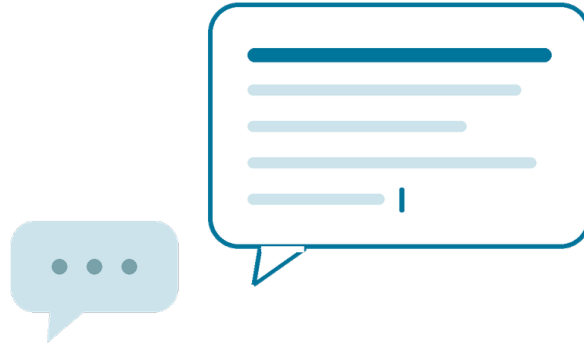


BRIEFING NO. 1

How to ask AI for what you actually want

Most people type into AI the way they type into Google. That's the whole problem.



Google is a filing cabinet. You give it a few keywords — *best CRM small business* — and it hands you a stack of folders to dig through. Twenty-five years of that has trained all of us to be terse.

AI is not a filing cabinet. It's closer to a smart temp who showed up this morning: capable, fast, and knows nothing about your business until you tell them. Type three keywords at a temp and you'll get back something generic, because generic is all you asked for. Give the temp a real briefing and the work comes back looking like you'd hired a specialist.

That briefing is called a **prompt**, and writing a decent one is a five-minute skill, not a technical one.

What goes in a good prompt

Four things, in any order:

Who it's for and who you are. “I run a 12-person dental practice” changes the answer more than anything else you'll type.

What you actually want. A letter? A summary? A list of questions? Say the format out loud.

The raw material. Paste the document, the numbers, the email thread. AI works with what you give it — nothing more.

The constraints. Length, tone, what to leave out, who's reading it. “One page, plain language, no jargon” saves you three rounds of revisions.

You don't need magic words. You need the same things you'd tell a person before handing them the job.

Three before-and-afters

Example 1 — the overdue-account letter

Weak: “collection letter template”

Better: “Write a firm but friendly letter to a longtime customer who is 60 days past due on a \$2,400 invoice. We value the relationship and want to keep them. One page, and give me two versions — one gentle, one firmer.”

The weak version gets you a form letter off the internet. The better one gets you something you could actually sign.

Example 2 — making sense of a contract

Weak: “explain this contract”

Better: “I’m the owner, not a lawyer. Read this vendor agreement and list anything unusual, one-sided, or worth asking about before I sign — in plain English, ranked by how much it could cost me.”

Same document, entirely different result — because now the AI knows the job is *protect the owner*, not *summarize the pages*.

Example 3 — the staff announcement

Weak: “write an email about the new PTO policy”

Better: “Write an email to our 18 employees announcing that PTO requests now go through the portal instead of paper forms, starting March 1. Friendly, short, and make the change sound like less work for them — because it is.”

The weak one reads like HR wrote it. The better one reads like you wrote it.

The habit that makes it stick

Treat the first answer as a first draft from that new temp. Reply to it: “shorter,” “warmer,” “now as a bulleted list,” “you missed the part about weekends.” The conversation is the tool — people who get great results out of AI aren’t smarter, they just don’t stop at the first answer.

One caution before you go practice on real work: a good prompt often means pasting in real business material — contracts, numbers, personnel matters. **Where you paste it matters as much as how you ask.** That’s a topic for its own briefing, but it’s the reason SterlingPRIVATE.ai exists.

Want to learn more about keeping your data private? Email PrivateAI@sterling.net