



Ten Prompting Practices That Improve AI Results

Using Generative AI as a Professional Assistant



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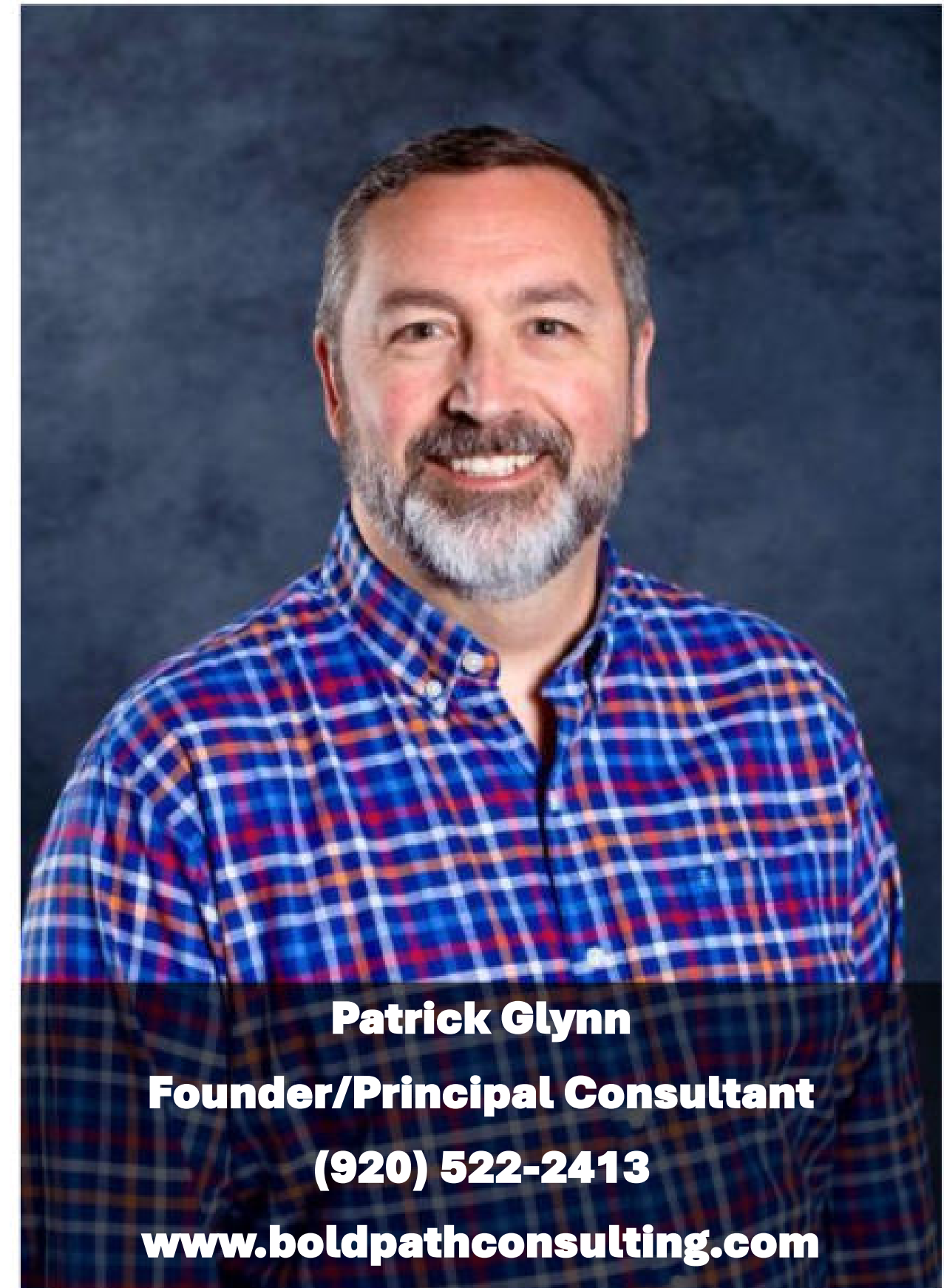
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BoldPath Consulting provides training and advisory services on generative AI, including policy development, implementation guidance, and practical applications in public-sector environments.

Patrick Glynn is the founder and principal consultant of BoldPath Consulting. He brings nearly **30 years of experience working with and advising Wisconsin local governments**, including service as a county human resources director and more than a decade as a public-sector HR and management consultant. His work spans labor relations, compensation and classification, workforce planning, management and leadership training, generative AI, and organizational assessment, with a consistent focus on solutions that are fair, defensible, and workable in real public-sector environments.

Patrick's approach is grounded in an **understanding of how local governments actually operate**: political scrutiny, limited resources, union dynamics, public accountability, and the need for decisions that can be explained and sustained over time. He is known for a collaborative, candid style that emphasizes clarity over spectacle and long-term institutional health over short-term wins. In recent years, he has also **helped public organizations carefully consider the role of generative AI in government work**, treating it as a governance and management issue rather than a technology trend, and integrating it into existing professional, ethical, and organizational frameworks.



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Our Shared Goal

To treat **Generative AI** not as a search engine or a magic button, but as a **capable junior assistant** that **requires clear, specific direction** to produce **high-quality work**.



The “Junior Assistant” Mindset

It is capable, fast, and has access to vast information, but it lacks context, judgment, and intuition. It needs you to provide the structure and constraints.

PRACTICE 01 — CLARITY

Be Specific and Explicit

Clearly state what you want the AI to do, providing necessary context, constraints, and desired format. Avoid ambiguity and ambiguity and vague requests. Treat the prompt as a detailed set of instructions for a task.





Weak Prompt

Can you take a look at this remote work policy and help summarize it? I need something for the department heads.

Improved Prompt

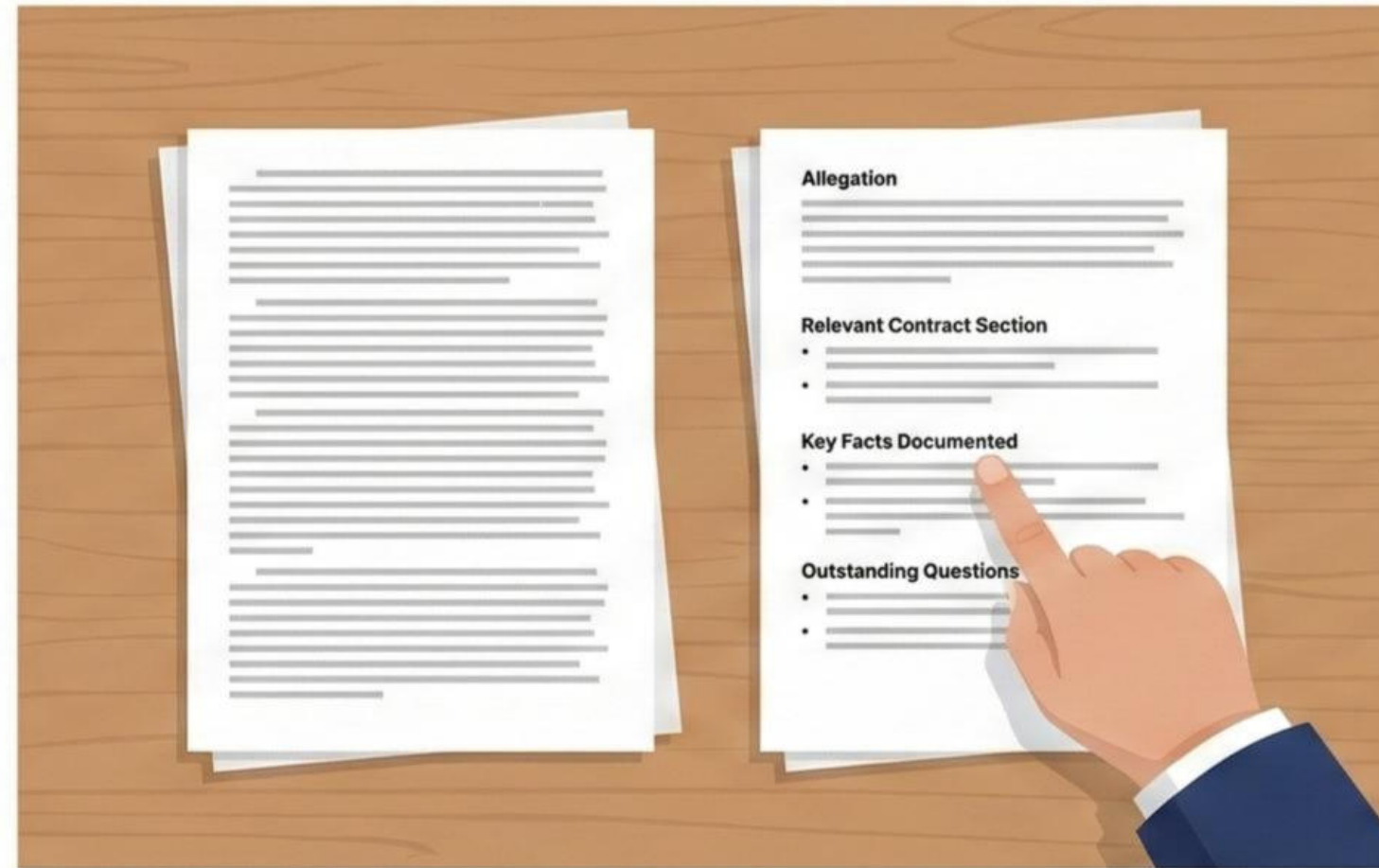
Using only the attached policy, draft a one-page summary for department heads. Cover eligibility, approval authority, and documentation requirements – in that order. Three labeled sections. Plain language.



Structure is not formatting. It is a decision about what the reader needs.

When a prompt does not specify format, the system defaults to narrative prose. Narrative requires reorganization before it can be used professionally.

Specifying a format — table, checklist, structured memo — produces output that is immediately usable.



Weak Prompt

Write up a summary of this grievance for me. I have a meeting tomorrow and need something to share.

Improved Prompt

Summarize this grievance using four labeled sections: Allegation / Relevant Contract Section / Key Facts Documented / Outstanding Questions. One page maximum. Facts only in section three – no inference.

PRACTICE 03 — AUDIENCE



The system does not know your audience unless you tell it.

A briefing for elected officials, a memo for supervisors, and an explanation for front-line employees require different depth, vocabulary, and emphasis. Without audience definition, the system chooses one register and applies it to all readers.



Weak Prompt

Write something about the new pay plan. I need to communicate it to people.

Improved Prompt

Draft three communications:

- (1) Two-paragraph employee email – plain language, no jargon.
- (2) One-page supervisor FAQ – step placement and documentation.
- (3) Board briefing paragraph – fiscal impact and timeline.

Each written for its audience.

Helpful systems expand into whatever space they are given.

In personnel, labor relations, and compliance contexts, AI systems will extend responses into legal opinions, disciplinary recommendations, and conclusory judgments unless explicitly told not to.

Guardrails are not restrictions on usefulness. They are definitions of the appropriate scope of the work product.





Weak Prompt

Look at this discipline file and tell me what you think. Did we do the right thing here?

This prompt invites legal opinion, disciplinary judgment, and outcome recommendation — none of which are appropriate outputs for an AI system in a personnel context.

Improved Prompt

Review the attached documentation. Your task: (1) identify which policy provisions were cited; (2) list documented facts for each provision; (3) identify factual gaps. Do not evaluate the discipline, offer offer a legal opinion, or recommend any action. Present as a three-column table: Provision | Documentation | Gaps.

Why This Works

The explicit prohibitions keep the output in its analytical role. In environments where AI-generated documents may appear in grievance appeals or public records responses, limiting scope is as important as defining it.



General knowledge is not the same as the governing document.

AI systems trained on large general datasets will apply general HR principles, statutes from other jurisdictions, and typical contract language unless explicitly told to rely only on the documents provided.

In CBA analysis, classification review, and policy interpretation, that substitution is a professional risk, not a feature.



Weak Prompt

Tell me whether we can require employees to use accrued leave during an unpaid suspension.

Without source constraints, the response may reflect general employment law or common CBA practice from other jurisdictions rather than the organization's actual governing documents.

Improved Prompt

Using only the attached personnel policy and collective bargaining agreement – no outside sources – identify every provision addressing leave during suspensions. Quote the relevant language. Identify any question the attached documents do not clearly resolve. Do not apply external law or practice from other jurisdictions.

Why This Works

Source limitation makes the analysis traceable. When the governing documents are the only inputs, every finding can be linked to identifiable text. Gaps the documents do not resolve are equally valuable: they identify where human legal or labor relations judgment is required.

PRACTICE 06 — EXTRACT

Analysis without extracted criteria reflects assumptions, not standards.

When prompts ask whether something meets a standard without first establishing what that standard is, the system may apply general assumptions rather than the organization's documented requirements.

Separating extraction from analysis in two explicit steps prevents this substitution and creates an auditable analytical trail.



Weak Prompt

Does this person qualify for the Senior Analyst classification based on their duties?

This prompt asks for a conclusion without specifying the criteria. The system supplies them from general knowledge rather than the classification specification.

Improved Prompt

Step 1: From the attached classification specification, extract every minimum qualification and every duty criterion distinguishing Senior Analyst from Analyst. Quote exact language. Do not apply criteria to anything yet.

Step 2 (after confirmation): Compare each criterion from Step 1 against the attached position description. Note: Met / Not Met / Cannot Determine.

Why This Works

Separating extraction from analysis forces the criteria to be stated and sourced before any judgment is applied. A skeptical audience — union representatives, HR directors, or administrators reviewing a classification appeal — can verify that the correct standards were applied to the correct facts.

PRACTICE 07 — ASSUMPTIONS



Confident presentation is not the same as established evidence.

AI systems produce responses in a consistent confident register regardless of whether the underlying evidence is strong or thin.

For decision-makers acting on these outputs, that consistency is genuinely misleading.

Prompts that require the system to separate what the data shows from what it suggests prevent borrowed confidence from reaching the decision record.



Weak Prompt

Look at this turnover data and tell me what's causing people to leave.

This prompt asks for a causal conclusion from data that may only show correlation. The response will produce **confident** language regardless of what the evidence actually supports.

Improved Prompt

Analyze the attached turnover report. Structure findings in three labeled sections:

- (1) Observed Patterns — what the data directly shows, with figures.
- (2) Possible Explanations — inferences the data is consistent with but does not confirm. Label each as inference.
- (3) Information Needed — what additional data would confirm or rule out each explanation.

Do not present inferences as conclusions.

Why This Works

Requiring three labeled sections forces the system to separate documented findings from interpretive judgment before the analysis is submitted. For boards and senior administrators who may act on these findings, the distinction between what data shows and what it suggests is a professional obligation, not a preference.

PRACTICE 08 — STEPS



Large tasks, handled whole, produce uneven results.

AI systems given lengthy documents to analyze in a single prompt may give disproportionate attention to early sections, compress later material, or miss detail entirely.

Dividing a complex task into sequential bounded steps produces more consistent results and creates natural checkpoints for human review before subsequent steps begin.



Weak Prompt

Can you summarize this whole union contract for me? I need to know what it says.

Improved Prompt

Step 1: List every article title and its page range.
Stop after Step 1 and wait.
I will then ask you to summarize specific articles one at a time before we produce any summary.

PRACTICE 09 — ITERATION



Effective direction is a practice, not a single instruction.

The first output from a well-constructed prompt should be treated as a draft, not a deliverable.

Iteration — providing specific, actionable feedback and requesting targeted revision — produces substantially better results than rewriting from a new prompt.

Professionals who manage staff work already practice this. The same discipline applies directly to AI direction.



Weak Prompt

This isn't quite right. Can you make it better?

Improved Prompt

Revise with these four changes:

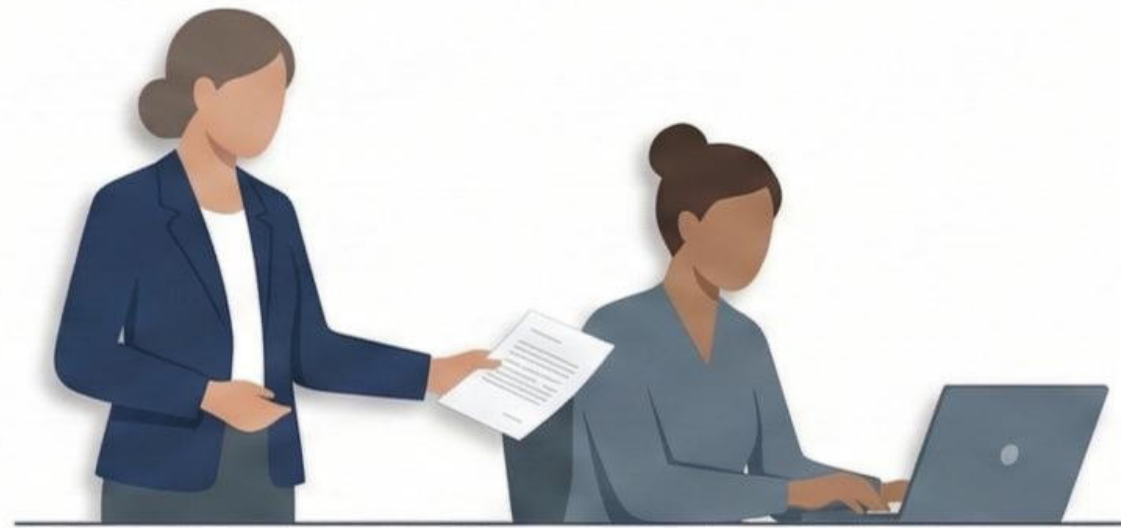
- (1) Reduce to three paragraphs.
- (2) Lead with the fiscal impact figure, not the description.
- (3) Remove all hedging language – state only what the data confirms.
- (4) Add a final sentence identifying the decision the board must make.

PRACTICE 10 — CONFIRM



Thirty seconds of confirmation prevents thirty minutes of correction.

Even carefully constructed prompts can be interpreted in unexpected ways. Asking the system to restate its understanding of the assignment before producing the response is a brief alignment check. If the restatement diverges from the intended task, the correction costs seconds. A mismatch discovered in the finished output costs significantly more — and in some contexts creates a document the organization did not intend to produce.



Weak Prompt

Here's the position description. Go ahead and analyze it.



Improved Prompt

Before producing your analysis, restate in two or three sentences: what document you are working with, what analytical question you are answering, what criteria you are applying, and what constraints limit your response. Wait for confirmation before proceeding.

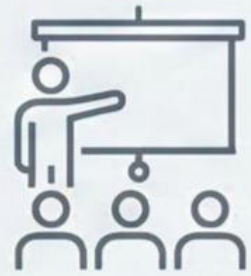


**Good prompting is not a technical skill.
It is supervision applied to a new tool.**



**Which of these ten practices
could you apply to an assignment
you give this week?**

Ways I Support Public Organizations on Generative AI



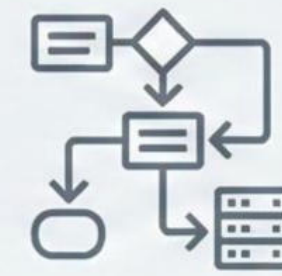
Training and Workshops

Employee, supervisor, management, and governing body training focused on practical, responsible use of generative AI.



Facilitation and Policy Support

Facilitated discussions on AI governance, risk, policy development, implementation strategy, and organizational readiness.



Applied Implementation Support

Prompting coaching, workflow design, internal use-case development, organizational surveys, and selective custom AI tools to improve internal functions.

In development: A deeper workshop focused on using generative AI to strengthen internal consulting and advisory capacity within public organizations. Announcement coming soon.

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