Blueprint.

neralake

AI Workflow Cheat Sheet

A practical guide to approaching problems with AI tools with validated best practices.

Core Philosophy

The biggest shift in working with AI is treating it as a collaborative thinking partner rather than a search engine. The counterintuitive part: you get better results by explaining problems in natural language and letting the AI ask you questions, rather than trying to craft the perfect prompt upfront.

The COSTAR Framework

Use this structure for any non-trivial prompt:
Context: What is the background or situation? The more the better.
Objective: What is your end goal? Why are we doing this?
Style: How should we structure the response?
Tone: What feeling should we convey?
Audience: Who is this for? Tell me about them.
Response: What format or output do you need?

The Three-Stage Problem-Solving Process

Stage 1: Research Current Best Practice
Before diving into your specific problem, get the AI to research what's already known.
Stage 2: Define Your Specific Problem
Take that research context and apply it to your situation.
Stage 3: Build and Test
Once the problem is clearly defined, move to implementation.

Voice Mode: Your Secret Weapon

Enable voice input and literally talk through problems. Don't worry about perfect grammar or structure.

How to use it:
1. Turn on voice input (available in Claude, ChatGPT, and Gemini)
2. Just start talking through the problem
3. Let the AI ask clarifying questions
4. Keep talking until the problem is fully described

Pro tip: Record important team discussions and upload the transcripts as context. Real conversations contain implicit knowledge that's hard to capture in written summaries.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Mistake 1: Not providing enough context The AI doesn't know what you know. Explain the situation fully.
Mistake 2: Accepting output without review Always validate, especially for code and data work. The AI makes confident-sounding mistakes.
Mistake 3: Trying to get it perfect in one prompt Iteration is the game. Start rough, refine through conversation.
Mistake 4: Not asking it to ask you questions This is the highest-leverage technique. Let the AI surface what it needs to know.
Mistake 5: Rolling out before testing Test with a subset of data or users first. What works in theory fails in practice all the time.

Quick Reference: Prompt Starters

For research: "Before we solve this, research current best practices for [topic]. What's the state of the art?"
For problem definition: "Ask me questions to fully understand this problem before we start solving it."
For implementation: "Walk me through the steps to implement this. Stop after each major step for me to validate."
For critique: "Here's what I've built. What am I missing? Where will this break?"
For outputs: "Output this as [format] that I can import into [tool]."

The Meta-Lesson

The best use of AI is not to replace your thinking but to amplify it. The workflow that works:

1. You define the problem (with AI helping you surface blind spots)
2. You make the decisions (with AI providing options and tradeoffs)
3. AI does the tedious execution (code, formatting, documentation)
4. You validate the output (always)