AI Prompting Guide for Small Business Owners

This guide is designed for small business owners and entrepreneurs who are getting started with AI tools. It covers the fundamental prompting styles and introduces three advanced frameworks — COSTAR, RIPE, and CRAFT — to help you communicate with AI more effectively and get higher-quality, more relevant outputs.

Beginner Prompting Styles

1. Zero-Shot Prompt

Description: Ask a simple question without context or examples. Best for quick facts.
- **Example:** What are three medium-length hikes near San Francisco?
- **Pros:** Fast and easy
- **Cons:** May be too generic
- **Use when:** You need a quick idea or fact.

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2. Few-Shot Prompt

Description: Provide examples, then ask the AI to follow the same pattern.
- **Example:**
    - Hike: Dipsea Trail
    - Distance: 9.5 miles
    - Why it's cool: Ocean views
      Now give me two more like this.
- **Pros:** Keeps consistent format
- **Cons:** Can restrict creativity
- **Use when:** You want uniform output.

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3. Instructional Prompt

Description: Give clear instructions like you're assigning a task.
- **Example:** Write a 500-word blog post comparing three lesser-known hikes near SF.
- **Pros:** Great for task completion
- **Cons:** Can sound robotic without added context
- **Use when:** You want structured content.

4. Exploratory Prompt

Description: Open-ended prompts for idea generation.
- **Example:** What are some unique hike-and-dine day trips near SF?
- **Pros:** Inspires creativity
- **Cons:** May be too broad
- **Use when:** You need fresh ideas.

5. o1 Prompt

Description: Add your personal context, preferences, and goals.
- **Example:** I want a hike within 2 hours of SF. We've done the main ones. We like ocean views and minimal crowds.
- **Pros:** Highly relevant, customized output
- **Cons:** Takes more effort
- **Use when:** The task is important.

6. Chain-of-Thought Prompt

Description: Break complex requests into steps.
- **Example:** List hikes under 10 miles. Then narrow to ocean views. Then find one with good food nearby.
- **Pros:** Clearer reasoning, better decision-making
- **Cons:** Takes more interactions
- **Use when:** You want logical output.

7. Role-Playing Prompt

Description: Assign the AI a persona or character.
- **Example:** Act as a Bay Area hiking guide and suggest an awesome weekend adventure.
- **Pros:** More engaging and creative
- **Cons:** Needs clear setup
- **Use when:** You want expert-like input or story-based output.

8. Multi-Turn Prompt

Description: Use a conversational approach — refine as you go.
- **Example:** Start with hiking options, then add filters and request nearby food.
- **Pros:** Interactive, flexible
- **Cons:** More time-consuming
- **Use when:** You're exploring a complex idea.

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9. Meta Prompt

Description: Ask the AI how to prompt it better.
- **Example:** Rewrite this to make it clearer: "Tell me about good hikes near SF."
- **Pros:** Helps improve prompting skills
- **Cons:** May be too advanced for some tasks
- **Use when:** You're stuck or want to learn.

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10. Constraint-Based Prompt

Description: Set word limits or formatting rules.
- **Example:** Suggest three hikes under 100 words each using bullet points.
- **Pros:** Concise, clean output
- **Cons:** May oversimplify
- **Use when:** You want brief, formatted content.

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11. Analogy or Mapping Prompt

Description: Use metaphors to frame the question.
- **Example:** If hikes were indie films, which would be hidden gems?
- **Pros:** Creative and fun
- **Cons:** May confuse if unclear
- **Use when:** You want a new lens on a topic.

Advanced Prompting Frameworks

- ◆ **COSTAR Framework (Context, Objective, Style, Tone, Audience, Response)**

Best for: High-quality content creation, clarity

- **Example:**
  - **Context:** Writing a newsletter for a retail shop
  - **Objective:** Increase weekend foot traffic
  - **Style:** Conversational
  - **Tone:** Energetic
  - **Audience:** Outdoor enthusiasts, 30–50
  - **Response:** Draft a 150-word promo email

Where it fits: A polished version of instructional and o1 prompts.

🔶 RIPE Framework (Role, Input, Process, Expectation) — by Scott Meyer

Best for: Expert-style prompts and logical walkthroughs

- **Example:**
  - **Role:** Small business finance coach
  - **Input:** Cash flow report for Q1
  - **Process:** Compare to industry norms
  - **Expectation:** Three insights + one Q2 warning

Where it fits: Combines role-playing, instructional, and chain-of-thought styles.

🟢 CRAFT Framework (Clarity, Role, Aim, Framing, Tone & Constraints)

Best for: Creative and precise prompts for branding, marketing, or advisory tone.
Craft better prompts with CRAFT:

- **C – Clarity:** Be direct about what you're asking. Avoid ambiguity.
- **R – Role:** Define the perspective or voice to respond from (e.g., expert, advisor).
- **A – Aim:** State the desired outcome or purpose of the response.
- **F – Framing:** Provide context, background, or examples to guide the response.
- **T – Tone & Constraints:** Set the style, word count, format, or tone to match your needs.

Where it fits: Ideal for content creation, marketing prompts, and creative direction.

Conclusion

Use this guide to match your AI prompt style to your goal. Start simple, then try more advanced styles or frameworks as you get more confident. Like good conversations, great AI prompts are clear, contextual, and collaborative.