

New models need new prompts

GPT-6 Astra and Claude Fable 5.1 do their best work with less instruction. A short guide to prompting the new generation, and to knowing which model gets which job.

The first real jump since Opus 4.5

Three years of using every major model, and no release felt like a different level of intelligence until GPT-6 Astra. A better version of the same thing is one thing. This is another.

1 **My prompts started getting in the way.**

Detailed steps, roles and rules that used to help were now slowing the model down or steering it wrong.

2 **It is not just me.**

People working with these new models report the same thing: skills and very detailed prompts now hinder more than they help.

3 **OpenAI says it in its own guide.**

Guidance that used to help can now hold the model back. Give it a goal, context, boundaries and room to work.

It sounds counterintuitive, and it goes against a lot of what we have all been learning. But it is where the models are right now.

Briefing a junior associate versus a senior partner

THE JUNIOR GETS

- A checklist
- The exact steps, in order
- The format before the purpose
- Rules for every case you can think of
- A review at every step

THE PARTNER GETS

- The goal
- The context they need
- What good looks like
- What must not happen
- Room to work it out

Prompting a strong model the junior way wastes the partner.

Over-prescriptive, the way many of us learned to write

THE PROMPT

You are an expert pricing consultant. Step 1: list five pricing models. Step 2: score each one on cost, simplicity and perceived value. Step 3: build a comparison table. Step 4: recommend one. Step 5: write a one-paragraph summary. Do not skip steps. Do not add anything I did not ask for. Follow these rules exactly.

WHAT IS GOING ON

- A role-play opener doing the job of context
- Numbered steps for a question that needs judgment
- Rules instead of a goal
- The format decided before the thinking

What you get: a tidy table.

Right-sized for a strong model

THE PROMPT

I am launching a small live workshop for past coaching clients. Here is who they are, here is what I charge for my other work, and here is what I want to avoid. Tell me how you would price it and why, then argue against your own answer.

WHAT IS GOING ON

- The situation, in one sentence
- The context the model needs, and nothing else
- What good looks like and what to avoid
- An invitation to think, then to challenge itself

What you get: a thinking partner.

ARE SKILLS USELESS NOW? ABSOLUTELY NOT.

Which work goes where

Procedures and templates did not stop working. What changes is where you use them.

GIVE THE STRONG MODEL

- A decision you have not made yet
- A strategy or a plan
- The first draft of something new
- A critique of how you do things today
- Anything still unclear in your own head

KEEP ON A PROCEDURE

- The weekly report
- The standard summary
- Anything that must come out the same every time
- Work you hand to a cheaper model
- Work someone else will run for you

Goal and constraints for the thinking. Playbook for the repeat work.

Which model for which job

In my experience so far. People who watch their spend are learning to match the model to the kind of work.

Thinking, deciding, new projects	GPT-6 Astra Claude Fable 5.1	Less instruction, more freedom. Give the goal and the constraints, leave the how open.
Repeat work, procedures, templates	Sonnet, Haiku sometimes even Opus	Tighter structure, clearer steps. This is where your skills and templates live.
Designing the process itself	The strong model, once	Have it write the playbook, then run the playbook on the cheaper model.

The partner writes the playbook. Someone else runs it.

A QUICK SELF-CHECK

Signs your prompt is over-prescriptive

Read your last prompt to a strong model. Tick what you see.

- ☐ Numbered steps for a question that needs judgment

- ☐ "Do exactly as I say" for something you have not figured out yourself

- ☐ The output format specified before the goal

- ☐ A role-play opener standing in for real context

- ☐ More rules than context

- ☐ No line that says what excellent looks like

Any one of these ticked: try the four questions on the next card instead.

Four questions instead of steps

- 1 What am I trying to accomplish?
- 2 Who is it for?
- 3 What does excellent look like?
- 4 What must not happen?

Give the model that. Let it figure out the how. See what comes back.

Your skills are not useless. They moved.

Procedures and templates still run the repeat work. The new models take the thinking, and they think better when you tell them what, not how.

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