

# AI Prompting Best Practices for Dispute Resolution Professionals

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## Elements of a Great Prompt and Prompt Series

### Single Prompt Essentials

#### Role and Context Setting

- Clearly identify yourself as a mediator/dispute resolution professional
- Specify your experience level when relevant ("new mediator" vs. "experienced practitioner")
- Indicate the type of dispute or process stage without confidential details

#### Specific Request

- Ask for one clear, actionable outcome
- Define the format you want (techniques, language examples, process steps, checklists)
- Specify scope and limitations of what you need

#### Sufficient Context Without Compromise

- Provide enough background for relevant advice
- Use anonymized, generic descriptors
- Focus on process dynamics rather than case specifics
- Include relevant constraints (time, resources, party dynamics)

#### Professional Focus

- Frame requests around your facilitation role, not case outcomes

- Ask for multiple options rather than single "right" answers
- Seek evidence-based approaches when possible
- Request considerations for different scenarios

## **Effective Prompt Series Structure**

### **Progressive Building**

- Start with foundational concepts, build to specific applications
- Reference previous responses: "Building on the techniques you suggested..."
- Maintain anonymization throughout the conversation thread

### **Iterative Refinement**

- Test initial suggestions: "How might this approach need modification if..."
- Ask for alternatives: "What are some other options if this technique doesn't work?"
- Seek troubleshooting: "What potential challenges might arise with this approach?"

### **Multi-Perspective Exploration**

- "Now consider this same situation from the other party's viewpoint..."
- "How might cultural differences affect this approach?"
- "What would change if power imbalances were more pronounced?"

### **Practical Application Focus**

- Move from theory to practice: "Can you provide specific language examples?"
  - Request implementation guidance: "How would I introduce this technique?"
  - Ask for adaptation strategies: "How could this work in virtual settings?"
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## **Core Privacy, Confidentiality & Cybersecurity Practices**

### **Data Anonymization**

- Remove all identifying information: names, case numbers, dates, locations, company names
- Use generic descriptors: "Party A," "construction company," "employment dispute"
- Avoid unique details that could identify parties even without names
- Create composite scenarios rather than using actual case facts

## **Information Minimization**

- Share only what's necessary for the AI task
- Focus on process questions rather than case specifics
- Use hypothetical scenarios when possible
- Separate sensitive facts from the procedural guidance you're seeking

## **Secure Practices**

- Never upload confidential documents to AI platforms
  - Use private/incognito browsing sessions
  - Clear conversation history after sessions
  - Avoid using AI on shared or public devices
  - Check your organization's AI usage policies
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## **Bias Mitigation Strategies**

### **Perspective Balance**

- Present multiple viewpoints when describing conflicts
- Avoid language that favors one party
- Question your own assumptions before prompting
- Ask the AI to consider alternative perspectives

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

- Be aware of cultural context in disputes
- Ask for culturally neutral approaches
- Avoid assumptions about "normal" behavior across cultures
- Request consideration of diverse communication styles

### **Process Neutrality**

- Focus on facilitation techniques rather than outcomes
  - Ask for multiple intervention options
  - Seek balanced approaches that don't prejudge solutions
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# Elements of Effective Prompts

## Clarity and Specificity

- State your role and context clearly
- Define the specific type of help you need
- Provide relevant background without confidential details
- Specify the format you want for the response

## Structured Information

- Break complex requests into clear components
- Use consistent formatting for similar requests
- Provide context about the dispute resolution process stage
- Specify your experience level when relevant

## Actionable Focus

- Ask for practical, implementable advice
  - Request specific techniques or approaches
  - Seek step-by-step guidance when appropriate
  - Ask for examples of language or questions to use
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## Subpar vs. Better Prompt Examples

### Example 1: Case Analysis Request

✗ **Subpar Prompt:** "I'm mediating between John Smith from ABC Corp and Sarah Johnson from XYZ Company about their contract dispute over the downtown office building project. John claims Sarah's team delayed completion by 3 months, causing \$500K in losses. Sarah says John's specifications kept changing. What should I do?"

**Problems:** Contains real names, company names, specific location, financial details, and asks for directive advice rather than facilitative guidance.

✓ **Better Prompt:** "I'm a mediator working with two parties in a commercial contract dispute. Party A (contractor) claims Party B (client) caused project delays through changing specifications. Party B claims Party A failed to meet agreed timelines. Both parties seem entrenched in blame. What are some effective

techniques for helping parties move from position-based arguments to exploring underlying interests and collaborative problem-solving?"

## Example 2: Difficult Behavior Management

✗ **Subpar Prompt:** "This lawyer keeps interrupting and being aggressive in our custody mediation. The mom is getting upset and the dad just sits there smugly. How do I shut down the lawyer?"

**Problems:** Contains case type details, shows bias against the lawyer, assumes negative intent, asks for confrontational approach.

✓ **Better Prompt:** "I'm facilitating a family dispute where one party's representative is dominating the conversation with frequent interruptions, while the other parties appear to be disengaging. What are some techniques for managing communication dynamics to ensure all voices are heard while maintaining a respectful dialogue? Please suggest both in-the-moment interventions and process adjustments I might consider."

## Example 3: Cultural Considerations

✗ **Subpar Prompt:** "I have a mediation with some Asian clients who won't make eye contact and barely speak. How do I get them to open up like normal people?"

**Problems:** Cultural stereotyping, assumption about "normal" behavior, deficit-based framing.

✓ **Better Prompt:** "I'm working with parties who come from cultural backgrounds that may have different communication norms than I'm accustomed to. Some participants are speaking less frequently and using less direct eye contact. What are some culturally sensitive approaches for creating an inclusive environment where all parties feel comfortable participating authentically? How can I adjust my facilitation style to honor different communication preferences?"

## Example 4: Process Design

✗ **Subpar Prompt:** "Design a mediation process for workplace harassment cases."

**Problems:** Too vague, doesn't specify context, could lead to generic advice that misses important nuances.

✓ **Better Prompt:** "I'm designing a mediation process framework for workplace interpersonal conflicts (not involving discrimination or harassment claims) where parties will continue working together post-resolution. What are key process considerations for: 1) Pre-mediation preparation, 2) Creating psychological safety during sessions, 3) Ensuring sustainable agreements, and 4) Follow-up protocols? Please focus on process design rather than specific case handling."

## Example 5: Communication Techniques

✗ **Subpar Prompt:** "What should I say when people get angry?"

**Problems:** Too broad, doesn't provide context, asks for prescriptive responses.

✓ **Better Prompt:** "When parties in mediation express strong emotions like anger or frustration, what are some evidence-based techniques for: 1) Acknowledging their emotions without taking sides, 2) Helping them feel heard while keeping the process productive, and 3) Transitioning from emotional expression back to problem-solving dialogue? Please provide specific examples of neutral language I could use."

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## Advanced Prompting Techniques

### Sequential Prompting

Break complex requests into steps, building on previous responses while maintaining confidentiality throughout.

### Role Specification

"As an experienced mediator..." or "From a process design perspective..." helps the AI understand your professional context.

### Output Formatting

Request specific formats: "Please provide 3 options with brief explanations" or "Structure this as a checklist I can reference during sessions."

### Perspective Testing

"Please critique this approach and identify potential blind spots or unintended consequences."

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## Presentation Examples: Poor → Better → Best

### Example 1: Managing Disruptive Behavior

#### ⊘ POOR PROMPT

"This jerk lawyer in my divorce case keeps yelling and the wife is crying. How do I make him stop being such an ass?"

#### **Problems:**

- Case type identified (divorce)

- Biased language ("jerk," "ass")
- Assumes negative intent
- Seeks confrontational solution
- No professional framing

### **BETTER PROMPT**

"I have a family mediation where one party's attorney is raising their voice and the other party appears distressed. What techniques can I use to manage this dynamic while maintaining neutrality?"

#### **Improvements:**

- Removes case specifics
- Uses neutral language
- Focuses on behavior, not character
- Seeks professional techniques

#### **Still needs:**

- More context about goals
- Specific output format
- Multiple intervention levels

### **BEST PROMPT**

"I'm an experienced mediator facilitating a family dispute where one party's representative is escalating their voice volume during emotional exchanges, while the other party shows visible distress. I need practical intervention techniques for: 1) Immediate de-escalation without taking sides, 2) Process adjustments to prevent recurrence, and 3) Ground rules I can establish proactively. Please provide specific language examples I can use and explain the rationale behind each approach."

#### **Why this works:**

- Clear professional role and experience level
- Descriptive without identifying case type
- Neutral, behavioral observations
- Structured, specific request
- Asks for both techniques AND reasoning
- Requests actionable language examples

- Addresses immediate and preventive solutions

## Example 2: Cultural Communication Challenges

### POOR PROMPT

"These Chinese parties won't talk and keep looking down. They're not engaging like they should. How do I get them to participate normally?"

#### **Problems:**

- Racial/ethnic identification
- Cultural stereotyping
- Deficit-based framing ("won't," "should")
- Assumes "normal" behavior standard
- No recognition of cultural competence needs

### BETTER PROMPT

"I'm working with parties from different cultural backgrounds who have varying communication styles. Some speak less and use different eye contact patterns. How can I create an inclusive environment for all communication preferences?"

#### **Improvements:**

- Removes ethnic identifiers
- Acknowledges cultural differences respectfully
- Recognizes communication diversity
- Seeks inclusive approaches

#### **Still needs:**

- Specific techniques requested
- Self-reflection component
- Multiple strategy options
- Implementation guidance

### BEST PROMPT

"I'm a mediator working with parties who appear to have different cultural communication norms than I typically encounter. I notice some participants speak less frequently, use indirect communication styles,

and have different eye contact patterns. I want to ensure my facilitation style doesn't inadvertently favor one communication approach over others. Please suggest: 1) Culturally responsive facilitation techniques, 2) Ways to create multiple participation pathways, 3) Questions to help me examine my own cultural assumptions, and 4) Process modifications that honor diverse communication styles. Include specific examples of how I might introduce these adaptations to all parties."

### **Why this works:**

- Acknowledges mediator's cultural lens
- Descriptive observations without assumptions
- Shows cultural humility and self-awareness
- Requests multiple types of guidance
- Asks for self-examination tools
- Seeks inclusive process design
- Requests implementation strategies
- Focuses on adaptation, not "fixing" parties

### **Example 3: Complex Multi-Party Negotiation**

#### **POOR PROMPT**

"I have this construction case with the contractor, owner, and architect all fighting about who screwed up the project. It's a mess. What do I do?"

#### **Problems:**

- Case type and parties identified
- Biased language ("screwed up," "mess")
- Overwhelmed tone, not professional
- Vague, general request
- No process focus

#### **BETTER PROMPT**

"I'm mediating a three-party commercial dispute where each party blames the others for project problems. The dynamics are complex with overlapping claims. What are some techniques for managing multi-party mediations with circular blame patterns?"

#### **Improvements:**

- Professional tone
- Focuses on process dynamics
- Identifies key challenge (circular blame)
- Asks for specific techniques

### **Still needs:**

- Structured request format
- Multiple intervention levels
- Specific outcome goals
- Sequential process guidance

### **BEST PROMPT**

"I'm facilitating a three-party commercial mediation where each party attributes responsibility to the others, creating circular blame dynamics that prevent forward movement. As an experienced mediator, I'm looking for evidence-based strategies to address: 1) Multi-party process design that prevents coalition-building against one party, 2) Techniques for reframing blame-focused dialogue toward problem-solving, 3) Methods for managing complex information flow between three parties, and 4) Structured approaches for generating collaborative solutions when interests overlap partially. Please provide a step-by-step process framework, specific facilitative language examples, and contingency strategies if initial approaches don't shift the dynamic. Also suggest how to sequence these interventions throughout the mediation process."

### **Why this works:**

- Identifies specific challenge pattern
  - States experience level for appropriate advice
  - Requests evidence-based approaches
  - Structured, multi-level request
  - Asks for process framework AND specific tools
  - Includes contingency planning
  - Requests sequential/timing guidance
  - Focuses on facilitation skills, not case outcome
  - Comprehensive yet organized approach
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# Key Takeaways

## Essential Principles

1. **Maintain Confidentiality:** Always anonymize and use generic descriptors
2. **Stay Process-Focused:** Ask about facilitation techniques, not case outcomes
3. **Remain Neutral:** Use balanced language that doesn't favor any party
4. **Be Specific:** Structure requests clearly with numbered components
5. **Seek Multiple Options:** Ask for various approaches rather than single solutions

## Red Flags to Avoid

- Real names, company names, or identifying details
- Biased or judgmental language about parties
- Requests for advice on case outcomes or legal positions
- Cultural stereotypes or assumptions about "normal" behavior
- Vague, general requests without specific context

## Professional Growth

- Use AI to enhance your facilitation skills, not replace professional judgment
- Continuously refine your prompting technique
- Share best practices with colleagues while maintaining confidentiality
- Stay updated on your organization's AI usage policies

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*This guide helps dispute resolution professionals leverage AI effectively while maintaining the highest ethical standards essential to mediation and conflict resolution work.*