

System Prompt Builder Kit

How to write a custom prompt that actually works.
Plus an interview prompt that builds yours for you.

Marc Andreessen posted his ChatGPT prompt and got mocked at 2 million views. This kit is everything he got wrong, fixed.

What's inside:

- What a system prompt is and where to put it (ChatGPT + Claude)
- The 5 elements every system prompt needs: RISEN
- The 6 mistakes Andreessen made and the fixes
- Before/after using his prompt as the worked example
- The Interview Prompt: paste it, the AI builds your custom instructions for you in 6 questions

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What Is A System Prompt?

A normal prompt is what you type every day. 'Rewrite this email.' Single use, low stakes, throwaway. A system prompt is the instruction that sits behind EVERY conversation. Write it once. It loads every time. Different beast, different rules.

Normal prompt

Single conversation, single task.

Examples:

'Rewrite this email.'

'Summarise this PDF.'

'What's the cheapest flight?'

System prompt

Loads with every conversation.

Examples:

*'When helping me write,
keep it concise, practical,
and audience-aware.'*

Where To Put Your System Prompt

ChatGPT (account level):	Settings -> Personalisation -> Custom Instructions
ChatGPT (project level):	Open project -> top right -> Project Settings -> Instructions
Claude (account level):	Settings -> General -> Instructions for Claude
Claude (project level):	Open project -> Project Instructions
Claude Code:	CLAUDE.md file in your project root

Account level applies to every conversation.

Project level applies only inside that project.

Use account level for general behaviour. Project level for specific work.

RISEN: The Five Elements

Every system prompt that works has these five elements. Run any prompt through RISEN before you save it. This is a brief, not a pep talk.

- R** **Role** - *Who should the assistant be for this task?*
Specific lens. Not 'world-class genius'.
Example: 'You are a senior B2B marketing strategist helping a founder turn rough ideas into clear LinkedIn posts.'
- I** **Instructions** - *What should it actually do?*
Verbs not adjectives. Tell it what to do, not how impressive to sound.
Example: 'Challenge weak assumptions. Separate facts from opinions. Give the strongest counterargument.'
- S** **Steps** - *What workflow or answer order should it follow?*
Steps = workflow. Not mind reading.
Example: 'Start with the answer. Then reasoning summary, trade-offs, risks, next actions.'
- E** **End goal** - *What should the user be able to do after this?*
Define success. The goal is not more words. It is a better outcome.
Example: 'Help me make better decisions faster without mistaking confidence for accuracy.'
- N** **Narrow** - *What constraints, sources, formats, or boundaries matter?*
Add the rules and limits at the end. Length, tone, things to avoid.
Example: 'Use plain English. Do not invent facts. Label uncertainty.'

The Six Mistakes (And Fixes)

All six are in Marc Andreessen's prompt. All six are common.

1. Pretend genius

BAD: 'You are a world-class expert in all domains.'

FIX: Specific role with a specific lens. e.g. 'You are a critical thinking partner for business and strategy decisions.'

2. Adjectives, not verbs

BAD: 'Be incisive, erudite, provocative, aggressive.'

FIX: Translate every adjective to a verb. 'Challenge weak assumptions. Give the strongest counterargument.'

3. 'Think step by step'

BAD: 'Process information and explain your answers step by step.'

FIX: Modern reasoning models already do this. Specify ANSWER STRUCTURE instead. 'Start with the answer. Then reasoning, risks, actions.'

4. 'Never hallucinate'

BAD: 'Never hallucinate or make anything up.'

FIX: AI doesn't know it's hallucinating. Wishes don't work. Rules do. 'Do not invent names, dates, studies, prices or citations.'

5. 'As long as possible'

BAD: 'Make your answers as long and detailed as you possibly can.'

FIX: Define success. 'Give enough detail for me to make a decision. Prioritise practical trade-offs over background.'

6. No end goal

BAD: A wall of instructions with no defined outcome.

FIX: Tell the AI what success looks like. 'Help me make better decisions faster without mistaking confidence for accuracy.'

Before / After

Marc Andreessen's prompt, stripped to RISEN. Quarter the length. Triple the usefulness.

BEFORE (Andreessen)

You are a world-class expert in all domains. Your intellectual firepower, scope of knowledge, incisive thought process, and level of erudition are on par with the smartest people in the world. Answer with complete, detailed, specific answers. Process information and explain your answers step by step. Verify your own work. Double check all facts, figures, citations, names, dates, and examples. Never hallucinate or make anything up. Your tone of voice is precise, but not strident or pedantic. Make your answers as long and detailed as you possibly can. [continues for several more paragraphs of theatre...]

AFTER (RISEN)

- Role:** You are a critical thinking partner for business and strategy decisions.
- Instructions:** Give direct, practical analysis. Challenge weak assumptions.
Separate facts, judgments, and guesses.
- Steps:** Start with the answer. Then a short reasoning summary, the strongest counterargument, key risks, and next actions.
- End goal:** Help me make better decisions faster without mistaking confidence for accuracy.
- Narrow:** Use plain English. Do not invent facts. Label uncertainty.
Ask for missing context only when it would materially change the answer.

Shorter. Clearer. Stronger.

The Interview Prompt

This is the bit most people will actually use. Paste the prompt below into ChatGPT or Claude. The AI will interview YOU one question at a time, then write you a polished RISEN system prompt you can paste straight into custom instructions.

How To Use It

1. Open Claude or ChatGPT (a fresh chat).
2. Copy the entire prompt on the next page.
3. Paste it as your first message and send.
4. Answer the AI's questions one at a time. Plain English. Don't overthink it.
5. After question 6, the AI writes your full system prompt.
6. Copy that output. Paste into ChatGPT custom instructions or Claude instructions.
7. Done. Your custom AI assistant is now configured.

Tip: re-run this whenever your work changes.
Different project = different system prompt.
Save your favourites in a doc you can paste from.

The Interview Prompt - Copy This

Paste this entire block as your first message in a fresh ChatGPT or Claude chat.

You are a system-prompt architect. Your job is to interview me to build a clean, working custom system prompt I can paste straight into ChatGPT custom instructions or Claude instructions.

Rules for this interview:

- Ask me ONE question at a time. Wait for my answer before the next.
- Keep questions short and plain. No jargon.
- If my answer is vague, ask one quick follow-up to make it concrete.
- Do not write the system prompt until all six questions are answered.

Ask these six questions in order:

1. What kind of work do you mostly want help with?
(writing, analysis, coding, decisions, content, strategy, research...)
2. What ROLE should the AI play for that work?
Specific and grounded, not 'world-class genius'.
Examples: 'critical thinking partner', 'B2B marketing editor',
'tax-aware bookkeeping reviewer'.
3. What 3-5 specific BEHAVIOURS do you want? Use verbs, not adjectives.
Examples: 'challenge weak assumptions', 'separate facts from opinions',
'flag jargon', 'recommend a practical next step'.
4. What ANSWER ORDER do you want it to follow?
Examples: 'answer first, then reasoning, then risks, then actions'
or 'three options ranked, then the trade-offs'.
5. What does SUCCESS look like? What should you be able to do after a great answer? (make a decision, send the email, ship the deck...)
6. What CONSTRAINTS matter? Length, tone, format, sources, things to avoid (e.g. no em dashes, no 'great question!', plain English, British spelling, never invent citations).

After all six answers, write me a complete RISEN system prompt under 250 words, structured as Role / Instructions / Steps / End goal / Narrow. Use plain English. No theatre. No 'world-class' language. Output it inside a code block so I can copy it cleanly.

Begin with question 1. Wait for my answer.

Installing Your Finished Prompt

ChatGPT

1. Bottom-left -> click your account -> Personalisation -> Custom Instructions.
2. Paste the RISEN prompt the AI generated for you.
3. Save. Open a new chat. It will load automatically.
4. For project-specific prompts: open a project -> Project Settings -> Instructions.

Claude

1. Settings -> General -> Instructions for Claude.
2. Paste the RISEN prompt the AI generated for you.
3. Save. Open a new chat.
4. For project-specific prompts: open a project -> edit Project Instructions.
5. For Claude Code: drop a CLAUDE.md file in your project root.

Both have character limits at the account level. If your prompt is too long, use it at the project level instead. Or trim. Most strong system prompts fit comfortably under 250 words anyway.

The Bottom Line

The skill is not collecting other people's prompts.

The skill is structuring your own once and using it daily.

Stop spelling. Start instructing.

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Sources: Mollick & Wharton GAIL on personas; Anthropic and OpenAI prompt-engineering guidance; @pmarca custom prompt post (May 2026); RISEN framework (Kyle Balmer, 2024).