



## Tips, Hints & Tricks For Using Large Language Models



At Colby, asking good questions is a shared learning goal among faculty and students. Similarly, getting useful information out of large language model (LLM) applications like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Llama or Mixtral requires generating an effective prompt, i.e., asking good questions. We offer up the following guidelines to help you navigate the use of Generative AI applications as a tool for information gathering, brainstorming, and creative design.

### Prompt Engineering

- 1) Be polite. Being rude to an LLM often yields poor results. Many LLMs are trained on social media interactions where polite people generally give and receive better information.
- 2) Using key phrases like “take your time” and “consider carefully” can reduce the amount of fabricated responses, sometimes referred to as “hallucinations.”
- 3) Providing clear and precise instruction and giving the context for your task can also reduce the extent to which LLMs will make up an answer to your prompt.
- 4) Alternatively, asking an LLM to “Be Creative” can lead to unanticipated results or new directions for the assigned task.
- 5) When assigning an LLM a task, begin by asking it to assume the role of an expert in the subject.
- 6) Ending your prompt with “Is there any other information that you need to help you with this task” can help focus and improve the quality of an LLM’s response.
- 7) The Power of Three. Ask for three variations of responses to enhance creativity and cover different perspectives. This helps uncover options or directions you might not have initially considered.
- 8) Validate the responses. When asking for a list of publications or an annotated bibliography, check the citations for accuracy using something like Google Scholar.
- 9) Use follow-up prompts to iterate the “conversation” to get the information you are seeking to complete a task.

### Be careful

- ✓ Never provide personal or confidential information to a Generative AI application.
- ✓ Fact check the responses you get.
- ✓ Be aware that the algorithms used by Generative AI models are subject to both implicit and explicit biases based on their architecture and training data.

# Writing with Generative AI Models

## Prompt Engineering Tips, Tricks, & Hints



### Using Generative AI for Editing

- 1) In your prompt provide a statement about the purpose and context for your writing. Copy and paste a paragraph or portion of your work to focus your prompt on a specific query about your writing. However, to protect your ideas and information, avoid potential assignment plagiarism, and best retain your own writing voice, we do not endorse uploading whole projects, essays, or papers – yours or the work of others – in any generative AI application.
  - *Does the opening paragraph of my essay make sense?*
  - *Does the last sentence provide a logical conclusion?*
  - *Can you help me change the passive voice sections of my essay to be more engaging?*
- 2) Be specific about the format and style that you are looking for help from the AI model.
  - *Please help me take this phrase and turn it into a haiku poem.*
  - *Help me make an outline based on the following main points that I plan to include in my research paper.*
  - *Please put your answers for this task in a table.*
  - *Please answer this prompt in no more than four sentences and less than 200 words.*
- 3) Be specific about the style of response you are looking for.
  - *Follow-up prompt: Please make your response more analytical.*
  - *Provide an informal summary of your findings using bullet points.*
- 4) Be polite. Being rude to an AI model often leads to poor results. Many generative AI models are trained on social media where polite people give and receive better information.
- 5) Reduce the possibility of fabricated responses using phrases like “Take your time...” and/or “Consider carefully the information you use...”.
- 6) Asking the generative AI model to role play can also improve accuracy.
  - *Pretend that you are an astronomer with access to the James Webb Space Telescope.*
- 7) Validate any bibliographic citations or stated “facts” using Google Scholar, JSTOR, etc.
- 8) Provide clear instructions for what you are looking for.
  - *Please edit this essay. I want to make sure that my essay provides a compelling narrative and is about half as long as it is now. Explain carefully each edit you make.*

### Guidelines & Suggestions

- ✓ Consider developing a class AI use policy collaboratively with your students.
- ✓ Consider incorporating generative AI in your grading rubric. This can create opportunities for discussion with your students about asking questions (prompt engineering), critical thinking (interpretation of results), implicit and explicit biases, fabrications or hallucinations, the creative process of writing, and ownership of work produced.
- ✓ If you allow students to use generative AI here are some useful style guides for citing AI assisted work:

[MLA Style Guide](#)

[American Psychological Association \(APA\) Guidelines](#)

[Chicago Manual of Style](#)