

LADLE Prompting cheat sheet

Five prompting patterns that consistently improve responses.

1. Audience + register + format, before the task.

Give the model who it's writing for, in what register, and how the output should be structured. A single sentence beats three edits.

2. Describe the shape of a good answer, not the answer itself.

'Give me three arguments against my plan and one argument for it that I'm underweighting.' Specific enough to be useful.

3. Name the constraint that matters.

'Under 120 words.' 'Preserve the public API.' 'Focus on auditor changes in this filing.' Constraints eliminate wrong-shape output.

4. Paste the real context that's what the 200K window is for.

Include the Slack thread, the actual file, the actual stack trace. Don't paraphrase; the model reads primary sources better.

5. Interrupt bad answers early.

Press Escape mid-stream if the first sentence is off. Redirect with 'stop I actually meant X' and continue. Fewer regenerations, faster.

Bonus: stop being polite to unlock better answers. Politeness doesn't help; specificity does. Time saved from softening prompts is time better spent sharpening them.

Updated 2026-08-06 • ladle.chat/learn/prompting-fundamentals