch out for

Name the few things that would spoil the result, like US spelling, a salesy tone, too much length or made-up facts. Where you can, say what you want instead ("use UK spelling" works better than "no American English"). Stick to the essentials, or the AI can overcorrect.

☐
DONE

4**R is for Result: what good looks like**

Say exactly how you want it back: bullet points, a table, a 100-word paragraph, an email, a CSV for a spreadsheet, even HTML. Add the tone and length too.

**PART 2****LEVEL UP****5****Show it an example**

Paste a piece of writing you like, or a past post that did well, and say what to copy from it. Examples are one of the most reliable ways to steer tone and format.

**6****Let it ask you questions first**

End your prompt with "Before you start, ask me any questions you need answered." The AI then fills the gaps with your facts instead of guesses.

**7****Refine, don't restart**

Treat the first answer as a draft. Stay in the same chat and steer it: "shorter", "more like option two", "make the opening friendlier". Good prompting is a conversation.

**8****Check it before you use it**

Read every word. Check facts, figures, prices and anything legal, then make it sound like you. AI can state wrong things with total confidence.



Build your tone of voice guide

Do this first. Paste the guide into future chats so everything sounds like you.

Context: I run [business name], a [type of business] in [town], and our customers are [who they are]. Below are three pieces of writing that sound like us.

Action: Analyse the tone and style of the examples: how formal they are, sentence length, favourite words and phrases, and anything distinctive. Turn it into a one-page tone of voice guide I can paste into future chats.

Warnings: Use UK spelling. Only describe what's actually in the examples.

Result: Short sections headed Our voice in one sentence, Do, Don't, Words we use, Words we avoid, plus two before-and-after examples.

[Paste your three examples here]

Plan a month of social posts

Twelve ideas built around the questions your customers really ask.

Context: I run [business name] in [area]. Our customers are [describe them] and they often ask us about [common questions]. Here's our tone of voice guide: [paste it].

Action: Suggest 12 social media post ideas for the next four weeks, mixing tips, behind-the-scenes, customer questions and offers.

Warnings: Keep every idea specific to a [type of business], not generic. Use UK spelling and no more than three hashtags per post.

Result: A table with columns for Week, Platform, Post idea, Opening line and Call to action.

Write a blog post, outline first

Gets your knowledge into the post, not the AI's guesses.

Context: I run [business name]. I want a blog post for [audience] that answers the question: [a question customers ask you]. Here's our tone of voice guide: [paste it].

Action: First, ask me up to five questions about my own experience with this topic. Then write an outline with an introduction, four to six sections and a conclusion. Wait for my OK before writing the full draft.

Warnings: Use my answers for examples rather than inventing them. Flag any fact or figure I should double-check.

Result: The outline as headings with a one-line note each. Then, once I approve, a draft of around 800 words in plain paragraphs.

Reply to a Google review

A calm first draft for the tricky ones. You personalise it and post it.

Context: I run [business name]. A customer left this Google review: [paste the review]. Here's what happened from our side: [brief notes].

Action: Write a reply I can post on our Google Business Profile.

Warnings: Keep it calm, personal and never defensive. Leave out the customer's personal details and don't offer anything in return for changing the review.

Result: Two options under 80 words each, one warmer and one more formal.

Write FAQs for a service page

Answers built only from your facts, with gaps flagged.

Context: I run [business name], offering [services] in [area]. These are the questions customers ask us most: [list them or paste a few emails].

Action: Write clear answers for the FAQ section of our [service] page.

Warnings: Use only the facts I've given you. Wherever you'd need information I haven't provided, write [CHECK] instead of guessing.

Result: Six to eight questions with answers of two or three sentences each, in plain English with UK spelling.

WHY A FEW MORE WORDS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Google has found that people's first prompts in Gemini are usually under nine words, while the prompts that work best average around 21. Those extra words are context, and context is what turns a generic answer into one that fits your business.

BEST-PRACTICE TIPS

A

Longer beats shorter

A few sentences of context almost always beat a one-line request.

K

One job per prompt

Ask for one thing at a time, then build on it in the same chat.

Q

Give it your facts

Paste your prices, opening hours or service list rather than hoping it knows them.

J

Name the audience

"For busy homeowners" or "for other business owners" changes the whole answer.

10

Ask for options

Ask for three versions, pick the best, then ask it to improve that one.

9

Save your winners

Keep prompts that worked in a note, so the next job takes seconds.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERED

Which AI tool should I use?

ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot and Claude all handle everyday business writing well. The CAWR formula works in all of them, so start with whichever fits the tools you already use.

Do I need a paid plan?

Not to start. Free plans are fine for learning. Paid business plans add more usage and admin controls, and with some providers they keep your chats out of model training by default.

Why does AI sometimes make things up?

AI tools predict likely-sounding text, so when they don't know something they can guess confidently. Give it your facts, and ask it to flag anything it isn't sure about.

Can I reuse the prompts on this page?

Yes, that's what they're for. Swap anything in [square brackets] for your own details.



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Sources

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- Prompting best practices (Anthropic): <https://platform.claude.com/docs/en/build-with-claude/prompt-engineering/claude-prompting-best-practices>
- Why language models hallucinate (OpenAI): <https://openai.com/index/why-language-models-hallucinate/>

The online version of this guide, with any updates, is at jaedigital.co.uk/advice/how-to-prompt-ai/.

got stuck? no shame in it

SHORT ON TIME? **WORK WITH US.**

This is our day job. Tell us where you got to and we'll pick it up from there, finish it with you, or take the whole thing off your hands. Discovery calls are free and take 30 minutes.

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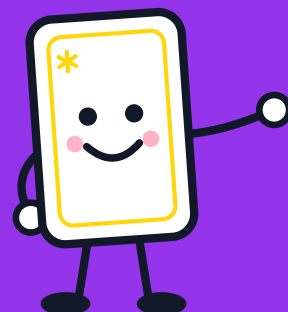
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