Upping Your AI Prompt Game

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Brandon Anaya
Seattle Jobs Initiative

Introduction

It's hard to believe that ChatGPT is less than 3 years old, but it has had a remarkably productive infancy. Whether people know it or not, we are using AI daily, and despite concerns, including privacy, accuracy and safety, most experts agree that not only will the use of AI grow, but it will have a positive impact in our lives. In spite of its rapid growth, it is important to remember we are still in the early stages. The current stage, which includes the use of large language model chatbots, is known as Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI), and as impressive as it is, people are not as of yet obsolete.

Whether your chatbot of choice is Claude, Gemini, ChatGPT or something else, learning a bit about creating better prompts will help you get the results you want (at least until Artificial Superintelligence arrives and does everything for us). AI can certainly help Community Action Agency staff streamline work, communicate clearly, and save time. The key is effective prompting—knowing how to ask AI for the support you need. But creating these prompts isn't necessarily the easiest thing to do before your first (or second) cup of coffee on a workday morning. Fortunately, for all their other concerns, chatbots do not suffer from writer's block.

General Advice

You can find terrific resources online to assist you in developing useful prompts. These include:

1. **Be Specific** – Include audience, tone, format, and length.
2. **Start with a Draft, Not the Final Word** – Always review for accuracy and context.
3. **Give Context** – Mention program areas (e.g., Head Start, Weatherization, SNAP E&T).

4. **Request a Format** – Use tables, checklists, or bullet points for clarity.
5. **Refine with Follow-Ups** – Ask AI to shorten, expand, or reframe as needed.
6. **Take Advantage of Prompt Codes** - ELI5 (Explain Like I'm 5), TL;DR (Summarize Long Text), Jargonize (Professional Tone), Humanize (Sound More Natural), Speak Like a Pirate (Arrgh! Just kidding!)

Additionally, chatbots excel at instruction prompting. For instance, if you want to remove certain words or personally identifiable information from an email or report, you can do so with a simple command.

Chatbots are also quite good at role play. Do you have an upcoming SNAP Employment and Training monitoring visit and want to get a sense of the compliance questions you will be asked? Direct your chatbot to play the role of a compliance site reviewer in your state or county for a comprehensive outline of questions that integrate your local rules and regulations.

Also remember that prompting is an iterative process. There's no need to develop the perfect prompt right away. Simply start typing and refine your questions as the chatbot responds.

Building a Prompt Library

Of course, if you do not have time to spend hours developing the perfect individual prompt, no need to worry. You can simply ask a chatbot like Claude to create a prompt library for you and your team by typing something like, "I'd like to create a prompt library to help community action agency staff unfamiliar with effective prompts." The chatbot will then produce a comprehensive set of prompts where staff can add specific details about their roles and expectations.

With this example, the chatbot instantly created instructions and sample prompts for the following tasks:

- Client Communication

- Creating Appointment Reminders
- Developing Program Impact Statements
- Summarizing Monthly Program Data
- Writing Case Notes
- Creating Social Media Posts
- Designing Flyers
- Creating Survey Questions
- Simplifying Complex Policies
- Creating Staff Training Materials

As an example of what one of these prompts could look like, here is what the chatbot might produce for *Writing Needs Statements:*

> I'm writing a needs statement for a grant focused on [food security/housing/job training] in [county/city]. Help me structure a compelling case using:
> - Local data: [provide statistics]
> - Gaps in current services
> - How our program addresses these gaps
> The audience is [foundation name] and they value evidence-based approaches.

To supplement this prompt library, you can also upload relevant documents and materials, which will help the chatbot fine-tune the results most useful to you.

Bottom Line

AI can be a valuable tool for productivity. With thoughtful prompts, you can transform complex tasks into clear drafts—leaving more time to focus on what matters most: **serving your community.**

Brandon Anaya is the Vice President for Consulting & Policy at Seattle Jobs Initiative, and a former community college dean overseeing apprenticeship. Feel free to reach out with questions – banaya@seattlejobsinit.com