

Writing Killer ChatGPT Prompts

Ever since ChatGPT went public, I've spent one to two hours a day learning about it and using it. This included reading articles about it, studying the FAQ, exploring uses for it, and putting together a course on how it can be used by course creators. Actually, two courses: a seven-day create-a-course challenge and a 15-Week Educators Guide to ChatGPT Intensive Workshop. So, as with any course I create, I begin by immersing myself in the subject.

I've learned a great deal about how the program works, that "intelligence" is a misnomer, the limits and the possibilities, the hype, and the hysteria. But one thing stands out. To unleash the power of Chat, you need to learn to write awesome prompts.

After pouring over scores of documents and hours of trial and error I've discovered a few best practices. Let's explore them here.

Talk Like a Human

Before I get into the step-by-step, let me address an important issue – conversational style. Chat is optimized to understand natural language. It is not like a search engine where you need to get specific keywords. It analyses the prompt based on patterns it has "learned" by scanning billions of documents written by human beings for human beings. The more natural the language you use to create your prompt, the easier it will be for the program to decode what you want it to do.

Step One: Imagine the Reader.

Something people when writing something forget the reader. Of course, when you are doing the writing yourself, somewhere in the back of your mind you might have a vague sense of who that reader is going to be. But when you outsource the writing, you have to tell your ghost writer more about the readers. She, he, or it needs that information. I've done copywriting for clients. Way too many clients before I got honest work. 😊 Just about the first question I would ask would be, "What's the audience for this ____?" Next to "what is this piece about," it's the most important question I can ask.

Chat isn't smart like a human being. He is like a hard-working but kind of stupid assistant we had at the radio station I worked at for a couple of years. His name was Clark. Funny, that. It's been 40 years, and I still remember his name. His mother owned the biggest furniture store in town, and she wanted a summer job for her son to help him learn responsibility. Clark was not that ambitious. He did what you told him, but only that.

One time we asked him to transfer individual commercials from a big tape reel (Think hard drive for younger folk) to individual cartridge tapes (think very low capacity thumb drives). He did it, and we were happy with his hard work until we saw that none of them had labels on them. We did not have any way of knowing which tape had which commercial.

When we asked Clark about this, he said, "Oh, you didn't tell me I also had to label them."

Yes, Clark did survive after we patiently (remember mother – big advertiser) explained to him that we wanted the tapes labeled.

Clark was, in fact, a good worker, but a very literal thinker. When we told him exactly what we wanted him to do he'd do it. But we could not assume anything beyond those instructions.

Chat has a little more initiative than Clark, but not much. It won't ask you for a profile of your reader. You have to provide that yourself.

This should include the normal demographics such as gender, cultural matters, occupation, financial status, education, special interests, etc. You should also include something about any level of knowledge about the subject. Also consider language use. If you are putting together something in English for widespread international publication, you might designate that the end product not exceed a sixth-grade reading level. Actually, unless you know your reader has a significantly higher literacy level, that's not bad for any type of general writing for distribution in the United States. However, if I'm writing to teachers, scholars, professors, or researchers, I'll designate a much higher reading level.

You might also include anything else about their personalities. For instance, if you are writing something for a group of entrepreneurs, you might add that fact, but go deeper like, "This group of entrepreneurs are specifically interested in ways to generate income streams through the sale of online courses. They are money-motivated, but also committed to helping people become more confident and successful."

Unlike a search engine, where very long prompts may result in you getting many sites listed that are nothing like what you need, the more information you provide Chat, the better your results. Having information about the likely reader helps any writer, human or AI, write better.

Step Two: Visualize the End Product

If Chat does its job well, what would that end product look like. What would be the style of the writing – casual, businesslike, humorous, professional, academic? Even if you don't know the label you can skip the label and just tell the AI what you want. For instance, "I want this to be written as if you were someone providing technical training" or "This needs to sound like you are just talking to someone else in their living room."

Also, what things need to be covered. The more you can provide in terms of your needs, the better job Chat will do. For instance, I often give it instructions like this:

Chat, I need a 1000-1500 word lesson using the introduction I have written below at the top of the lesson. Please print that verbatim. Place that at the top of the lesson. After the introduction, be sure to cover the following points

First, include information about the importance of creating behavioral objectives for the course.

these include – providing direction for the lesson, staying student centered, and providing a basis for evaluation. Expand on each of those three reasons. Maybe a paragraph for each.

Include a discussion of Bloom’s Taxonomy of behavioral objectives. Include a discussion of both cognitive and affective domains. List each of the types of objectives within each domain and include an example for each type.

Discuss ways that ChatGPT can help people brainstorm or clarify their objectives. For example, they can give you the topic and their student description and ask you to create 10 objectives

Maybe they could “interview” you in the persona of a typical student.

Include an exercise which moves the student toward complete their first course and a discussion question we can put in the discussion forum. Limit your research to information coming from websites with the domain extension .edu. You could also include a recommended reading list.

Yes, this takes time, but it describes specifically what the lesson should look like. It is personalized. And I set some limits on the research sources it can use that will reduce the possibility of fact errors and misinformation.

YOU SHOULD NEVER USE CHAT TO WRITE ARTICLES ABOUT THINGS YOU ARE NOT ALREADY KNOWLEDGEABLE OF.

Chat is not a substitute for you doing your due diligence to gain a level of expertise or knowledge about the topic. You wouldn’t ask a human copywriter to write something about a topic neither of you knew or understood. Why do that with a digital copywriter?

Step Three: Review, Revise, Regenerate

You won’t always get the best result the first time. Look at what it missed or misunderstood and revise the prompt. And ask for another draft. The good news is that as long as you stay in the same chat, it remembers what went before. Something like:

Chat, good start. However, I would like to revise this a bit. Keeping the same general parameters, could you provide more examples about how to use ChatGPT to generate objectives. Also emphasize that when you generate cognitive objectives to begin with the words “Student should be able to...” and affective ones with “Student will be given an opportunity to...” Also, you have used the words “super” and “awesome” five times. Delete each use of those weak adjectives. In fact, reduce the number of adjectives used in this piece.

It is a collaboration. You are working together.

So, talk like a human, imagine the reader, visualize the end product, and review, revise, and regenerate. That’s what makes a Killer Prompt.

Part 2

Using ChatGPT to Help Build Your Course
