*2026 AI Skills Series*

# DAY 1

## Mastering Prompt Engineering

*The Foundation of the 2026 AI Skillset*

Student eBook & Reference Guide

90-Minute Virtual Classroom | Complete with Workbook & Assignments

### How to Use This eBook

This eBook is your personal reference guide for Day 1 of the 2026 AI Skills Series. You can read it before, during, or after the live virtual classroom session. Think of it as your AI Prompt Engineering Handbook that you can return to anytime.

| 📖 LEARN | ✍️ PRACTICE | 🎯 APPLY |
|---|---|---|
| Read the chapters during the session | Complete the workbook exercises | Complete the assignment after class |

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# Chapter 1: Welcome — What Is AI and Why Does It Matter?

## 1.1 What Exactly Is Artificial Intelligence?

If the term 'Artificial Intelligence' sounds intimidating, you are not alone. Most people picture robots or science fiction movies. The reality is much simpler — and much more useful.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is software that can perform tasks that normally require human thinking. This includes things like:

- Reading and writing text
- Answering questions
- Summarising long documents
- Writing emails, plans, and creative content
- Giving advice and ideas

> 💡 **The Simple Truth About AI**
> Think of AI as a very well-read assistant who has studied millions of books, websites, and documents. It does not 'think' the way you do, but it has learned patterns from enormous amounts of text and can generate helpful, human-like responses to your questions.

## 1.2 Why This Matters in 2026

The world is changing fast. In 2026, professionals who know how to work with AI tools are getting more done in less time — writing better documents, solving problems faster, and learning new skills more easily. The good news? You do not need to be a programmer or a tech expert to benefit from AI.

According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report, over 85 million jobs globally are being transformed by AI and automation — but at the same time, 97 million new roles are emerging that require the ability to work alongside AI tools. This course gives you exactly those skills.

## 1.3 Common Myths About AI — Busted

| MYTH | REALITY |
|---|---|
| You need to be a programmer to use AI. | Anyone who can type can use AI tools like ChatGPT or Gemini. |
| AI will replace my job. | People who use AI will replace people who don't. AI is a tool, not a replacement. |
| AI is always correct. | AI can make mistakes. Always review and verify important outputs. |
| AI is only for big companies. | Free and low-cost AI tools are available to anyone with an internet connection. |

# Chapter 2: What Is a Prompt? Your First Conversation with AI

## 2.1 The Prompt — Your Most Important New Skill

A prompt is simply the message or instruction you type into an AI tool. It is how you start a conversation with AI. The quality of the answer you receive is directly connected to the quality of the question you ask.

Think of it like giving directions. If you told a taxi driver 'take me somewhere nice,' you might end up anywhere. But if you said 'take me to The Yellow Chilli restaurant on Victoria Island,' you will get exactly where you want to go. Prompting works the same way.

> **The Golden Rule of Prompting**
> Garbage in, garbage out. A vague prompt produces a vague answer. A specific, well-structured prompt produces a professional, useful result. This entire course teaches you how to write better prompts.

## 2.2 The Anatomy of a Prompt

Every great prompt contains one or more of these components:

- ROLE — Who should the AI act as? (e.g., a marketing expert, a doctor, a teacher)
- TASK — What exactly do you want the AI to do? (e.g., write, summarise, explain, create)
- CONTEXT — What background information does the AI need?
- CONSTRAINTS — What limits should the AI respect? (e.g., word count, tone, format)
- FORMAT — How should the output be structured? (e.g., a table, bullet points, an email)

## 2.3 Types of Prompts

### Instructional Prompts

You give the AI a clear task to complete.

**Example:** *"Write a professional out-of-office email response for when I am on annual leave."*

### Question Prompts

You ask the AI to answer a question or explain something.

**Example:** *"What is the difference between machine learning and artificial intelligence, explained simply?"*

### Creative Prompts

You invite the AI to generate creative content.

**Example:** *"Write a short poem about the beauty of Abuja at sunset."*

### Conversational / Iterative Prompts

You treat the AI like a conversation partner, building on previous responses.

**Example:** *"That is a good start. Now make it shorter and more formal."*

# Chapter 3: Getting Started with Your AI Tools

## 3.1 Your Two Primary Tools

For this course, we recommend starting with either Google Gemini or OpenAI ChatGPT. Both are excellent, beginner-friendly AI tools that work in your web browser. You do not need to download any software.

| Google Gemini | ChatGPT (OpenAI) |
|---|---|
| • Access at: gemini.google.com<br>• Sign in with any Gmail account<br>• Free to use, no credit card needed<br>• Great integration with Google Docs and Gmail | • Access at: chatgpt.com<br>• Create a free account with any email<br>• Free tier available; GPT-4o for free users<br>• Widely used in business environments |

## 3.2 Your First Steps — A Step-by-Step Guide

1. Open your web browser (Chrome, Edge, or Firefox) on your computer.
2. Go to gemini.google.com or chatgpt.com.
3. Click 'Sign In' or 'Get Started' and log in with your email address.
4. Look for the message bar at the bottom of the screen — this is where you type your prompt.
5. Type: 'Hello! Can you explain what you are and what you can help me with?' and press Enter.
6. Read the response. Congratulations — you have just had your first AI conversation!

> ⚠️ **Privacy Reminder**
> Do not type personal information (such as your bank details, passwords, or ID numbers) into any AI tool. Treat your AI conversations the way you would treat a public forum.

## 3.3 Understanding the Interface

Both Gemini and ChatGPT share a similar interface. Here are the key elements you need to know:

- The Chat Window: Where the conversation appears. Your messages are shown on the right; the AI's responses appear on the left.
- The Prompt Bar: The text box at the bottom where you type your message. Press Enter or click the Send button to submit.
- The Pencil/Edit Icon: If you hover over your own message, you will see an edit icon. Click it to revise your original prompt without starting over.
- New Chat Button: Click this to start a fresh conversation. Your previous chats are saved in the sidebar.

- Conversation History: All your past conversations are listed in the left sidebar, organised by date.

# Chapter 4: The CO-STAR Framework — Speak to AI Like a Pro

## 4.1 What Is the CO-STAR Framework?

CO-STAR is a simple, powerful method for structuring your prompts. When you use CO-STAR, you give the AI everything it needs to produce a professional-quality result — the first time. It was first popularised by AI practitioners and has been adopted widely as a beginner-friendly prompt engineering method.

CO-STAR stands for: Context, Objective, Style, Tone, Audience, and Response Format.

## 4.2 The CO-STAR Table

| Element | What It Means | Example |
|---|---|---|
| C — Context | Provide the background information the AI needs to understand your situation. | "I am starting a small side-business selling hand-poured candles from home." |
| O — Objective | State the specific task you want the AI to complete. Be precise. | "Create 5 catchy product collection names for my first range." |
| S — Style | Tell the AI whose voice or communication style to use. | "Sound like a modern, minimalist branding expert." |
| T — Tone | Describe the emotional quality or vibe of the output. | "Sophisticated, yet earthy and warm." |
| A — Audience | Tell the AI who will read or receive this content. | "Environmentally conscious women aged 25 to 40." |
| R — Response | Specify the format, length, and structure of the answer. | "A bulleted list with a 1-sentence vibe description for each name." |

## 4.3 You Don't Always Need All Six Parts

CO-STAR is not a rigid formula — it is a toolkit. For simple tasks, you may only need two or three elements. For complex, high-stakes tasks, use all six. As a rule of thumb:

- Simple task (e.g., 'Give me 3 synonyms for happy'): You may not need CO-STAR at all.
- Medium task (e.g., write a short email): Use Objective + Tone + Response Format.
- Complex task (e.g., create marketing copy): Use all six elements for the best result.

## 4.4 A Full CO-STAR Prompt Example

Let's put it all together with a real-world example. Imagine you want help writing a professional bio for LinkedIn.

**FULL CO-STAR PROMPT: LinkedIn Bio Example**

*Context: I am a mid-level accountant in Lagos with 7 years of experience in financial auditing for SMEs.Objective: Write a compelling LinkedIn summary/bio for my profile.Style: Write like a professional career coach who specialises in finance.Tone: Confident, warm, and approachable – not stiff or corporate.Audience: Potential employers and clients looking for a reliable accountant.Response: A 3-paragraph bio, approximately 150 words. No jargon.*

Notice how this prompt gives the AI everything it needs. The output will be far more relevant and useful than if you had simply written 'write my LinkedIn bio.'

🔑 **The CO-STAR Shortcut**

If you are in a hurry, focus on the three most important elements first: Objective (what you want), Context (your situation), and Response Format (how you want it presented). You can always add more later.

# Chapter 5: The Prompt Evolution Drill

## 5.1 Why Practice Matters

Reading about prompting is helpful. Actually doing it is transformational. In this chapter, you will follow the 'evolution' of a single prompt from vague to professional. Copy each prompt into your AI tool and observe how the quality improves with each version.

## 5.2 The Three Levels of a Prompt

**LEVEL 1 ❌ The Basic Prompt (Too Vague)**

*"Write a workout plan."*

What happens: The AI produces a generic 7-day plan that might not suit your fitness level, available time, or equipment. It must guess everything.

**LEVEL 2 ✅ Adding Constraints (Better)**

*"Write a workout plan for a beginner who only has 20 minutes a day and no equipment."*

What happens: The AI now knows your level, time limit, and equipment restriction. The output is significantly more relevant.

**LEVEL 3 🏆 The Professional CO-STAR Prompt**

*"Act as a certified personal trainer. Create a 20-minute, no-equipment workout plan for an absolute beginner. The goal is to improve mobility and basic cardiovascular health. Present the plan in a table with three columns: Exercise, Duration, and Quick Tip. Keep the language encouraging and simple."*

What happens: The AI knows your exact requirements and format. The result is a structured, professional-quality workout plan tailored precisely to your needs.

## 5.3 The Improvement Formula

Use this simple mental checklist before you submit any prompt:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Have I stated exactly WHAT I want? (Objective) |
| 2 | Have I given the AI my CONTEXT? (Background) |

| | |
|---|---|
| **3** | Have I told it WHO will read this? (Audience) |
| **4** | Have I specified the FORMAT I want? (Response) |
| **5** | Is the TONE or STYLE important for this task? |

# Chapter 6: Pro Tips for Beginners

## 6.1 The 'Think Step-by-Step' Technique

For complex tasks — like analysing a business problem, writing a detailed plan, or solving a multi-part question — simply add the phrase 'Think step-by-step' at the end of your prompt. This technique is backed by research from AI labs and produces noticeably more accurate, logical results.

**EXAMPLE: Step-by-Step Prompt**

*"I need to plan a small business launch for a catering service in Abuja. I have a budget of ₦300,000. Think step-by-step."*

## 6.2 Iterate, Don't Restart — The Conversation Strategy

Most beginners make the mistake of deleting a response they don't like and starting over. This is the slow way. Instead, treat your interaction with AI like a conversation with a colleague. If the first response is close but not perfect, simply reply with a refinement instruction:

- "That is good, but make it 50% shorter."
- "Rewrite this in a more formal, professional tone."
- "Keep the same format but change the audience to university students."
- "Add three more examples and include a summary at the end."

💬 **The Power of Iteration**

Professional AI users rarely get a perfect result on the first try. They treat it as a conversation: draft → review → refine → review → finalise. This iterative process typically takes 3-5 exchanges and produces far better results than any single prompt.

## 6.3 Using the Edit/Pencil Feature

If you realise your original prompt was wrong or incomplete, you do not need to scroll down and type a correction. On both ChatGPT and Gemini, hover over your original message and click the pencil (edit) icon. You can revise the original prompt, and the AI will regenerate its response from scratch.

## 6.4 Assigning a Role to the AI

One of the most powerful prompting techniques is to give the AI an explicit role before asking your question. This shapes the entire tone and expertise level of the response.

- "Act as a senior human resources manager with 15 years of experience..."
- "You are a friendly primary school teacher explaining this to a 10-year-old..."
- "Respond as a Nigerian tax consultant advising a small business owner..."

## 6.5 Asking for Multiple Options

Instead of accepting the first option AI gives you, ask for variety. This is perfect for creative tasks.

**EXAMPLE: Requesting Options**

*"Give me 5 different subject line options for this email. Vary the tone from formal to conversational."*

## 6.6 Setting Boundaries and Constraints

AI will write as much as it can if you let it. For focused, usable outputs, always set clear limits:

- "In no more than 100 words..."
- "Limit your response to exactly three bullet points."
- "Do not use any technical jargon. Write at a secondary school reading level."
- "Avoid mentioning any competitor brands."

# Chapter 7: Real-World Use Cases — AI in Your Daily Life

## 7.1 Professional Use Cases

- Writing and refining emails: Draft a difficult email to a client, then ask AI to make it more professional.
- Summarising long documents: Paste in a long report and ask AI to 'summarise this in 5 bullet points.'
- Job applications: Get AI to help tailor your CV or write a cover letter for a specific role.
- Meeting preparation: Ask AI to help you prepare questions or an agenda for an important meeting.
- Learning new skills: Use AI as a tutor — ask it to explain any concept in simple terms.

## 7.2 Business Use Cases

- Marketing copy: Write product descriptions, social media captions, or email newsletters.
- Business plans: Use AI to help outline a business plan or brainstorm market entry strategies.
- Customer service scripts: Draft professional scripts for handling common customer complaints.
- Financial summaries: Ask AI to explain a financial concept or summarise a set of figures.

## 7.3 Personal Use Cases

- Travel planning: 'Plan a 5-day itinerary for Lagos with a budget of ₦50,000 per day.'
- Health and fitness: Create workout or meal plans tailored to your goals.
- Learning: 'Explain quantum physics to me as if I am 12 years old.'
- Creative writing: Write poems, stories, or speech drafts for special occasions.

# Chapter 8: Workbook — In-Session Exercises

Complete these exercises during the live classroom session. Work in pairs or individually as directed by your instructor.

## Exercise 1: Identify the CO-STAR Elements

Read the following prompt and identify which CO-STAR elements are present. Write each element in the space below.

**PROMPT TO ANALYSE:**

*"You are a professional career counsellor. I am a recent university graduate with a degree in Computer Science looking for my first job in tech in Lagos. Write a 3-paragraph cover letter for a junior software developer role at a fintech startup. Keep the tone enthusiastic but professional."*

| | |
|---|---|
| **C** | **What is the Context in this prompt?**<br>Your answer: _____ |
| **O** | **What is the Objective?**<br>Your answer: _____ |
| **S** | **What Style instruction was given?**<br>Your answer: _____ |
| **T** | **What Tone was requested?**<br>Your answer: _____ |

| | |
|---|---|
| **A** | **Who is the Audience?**<br>Your answer: _____ |
| **R** | **What Response Format was specified?**<br>Your answer: _____ |

## Exercise 2: Upgrade a Vague Prompt

The following prompt is too vague. Rewrite it using at least 4 CO-STAR elements to make it professional and specific.

**ORIGINAL VAGUE PROMPT:**

*"Write something about social media for my business."*

**Your improved CO-STAR prompt:**

Context: _____

Objective: _____

Style: _____

Tone: _____

Audience: _____

Response: _____

## Exercise 3: The Iteration Challenge

Submit a basic prompt to your AI tool, then practice iterating to improve it. Record each stage below.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Round 1Your first prompt** | **Write your first prompt here:** |

| | |
|---|---|
| | **Was the AI output good? What was missing?** |
| **Round 2Your refinement** | **What follow-up instruction did you give?**<br>**How did the output improve?** |
| **FinalResult** | **Paste or summarise your final output:** |

# Chapter 9: Day 1 Assignment

### 🎯 Your Real-World Prompt Challenge

*Complete this assignment before Day 2. Estimated time: 20-30 minutes.*

## The Task

Choose ONE real-world task that you have this week (at work, at home, or in your business). Use the AI tool of your choice to complete that task using the CO-STAR framework.

## Step-by-Step Instructions

7. Choose your task — something real and relevant to you today.
    - Examples: Writing a difficult email, planning a presentation, drafting a business proposal, creating a social media post, preparing a report, planning a meal or event.
8. Write your CO-STAR prompt — use at least 4 of the 6 elements.
9. Run the prompt and review the output. Note what you liked and what could be better.
10. Iterate at least ONCE — give the AI one follow-up instruction to improve the result.
11. Ask the AI to 'make it 20% shorter' — observe what changes.

## What to Submit

Take a screenshot or copy-paste the following into a document and email it to your instructor:

- Your original CO-STAR prompt (label each element C, O, S, T, A, R)
- The AI's first response
- Your follow-up instruction (the iteration)
- The final improved response
- One sentence: What did you learn from this exercise?

## Reflection Questions

Answer these questions in your own words (2-3 sentences each):

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **What surprised you most about using AI for the first time (or this time)?**<br>Your answer: _____ |

**2**

**Which part of CO-STAR did you find most useful and why?**

Your answer: _____

**3**

**How could you use prompt engineering in your work or daily life regularly?**

Your answer: _____

# Chapter 10: References & Further Learning

## 10.1 Core References


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- White, J., et al. (2023). A Prompt Pattern Catalog to Enhance Prompt Engineering with ChatGPT. Vanderbilt University. Available at: arxiv.org/abs/2302.11382
- World Economic Forum. (2023). Future of Jobs Report 2023. Available at: weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023
- OpenAI. (2024). Best Practices for Prompt Engineering. Available at: platform.openai.com/docs/guides/prompt-engineering
- Google DeepMind. (2024). Gemini Technical Report. Available at: deepmind.google/technologies/gemini


## 10.2 Free Learning Resources

- Anthropic's Claude Prompt Engineering Guide: docs.anthropic.com/en/docs/build-with-claude/prompt-engineering
- Google's Prompting Essentials Course: grow.google/ai/
- Microsoft's AI Skills Initiative: microsoft.com/en-us/ai/ai-skills
- DeepLearning.AI's ChatGPT Prompt Engineering for Developers (Free): deeplearning.ai
- Learn Prompting (Open-Source Prompting Guide): learnprompting.org

## 10.3 African AI Resources

- AI4D Africa — Research and Resources for African AI Practitioners: ai4d.ai
- Deep Learning Indaba — Pan-African AI Community: deeplearningindaba.com
- Africa AI Institute: africaai.org
- Zindi — African Data Science Competition Platform: zindi.africa

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**End of Day 1 eBook**

*See you at Day 2 — where we go deeper into AI tools and applications!*

2026 AI Learning Roadmap | Created for beginners, designed for results.