

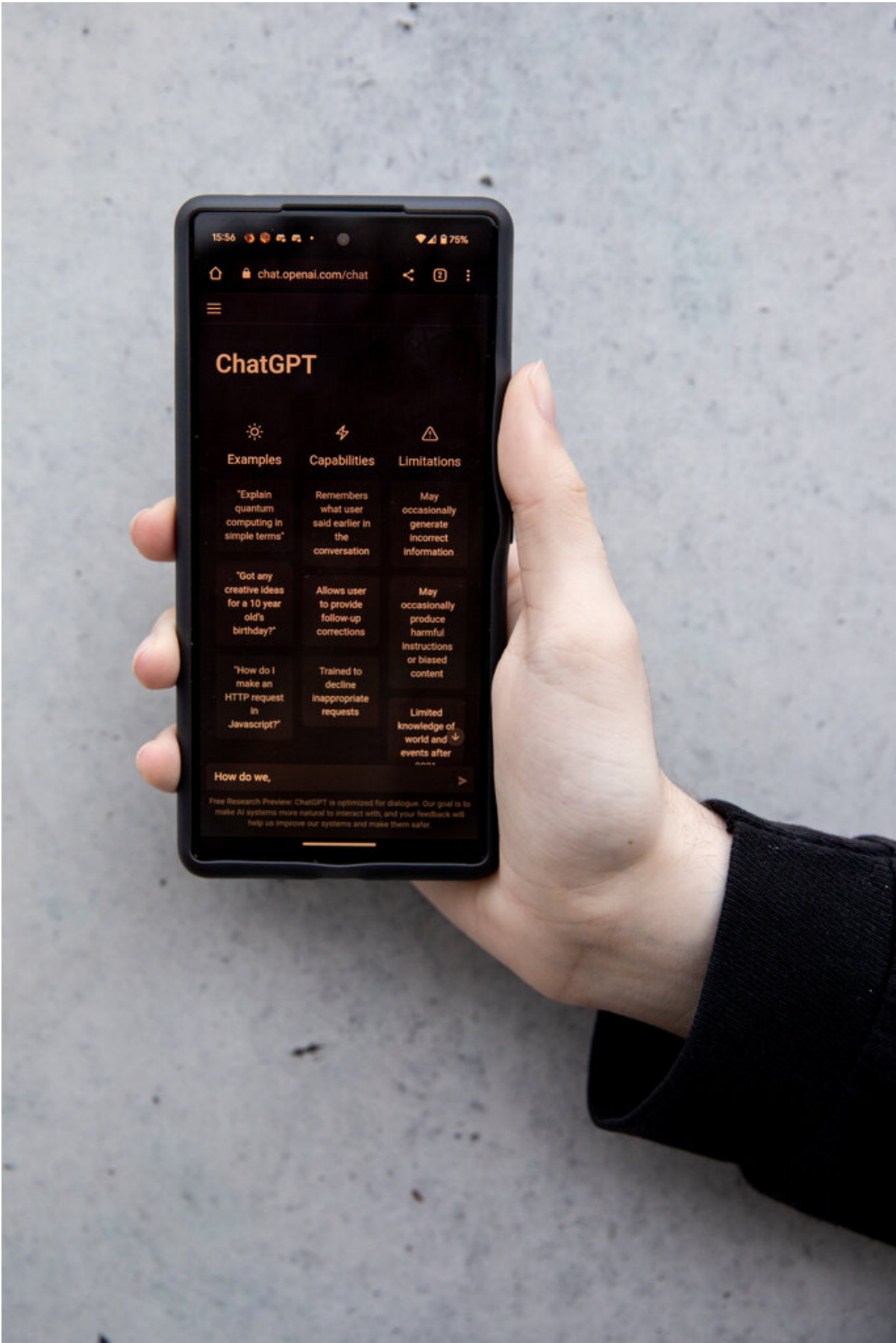
The best ways to use ChatGPT

 messaging-custom-newsletters.nytimes.com/template/oakv2

The New York Times

OnTech
Artificial Intelligence

For subscribers May 25, 2023



Get the best from ChatGPT with these golden prompts



By [Brian X. Chen](#)

Welcome back to On Tech: A.I., a pop-up newsletter that teaches you about artificial intelligence, how it works and how to use it.

A few months ago, my colleagues [Cade Metz](#) and [Kevin Roose](#) explained the [inner workings of A.I.](#), including chatbots like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Microsoft's Bing and Google's Bard. Now we're back with a new mission: to help you learn to use A.I. to its full potential.

People from all walks of life — students, coders, artists and accountants — are experimenting with how to use A.I. tools. Employers are posting jobs seeking people who are adept at using them. Pretty soon, if not already, you'll have the chance to use A.I. to streamline and improve your work and personal life.

As The Times's personal tech columnist, I'm here to help you figure out how to use these tools safely and responsibly to improve many parts of your life.

I'm going to spend today's newsletter talking about two general approaches that will be useful in a number of situations.

Then, in the coming weeks, I'll give you more specific tips for different aspects of your life, including parenting and family life, work, organizing in your personal life, learning/education, creativity, and shopping.

A few common-sense warnings to start:

- If you're concerned about privacy, leave out personal details like your name and where you work. The tech companies say your data is used to train their systems, which means other people could conceivably see your information.
- Don't share confidential data. Your employer may have specific guidelines or restrictions, but in general, entering trade secrets or sensitive information is a very bad idea.
- Hallucinations: Chatbots are powered by a technology called a large language model, or L.L.M., which gets its abilities by analyzing enormous amounts of digital text culled from the internet. Plenty of stuff on the web is wrong, and chatbots may repeat those untruths. Sometimes, while trying to predict patterns from their vast training data, they can make things up.

The golden prompts

ChatGPT, Bing and Bard are among the most popular A.I. chatbots. (To use ChatGPT, you'll need to create an OpenAI account, and it requires a subscription for its most advanced version. Bing requires you to use Microsoft's Edge web browser. Bard requires a Google account.)

Though they look simple to use — you type something in a box and get answers! — asking questions in the wrong way will produce generic, unhelpful and, sometimes, downright incorrect answers.

It turns out there's an art to typing in the precise words and framing to generate the most helpful answers. I call these the golden prompts.

The people who are getting the most out of the chatbots have been using variants of these strategies:

“Act as if.” Beginning your prompt with these magic words will instruct the bot to emulate an expert. For example, typing “Act as if you are a tutor for the SATs” or “Act as if you are a personal trainer” will guide the bots to model themselves around people in those professions.

These prompts provide additional context for the A.I. to generate its response. The A.I. doesn't actually understand what it means to be a tutor or a personal trainer. Instead, the prompt is helping the A.I. to draw on specific statistical patterns in its training data.

A weak prompt with no guidance will generate less helpful results. If all you type is “What should I eat this week?” the chatbot will come up with a generic list of meals for a balanced diet, such as turkey stir fry with a side of colorful veggies for dinner (which, to me, sounds very “meh”).

“Tell me what else you need to do this.” To get results that are more personalized — for example, health advice for your specific body type or medical conditions — invite the bot to request more information.

In the personal trainer example, a prompt could be: “Act as if you are my personal trainer. Create a weekly workout regimen and meal plan for me. Tell me what else you need to do this.” The bot might then ask you for your age, height, weight, dietary restrictions and health goals to tailor a weeklong meal plan and fitness routine for you.

If you don’t get good answers on your first try, don’t give up right away. Better yet, in the words of Ethan Mollick, a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, treat the bot as if it were a human intern: “When it makes a mistake, point that out and ask for it to do better.” Be forgiving and patient, and you’re likely to get better results.

Thread your chatbot conversations

After you get the hang of prompts, you can make your chatbot more helpful over time. The key here is to avoid treating your chatbot as a web search and starting with a fresh query each time. Instead, keep several threads of conversations open and add to them over time.

This strategy is easiest with ChatGPT. Bing requires you to reset your conversations periodically, and Bard does not make it as easy to hop between conversation threads.

Natalie Choprasert, an entrepreneur in Sydney, Australia, who advises companies on how to use A.I., uses ChatGPT as a business coach and an executive assistant. She keeps separate conversations running side by side for each of these roles.

For the business coach thread, she shares insights about her professional background and the company’s goals and problems. For the executive assistant thread, she shares scheduling information, like the clients she’s meeting with.

“It builds up and trains properly, so when I ask it a question later on, it will be in the right context and it will give me answers close to what I’m looking for,” Choprasert said.

She shared a bonus golden prompt that has trained her assistants to be extra helpful: Apply a framework. She recently read “Clockwork,” a book about setting up a business. When she asked ChatGPT-the-business-coach to offer advice using the framework of “Clockwork,” she was delighted to see that it could incorporate principles from the book into an action plan for expanding her company.

Share your prompts

What are your golden prompts that have gotten you the most impressive, helpful results from A.I.? [Email us your examples](#). We may use your submissions in future editions of this newsletter.

Thank you for being a subscriber

Browse all of our subscriber-only newsletters [here](#).



Need help? Review our [newsletter help page](#) or [contact us](#) for assistance.

You received this email because you signed up for On Tech: A.I. from The New York Times.

To stop receiving On Tech: A.I., [unsubscribe](#). To opt out of other promotional emails from The Times, including those regarding The Athletic, [manage your email settings](#). To opt out of updates and offers sent from The Athletic, [submit a request](#).

[Explore more subscriber-only newsletters.](#)

[Change Your Email](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Contact Us](#) [California Notices](#)

The New York Times Company. 620 Eighth Avenue New York, NY 10018