

Quick Kit Steps to Stronger Prompt Building (with Classroom Adaptation)

Mentoring your AI Intern through Clear Communication and Reflection

Generative AI models are built on large language systems that learn from patterns in communication, but that doesn't mean they automatically understand what you want. Like mentoring a student through their first writing assignment or presentation, good instructions and context up front lead to stronger, more usable work.

This Quick Kit walks you through five steps to more effective prompting with reflection prompts to help you model and teach these same habits to students.

Step 1. Define the Purpose Clearly

What are you asking the AI to do and why? Start with intention. Give the AI a clear sense of your purpose and expectations.

Ask yourself:

- What task am I trying to complete or explore?
- What role or perspective should the AI take? (“act as a research assistant,” “respond as a first-year student,” “explain as if to a community audience...”)
- What format should the response take (e.g. paragraph, outline, list, chart, or script)?

Teaching tip: Have students begin every AI-based assignment by writing one sentence defining the goal of their interaction. This builds intentionality before generation.

Step 2. Provide Context Generously

Details are your friend. AI tools respond best when they understand the full picture. Think of it like writing assignment instructions or a research proposal: the more context you provide, the more aligned the results should be with your expectations.

Include:

- Audience, purpose, boundaries (time, word limit, tone, scope).
- Key criteria or rubric language.
- Example work, drafts, or models (with sensitive data removed).
- References or data sources you expect it to consult and be ready to verify them for accuracy.

Teaching tip: Model “context-rich prompting” by showing students how specifying audience, constraints, or tone affects results. Let them compare minimal vs. detailed prompts.

Step 3. Evaluate the Output Critically

Treat the AI's work as a draft to review, not a product to accept. Once the AI produces output, pause and ask:

- Did it meet my purpose?

- Is it accurate, ethical, and appropriate for my audience?
- What assumptions or biases show up in the response?

If it misses the mark, refine your prompt. You might even ask:

- “What information would help you answer this more accurately?”
- “Where might this need more context for a first-year reader?”

Teaching tip: Have students annotate an AI-generated draft, highlighting strengths, gaps, and missteps. This reinforces analytical reading and revision skills.

Step 4. Iterate and Improve

Use feedback language like you would with a student intern (or as a student would desire to be mentored!). Prompting is a dialogue, not a one-shot command.

Give specific, constructive directions (“Add supporting evidence,” “Simplify jargon for a general audience,” “Use examples from Texas higher education”).

Rerun the prompt and note improvements. Positive feedback on what was done right is just as important as critiques on what needs improvement!

Keep short reflection notes: What changed? Why did it improve?

Teaching tip: Let students practice “prompt-revision rounds” where they submit both their prompts and their reflections on what they changed and why. Invite students to use an empathetic lens in identifying what information *they* would want from you in order to know they were on the right track.

Step 5. Know When to Take Over — The Human in the Loop

Recognize when it’s time for human judgment. If the output stalls, drifts off-topic, or needs a nuanced tone and style, step in and finish it yourself. Your voice, ethics, and insight complete the process, not the model.

Teaching tip: Emphasize to students that authorship includes decision-making. Have them note where they “took over” and why, providing a metacognitive moment that reinforces intellectual ownership.

Reflection Prompts for Faculty

- Where in your current teaching or research could you model this process for students?
- Which step do you find most natural to accomplish and/or which step stretches your own practice? How could a student benefit from this kind of process analysis?
- How might you assess students’ reflective growth as prompt-builders?