

Writing Better AI Prompts for Community College Leaders

Oregon Community College Association

April 30, 2026

Welcome!

- ▶ Brett Rowlett, Executive Director of External Affairs at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon
- ▶ As an early adopter of new technologies, I like to look for new ways to improve efficiencies & outputs
- ▶ To maximize AI tools like LLM's, it's important to know how to prevent "Garbage In, Garbage Out"
 - Vague prompts → weak results
 - Clear prompts → high-quality output

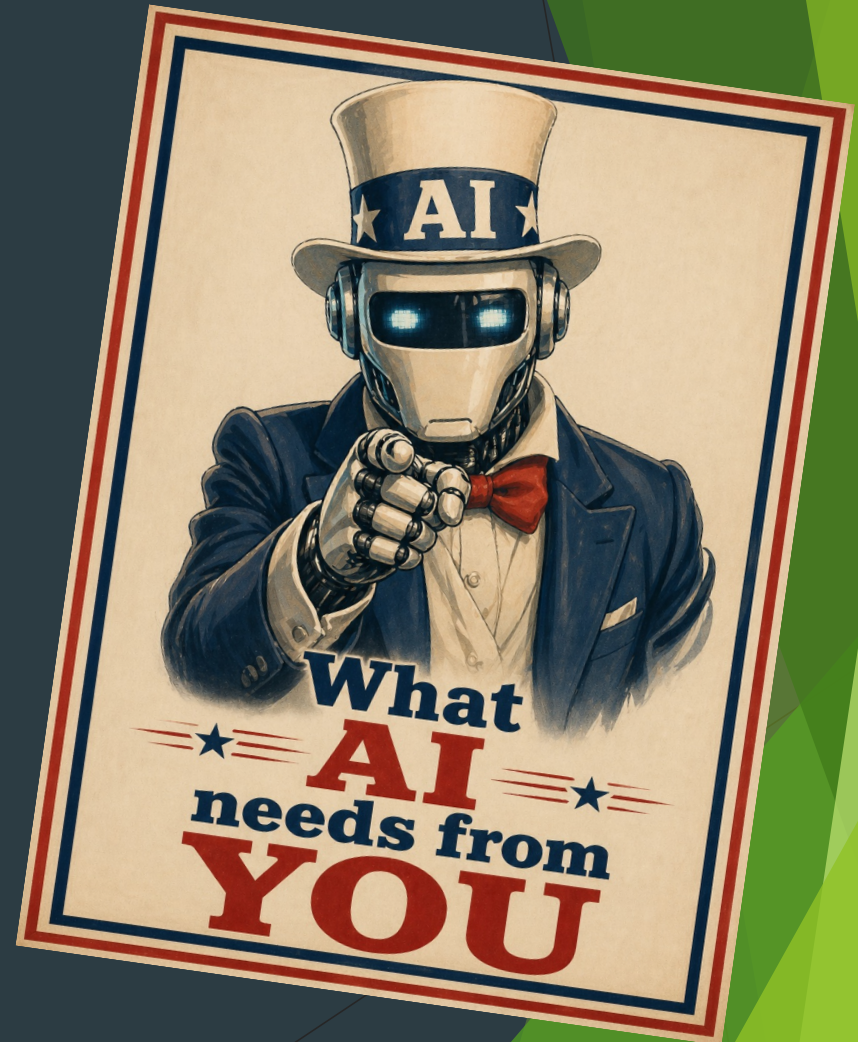
Why this matters...

- ▶ AI tools are powerful—but only with good prompts
- ▶ Better input = better output
- ▶ Save time and improve quality



What AI needs from you

- ▶ AI predicts patterns - it does not think
- ▶ AI needs context, audience and direction



Weak vs. Strong Prompts

Weak Prompts:

Vague or general (“Write something about...”)

No defined audience

No clear purpose or outcome

No tone specified

No format or length guidance

Treats AI like a search engine

One-shot request (no refinement)

Strong Prompts:

Specific and detailed

Clearly defines the audience

States the goal or outcome

Specifies the tone (e.g., professional, friendly)

Includes format and length (email, bullets, 100 words)

Assigns a role (“Act as....”)

Designed to iterate and refine

The prompting framework

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The prompting framework

Context - What's the situation or task?

L

E

A

R

The prompting framework

Context - What's the situation or task?

Length & Format - What should the output look like?

E

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Audience - Who is it for?

Role - Who should the AI “act as”?

The CLEAR framework

Context - What's the situation or task?

Length & Format - What should the output look like?

Expectations - What should it accomplish?

Audience - Who is it for?

Role - Who should the AI "act as"?

Example 1: Enrollment Email

Weak Prompt:

Strong Prompt:

Example 1: Enrollment Email

Weak Prompt:

Write an email about fall enrollment.

ChatGPT

chatgpt.com

ChatGPT

What are you working on?

+ Ask anything

Company knowledge

ChatGPT can make mistakes. OpenAI doesn't use Lane Community College workspace data to train its models.

Example 1: Enrollment Email

Weak Prompt:

Write an email about fall enrollment.

Strong Prompt:

Act as a marketing professional. Write a 150-word email to adult learners encouraging fall enrollment. Emphasize flexibility, affordability, and career advancement.

Fall Enrollment Email

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ChatGPT

Email

Dear Students,

Fall term enrollment is now open, and we're excited to welcome you back to campus for another great semester.

Whether you're continuing your program, exploring a new area of study, or just getting started, now is the time to secure your classes. Many courses fill quickly, so we encourage you to enroll early to get the schedule that works best for you.

Key reminders:

- Check your program requirements and meet with an advisor if needed
- Review your financial aid status or payment options
- Plan your schedule early to balance classes, work, and life commitments

Our faculty and staff are here to support you every step of the way. If you have questions about registration, advising, or resources available to you, please don't hesitate to reach out.

We're looking forward to a successful fall term and to seeing you on campus.

Best regards,
[Your Name]
[Your Title / Department]

If you want, I can tailor this specifically for Lane, include deadlines, or make it sound more like a presidential message or marketing campaign.

+ Ask anything

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Example 2: Board Communication

Weak Prompt:

Summarize enrollment trends.

Fall Enrollment Email Draft x Winter26 Credit Registration x +

chatgpt.com/c/69f0d447-b39c-8329-bd31-a055eef6154c

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ChatGPT

Email

Subject Fall Enrollment is Open—Take the Next Step in Your Career

Dear Future Student,

This fall is your opportunity to invest in yourself—without putting your life on hold.

Our programs are designed with busy adults in mind, offering flexible options including evening, online, and hybrid classes. Whether you're balancing work, family, or other commitments, you can build a schedule that works for you.

Affordability matters, too. With competitive tuition, financial aid options, and short-term programs, you can gain valuable skills without taking on overwhelming debt.

Most importantly, your education should move you forward. Our career-focused programs are built to help you advance in your current field or transition into a new one with confidence.

You've been thinking about it—now is the time to act. Enroll today and take the next step toward your goals.

We're here to support you every step of the way.

Best regards,
[Your Name]
[Your Title / Department]

+ Ask anything

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Example 2: Board Communication

Weak Prompt:

Summarize enrollment trends.

Strong Prompt:

Act as an institution research analyst. Write a concise executive summary with bullet points for a board of education.

Fall Enrollment Email Draft x Winter26 Credit Registration x +

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ChatGPT

Summarize enrollment trends. Share

Enrollment trends over the past several years show a mixed but gradually stabilizing picture:

- **Pandemic decline:** Most colleges experienced significant enrollment drops starting in 2020, with community colleges and adult learners among the hardest hit.
- **Adult learner disruption:** Many working adults paused or delayed education due to job instability, caregiving responsibilities, and uncertainty.
- **Recent stabilization and recovery:** Since 2023, enrollment has begun to rebound modestly, especially in workforce-aligned and short-term credential programs.
- **Shift in program demand:** There is growing interest in career-focused fields like healthcare, skilled trades, and technology, while some traditional academic pathways remain softer.
- **Flexibility is key:** Online, hybrid, and evening offerings continue to drive participation, particularly among adult learners.
- **Affordability concerns persist:** Cost remains a major barrier, increasing demand for financial aid, scholarships, and low-cost pathways.

Overall, enrollment is not fully back to pre-pandemic levels, but institutions that emphasize flexibility, affordability, and clear career outcomes are seeing the strongest gains.

+ Ask anything

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Example 2: Board Communication

Strong Prompt:

Act as an institution research analyst. Write a concise executive summary with bullet points for a board of education.

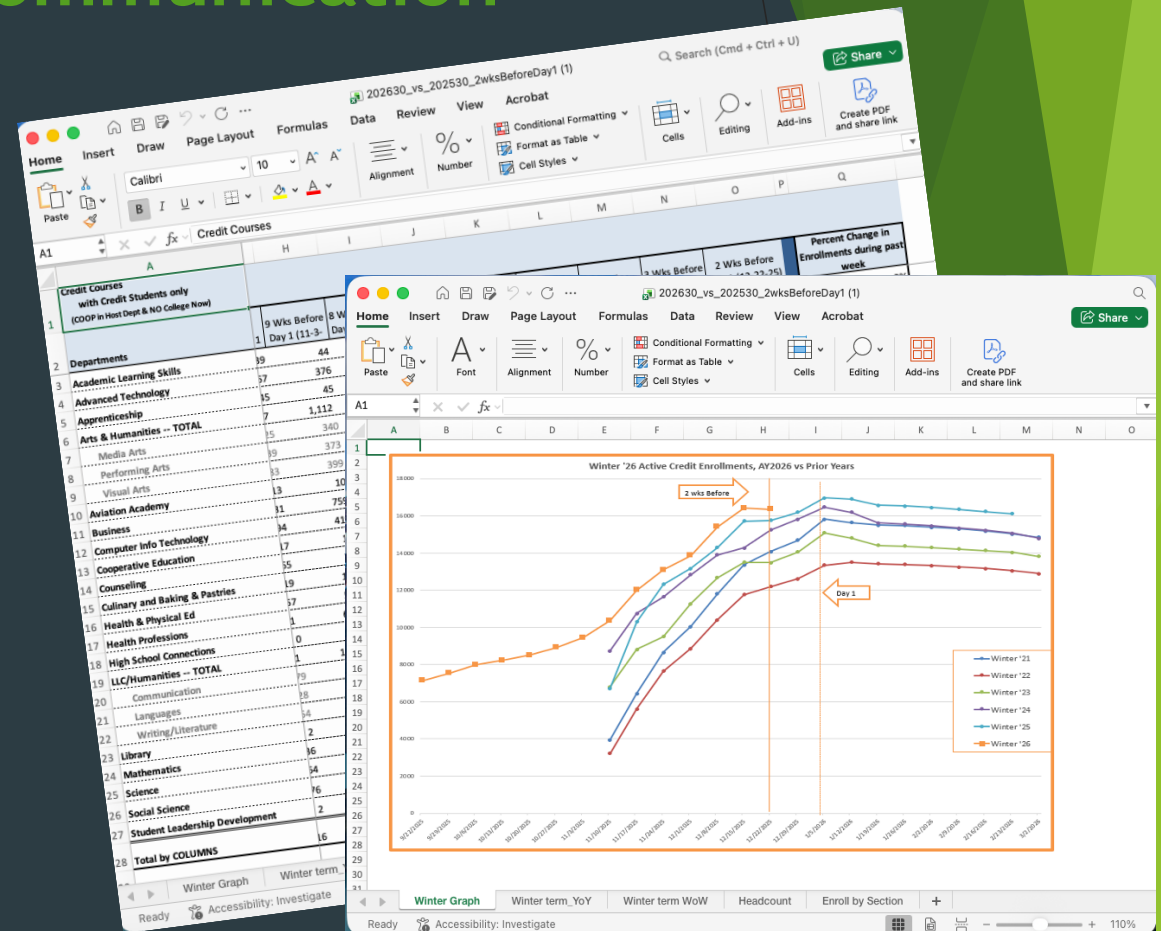
How can we support this strong prompt to make an even better response?

Example 2: Board Communication

Strong Prompt:

Act as an institution research analyst. Write a concise executive summary with bullet points for a board of education.

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ChatGPT

Act as an institution research analyst. Write a concise executive summary with bullet points for a board of education.

Executive Summary: Enrollment Trends

- **Post-Pandemic Decline:** Enrollment dropped significantly beginning in 2020, with community colleges experiencing the steepest losses, particularly among adult learners and part-time students.
- **Early Signs of Recovery:** Since 2023, enrollment has shown modest but measurable gains, though overall headcount remains below pre-pandemic levels.
- **Shifting Student Demographics:** Traditional-age student enrollment has stabilized, while adult learner participation is recovering more slowly but shows growth in targeted programs.
- **Program Demand Realignment:** Strongest enrollment gains are concentrated in workforce-aligned fields (healthcare, trades, technology) and short-term credentials; transfer-oriented programs remain comparatively flat.
- **Modality Preferences:** Demand for flexible delivery (online, hybrid, evening) continues to increase and is a key driver for adult learner re-engagement.
- **Affordability Pressures:** Cost sensitivity remains high, increasing reliance on financial aid and reinforcing the importance of low-cost pathways and clear return on investment.
- **Strategic Implication:** Institutions that prioritize flexibility, career alignment, and affordability are outperforming peers in enrollment stabilization and growth.

Do you like this personality?

+ Ask anything

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Example 3: Simplifying Information

Weak Prompt:

Explain financial aid policy.

summary with bullet points for a board of education. Analyze and use the enrollment data attached information in the response.

Executive Summary: Winter Term Enrollment (2 Weeks Before Start)

- **Overall Growth (Year-over-Year):**
 - Total headcount is **6,075**, up from 5,729 last year (**+346 students, +6.0%**).
 - Indicates continued **post-pandemic recovery and strengthening demand**.
- **Segment Performance (YoY):**
 - **New students:** 672 vs. 571 (**+101, +17.7%**) — strongest growth driver.
 - **Returning students:** 552 vs. 499 (**+53, +10.6%**) — solid re-engagement trend.
 - **Continuing students:** 4,851 vs. 4,659 (**+192, +4.1%**) — stable base with moderate growth.
- **Short-Term Momentum (Week-over-Week):**
 - Headcount declined slightly from **6,169 to 6,075 (-94 students, -1.5%)**.
 - Typical late-cycle fluctuation; does not materially change overall positive trajectory.
- **Pipeline Strength:**
 - Enrollment buildup shows consistent gains across all student types compared to prior year at each weekly interval.
 - Suggests **improved recruitment and earlier student commitment**.
- **Strategic Implications:**
 - Growth is being driven by **new and returning students**, signaling effective outreach and re-engagement strategies.
 - Continued focus on **onboarding, retention, and conversion** will be critical to sustain momentum.

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Example 3: Simplifying Information

Weak Prompt:

Explain financial aid policy.

Strong Prompt:

Act as a financial aid advisor. Explain eligibility in plain language for first-generation students in under 120 words.

Fall Enrollment Email Draft x +

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ChatGPT Share ...

- Students must complete the FAFSA (or equivalent application)
- Demonstrate financial need (for need-based aid)
- Meet basic criteria (e.g., enrollment in an eligible program, citizenship/status requirements)

2. Types of Aid

- **Grants:** Need-based, do not require repayment
- **Scholarships:** Merit- or need-based, do not require repayment
- **Loans:** Must be repaid, often with interest
- **Work-study:** Earned through part-time employment

3. Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

- Students must maintain minimum GPA, course completion rates, and pace toward degree completion to continue receiving aid

4. Enrollment Requirements

- Aid amounts are often tied to credit load (full-time vs. part-time)
- Dropping or withdrawing from classes can reduce aid or trigger repayment

5. Disbursement and Refunds

- Aid is applied to tuition and fees first
- Remaining funds may be refunded to the student for educational expenses

6. Compliance and Accountability

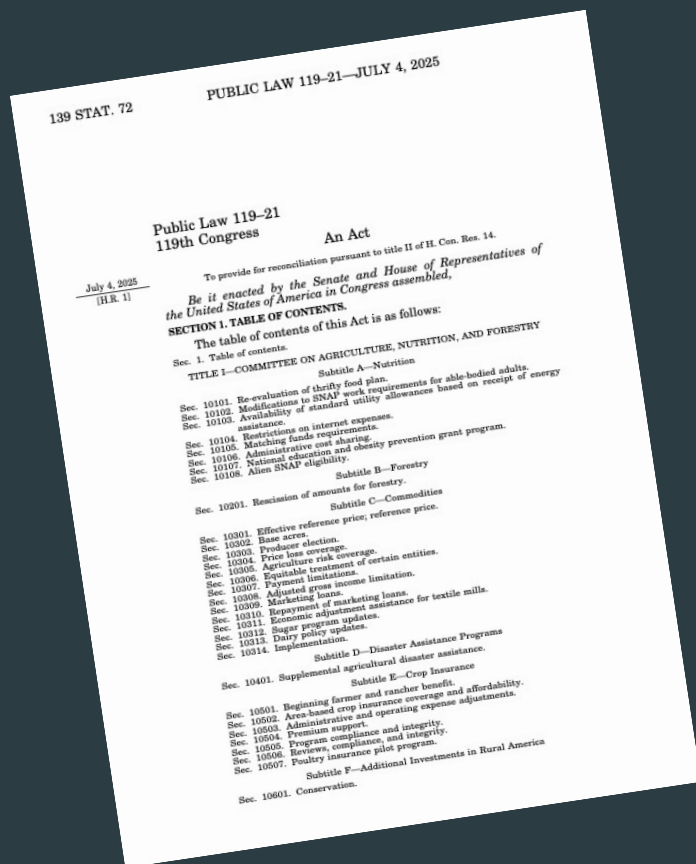
- Institutions must follow federal and state regulations
- Policies ensure equitable distribution and proper use of funds

In practice, financial aid policy balances **access (making education affordable)** with **accountability (ensuring funds are used appropriately and students make progress)**.

+ Ask anything

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Example 4: Simplifying Information



Strong Prompt:
Act as a government relations professional. Explain the impact of the attached federal legislation, HR 1, on community colleges for members of community college boards of education.

ChatGPT

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School

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ChatGPT

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- Search chats
- Library
- Apps
- Agents NEW
- Deep research
- Codex

GPTs >


Projects >


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Lane Community College Business

Invite team members

How can I help, Brett?

+ Ask anything Instant ▼ 

 Company knowledge

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Common Mistakes

- ▶ Vague prompts
- ▶ No defined audience
- ▶ No clear goal or outcome
- ▶ No format or length specified
- ▶ Not assigning a role
- ▶ Too much at once
- ▶ Treating AI like a search engine
- ▶ No iteration

Hallucinations

▶ What are hallucinations?

- ▶ AI-generated responses that are incorrect, misleading or fabricated
- ▶ They may sound confident and well-written--but are not accurate

▶ Why do they happen?

- ▶ AI predicts patterns - it does not verify facts
- ▶ Fills in gaps when prompts lack context or specificity
- ▶ Models are trained on broad data—not your institution's real-time information

Hallucinations

▶ How to identify them

- ▶ Information sounds too certain without sources
- ▶ Specific details you can't verify (dates, numbers, policies)
- ▶ Inconsistencies or contradictions
- ▶ Doesn't match your institutional knowledge

▶ Best practices

- ▶ Verify important facts before using; ask for AI's sources
- ▶ Provide context and source material when possible
- ▶ Use AI for drafting and summarizing—not final authority

Key Takeaways

- ▶ Be specific
- ▶ Define your audience
- ▶ State the goal
- ▶ Give the AI a role
- ▶ Take your time to refine your results



Homework

- ▶ Take one AI task you already do regularly.
- ▶ Rewrite your prompt using the CLEAR framework
 - ▶ Add context
 - ▶ Define your audience
 - ▶ Be clear about the goal
- ▶ Compare the results

Thank you!

Brett Rowlett

Executive Director of External Affairs

Lane Community College

rowlettb@lanecc.edu