THE
INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER'S
A.I. PROMPTS

Bridging Pedagogy and Technology to Create Inclusive, High-Impact Learning

OVERVIEW

As instructional designers (IDs), our value lies in translating complex information into meaningful learning experiences. AI platforms can significantly accelerate this process, but only when guided by the specific constraints of our field. This guide provides a framework for "engineering" AI prompts that respect cognitive load, accessibility standards, and the unique needs of adult learners, turning a general-purpose tool into a specialized ID assistant.

1. Target Audience Analysis

- **Description:** Defining the learner's prior knowledge, demographics, and professional context before generating content.
- **Prompt Example:** "Act as an ID. I am building a module for first-time solar panel installers with a high school education. Analyze this technical manual and identify three potential 'knowledge gaps' they might face."
- **The "Why":** AI defaults to a "generalist" tone. Without a specific audience profile, the content may be too remedial or overly advanced, leading to learner frustration or disengagement.

2. Reading Level & Literacy Alignment

- **Description:** Explicitly directing the AI to write at a specific grade level (e.g., 8th grade for general workforce) or for non-native speakers.
- **Prompt Example:** "Rewrite this compliance policy for a 7th-grade reading level. Use the Flesch-Kincaid scale as a guide. Ensure the logic remains intact but the vocabulary is simplified."
- **The "Why":** High-level academic writing creates a cognitive barrier. Lowering the reading level (without "dumbing it down") increases comprehension speed and retention for all learners.

3. Accessibility & Inclusive Design

- **Description:** Using AI to generate alt-text, transcripts, or screen-reader-friendly structures (WCAG compliance).
- **Prompt Example:** "Review this course outline. Suggest three ways to make the activities more accessible for learners using screen readers, and provide descriptive alt-text for the attached diagram."
- **The "Why":** Accessibility is a legal and ethical requirement. Prompting for it specifically ensures that "Universal Design for Learning" (UDL) is baked into the content from the start.

4. Reducing Jargon & "Technobabble"

- **Description:** Forcing the AI to use "Plain English" and define essential technical terms immediately.
- **Prompt Example:** "Explain the 'TCP/IP Handshake' to a non-technical manager. Do not use any acronyms without defining them first, and use an analogy involving a telephone call."
- **The "Why":** Jargon creates "insider/outsider" dynamics. Reducing it ensures that the learning is focused on the concept rather than the vocabulary.

5. Active vs. Passive Voice

- **Description:** Directing the AI to use subject-verb-object structures to create a sense of agency.
- **Prompt Example:** "Scan the following procedure. Convert all passive voice sentences (e.g., 'The button should be pressed') into active voice commands (e.g., 'Press the button')."
- **The "Why":** Active voice is more concise and clearer for instructional steps. It tells the learner exactly what they need to do, reducing ambiguity in procedural training.

6. Conciseness & Information Mapping

- **Description:** Using constraints like word counts or "bullet-only" modes to prevent AI "hallucination" or fluff.
- **Prompt Example:** "Summarize this 10-page whitepaper into five 'Need-to-Know' bullet points. Each bullet must be under 15 words and start with an action verb."
- **The "Why":** Learners have limited "Cognitive Load" capacity. Trimming unnecessary wordiness helps the brain focus on the most critical learning objectives.

NEXT STEPS

See below to move beyond experimentation and into production:

1. ***Draft with Constraints:*** *Start every project by "priming" the AI with your target audience and reading level before asking it to generate content.*
2. ***Audit for Tone:*** *Use AI to "critique" your own drafts. Ask: "Where is this too wordy?" or "Identify three pieces of jargon in this paragraph."*
3. ***The 80/20 Rule:*** *Use AI to generate the first 80% (the "shitty first draft"). Use your professional expertise to provide the final 20%—the nuance, cultural context, and pedagogical polish.*
4. ***Create a Prompt Library:*** *Save your most successful ID prompts in a shared team document to ensure consistency across your department's output.*

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The ID's AI Prompt Freebie

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