Session 1 Handout: Asking Well: Prompting Basics

FAST-16 Working Well with AI · 7formations · Instructor: Wadood Chaudhary · All examples fictional · Suggested reading: Svekis, AI Literacy for All Employees (2026), chapter 6

Why this session matters

The answer you get from an AI assistant can only be as specific as the request you give it. A vague prompt gets a generic answer, and generic answers are where invented details creep in. Good prompting is not a trick; it is the same skill as giving a new coworker a clear assignment.

Key concepts

1. Weak versus strong prompts

A weak prompt is short, vague, and leaves the AI to guess: "Write about parking." A strong prompt says who it is for, what to do, what facts to use, and what the result should look like.

2. The four elements

Element	Question it answers	Cape Harbor Inn example (fictional)
Context	What is the situation? What facts apply?	"Overflow parking moves to the town lot on Main Street from June 1, a 4-minute walk, free with a desk pass."
Specific instruction	What exactly should the AI do?	"Write a short FAQ answer to 'Where do I park?'"
Structure	What form, length, format?	"Three sentences, under 70 words."
Audience	Who will read it?	"Arriving guests who have never visited."

Add a **gap rule**: "Use only these facts; if something is missing, write [CHECK]." It is the single most useful line for cutting invented details.

3. Four techniques

- **Step-by-step:** break the task into ordered steps.
- **Iterative:** improve with specific follow-ups ("keep the facts, cut to two sentences").
- **Role:** "as a friendly front-desk lead" changes style and focus, not expertise. You are still accountable.
- **Constraint:** limits on length, scope, source, or tone.

4. Common mistakes

Expecting one vague prompt to be perfect; leaving out the facts; asking for several unrelated things at once; accepting the first answer; and keeping one long chat for every task. Start a **new chat** when the task changes or when the thread contains something that should not be there (and report the slip).

Worked example

Weak: "Reply to a guest who wants to bring pets." Typical result: a warm reply that invents a $50 fee and welcomes cats. Strong: "Using only the pet policy below, write a friendly three-sentence reply to a guest asking to bring two dogs and a cat. If the policy doesn't cover something, say we'll check with the manager. --- Dogs up to 40 lb, garden rooms only, $35 per night; no cats. ---" Result: accurate, polite, and nothing invented.

Try this before session 2

- Rewrite one prompt you used recently with all four elements and a gap rule.
- Read Svekis chapter 6.