CHAPTER 6: STEERING THE SHIP | TOOLKIT

Prompt Lab: Vague to Mission Ready

Bad prompts are still useful. They show you how the model behaves. This lab walks one prompt from vague to mission ready, one deliberate change at a time.

The task in plain words

PART 1 What kind of prompt is this?

Type	The question it asks	Example
Retrieval	What is already known?	What are the known IOCs for Shiny Hunters?
Compression	What is important?	Summarize this 50-page threat report into key findings
Interpretation	What does this mean?	What does the shift in Sandworm's targeting pattern in the last 30 days suggest about their priorities?
Generation	Can you create something new?	Develop a scenario where Iran targets U.S. critical infrastructure during a geopolitical crisis
Judgment	What's the answer?	Is Charming Kitten responsible for the infrastructure outage? (Always ask what supports and contradicts it.)

My task is mostly: ○ Retrieval ○ Compression ○ Interpretation ○ Generation ○ Judgment

PART 2 Earn all four badges

- ☐ Firebending your task: the model knows exactly what job to do
- ☐ Earthbending your scope: hard limits on timeframe, sources, region, and what NOT to use
- ☐ Waterbending your format: length, structure, and audience defined
- ☐ Airbending your controls: cite sources, flag uncertainty, make the invisible gaps visible

PART 3 Iteration log

Start vague on purpose. Each round, change one thing and note what broke and what you fixed.

Version 1 (the vague one)

Prompt

What was wrong with the output

What I changed next

Version 2

Prompt

What was wrong with the output

What I changed next

Version 3

Prompt

What was wrong with the output

What I changed next

Version 4

Prompt

What was wrong with the output

What I changed next

PART 4 Advanced techniques used

- [ ] Role-based: told the model what disguise to wear
- [ ] Chain-of-thought: made it show its work
- [ ] Few-shot: showed it what good looks like
- [ ] Iterative refinement: treated it like a junior analyst

Final prompt

What I verified by hand before trusting it

Pro tip: if your prompt is terrible, ask the model to help fix it.