

Beginning AI Skills

From Your First Prompt to Your Own Prompt Engineer

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Shows I Host / Anchor

- Vision ProFiles
- The Old Mac Gang
- A.I. Productivity Workflow
- The Tech Savvy Professor
- 15 Minute Bytes
- Fade to Chat: Golden Age Cinema
- The Neo Notebook

Also panelist on: MacVoices • InTouch with iOS • The Mac Show

All shows at ThePodTalk.net

What We Are NOT Covering Today

- X Ethics debates
- X "AI will take your job" arguments
- X Ecological / energy impact
- X "What if AI becomes conscious" philosophy
- X AI doom and gloom scenarios
- X Critical theory objections

**Today is about
learning
SKILLS**

These are real topics — just distractions from today's purpose. They'll always be there for another day.

Today's Journey – 2 Hours to Prompt Engineer

1

What AI
Actually Is

2

Paid vs. Free /
Your Data

3

Your First
Prompt

4

Anatomy of a
Better Prompt

5

Documents as
Context

6

Prompt
Engineering

7

Socratic Prompt

8

Build Your Own

+ 5-min break at the halfway point • 10 minutes of pure Q&A to close

The Running Experiment — We Need Volunteers!

1–2 volunteers will run the Socratic Prompt while we go through the workshop:

- You'll receive a special prompt at the start of the session
- Pick any personal topic: a trip, a home project, a letter to write, financial planning, a hobby...
- Work the process quietly in the background as we go
- By the end, you'll have a fully formed, custom prompt engineer built around your topic that you can run
- You share it with the group — everyone sees the process and the result

 *Raise your hand in Zoom or drop your name in the chat — we need a couple of volunteers!*



Give this to your AI tool and choose your topic:

I want you to become my prompt engineer. Your goal is to help me craft the best possible prompt for my needs.

You will follow this process:

1. Your first response will be to ask me what the prompt should be about. I will provide my answer, but we will need to improve it through continual iterations.
2. Based on my input, you will generate 2 sections:
 - a) Revised Prompt — a clear, concise rewrite
 - b) Questions — anything you need from me to improve it further
3. We continue this process until I say we are done.

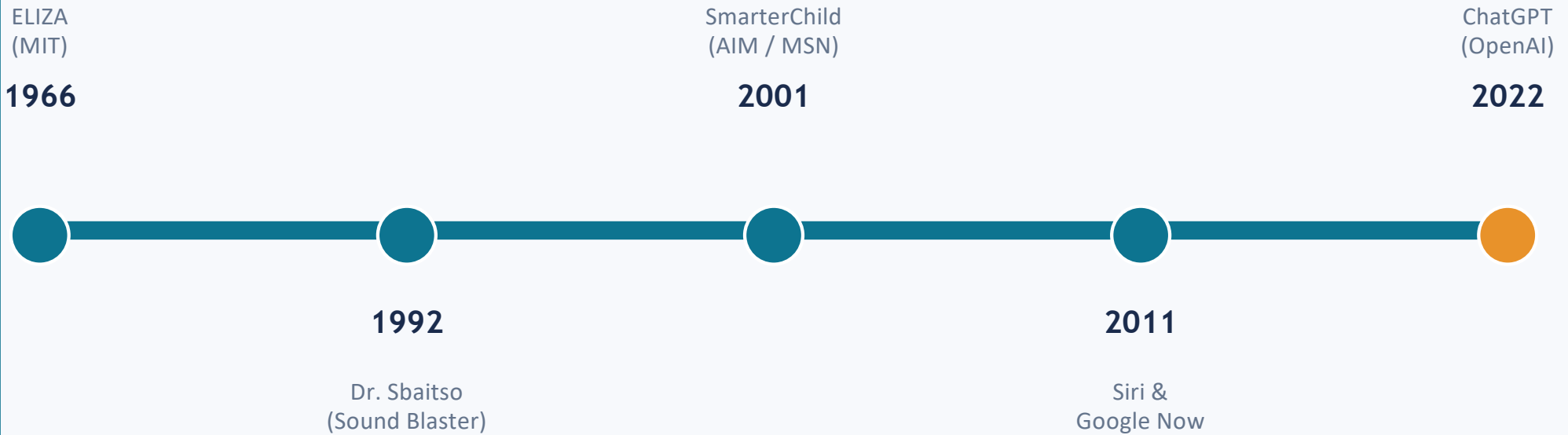
Work in the background — we'll check in at the break!

1

What AI Actually Is

Demystifying the tool before we start using it

A Very Brief History of Chatbots



Chatbots have been around for decades. This generation just got dramatically better.

What AI Is – and Isn't

✓ AI IS

- A pattern-completion tool trained on enormous amounts of text
- Very good at drafting, summarizing, explaining, brainstorming
- A capable assistant — when given clear direction
- Something accessible and usable today

✗ AI ISN'T

- A search engine
- A mind or sentient being
- Always right — it can be confidently wrong
- A replacement for human judgment

The Mental Model That Helps

Think of it like a very well-read assistant who has absorbed almost everything ever written — but occasionally misremembers details.


- It predicts the most useful-sounding response — not necessarily the true one
- "Hallucination" = confidently wrong output — always verify facts that matter
- The better your instructions, the better your results
- Use it as a thinking partner, not an oracle

2

Paid vs. Free — Your Data

One setting worth finding before you do anything else

Free vs. Paid – What Changes for You

Feature	Free Tier	Paid (~\$20/mo)
Conversations used for model training	May be ON by default	Can be turned OFF 
Access to latest AI model	Older / limited version	Latest model
Upload files / documents	Limited or unavailable	Full support
Response length & consistency	Shorter, may cut off	Longer, more reliable
Ideal for	Trying it out	Regular personal use

Turn Off Training Data – Where to Find the Setting

ChatGPT

1. Click your profile icon (top right)
2. Go to Settings
3. Click Data Controls
4. Toggle off 'Improve the model for everyone'

Claude.ai

1. Click your profile icon
2. Go to Settings
3. Click Privacy
4. Turn off usage data for model training

 For anything personal — health, finances, private letters — use a paid account with this off

3

Your First Prompt

A prompt is just a message. You already know how to do this.

The Only Skill: Be Specific

No special syntax. No coding. Just type what you want — with enough detail to be useful.

FLAT

"Help me plan a trip"

Vague. The AI guesses at everything. Results are generic and not very useful.

SPECIFIC

"Plan a 3-day Oregon coast road trip for two retirees who love photography and light hiking"

AI knows who you are and what you need. Results are immediately useful.

Specificity is the skill. Everything else we do today is about getting better at it.

PMUG Starter Prompts – Try These for example

Travel

"Plan a 5-day Pacific Northwest road trip from Portland for two retirees who love landscape photography and moderate hiking. Include one hidden gem per day."

Health

"Explain what elevated creatinine levels mean in plain language for someone with no medical background. Suggest 3 questions to ask my doctor."

Home

"I need to re-grout tile in a small bathroom for the first time. Walk me through the steps and list all supplies I need."

Letter

"Draft a firm but polite letter to my HOA requesting sidewalk repair in front of my property. Under 200 words."

Garden

"Suggest 10 plants for a raised bed with afternoon shade in the Pacific Northwest for a beginner gardener."

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The Anatomy of a Better Prompt

Role + Task + Context + Constraints

The Formula: Role + Task + Context + Constraints

ROLE

Tell AI what expert to be

"Act as a travel planner"

TASK

What you want it to do

"Suggest a 5-day itinerary"

CONTEXT

Background it needs

"for 2 retirees who love photography"

CONSTRAINTS

Guardrails: length, tone, format

"under 300 words, avoid freeways"

ROLE – Setting the Expert Changes Everything

Adding a role immediately changes the tone, depth, and usefulness of the response.

Try: "Act as a..."	Good for...
Travel Planner	Road trips, itineraries, destination ideas
Patient Health Educator	Understanding test results, medical terms
Financial Advisor (general info)	Comparing Medicare options, understanding fees
Professional Writer	Letters, emails, club announcements
Home Improvement Coach	Step-by-step project instructions
Tech Explainer	Setting up devices, troubleshooting your Mac

CONTEXT + CONSTRAINTS – The Details That Matter

CONTEXT

Background the AI needs to help you:

- Who you are
- Your situation or goal
- What you already know
- Who the audience is
- Any relevant history

CONSTRAINTS

Guardrails that shape the output:

- "Keep it under 200 words"
- "Plain language, no jargon"
- "Format as a bullet list"
- "Friendly, not formal"
- "Give me 3 options to choose from"

Before & After – PMUG Examples (Part 1)

BEFORE

"Help me plan a trip"

AFTER

"Act as a travel planner. Suggest a 5-day Pacific Northwest road trip for two retirees who love landscape photography and moderate hiking. Avoid freeways. Include one hidden gem per day."

BEFORE

"Explain my test results"

AFTER

"Act as a patient health educator. Explain what elevated creatinine levels mean in plain language for someone with no medical background. Suggest 3 questions I should ask my doctor."

Before & After – PMUG Examples (Part 2)

BEFORE

"Help me write a letter"

AFTER

"Act as a professional writer. Draft a firm but polite letter to my HOA requesting they repair the sidewalk in front of my property. Under 200 words."

BEFORE

"Tell me about Medicare"

AFTER

"Act as a patient benefits advisor. Compare Medicare Advantage vs. Medicare Supplement for a healthy 68-year-old on a fixed income in the Pacific Northwest. Plain language, no jargon."



5-Minute Break

Back in 5 minutes — stretch, refill, check on your volunteer experiment!

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Giving AI More to Work With

Context documents change what AI can do for you



Beyond the Chat Box – Uploading Documents

Paid tiers of ChatGPT and Claude let you upload files and have a conversation about them.

Format	Good for...
PDF	Manuals, articles, benefit summaries, HOA documents
Word / Pages	Letters, drafts, club newsletters
Plain text	Any text content — notes, articles you copied
Images	Photos of documents, receipts, handwritten notes

The concept: hand AI your document, then ask it specific questions about it

What to Upload – PMUG Examples (Part 1)



HOA Newsletter

Prompt: "Pull out every action item that affects residents"



Camera Manual

Prompt: "How do I set up interval shooting for a time-lapse on my Sony A7?"



A Recipe

Prompt: "Scale this down to serve 2 and suggest dairy-free substitutions"



Gardening Guide

Prompt: "What from this guide applies to raised beds in the Pacific Northwest?"

What to Upload – PMUG Examples (Part 2)



Medicare Summary

Prompt: "What's covered for physical therapy under this plan?"



Club Meeting Agenda

Prompt: "Draft meeting minutes from this agenda in standard format"



Travel Article

Prompt: "Pull out every specific hotel recommendation and activity suggestion"



Product Spec Sheet

Prompt: "Compare these two items and tell me which is better for a non-technical user"

One Important Privacy Note

Keep OUT:

- ✗ Social Security numbers
- ✗ Bank account / credit card numbers
- ✗ Passwords or PINs
- ✗ Full medical records with your name
- ✗ Tax documents with personal details

Generally fine to upload:

- ✓ A scanned HOA rules document
- ✓ Your camera manual
- ✓ A recipe you want to modify
- ✓ A generic Medicare brochure
- ✓ A magazine article you want to discuss

Time for an example?

Constructing a shownote for a podcast.

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Introduction to Prompt Engineering

Sounds technical. It's really just getting systematically better at giving instructions.

Prompt Engineering – Demystified

Prompt engineering is crafting instructions that consistently get useful, high-quality results from an AI.

No coding. No tech background required.

- It's a learnable skill — like learning to write a better email
- The shift: stop treating AI like a search engine; start treating it like a capable assistant that needs clear direction
- You're writing instructions that are repeatable and improvable
- You started doing this the moment you added Role, Task, Context, and Constraints

Three Moves That Immediately Improve Results

1

Persona Pattern

Assign the AI a role before the task. Single highest-impact move.

"Act as a patient health educator..."

2

Step-by-Step Thinking

Ask AI to reason before answering.

Add: "Think through this step by step before giving your answer"

3

Iterate

First result = starting point. Follow up, push back, refine. AI remembers the conversation.

"Good — now make it shorter and more casual"

Iteration Is the Real Skill

Nobody nails it on the first try — and that's not how it works for anyone.

YOU

Plan a 5-day Oregon coast trip for two people.

AI

[gives a decent but generic itinerary]

YOU

Good — now add more photography spots and remove anything with more than a mile of hiking.

AI

[revised with lighthouse pullouts, whale watch points, and easier walks]

YOU

Perfect. Now format it as a day-by-day packing checklist instead.

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The Socratic Method Prompt

Turning AI into your personal prompt engineer

The Socratic Method Prompt – Full Text

"I want you to become my prompt engineer. Your goal is to help me craft the best possible prompt for my needs. The prompt will be used by you.

You will follow this process:

1. Your first response will be to ask me what the prompt should be about. I will provide my answer, but we will need to improve it through continual iterations by going through the next steps.
2. Based on my input, you will generate 2 sections:
 - a) Revised Prompt — provide your rewritten prompt; it should be clear, concise, and easily understood by you
 - b) Questions — ask any relevant questions pertaining to what additional information is needed from me to improve the prompt
3. We will continue this iterative process with me providing additional information to you and you updating the prompt in the Revised Prompt section until I say we are done."

How the Socratic Prompt Works – The Logic

The key shift: you become the answerer. The AI becomes the interviewer.

- 1 Paste the prompt and tell the AI to begin
- 2 AI asks: "What should this prompt be about?"
- 3 You describe your goal — vague is fine at first
- 4 AI writes a revised prompt and asks clarifying questions
- 5 You answer the questions → it improves the prompt again
- 6 Repeat until the prompt does exactly what you need
- 7 Copy the final version — you now own a reusable tool

Sample Exchange – Building a Road Trip Prompt

AI

What should this prompt be about?

YOU

I want a prompt to help me plan road trips

AI

*Revised Prompt: 'Plan a road trip based on the details I provide'
Questions: Where do you typically start from? Trip length? Hotels or camping? Activities you always want?*

YOU

Portland OR, 3–5 days, hotels, photography stops are a must

AI

Revised Prompt: 'Act as a Pacific Northwest travel planner. Each time I give you a destination and duration, create a day-by-day itinerary from Portland with hotels, prime photography spots at golden hour, and one hidden gem per day. Max 90 minutes of driving between stops.'

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Building Your Own Prompt Engineer

Creating reusable tools for things you do all the time

The Concept – A Reusable Prompt Template

You're not just crafting one great prompt — you're building a tool you can use over and over, for anything in that category.

- Identify something you do repeatedly: plan trips, write letters, research health topics, compare products
- Ask AI to build a prompt template that handles all cases in that category
- Test it, iterate, refine until it nails it every time
- Save it where you can paste it quickly — Apple Notes, TextExpander, a Word doc

Prompt Templates PMUG Members Actually Need

Road Trip Planner

Asks for destination + duration → full itinerary from Portland, photography stops, hidden gems

Complaint Letter Writer

Asks for situation + recipient + desired outcome → firm, professional letter

Article Summarizer

Paste any article → 3-sentence summary + 3 follow-up questions

Home Project Planner

Describe any project → supply list, step-by-step instructions, first-timer tips

Benefits Comparer

Paste two plans/products → clear comparison with a recommendation

Club Newsletter Writer

Paste meeting notes → polished, reader-friendly newsletter

The Build-Your-Own Prompt – Full Text

"Help me create a reusable prompt I can use every time I want to [describe your recurring task].

The prompt should:

- Ask me for the key variable details each time I use it
- Generate a complete, high-quality result based on what I provide
- Adjust its tone and format based on what I need

Before you write the prompt, ask me any clarifying questions that would help you design it well — for example:

- Who is the audience?
- What format works best?
- Are there things I always want included?
- Are there things I never want?"

Save Your Prompts – Don't Lose Them

Once you've built a great prompt, save it somewhere you can paste it in seconds.

Option	How to use it
Apple Notes	Create a note called "My AI Prompts" — paste from anywhere on any device
TextExpander	Assign a short abbreviation (e.g. ;trip) that expands into your full prompt
Notion / Obsidian	Build a personal prompt library if you get serious about this
A plain Word doc	Simple, always works, easy to share with friends
Custom Instructions	Some AI tools let you set defaults that apply to every conversation



Volunteer Reveal — Let's See What You Built

The moment we've been building toward!

- What topic did you work on?
- Walk us through 1–2 exchanges — what did AI ask you?
- What does the final prompt look like?
- Run it live if you're up for it — type in your topic and show the result
- What surprised you most about the process?

This is something you can do tonight at home — with any topic that matters to you

Quick Tools Tour

Tool	Best For	Cost
ChatGPT (OpenAI)	All-around workhorse; most widely known; great for general tasks	Free / Plus \$20/mo
Claude (Anthropic)	Long documents, nuanced writing, follows instructions carefully	Free / Pro \$20/mo
Perplexity (Perplexity AI)	Research with cited sources — shows where it got information	Free / Pro \$20/mo
TextExpander (Smile Software)	Save and instantly recall your best prompts with a short abbreviation	~\$3.33/mo

Three Things to Try This Week

1

Give AI a role

Before your next request, add "Act as a [expert]." Compare the result to asking without it.

2

Upload one document

A PDF article, your camera manual, a Medicare brochure — upload it and ask something specific.


3

Run the Socratic Prompt


Paste it, pick any recurring task, and build your first reusable prompt template.


Where to Find Marty – Keep the Conversation Going

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Shows I Host / Anchor

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Q & A

Ask anything

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