

Pro Tips for Ideating with Generative AI

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As I've been learning how to work most efficiently with ChatGPT, I've learned a few tips about crafting effective prompts and interacting with it that I'm happy to share:

- 1.** I find that ChatGPT yields far better results if you have a conversation with it first to **establish the context and parameters** before you ask specific questions you really want to know. Cold questions get cold responses, but contextualized questions yield great responses.
- 2.** It's perfectly OK to **tell it when it gets it wrong**, and even better to tell it why it was wrong. Generative AI can't get offended, and it welcomes the feedback; it uses that to train itself and improve its response, and it nearly always offers a revised improved version.
- 3.** It's **obligated to respond to everything** (it must be trained that way), so if you're simply telling it contextual or background information, it helps to conclude with, "Do you understand?" If you don't, it will give you an essay response re-stating what you've just told it and affirming your thinking, which is rarely helpful. By asking "Do you understand?" I'm telling it that I don't need feedback on what I told it (that's what IT needs to know), but that does give it a question to answer.
- 4.** When I want to have a longer dialogue or include a lengthy or multi-phase project, I find it works significantly better to **explain upfront what I'm trying to do and how I will want it to assist** (rather than just start typing), and then provide the parts I told it about one at time. Otherwise it jumps the gun and answers the first question I ask with gusto, even if that's not at all where I'm going.
- 5.** When it seems like it's trying to conclude or assuming the conversation is over, I **tell it, "Let's continue,"** and that signals that we're not done and there's more. It can also be helpful to remind or check about progress. For example, if you were developing 7 examples of something, part way through you can say, "How many of these have we completed now, and which topics still remain?" Or say, "OK, we've done the first 5 of these, but we still have 2 more to go, right?" That seems to keep it focused on the larger task at hand without straying too much into unrelated aspects (even if you wanted to chase that rabbit, this bring it back to the central task).
- 6.** When you're trying out a new project or format you haven't done with it before, it helps to tell ChatGPT what you would like to do and then **specifically ask it what it needs from you** to be able to provide what you want. It will identify details and parameters that are important to provide and, when you include those, that will ensure better, more accurate responses.

7. There is a point where things explained or asked/answered earlier drop off its memory and it forgets things you discussed further back in the session (the length varies between generative AIs as to how large the “context (input) window” is). So, if you're having an extended conversation, I find it helps to scroll back up and copy & paste specific comments, topics, and phrases to reference in your current questions as this **reminds it of the priorities you've established** that you want the response centered around.

8. Don't be afraid to **keep probing, ask follow-up questions, go deeper, and even challenge assumptions or statements it makes...**and feel free to mention when it overlooks or misses anything that's important in your context. Sometimes it will mention an author, theory, or person from history, but only give a short pseudo-answer synopsis about it. But, if understanding that is important to effectively answering your question, then call it on it, or clarify those details.

For example, in one conversation I was asking it to take a “backwards design” approach, but I wasn’t impressed with its synopsis of that, so I mentioned “backwards design as articulated by Wiggins and McTighe” and then it nailed it, utilizing their framework to the letter and describing it well.

9. The **more context and background** you can give it, the better it will do. On the technical back end, each contextual and background detail you provide establishes a “token” that correlates its data to guide it when generating the text.

On the example above, naming Wiggins and McTighe provided an essential token in the context window that helped it narrow the diversity of sources and ideas down to the specific framework I wanted it to utilize.

10. Ask it for examples, resources, books, voices, etc. In the educational context, you can ask it to suggest other voices, identify missing or diverse perspectives you had not included, or recommend textbooks, videos, OER content, or more on the subject you’ve been asking for help with. However, make sure you always check that output to verify (every now and then it will make something up that seems plausible in order to give you what you want, even if it’s not a real source).