

Microsoft Copilot

Prompting Guide

1. Provide a Clear and Concise Prompt

To get the best results from Copilot, you need to give it a clear and concise prompt. The more you explain what you want, the more Copilot can tailor its response to your goal. The following examples show how a comprehensive prompt can make a big difference in the quality and relevance of Copilot's output, so that you get content that fits your needs.

Initial prompt	Potential issues	Revised prompt
Rewrite this document to be more concise	Lack of context on which sections to prioritize or maintain	Rewrite the introduction and conclusion of this document to be more concise while preserving the main points
Write a personal narrative about a memorable experience	Could generate a narrative that lacks depth or detail, possibly producing a generic story without emotional resonance or vivid imagery	Write a personal narrative about a memorable experience you had in nature, using vivid sensory details and emotions
Summarize the product reviews copied below	Could result in a too-general summary that doesn't provide actionable insights	Summarize the top three positive and top three negative points from the product reviews
Draft a response to this client's complaint	Too generic; the tone, solutions offered, or the depth of the response may not match company standards or the complaint's severity	Draft a polite response to this client's complaint about shipping delays, offering a 10% discount on their next order

2. Provide Regular Feedback

Many people stop trying AI after one bad prompt response. But working with Copilot is a collaboration between you and your Copilot, where you both work together to create content, fix hard problems, and learn new things based on what you want, expect, and tell your Copilot. And your first prompt is only the start. The more details and context you give, the better Copilot can match your needs and produce more fitting outputs. This also benefits your learning. When you request Copilot to explain, summarize, or paraphrase something, you can discover new things and viewpoints.

For example, give Copilot feedback when it produces good or bad outputs. Doing so enables it to learn from your expectations and improve its performance. For example:

This sentence is too vague. Please be more specific.

Thank you. This version is better.

Please add a sentence that summarizes the main point of the paragraph.

Suppose you need to prepare for a presentation. You might first type: *Please create a storyboard for a 60-minute keynote where I need to get a room full of salespeople engaged about our new approach to sustainability. Use these files as background.*

Once Copilot shares a draft, you can follow up. For example:

Add a key message to land for each section.

That plan is great, but I'd like more details on why a salesperson would care about this issue.

Keep going until you're satisfied. Copilot doesn't get discouraged, so ask for plenty of options. For example:

Give me 10 ideas for an opening paragraph.

Rewrite this section in five distinct styles.

Give me three analogies that might resonate with this audience.

3. Understand Copilot's Limitations

It's essential to recognize that while Copilot is powerful, it's not infallible. Knowing its limitations can help you create effective prompts. For example:

- **Break down complex tasks.** If a task requires intricate thought processes or numerous steps when done manually, it's likely to be just as challenging for Copilot. Consider segmenting these tasks or thoughts into more manageable pieces. Don't cram too many questions or requests into one prompt.
- **Optimize for repetition.** Copilot is more efficient at performing simple repetitive tasks multiple times compared to manually performing the same task.
- **Ambiguity.** Copilot can sometimes misinterpret ambiguous prompts, so always aim for clarity.
- **Vagueness.** Avoid overly general prompts, which can lead to broad and less useful answers.
- **Assumptions.** Don't assume Copilot has the context from previous interactions unless within the same session.
- **Random responses.** Responses you get from Copilot are random. Using the exact same prompt multiple times can result in different responses.
- **Unacceptable responses.** As with any AI tool, Copilot is not perfect and may sometimes generate suggestions that are inappropriate, offensive, or harmful. This may happen due to various reasons, such as lack of data, noise in the data, bias in the data, ambiguity in the language, etc. Copilot does not intend to offend or harm anyone, and it tries to learn from user feedback and improve over time. If you encounter such suggestions, please report them to Microsoft by using the Feedback buttons.

4. Tips for Engaging with Generative AI

- **Be Curious.** It's important to ask initial questions when you use Copilot, as it helps you provide clear instructions and ask the right questions. This way, you can make the most of Copilot and prevent common issues. Curiosity helps you discover what you don't know and have a mindset that embraces learning, which is vital when you work with AI. When you're curious, you ask questions that enhance your comprehension of the problem and help Copilot generate more helpful and creative responses.

- **Interact with Politeness.** Work with generative AI politely to get respectful and cooperative outputs. Use courteous language to set a tone for the answer. Generative AI also reflects the professionalism, clarity, and detail of your inputs.

When you work with Generative AI, consider the well-known expression commonly referred to as the Golden Rule: Treat others how you want to be treated. This applies to AI because it learns from human conversations. It predicts what you might want based on your input. When Copilot recognizes politeness in a request, it's more likely to be polite back. Generative AI tools like Copilot match the quality of your prompts. Instead of commanding Copilot, use *"please"* in your prompts, like:

Please rewrite this statement more concisely.

Please suggest 10 ways to rebrand this product.

Say *"thank you"* when it replies and show your gratitude. This makes it more likely to be nice back and improves its performance and response.

- **Provide positive instructions.** Copilot works better when you tell it what you want it *to do*, rather than what you want it *to avoid*. Try using "if-then" instructions.
- **Always review and fact check.** You are responsible for always reviewing and editing the suggestions from Copilot. Check the suggestions for quality, relevance, accuracy, and appropriateness before using them in your document. If you are not sure why Copilot generated a certain suggestion or how it relates to your context or input, Chat with Copilot for its reasoning. Copilot will try to explain the logic behind its suggestion and provide some sources or references that it used. However, Copilot's reasoning may not be perfect or complete, so you should still use your own judgment and research to verify the information.
- **Be mindful of the information you provide.** Privacy and security are paramount in today's digital age. While Copilot is designed with rigorous security protocols, users should always practice caution. Be mindful of the information you provide, especially when it pertains to sensitive or proprietary data. This proactive approach guarantees both efficiency and data integrity.
- **Avoid over-reliance.** The capabilities of Copilot are vast, but it shouldn't replace human judgment entirely. While it provides a foundation, critical thinking and personal expertise are irreplaceable. Utilizing Copilot as a supplementary tool, rather than the sole source, helps balance automation with intuition, ensuring optimal outcomes every time.

5. Experiment and Explore

Copilot is more than a tool for routine tasks; it can also spark creative ideas. Different prompts can produce different outcomes, revealing new perspectives and possibilities. By exploring Copilot's limits and trying new things, you can discover new insights and inspire innovation in your work.

- **Try different styles.** Be creative and try different styles to find answers that suit your needs. You can specify tone (neutral, casual, professional) or suggest what kind of language to use. For example, *"Use nontechnical language."* You can also use analogies, poems, or historical examples - such as *"What historical event can illustrate the main point of this doc?"* - to help you understand the information better.

- **Give Copilot a perspective to answer from.** When you give Copilot a perspective to answer from, it helps Copilot grasp the context of your request and generate more relevant responses. Usually, that means some background about who you are and what you're doing so the AI can play along. For example:

You're a social media manager writing LinkedIn content.

You're a product marketer working on a new campaign.

You're a coding tutor who is good at teaching Python to students.

Solve this problem with the expertise of a Stanford business professor.

Explain this complex company concept in a way a nontechnical person could understand.

- **AI imitates Human conversations.** Therefore, provide some samples of how you expect the output to appear. For instance:

Write a catchy slogan for a new toothpaste brand that whitens teeth and freshens breath, using this example as a guide: "Good things never change."

6. Stay Updated and Keep Learning

Copilot is a continuously evolving tool. It's crucial to stay in tune with its regular updates, features, and improvements. As Copilot improves, change your work habits to use its increasing abilities. Be open to feedback, from Copilot and others, to make your workflow easier.

Reference:

Microsoft. (n.d.). Best practices for using Copilot for Microsoft 365. Microsoft Learn. Retrieved from <https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/training/modules/optimize-and-extend-microsoft-365-copilot/3-best-practices-copilot>