

Cheat Sheet: Steer AI with Examples

AI learns from your examples – even 1 or 2 lines can shape the style and structure of its response.

Why this matters

Many users only work with zero-shot prompts (a bare question). In our training sessions, we see that with 1–3 well-chosen examples, AI delivers **much more consistent and useful answers**. Few-shot prompting is therefore a core technique for anyone working with AI professionally.

The three forms

- **Zero-shot** → only the task. Fast, but often generic.
- **One-shot** → 1 example. Establishes a clear pattern.
- **Few-shot** → 2–3 examples. Produces predictable style and structure.

Example

✘ *Zero-shot*: “Write a short poem about the sea.”

✔ *Few-shot*:

“Write a short poem about the sea in the style and structure of these examples:

Example 1: Roses are red, skies are blue, the ocean is deep, and so are you.

Example 2: Waves keep rolling, the shore remains, the sea whispers softly, an eternal refrain.”

👉 With zero-shot, AI chooses the style itself; with few-shot, it follows your tone, length, and structure.

Tips

- Choose examples that precisely reflect the **tone and format** you want.
- Keep them short and concrete – long texts are inefficient.
- Use 2–3 examples in most cases. More rarely adds value.
- Vary audiences: try explaining the same concept to a child, a student, and an expert.

✔ Checklist – Do's & Don'ts

Do's	Don'ts
Use 1–3 clear examples	10+ examples → wasteful
Match examples to your goal (style, audience, format)	Mixing unrelated examples → confusion
Keep them brief and to the point	Long essays as examples
Always finish with the real task	Only giving examples, no task
Use few-shot when style or structure matters	Always using few-shot, even when zero-shot suffices

⊘ Not to be confused with...

- **Training or fine-tuning** → large datasets with dozens of examples = retraining the model, not prompting.
- **Role prompting** → giving a role (“act as a teacher”) is not an example, it steers perspective.
- **Templates** → a fully completed format is a template, not shot prompting.
- **Overload** → using 10+ examples rarely adds value and looks more like training.

👉 Shot prompting means **0, 1 or a few examples** to guide style and structure — no more, no less.

Try this

Take a prompt like: “*Explain gravity.*”

1. Zero-shot.
2. Few-shot: give 2 examples (e.g. explanation for children + explanation as a science journalist).
 - 👉 Compare how the tone and structure shift.

Learn & Apply

The real difference doesn't come from reading cheat sheets, but from creating your own.

Explore more

🎧 Podcast – Episode 2: [The Magic Touch – Few-Shot & Role Prompting Made Simple](#)

🔗 More cheat sheets on prompting: symbio6.nl/en/sheets

🚀 In our workshops we show how few-shot prompting makes AI output more consistent and reliable.