

Prompting tips: AI for formulating evaluation questions and indicators.

Introduction

These tips aim to help Australian Public Service (APS) officers interested in using Gen AI tools to support them in formulating evaluation questions and linked indicators. They relate to **video 5** 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. Any AI-based 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 overarching 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.

Prompting tips to formulate evaluation questions and indicators.

Clear, specific and relevant evaluation questions help to ensure evaluation findings are of interest to decision-makers and can be used to improve programs and services. These are some examples of prompts that you could use to formulate draft evaluation questions. Using them in sequence may help to generate more useful outputs. These can be used and adapted to most Gen AI tools such as Copilot. You can experiment with these using the tips in table 1 to suit your needs.

1. "Please summarise this document/these documents in 1-2 pages". (this helps prime the Gen AI tool with reference content)
2. "What are this program/policy's objectives and/or outcomes? Please provide page references"
3. "Please define the term "evaluation question". Provide references for your response." (this provides context for the AI tool for the follow-up questions you will ask).
4. "Please draft 2-3 evaluation questions for each of the following program outcomes: (list outcomes of interest here)." (You can use the objectives/outcomes identified through question 2 above or a logic model, if available). **OR**
"Please draft 2-3 evaluation questions for each of the following program activities and outputs (list outcomes of interest here)." (You can use the activities and outputs identified through a logic model, if available).

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5. “What are some sub-questions that will help answer this evaluation question (*evaluation question text here*)? Provide page references for your response, and reasoning.” (You may repeat this for as many evaluation questions that you have identified for the evaluation).

Indicators

1. “Please define indicators for program evaluation. Provide references.”
2. “Please identify any evaluation indicators from the uploaded document”
3. “For each evaluation question below (*list these here*) please suggest SMART indicators based on the uploaded document. Provide references.”

Testing and finalising evaluation questions and indicators

Once you have shortlisted draft key evaluation questions, and linked indicators, the next phase is to test these with key stakeholders, including key decision makers and program staff. Depending on the complexity of the program, you may also work with sector experts to understand how feasible your proposed indicators are.

Finally, you must make sure that any evaluation questions and indicators, meet the needs of the evaluation commissioners, align with the program’s goals and available data. This is to ensure that the evaluation’s findings are useful to program staff, and decision makers.

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).