

Prompting tips: AI tools and consultation tool development.

Introduction

These tips aim to help Australian Public Service (APS) officers interested in using Gen AI tools to support them in developing qualitative data, or consultation tools. They relate to **video 9** from the “Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for Evaluation in the Australian Government” series.

This video series and resources are meant to inspire ideas and learning. They are not designed to be a manual. It aims to show how AI tools, especially generative AI (Gen AI) can support the evaluation process. The goal is to help evaluators and APS staff explore how AI can be useful, and where it is less useful.

AI can help with repetitive tasks but cannot replace expert knowledge. APS officers must carefully review AI outputs, and any decisions and products must be owned by the officers. This human oversight can help ensure that results are accurate, fair, and culturally appropriate.

Please note that you should only use AI tools that have been approved by your agency or department. Any documents that you upload to the tool should only be up to the security clearance level approved for the tool by your agency or department.

Prompt engineering

A prompt is an instruction in natural language that tells a Gen AI tool to perform a task. Prompt engineering is the process of creating and refining these prompts to get a suitable output from the tool.¹ Table 1 below shares some essential tips for using Gen AI tools. This is derived from the AI Colab’s “AI for Policy People” course, available through APSLearn. These tips are organised along four pillars:



Share specifics and context



Provide examples



Avoid leading or biased prompts



Chat, not search

¹ [Prompts overview | Microsoft Learn](#)

Table 1: Essential prompt engineering tips

Share specifics and context	Provide examples	Avoid leading or biased prompts	Chat, not search
Gen AI tools like Copilot are not search-engines. They don't work on keywords, they work on the meaning of words and how they are used, just like people. For more tailored, and useful responses from AI tools, you should provide as much context as you can, with specific requests. Vague prompts lead to generic answers.	Gen AI tools can “read between the lines” pick up a lot of indirect instructions when you share raw examples about your topic of interest. Examples help reinforce your specific requests.	Use balanced prompts/requests to get well-rounded responses. Avoid leading or biased prompts. If you are unsure that the Gen AI tool has considered all aspects of your query, simply ask it to be appropriately critical.	Use Gen AI tools conversationally. Ask clarifying questions, build on responses, and treat it like a colleague you're bouncing ideas off. Don't expect a perfect response in one go. Iterate, get a rough version, revise and refine through additional prompts.

Prompts to support survey question development

A survey questionnaire or survey is a set of questions asked in a structured way to collect predominantly number-base data. This data is collected from people or organisations to help us answer evaluation questions. These are some example prompts that you could use to generate survey questions for a program evaluation using Gen AI tools. You should develop survey questions after you have clearly defined evaluation questions and indicators

1. “Please summarise the key program outcomes from this document(s). Provide references” (this helps prime the Gen AI tool with reference content)
2. “What are common survey questions that could be used to assess **[outcome]**?”
3. “Generate a set of **[number]** survey questions to measure participant satisfaction with **[activity]**?”
4. “Draft pre- and post-activity survey questions to assess self-reported changes in **[insert knowledge, attitude, or practice of interest]**.”

Prompts to support interview or focus group guides

Surveys which generate quantitative data are among a range of data collection methods. Mixed methods researchers also use interviews and focus groups with people who have used a program or are affected by it. This helps us gain a deeper understanding of the program's activities and outcomes. These prompts can help you generate interview and focus group questions using Gen AI tools.

1. “What is a data collection matrix? Provide references” (this helps prime the Gen AI tool with reference content)

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2. “What are semi-structured interviews and focus groups for evaluation” (this helps prime the Gen AI tool with reference content)
3. “Please draft a semi-structured interview guide exploring the topics below: **[list evaluation questions of interest]**”
4. “Suggest three-four probing questions to explore user experience with **[insert activity]**?”
5. “Share **[x number]** of interview questions to understand barriers and enablers to **[implementation/access]** for **[stakeholder group]**.”
6. “Map questions from the interview guide with key evaluation questions and indicators in a data evaluation matrix.” (this can help identify gaps in the interview guide)

A similar sequence of prompts can be used to develop a focus group script or guide:

1. “What is a data collection matrix? Provide references” (this helps prime the Gen AI tool with reference content)
2. “Please draft a facilitator guide for a focus group with **[stakeholder group]** exploring the topics below: **[list evaluation questions of interest]**”
3. “Suggest two-three probing questions to exploring user experience with **[insert topic]**.”
4. “Map questions from the focus group facilitation guide with key evaluation questions and indicators in a data evaluation matrix.”

Testing and finalising data collection tools

You should test your draft data collection tools with end users. These users can include a sample of survey, interview and focus group participants. This can help us capture evaluation insights with minimal disruption.

You may use templates available on the ACE website to complete a suitable data evaluation matrix. This matrix can be updated as required. You can use the data evaluation matrix to check alignment between the data collection tools with the program’s objectives. The matrix should also include any data sensitivities and access arrangements. Finally, any data must be collected, stored and used in accordance with the Privacy Act (1988)², and other relevant legislation.

Policy and training

All use of AI tools must comply with the [Policy for the responsible use of AI in government](#). Your use of AI tools should also comply with any guidance and any specific requirements from your entity’s accountable official under the Policy for the responsible use of AI in government.

The ACE strongly recommends that you complete the APS Learn course, [AI in government fundamentals](#). This course has been designed to provide all APS staff with foundational knowledge of AI, and the principles of safe and responsible use. Lastly, you can test a suite of AI tools on [GovAI](#). This is a secure, APS-only platform designed to help APS officers learn about and use artificial intelligence (AI).

² [Privacy Act 1988 - Federal Register of Legislation](#)