

ChatGPT

Beginner Cheat Sheet

What each main function does, how to write better prompts, and how to get accurate, ready-to-use results.

VISIBLE FUNCTION SYMBOLS



THE BIG IDEA Tell ChatGPT the result you need in ordinary language. Add the context that changes the answer, describe the format, set any non-negotiable boundaries, then review and refine the result.

Five rules that improve almost every result

1. **Lead with the outcome:** Say what you want made, answered or changed before giving background.
2. **Add useful context:** Include the audience, source material and facts that could change the result.
3. **Specify the output:** Name the format, length, tone, structure, file type or character limit you need.
4. **Protect what matters:** State what must remain unchanged and what ChatGPT must not guess or do without approval.
5. **Check important work:** For current or high-stakes information, request sources, verify dates and numbers, and review before using it.

Choose the right mode

Mode	Best for	Typical result
Chat	Questions, explanations, brainstorming and short drafts.	An answer or conversation you refine with follow-ups.
Work	A substantial task with files, sources, tools or several steps.	A reviewable deliverable such as a document, spreadsheet, deck or analysis.
Codex	Software development and technical work that benefits from developer tools.	Code changes, tests, technical analysis or a working software result.

DEVICE NOTE ChatGPT changes over time. Names, symbols, positions and available features can differ between iPhone, web, desktop, plan, workspace settings and rollout. Match the label and function if your symbol looks different.

02 Main composer and navigation symbols

Large recognition symbols are shown separately from their function. They are simplified guides, not pixel-for-pixel screenshots.

Symbol	Control	May look like	What it does	Use it when
START AND ORGANISE				
	Sidebar / menu	panel or three lines	Opens chats, projects and account navigation.	Finding an earlier chat or changing section.
	New chat	bubble, pencil or plus	Starts a clean conversation without the current transcript.	Beginning a different topic or outcome.
	Project	folder	Keeps related chats, files, instructions and sources together.	Work that continues over time or shares context.
	Web search	globe, magnifier or Tools	Lets ChatGPT look for current information and sources.	News, prices, rules, schedules or anything time-sensitive.
ADD CONTEXT				
	Attach / add	plus or paperclip	Adds a file, photo or other available input to the prompt.	The answer depends on a document, image or data file.
	Camera	camera	Takes or adds a new photo where the device supports it.	Showing a screen, object, label or printed document.
	Image input	landscape/photo	Attaches an existing screenshot, diagram or visual reference.	You want ChatGPT to inspect, compare or edit an image.
SPEAK AND SEND				
	Microphone / dictation	microphone	Turns speech into prompt text for you to review before sending.	Typing would be slower than speaking.
	Voice chat	waveform or headphones	Starts a live spoken conversation when available.	Talking naturally and using spoken follow-ups.
	Send	up arrow	Sends the written prompt to ChatGPT.	Your prompt and attachments are ready.
	Stop	square	Stops a response or task that is currently running.	The direction is wrong or you need to change the request.

ATTACHMENT BUTTON On some versions, one + button opens camera, photos, files and tools. On others, these appear separately. Read the menu label before choosing.

03 Mode, response and account symbols

Some actions appear only after a response, under an ellipsis menu, or when a generated file is available.

Symbol	Control	May look like	What it does	Use it when
CHOOSE HOW CHATGPT WORKS				
	Chat mode	speech bubble	Runs a conversational question-and-answer chat.	You want an answer, explanation, ideas or a short draft.
	Work mode	briefcase or Work label	Carries a larger task through to a reviewable result.	You want a file, analysis, workflow or multi-step deliverable.
	Codex mode	code brackets or Codex label	Uses developer-focused views and technical tools.	You are building, testing, debugging or reviewing software.
CORRECT OR REUSE A RESPONSE				
	Edit prompt	pencil	Changes an earlier prompt so ChatGPT can answer the revised version.	The original instruction was wrong or incomplete.
	Copy	overlapping squares	Copies response text for pasting elsewhere.	You want to reuse the answer in another app.
	Try again	circular arrow	Requests another response to the same prompt where offered.	You want a different approach without rewriting the prompt.
	Feedback	thumbs up/down	Rates the response and may open a feedback form.	A response was especially helpful or had a problem.
MANAGE, SHARE AND OPEN				
	Share	arrow leaving a box	Opens available sharing options for a chat or result.	You intend to give someone else access; review private content first.
	More options	three dots	Shows extra actions that do not fit in the main toolbar.	You need rename, archive, delete or another contextual action.
	Settings	gear or sliders	Opens app preferences, personalization and available controls.	Changing appearance, instructions, memory or other preferences.
	Download	down arrow or file link	Downloads or opens a generated file when available.	ChatGPT created a document, spreadsheet, presentation or PDF.
	Sources	citation or linked source	Opens the evidence connected to a sourced claim.	You need to check the original page, date or wording.

BEFORE SHARING Open the shared result yourself and check names, private information, attachments and permissions. Sharing controls can differ by account and workspace.

04 Write a useful prompt

OpenAI's current guidance uses four optional parts: Goal, Context, Output and Boundaries. Use only the parts that improve the task.

Part	Question to answer	Example
Goal	What should ChatGPT do?	Rewrite this email so it is clear and professional.
Context	What information could change the result?	It is for colleagues who deliver wine to hospitality clients.
Output	What format, length or level of detail is required?	Use UK English, keep it under 180 words, and include a subject line.
Boundaries	What must remain unchanged or be avoided?	Keep all service details accurate. Do not invent dates, charges or client names.

REUSABLE PROMPT TEMPLATE

GOAL: [what you want done]

CONTEXT: [audience, facts, files or sources]

OUTPUT: [format, length, tone, structure or file type]

BOUNDARIES: [what must stay unchanged, what to avoid, and what to verify]

Weak prompt versus strong prompt

Weak	Stronger
Write an email about corks.	Rewrite the attached email for Wine&Earth colleagues. Explain the Recorked collection service and the action required. Use warm UK business English, keep every operational fact unchanged, correct grammar, and finish with 'Thank you, Keith'.

Refine instead of starting over

- **Direction:** Make the opening warmer, but keep all dates and service details unchanged.
- **Length:** Reduce this to 120 words without losing the requested action.
- **Structure:** Put the decision and next steps first, then the background.
- **Evidence:** Add a source beside every claim that could have changed since last year.
- **Control:** Prepare a draft only. Do not send, publish or replace the existing file.

NO MAGIC WORDS REQUIRED A first prompt does not need to be perfect. Give a clear outcome, review the answer, then request the specific correction you need.

05 Choose the right workspace

Use the smallest workspace that contains the context needed for the result.

Use	Choose it when	Practical rule
Same chat	You are revising the current answer or continuing the same outcome.	Refer to the exact section to change and say what must remain.
New chat	The outcome is different and the old transcript would distract from it.	Start with a clean brief and attach only relevant context.
Project	Work continues over time, produces several outputs, or shares files and instructions.	Keep one distinct outcome per chat inside the project.
Work mode	The task needs several steps, tools, sources or a finished file.	Define the outcome and review criteria, then steer as work progresses.
Codex mode	The task is software development or needs technical developer tooling.	Name the codebase, expected change and tests that must pass.

A reliable Work-mode brief

1. **Outcome:** Describe the finished result, not every step ChatGPT should take.
2. **Sources:** Attach the files and name any connected sources that should be used.
3. **Acceptance checks:** State what must be present, correct and visually reviewed before delivery.
4. **Boundaries:** Say what may not be changed and which actions require your approval.
5. **Review:** Inspect the result, sources and generated files before using or sharing them.

EXAMPLE WORK PROMPT

Create an A4 beginner cheat sheet from the attached source notes. Include large visible symbols, plain-English explanations, practical examples and an official-source page. Produce both an editable Word file and a print-ready PDF. Render and inspect every page, fix any clipping or missing symbols, and tell me exactly what checks passed.

STEER WHILE IT WORKS If a task is running, add the missing fact or change of direction as soon as you notice it. State whether the new message changes the current result or is a later follow-up.

06 Files, photos and images

An attachment supplies context. Your written prompt still needs to say what to inspect and what outcome you want.

When attaching a file

1. **Identify it:** Say what the file is and which pages, sheets, columns or areas matter.
2. **State the task:** Ask to summarize, compare, extract, correct, transform, calculate or create.
3. **Define the output:** Name the file type, structure, audience and level of detail.
4. **Protect the source:** Say whether the original must remain unchanged and whether a new copy is required.
5. **Request checks:** Ask ChatGPT to report missing information and the validation it performed.

Use the right image feature

Need	Use	Prompt should include
Inspect a visual	Image input	What the image shows, the exact area to inspect, and the answer or action required.
Create a new visual	Image generation	Purpose, subject, setting, composition, style, size and anything forbidden.
Edit an existing visual	Image generation/editing	Exactly what changes, exactly what stays, and which attached image is the master.

CONTROLLED IMAGE-EDIT PROMPT

Edit the attached Wine&Earth pamphlet. Change only the green background blocks to the exact maroon sampled from the attached original logo. Preserve the supplied logo pixels and colours, all approved text, the layout, crop and every other element. Do not add flowers, leaves, logos or wording. Return one edited image and list what you changed.

PIXEL-EXACT ASSETS Generated edits can still drift. If a logo must remain pixel-for-pixel unchanged, keep the original logo as a separate placed asset or layer rather than asking the model to redraw it. Check brand colours, spelling and fine text at full size.

07 Web search and accuracy

ChatGPT can search for current information and show sources, but a cited answer still needs human review.

Ask for web search when the answer may have changed

- **Current information:** news, prices, laws, regulations, schedules, office-holders, product details or software behavior.
- **Recommendations:** products, services, travel or choices that could cost significant time or money.
- **Source-sensitive work:** you need direct links, current official guidance, exact attribution or a date-stamped answer.
- **Uncertain facts:** the topic is niche, disputed, unfamiliar or easy to confuse with something similar.

CURRENT-INFORMATION PROMPT

Search the web for the current answer as of 4 August 2026. Prefer official primary sources. Cite each factual claim beside the sentence it supports. Separate confirmed facts from your inference, flag anything you could not verify, and give me the direct source links.

The six-point accuracy check

Check	What to request or inspect
Date	Does the source and event date match the question's required time period?
Authority	Is the source official or primary for the claim, rather than a repost or search snippet?
Support	Does the linked page directly support the sentence beside it?
Numbers	Recalculate totals, percentages, character counts and row ranges independently.
Uncertainty	Ask ChatGPT to label missing information, assumptions and inference instead of guessing.
Final review	Open the important sources and confirm names, dates, figures and quoted wording yourself.

HIGH-STAKES INFORMATION For medical, legal, financial or safety decisions, use ChatGPT to understand and prepare questions, not as the sole decision-maker. Check current authoritative guidance and consult a qualified professional when appropriate.

08 Create documents, spreadsheets, slides and PDFs

For a finished file, describe the source data, expected file type, structure and review criteria.

Give ChatGPT these five things

1. **File type:** Word/DOCX, PDF, Excel/XLSX, PowerPoint/PPTX, CSV, image or another specific format.
2. **Audience and purpose:** Who will use it and what decision, action or task it should support.
3. **Content and structure:** Required sections, sheets, columns, slides, calculations, charts or page size.
4. **Visual rules:** Brand colours, font style, icon size, print size and any supplied assets that must remain exact.
5. **Quality checks:** What must be recalculated, rendered, inspected, cited or compared before delivery.

Output	Useful details to specify
Word / PDF	Page size, headings, images, table of contents, editable version, print margins and visual inspection.
Spreadsheet	Sheet names, data ranges, formulas, number formats, conditional formatting, charts and recalculation.
Presentation	Slide count, audience, story order, speaker notes, image style, editable elements and overflow checks.
Image	Dimensions, purpose, composition, exact text, brand assets, reference images and prohibited changes.

FILE-CREATION PROMPT

Create an editable Excel workbook from the attached wine list. Data starts on row 17; producer is column C and wine is column D. Count unique producer+wine pairs, not unique wine names alone. Include the formula, a visible check total, and a note explaining the range used. Recalculate the workbook and verify the result against the source rows before delivery.

PRECISE REVISION PROMPT

On page 3, enlarge only the function symbols to 0.30 inches and keep the table widths, wording, colours, page count and all other pages unchanged. Re-render every page and confirm there is no clipping, overlap or missing symbol.

REVIEW TARGETED CHANGES Name the page, slide, sheet, table, cell range or image area that needs attention. Also state what must stay unchanged so a small correction does not become a full redesign.

09 Personalization, memory and privacy

Put stable preferences in personalization; keep task-specific facts in the current prompt or project.

Place	Use it for	Example
Current prompt	Facts and constraints needed only for this task.	Keep this email under 180 words and do not change the delivery schedule.
Project instructions	Rules and context that should apply across one ongoing project.	Use the approved Wine&Earth terminology and supplied brand assets.
Custom instructions	Stable preferences that should apply across many chats.	Use UK English and explain software steps for a beginner.
Memory	Useful context from earlier chats that ChatGPT may carry forward where enabled.	My name is Keith and I prefer precise, step-by-step software guidance.
Personality	How ChatGPT communicates, not what the model is capable of doing.	Choose the available communication style you prefer.

SUGGESTED CUSTOM INSTRUCTIONS FOR KEITH

My name is Keith. Use UK English. For software instructions, assume I am a beginner: name the exact tool or control and describe its icon. Be precise and state uncertainty instead of guessing. When editing approved text, images or files, change only what I request and list what stayed unchanged. Count word and character limits exactly.

Privacy and action safeguards

- **Do not paste secrets:** passwords, one-time codes, private keys or full payment-card details.
- **Share only authorised material:** remove unnecessary personal, client, medical or commercially sensitive data before uploading.
- **Review before external action:** ask for a draft before sending messages, publishing, booking, purchasing or deleting.
- **Check the target:** verify the correct person, file, folder, account or website before an action affects someone else.
- **Manage saved context:** review available custom instructions, memories, archived chats and data controls in Settings.

AVAILABILITY VARIES Personalization, memory labels and settings paths can differ by app, plan, workspace and rollout. Use the controls shown in your own Settings rather than relying on a screenshot from another version.

10 Ready-to-copy prompts: writing and research

Replace the bracketed text. Keep any boundary that matters to the finished result.

CORRECT AN EMAIL WITHOUT CHANGING ITS MEANING

Correct the grammar, spelling and punctuation in the text below. Use warm, professional UK English. Keep every fact, name, date, request and sign-off unchanged. Do not add new promises or information. Return only the finished email, followed by a short list of any wording whose meaning was unclear.

[PASTE EMAIL]

REWRITE FOR A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE

Rewrite the attached text for [AUDIENCE]. The purpose is [PURPOSE]. Use a [TONE] tone and keep it under [WORD COUNT] words. Put the requested action first. Preserve [NON-NEGOTIABLE FACTS]. Do not invent missing details.

SUMMARISE A FILE

Read the attached [FILE TYPE]. Summarise the main points in no more than [NUMBER] bullets. Separate decisions, actions, owners, dates and unresolved questions. Cite the page, slide or sheet for each important point. Flag anything you cannot read or verify.

RESEARCH CURRENT INFORMATION

Research [QUESTION] using current information as of [DATE]. Prefer official primary sources. Compare at least [NUMBER] relevant sources, cite each claim beside the sentence it supports, separate fact from inference, and include a short conclusion plus direct links.

COMPARE OPTIONS

Compare [OPTION A], [OPTION B] and [OPTION C] for [USE CASE]. Use these criteria: [CRITERIA]. State assumptions, current prices and dates, important drawbacks and who each option suits. Finish with a recommendation, but explain what would change that recommendation.

11 Ready-to-copy prompts: software, files and images

These examples make the required output and the non-negotiable checks explicit.

BEGINNER SOFTWARE INSTRUCTION

Talk me through [TASK] in [APPLICATION] step by step. Assume I am a beginner. For every step, name the exact tool or menu command, describe the icon I should look for, say where it is usually found, and explain what the action does. Give one step at a time and warn me before any destructive action.

DIAGNOSE A SPREADSHEET FORMULA

Diagnose why this Excel formula gives the wrong result: [FORMULA]. Data starts at row [ROW] and ends at row [ROW]. Explain the cause, give the corrected formula, and test it against these example rows: [EXAMPLES]. Check blanks, text-versus-number values, hidden spaces and absolute/relative references.

CREATE AND VERIFY A FILE

Create a [DOCX/XLSX/PPTX/PDF] for [AUDIENCE] using the attached sources. It must include [REQUIRED SECTIONS]. Use [PAGE/SLIDE/SHEET RULES]. Keep [APPROVED CONTENT] unchanged. Before delivery, recalculate or render the file, inspect every page/slide/sheet, fix defects, and report the checks performed.

CONTROLLED IMAGE EDIT

Edit image 1. Change only [EXACT CHANGE]. Use image 2 only as the [COLOUR/STYLE/LAYOUT] reference. Preserve [SUBJECT, LOGO, TEXT, COLOURS, CROP AND LAYOUT] exactly. Do not add [FORBIDDEN ELEMENTS]. Return one result and list the changed elements.

STRICT LENGTH LIMIT

Write [CONTENT] with a maximum of [NUMBER] characters, including spaces and punctuation. Count the final text exactly before answering. Put only the final copy in one clearly labelled block, then state the exact character count outside the block. If it is over the limit, shorten and recount before sending.

12 Fix a poor result

Correct the smallest thing that caused the problem, then ask ChatGPT to check the revised result.

Problem	Likely cause	What to say next
Answer is too vague	The goal or audience is unclear.	Ask for a specific decision, audience, format and level of detail.
Facts are old or wrong	No live search, weak sources or an unchecked assumption.	Search current official sources, cite each claim, state the date and flag uncertainty.
Instruction was ignored	Too many competing directions or the boundary was buried.	Restate the one or two non-negotiable rules first and request a targeted revision.
Answer is too long	No measurable limit was given.	Set an exact word, bullet, paragraph or character limit and ask it to recount.
Tone is wrong	Audience and example tone were missing.	Name the audience and tone; attach a short example you want it to match.
Image changed too much	The preserved elements were not explicit or generation drifted.	Attach the original again; say change only X and preserve Y. Use original brand assets separately.
Generated file looks broken	Layout was not rendered or visually checked.	Name the affected page/slide/sheet and ask for a full render-and-inspect pass.
Chat is confused	The thread contains conflicting versions or a different outcome.	Provide a short approved-state recap, or start a new chat in the same project.
A feature is missing	Plan, device, app version, workspace control or rollout differs.	Check your app Settings and current official documentation; use the available label rather than an old screenshot.

UNIVERSAL REPAIR PROMPT

The last result is not correct. Keep [APPROVED PARTS] unchanged. Fix only [SPECIFIC PROBLEM]. Use [SOURCE OR RULE] as the authority. Before replying, check [NAMES/DATES/NUMBERS/LAYOUT/CHARACTER COUNT]. Return the corrected result and a concise list of what changed.

Do not use 'try again' when the prompt itself is wrong

- **Edit the prompt:** when a fact, file, audience, format or boundary was missing.
- **Use a follow-up:** when the answer is mostly right and needs a specific local change.
- **Start a new chat:** when the outcome is genuinely different or the transcript has become contradictory.

SAVE THE APPROVED STATE When a file or long draft reaches a good version, say which version is approved and list the elements that must not change in later revisions.

13 One-minute checklist and official sources

Use this before trusting, downloading, sending, publishing or paying for the result.

One-minute result check

Check	Question
Outcome	Does the result actually answer the requested task and audience?
Completeness	Are all required sections, files, rows, pages, links or outputs present?
Accuracy	Have names, dates, figures, formulas and character counts been checked?
Sources	For current claims, are the sources authoritative, dated and directly supportive?
Boundaries	Did approved text, brand assets, formatting and protected details remain unchanged?
Privacy	Is unnecessary personal, medical, client or confidential information absent?
Visual quality	Have generated files and images been opened at full size and checked for defects?
Action	If something will be sent, shared, booked, bought or deleted, has the target been confirmed?

Official OpenAI documentation checked

Use ChatGPT - learn.openai.com/docs/use-chatgpt

Prompting - learn.openai.com/docs/prompting

Get started with ChatGPT Work - learn.openai.com/docs/get-started-with-work

Projects and chats - learn.openai.com/docs/projects

Work with files - learn.openai.com/docs/artifacts-viewer

Web search - learn.openai.com/docs/web-search

Image inputs - learn.openai.com/docs/image-inputs

Image generation - learn.openai.com/docs/image-generation

Personalize ChatGPT - learn.openai.com/docs/personalize

ChatGPT Voice - learn.openai.com/docs/features/voice

Settings - learn.openai.com/docs/reference/settings

ACCURACY DATE Content was checked against the official pages above on 4 August 2026. Feature availability, labels, icons and limits may change after that date.