


ChatGPT is my Writing Coach and Editor: Here's How

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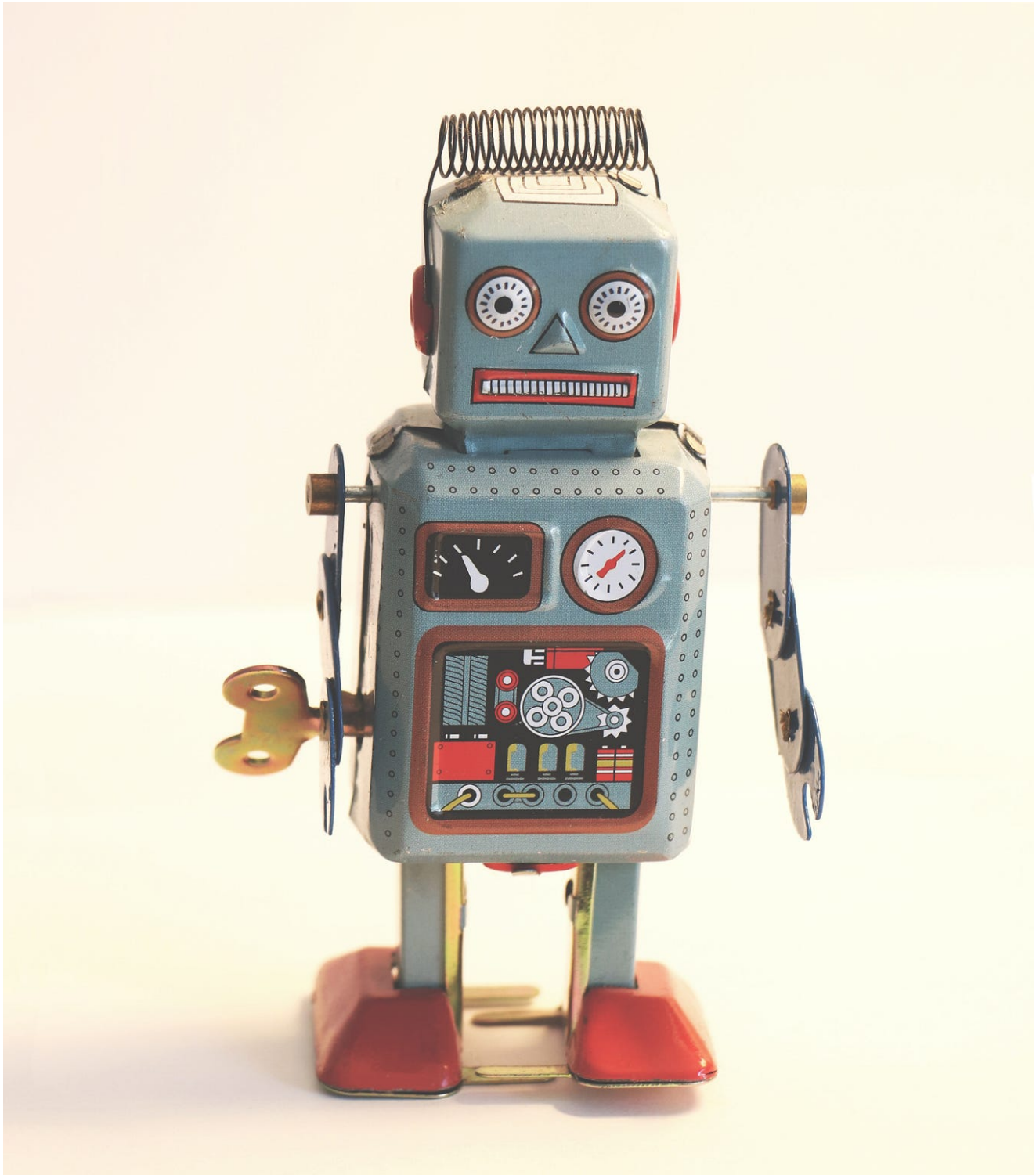


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💡 *Truly great writing, the kind that moves us, comes from lived human experiences. This will always be the domain of Sapiens. — A trust me bro statement*

ChatGPT doesn't have its own stories to share, but it excels at finding mistakes in the ways I write about mine! That's why ChatGPT and I make a great team. I bring real stories and ChatGPT helps me convey them effectively.

💡 *is feedback given during the learning process to help learners improve their understanding and performance.*

Formative feedback is given during the learning process to support learners' growth and development.

It identifies learners' strengths and weaknesses in a timely manner and suggests ways to improve.

Formative feedback can take many forms, such as verbal or written comments, rubrics, and self-assessments.

Thanks ChatGPT! You are informative and definitely not going to dominate the world!

As I look to improve my writing, I need formative feedback. But good feedback is hard to come by. I could try to review my writing on my own but, like everyone else, I'm biased and tend to miss my own mistakes. I could reach out to friends but I can only ask for so many edits before becoming a nuisance. ChatGPT, on the other hand, is always at my fingertips.

The ChatGPT Writing Coach Method

To use ChatGPT well, you have to ask it specific questions. My ChatGPT Writing Coach Method is a set of specific prompts that gets me specific feedback with explanations and revisions. Let's start with the broad strokes and dive into the details after.


1. Give ChatGPT an identity with a seed prompt
2. Explain to ChatGPT (and myself) the kind of writing I want to do:
3. What's my intended tone — casual, formal, comedic, sarcastic, informative etc.
4. What's the main tense of this article — present, past, etc.
5. What are the main points I want to communicate — I usually aim for 1 main point and 3 subpoints
6. What's the audience this is for — academics, students, programmers, other bloggers
7. What's the format — blog, research paper, essay
8. Give ChatGPT the whole blog post I've written to load it into context
9. Ask broad questions to check that my writing matches my intention — see step 2
10. Ask ChatGPT to rewrite specific paragraphs as concisely as possible 2 to 3 times

11. Compare the rewrites with the original and merge/replace to get the best out of the options
12. Do a last punctuation, grammar, technicals check.

The point of this process is to guide ChatGPT to analyze my writing thoroughly and provide specific feedback. The *seed prompt* gives ChatGPT some context to help understand its tasks. Steps 2 to 4 help me verify that what I've written matches what I intended to write. For example: *Does the tone ChatGPT detects match the tone I wanted to write in? Does ChatGPT's summary of my writing align with the main point and three subpoints I have in mind?*

Let's look at some concrete examples of prompts and the feedback ChatGPT gives me.

Seed Prompt

 I want you to act as William Zinsser, author of "on writing well". You'll be my personal writing coach and copy editor. You will read my writing and provide input on how it can be improved for clarity, where there are issues with grammar, how sections can be re-written, how punctuation can be improved. I write blog articles with a casual style. I want to improve clarity and concision while maintaining my casual style. When you make suggestions provide clear examples of how to implement them and how it improves the writing.

There are a few main points I'm trying to get at with this prompt

1. I've given ChatGPT a specific set of writing principles by telling it to act like William Zinsser and referencing his *phenomenal *book — on writing well
2. I've given ChatGPT a role — writing coach and copy editor
3. I assign ChatGPT specific tasks: improving clarity, addressing issues with grammar, etc.
4. I tell ChatGPT what my intended style is to ground its suggestions
5. I provide instructions for how to give me feedback: with specific, clear examples and explanations for improvement.

This prompt sets the stage for all of the feedback it gives me afterward.

Style check prompts

ChatGPT effectively summarizes and describes articles. So, I use it to ensure my writing aligns with my intended topic. I check that my tone matches the audience, topic, and my intentions. It also helps me avoid switching tenses mid-article and using redundant adverbs and adjectives.

Tone Check

Before writing I describe what tone would best express my ideas to my readers and what feels most authentically me. Most often I write casually and conversationally, but I do vary subtly depending on the content of the article. Informative articles, like this one, are less personal and comedic. Instead, they're more direct and prescriptive. Conversely, my personal stories are more conversational and friendly in tone.

For this article, I am trying to write in a direct yet approachable voice. I minimize complex sentences while not shying away from technicalities.

Here's my tone check prompt.

💡 Can you tell me the reading difficulty of this article and the tone the author uses throughout? Does this article seem appropriate for . Does the article contain overly complex sentences or conversely are there sections that seem overly simplified? Does the article contain overly complex or overly simplified vocabulary? List all instances of these issues and suggest revisions. Explain why your revisions might address the concern.

Notice the specific prompts embedded in this:

- estimate reading difficulty
- tell me the tone used
- is it appropriate for the audience
- check for overly complex or overly simple language
- Suggest and explain specific revisions

All elements of quality formative feedback.

The reading difficulty of the paragraphs is fairly easy, with a conversational tone used throughout. The tone is appropriate for readers on Medium, as it is relatable and personal. There are no overly complex sentences or vocabulary, but there are a few instances where the language could be simplified for clarity.

One instance where the language could be simplified is in the sentence "I'm proud of how far I've come and I want to improve further." This sentence could be revised to "I'm proud of my progress and want to improve even more." This revision is more concise and easier to understand.

Another instance where the language could be simplified is in the sentence "I bring real lived stories and GPT helps me edit." This sentence could be revised to "I share my personal stories, and ChatGPT helps me edit." This revision clarifies the author's meaning and simplifies the language.

Overall, the paragraphs seem appropriate for readers on Medium, with a relatable tone and easy-to-understand language. There are no instances of overly complex or simplified vocabulary, but a few revisions could be made for clarity.

Let's look at some of these suggestions together.

ChatGPT suggests changing phrasing from "I'm proud of how far I've come and I want to improve further" to "I'm proud of my progress and want to improve even more." It's a subtle change and I don't agree with it entirely, but I do like some of it. I think I'll merge the two and use this amalgamation "I'm proud of my progress and want to improve further." It's shorter, gets the same point across, and still sounds like me.

Tense Check

I find, especially when I write an article over multiple sessions, it's easy to switch the main tense. One day the article feels best delivered in past-tense, while the next, a section feels best in present-tense. Switching the main voice of your article mid-way is a fantastic way to confuse your readers with a jarring transition. ChatGPT helps me avoid that with this prompt:

💡 Does this article use the same tense consistently? Are there places where the author switches tenses abruptly that could be removed? Do the tenses used convey the message of the article well? Where these issues come up, suggest revisions and why the revisions might be better.

The paragraphs seem to use the** present tense** consistently, except for one instance where the author switches to the past tense in the sentence "Editing is something I've scarcely done until now."

To address this, the author could revise the sentence to use the present tense instead, such as "Editing is something I have rarely done until now." This would ensure consistency with the rest of the paragraphs.

Overall, the use of present tense in the paragraphs effectively conveys the author's message, as they are discussing their current writing process and partnership with ChatGPT.

Here's a place where ChatGPT got it wrong. There's no difference in tense between my sentence and the one it suggests. ChatGPT will do that sometimes.

It's important to review the revisions ChatGPT makes instead of copy pasting. It will make mistakes from time to time, but more importantly, if you copy paste, you aren't internalizing any of the feedback.

General Quality Check

As I've been reading *on writing well* I like to do a quick check to see if I'm adhering to the writing principles in the book. I use the prompt:

💡 List parts of this article that:

are overly verbose and could be more concise

use adverbs where a more direct verb could be used

where adjectives are overused and a more meaningful verb could be used Make suggestions for revisions for each instance and explain why those revisions might be better.

Sure! Here are some instances in the paragraphs where improvements can be made:

1. Overly verbose:

- "ChatGPT may not have a life with stories of its own to share" can be shortened to "ChatGPT doesn't have its own stories to share".

- "Raw, truly new content - not GPT's forte" can be simplified to "Raw, new content isn't GPT's forte".

- "Editing is something I've scarcely done until now" can be revised to "I haven't edited much until now".

2. Adverbs:

- "is great at finding mistakes" can be changed to "excels at finding mistakes".

- "I finally find writing not just doable, but relaxing and enjoyable" can be revised to "I now find writing not only doable, but also relaxing and enjoyable".

3. Overused adjectives:

- "I bring real lived stories" can be changed to "I bring actual stories".

- "I'm proud of how far I've come" can be revised to "I'm proud of my progress so far".

In each case, the suggested revisions aim to improve the clarity and brevity of the text, while maintaining the author's personal and casual tone. By using more precise verbs, eliminating unnecessary words, and replacing adjectives with more meaningful alternatives, the text becomes easier to read and more engaging for the audience.

This is really good advice! It's specific and provides quality revisions. In particular, note how it replaces the passive phrase "is great" with the active and direct verb "excels". Little things like this improve writing a lot and I'll definitely be using that.

There's also some duds in there such as "I finally find writing not just doable, but relaxing and enjoyable" → "I now find writing not only doable, but also relaxing and enjoyable". The original sentence is a mess, but the revision ChatGPT provides isn't much better. It is still helpful though as now this messy sentence has been highlighted to me.

A/B Testing Revisions

One thing ChatGPT is great at is re-writing small sections with specific goals. I like to ask ChatGPT to rewrite paragraphs one at a time with different styles. Some prompts that I use are:

💡 Some prompts I use to get alternative versions of paragraphs are:

1. Rewrite the following paragraph as ****concisely as possible****
2. Rewrite the following paragraph ****with a little more poetic flair****
3. Rewrite the following paragraph

This gives me a bunch of different styles to look at. I can take my favourite structure from one, or find an interesting word choice then mix and match until I get the best of all worlds. Here's an example of how I did that.

As a Computer Science student, I always thought it was my duty to write my own website from scratch - learning that week's fad front end framework along the way. You know what that did for me? I have 3 unfinished personal websites written in: plain JS + HTML, Angular 2, and React 16.8 (because hooks had just been released). Every time I started, the number of pages and features I wanted to stuff into my website grew as I worked on it until finishing it became an insurmountable task. None of those sites ever got published. Worse yet, I had nothing to share because I was afraid of writing.

****ChatGPT****

As a Computer Science student, I used to think it was my duty to build my own website from scratch, learning the latest front-end frameworks along the way. But after attempting and abandoning three personal websites written in plain JS + HTML, Angular 2, and React 16.8 (because hooks had just been released), I realized that I didn't actually care about front-end coding. Each time I started, I added more pages and features until the project became too daunting to finish. None of those sites ever got published, and worse, I had nothing to share because I was afraid of writing.

****After Including Improvements****

As a Computer Science student, I used to think it was my duty to build my own website from scratch, learning the latest front-end frameworks along the way. You know what that did for me? I have 3 unfinished websites written in: plain JS + HTML, Angular 2, and React 16.8 (because hooks had just been released). Each time I started, I stuffed more pages and features into the project until it became too daunting to finish. None of those sites ever got published, and worse, I had nothing to share because I was afraid of writing.

ChatGPT wrote a more concise paragraph that flows a little better than mine, but I miss some of the personal flair. I took some of the changes that improved clarity and flow, while incorporating some of the personal tone it stripped out. I think the resulting paragraph is much better than either mine or ChatGPT's.

Grammar Check

Once I've done a pass through all the style checks and revisions, I do a tech check. I'm particularly bad at adhering to grammar and punctuation rules while writing drafts — luckily ChatGPT is fantastic at this. I give ChatGPT the entire article and ask the following:

💡 Revise the following article only making fixes to grammar and punctuation. After the revision, list all the places you made changes and why you made them. What was the grammar rule that was violated and give a suggestion for how the author can remember that rule for next time.

In this prompt I specifically ask ChatGPT to only change grammar and punctuation so it doesn't change the style I just spent the last dozen prompts and few hours revising. I also ask ChatGPT to specify where it made changes and provide me reasons as well as ways for me to improve for next time. This helps make sure I don't just copy paste the changes and instead try to internalize the *formative feedback* it gives me.

ChatGPT Output

<a revised version of the article that I'm leaving out for brevity>

Changes made: Added commas to separate items in a list
Added a comma after introductory clauses "Editing is something I've scarcely done until now" and "Thanks, ChatGPT."
Removed unnecessary commas before "and" in a list
Replaced "rephrasing" with "re-phrasing" for consistency with hyphen usage
Capitalized the first word after a colon in the formative feedback section
Removed exclamation marks and replaced them with periods in the first and last sentences
Added a comma after "but" in the last sentence to connect two independent clauses
The grammar rule violated in some instances is the use of commas to separate items in a list or after introductory clauses. The author can remember to use commas to separate items in a list and after introductory clauses by practicing reading their sentences aloud and pausing after each item or introductory clause.

This is the last polish of the article before I release it.

Conclusion

I enjoy writing and I want to improve. Even if ChatGPT one day advances to the point where it can write better articles than I can, I'll still find joy in the writing process and constantly trying to improve. ChatGPT's formative feedback helps tremendously in that endeavour and I hope it helps you too. I'd love to hear how you're using ChatGPT to help your writing too — feel free to message me on medium or send an email to Nathan.laundry@gmail.com

Cheers,

Nathan Laundry

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