

Prompting 101 - Episode 3: Common Mistakes and How to Fix Them

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Welcome back to Prompting One O One. This is Episode 3, Common Mistakes and How to Fix Them. If you've been following along and doing the homework, you've now learned the Four W's Framework and the CRAFT framework. You understand the building blocks of effective prompts.

Today, we're going to accelerate your learning by looking at what NOT to do. We'll examine the ten most common mistakes beginners make when writing prompts, and more importantly, I'll show you exactly how to fix each one.

Learning from mistakes, both your own and others', is one of the fastest ways to improve any skill. By the end of this episode, you'll be able to spot these errors immediately and know exactly how to correct them.

Let's start with Mistake Number One: Being Too Vague.

This is the most common mistake of all. Beginners often write prompts like "Tell me about marketing" or "Help me with my business" or "Write something creative." These prompts give the AI almost no direction.

The problem with vague prompts is that you get vague, generic results that probably won't meet your actual needs.

Here's the fix: Apply the specificity principle. Define exactly what you want. Instead of "Tell me about marketing," try "Explain the three most effective email marketing strategies for small e-commerce businesses selling handmade products, with one specific example for each strategy."

See the difference? You've specified the topic (email marketing), the audience (small e-commerce), the product type (handmade), the number of strategies (three), and requested examples. That's specificity.

Mistake Number Two: Forgetting to Define the Audience.

Many beginners write prompts without considering who will read or use the output. The AI doesn't know if it should write for experts or beginners, for children or adults, for technical specialists or general consumers.

For example, "Explain how blockchain works" will get you one type of answer. But that answer might be too technical for a complete beginner or too simplified for someone with a computer science background.

The fix: Always specify your audience. "Explain how blockchain works to a 40-year-old small business owner who has never studied technology but is considering accepting cryptocurrency payments." Now the AI knows exactly what level of complexity and what type of examples to use.

Mistake Number Three: Not Specifying Format or Length.

You might ask the AI to create content without saying how long it should be or how it should be structured. Then you get a response that's too short, too long, or formatted in a way that doesn't fit your needs.

For example, you ask for "tips for better productivity" and the AI gives you three short sentences. But what you really needed was a comprehensive guide with detailed explanations.

The fix: Always include format and length specifications. "Provide ten productivity tips for remote workers. For each tip, include the tip itself as a heading, followed by a 50-word

explanation and one real-world example. Format as a numbered list. Total length should be approximately 800 words."

Now you'll get exactly what you need, formatted exactly how you need it.

Mistake Number Four: Using Ambiguous Language.

Words like "some," "a few," "several," "short," "detailed," or "good" mean different things to different people. When you use ambiguous language in your prompts, the AI has to guess what you mean.

For instance, "Write a short article about social media" could result in 200 words or 800 words, depending on how the AI interprets "short."

The fix: Replace ambiguous terms with specific numbers and clear descriptors. Instead of "a few tips," say "exactly five tips." Instead of "a short article," say "a 400-word article." Instead of "detailed explanation," say "explanation including definition, three examples, and a step-by-step breakdown."

Precision eliminates ambiguity.

Mistake Number Five: Asking Multiple Unrelated Questions in One Prompt.

Sometimes beginners try to save time by cramming multiple different requests into a single prompt. "Write me a business plan and also create social media posts and explain SEO and give me email templates." This confuses the AI and leads to scattered, incomplete results.

The fix: One prompt, one primary task. If you have multiple needs, create separate prompts for each one, or if they're related, structure them as a sequence. For example, "First, provide an outline for a business plan for a coffee shop. After I review the outline, I'll ask you to expand each section."

This approach gives you more control and better results for each individual task.

Mistake Number Six: Not Providing Enough Context.

The AI doesn't know anything about your specific situation unless you tell it. If you ask for advice without context, you'll get generic advice that might not apply to you.

For example, "How can I improve my website?" The AI doesn't know what kind of website you have, what problems you're experiencing, who your audience is, or what your goals are.

The fix: Front-load your prompts with relevant context. "I have an e-commerce website selling organic skincare products. My traffic is good, about 5,000 visitors per month, but my conversion rate is only 0.5 percent, well below the industry average of 2 to 3 percent. My target customers are women aged 25 to 45 who are interested in natural beauty products. How can I improve my website to increase conversions?"

With that context, the AI can give you specific, actionable advice tailored to your situation.

Mistake Number Seven: Ignoring Tone and Style.

Beginners often forget to specify the tone or style they want, then they're disappointed when the AI's response doesn't match their brand voice or personal style.

If you don't specify tone, the AI will default to a somewhat neutral, professional style. That might not be what you need.

The fix: Always include a tone directive. Be specific about the style you want. "Use a warm, conversational tone as if you're a trusted friend giving advice," or "Write in a formal, academic style appropriate for a research paper," or "Use an enthusiastic, energetic tone that would appeal to teenagers."

You can even reference existing writing styles: "Write in the style of a Malcolm Gladwell article: engaging narrative with surprising insights and accessible explanations of complex ideas."

Mistake Number Eight: Not Iterating or Refining.

Many beginners think they should get perfect results on the first try. When the initial output isn't exactly what they wanted, they give up or think they're bad at prompting.

The truth is, prompting is a conversation. The first response is often a starting point, not the final product.

The fix: Plan to iterate. After you get the first response, refine your request. You might say, "This is good, but make it more concise," or "Great start, but can you add more specific examples," or "Adjust the tone to be more professional and less casual."

Each refinement teaches you more about what works and brings you closer to the ideal result. Professional prompt engineers regularly refine and iterate.

Mistake Number Nine: Overcomplicating the Prompt.

While specificity is important, some beginners go too far in the other direction. They write extremely long, complicated prompts with dozens of requirements and conditions. This can actually confuse the AI or lead to some requirements being missed.

For example, a 500-word prompt with 30 different specifications is harder for the AI to process than a well-organized 150-word prompt with 8 clear requirements.

The fix: Aim for structured clarity, not length. Use the CRAFT framework to organize your thoughts. Be specific, but also be concise within each element. If you have many

requirements, consider breaking them into a sequence of prompts rather than one massive request.

Quality and organization matter more than quantity.

Mistake Number Ten: Not Reviewing and Testing.

The final mistake is sending off your prompt without reviewing it first, or accepting the AI's first response without evaluating whether it actually meets your needs.

This is like sending an important email without proofreading it. You might miss errors, unclear instructions, or missing elements.

The fix: Before you submit a prompt, quickly run through the CRAFT checklist. Do I have Context, Role, Action, Format, and Tone? Is everything clear and specific? Are there any ambiguous terms?

After you get the response, evaluate it critically. Does it meet all your requirements? Is the tone right? Is the length appropriate? If not, refine your prompt and try again.

This review habit will improve your prompting skills faster than almost anything else.

Now, let's put all of this into practice with before-and-after examples that fix multiple mistakes at once.

Example One:

Before (with mistakes): "Tell me about starting a podcast."

This prompt is too vague (Mistake 1), doesn't define the audience (Mistake 2), has no format specification (Mistake 3), and lacks context (Mistake 6).

After (mistakes fixed): "I'm a fitness coach who wants to start a podcast to reach potential clients and establish authority in the health and wellness space. I've never created a podcast before and I'm not very technical. You are a podcast consultant who specializes in helping entrepreneurs launch shows. Create a beginner-friendly step-by-step guide to launching my first podcast. Include 8 specific steps, with each step containing: the step name, a 75-word explanation, tools or resources needed, and estimated time to complete. Format as a numbered list. Use an encouraging, supportive tone that builds confidence. Total length should be 800 to 1,000 words."

See how fixing the mistakes creates a powerful, effective prompt?

Example Two:

Before (with mistakes): "Write social media stuff for my business."

This has vagueness (Mistake 1), no format (Mistake 3), ambiguous language (Mistake 4), and no context (Mistake 6).

After (mistakes fixed): "I own a boutique wedding planning business in Austin, Texas. My ideal clients are couples aged 25 to 35 planning weddings with budgets of 30,000 to 60,000 dollars. You are a social media marketing specialist who works with service-based businesses. Create a one-week content calendar for Instagram with exactly 7 posts. For each post, provide: the post concept or theme, the caption text of 100 to 150 words including 3 to 5 relevant hashtags, and a description of the ideal image or video to accompany it. Use a warm, romantic, but professional tone that appeals to engaged couples. Present this as a table with columns for: Day, Post Concept, Caption, and Visual Description."

Now the AI has everything it needs to create exactly what you want.

Let me give you three quick diagnostic questions you can ask yourself whenever you write a prompt. These will help you catch mistakes before they happen.

Question One: If someone else read this prompt with no other context, would they know exactly what to create? If the answer is no, you need more specificity or context.

Question Two: Have I included all five CRAFT elements? If you're missing any, add them.

Question Three: Are there any words or phrases in my prompt that could be interpreted in multiple ways? If yes, replace them with specific, clear language.

These three questions will catch probably 80 percent of common mistakes before you even submit your prompt.

Let's recap the ten common mistakes we covered today:

One: Being too vague. Fix: Be specific about every element of your request.

Two: Forgetting to define the audience. Fix: Always specify who the output is for.

Three: Not specifying format or length. Fix: Include exact format and length requirements.

Four: Using ambiguous language. Fix: Replace vague terms with specific numbers and descriptors.

Five: Asking multiple unrelated questions in one prompt. Fix: One prompt, one primary task.

Six: Not providing enough context. Fix: Front-load your prompts with relevant background.

Seven: Ignoring tone and style. Fix: Always include a clear tone directive.

Eight: Not iterating or refining. Fix: Plan to refine and improve through conversation.

Nine: Overcomplicating the prompt. Fix: Aim for organized clarity, not excessive length.

Ten: Not reviewing and testing. Fix: Check your prompt before sending and evaluate the response critically.

Your homework before Episode 4 is practical error correction. Take three prompts you've written in the past, or write three new ones. For each prompt, identify which of the ten mistakes it contains. Then rewrite each prompt, fixing all the mistakes you identified.

Compare the results you get from the original prompts versus the corrected versions. This exercise will train your eye to spot and fix problems automatically.

In Episode 4, we're moving into Advanced Techniques for Better Results. We'll explore role-playing, chain-of-thought prompting, few-shot examples, prompt chaining, and other professional strategies that will take your skills to an expert level.

Thank you for joining me for Episode 3. You're well on your way to becoming a confident, skilled prompt engineer. I'll see you in the next episode. Keep practicing, stay curious, and remember: mistakes are simply opportunities to improve.