

Five Prompts That Force Transparency | Use these exact phrases — they change the quality of what comes back.

These five questions shift AI from confident-sounding to genuinely useful. They are not tricks — they are habits. The more you use them, the better the results you will get, and the less likely you are to be misled.

1	<p>"What sources or references support this? Please list them."</p> <p>WHY IT WORKS: Forces AI to surface what it's drawing from — and exposes when it can't.</p> <p>Most AI answers sound confident. This question breaks that. The AI must either name a real source — a study, a website, a text — or admit it doesn't have one. When it can't name a source, that's your signal to verify the answer independently before trusting it. Use this for anything factual: statistics, medical information, historical claims, theology.</p> <p>Try this: <i>If the AI says 'according to general knowledge' or 'based on my training,' that's not a source. Press it: 'Can you name the specific study or publication?'</i></p>
2	<p>"How confident are you in this answer, and where might you be wrong?"</p> <p>WHY IT WORKS: Triggers self-assessment. AI will often flag its own limitations when asked.</p> <p>AI systems are designed to respond — and that instinct can make them sound more certain than they are. This question forces a different mode: instead of generating an answer, the AI evaluates the one it just gave. You will often get a more honest, more useful response. It also teaches you which parts of an answer are solid and which parts need more research.</p> <p>Try this: <i>Ask this as a follow-up after any answer that matters. It costs you two seconds and can save you from acting on bad information.</i></p>
3	<p>"Is there any part of this answer I should verify independently?"</p> <p>WHY IT WORKS: Teaches good verification habit — and the answer is almost always 'yes.'</p> <p>This prompt does two things: it reminds you that AI is not the final word, and it makes the AI tell you specifically where to double-check. Most of the time, AI will identify the claims most likely to be wrong or outdated. That's exactly the list you need. Use it as a starting point for your own research, not as a reason to skip research.</p> <p>Try this: <i>Great for anything you plan to share publicly, teach in a class, or make a decision based on. If it's going to affect someone else, verify it.</i></p>
4	<p>"What do you not know about this topic?"</p> <p>WHY IT WORKS: Reveals the edges of AI knowledge — especially useful for theology and medicine.</p> <p>Every AI has gaps — topics where training data is thin, outdated, or contested. This question forces the AI to map those gaps out loud. For theology, this is especially important: AI has read a lot of commentary, but it has no spiritual authority, no pastoral wisdom, and no understanding of your specific community's context. Asking what it doesn't know protects you from treating its answers as authoritative.</p> <p>Try this: <i>This is one of the most powerful questions you can ask. An AI that answers it well is one you can trust more. An AI that claims to know everything is one you should trust less.</i></p>
5	<p>"Summarize the opposite view of what you just said."</p> <p>WHY IT WORKS: Breaks out of sycophancy. Forces AI to show you the full picture.</p> <p>AI is designed to be agreeable. If you ask it to make a case, it will make a case — and it will sound very convincing. This prompt forces it out of that mode. By asking for the opposing view, you get the full picture: the strongest arguments on both sides. This is how you make better decisions, write more credible content, and avoid being misled by a one-sided response.</p> <p>Try this: <i>Especially useful for anything you're writing, teaching, or preparing to present. If you can't summarize the opposing view, you don't fully understand your own.</i></p>

note on sycophancy: AI is designed to be agreeable. It will confirm your beliefs, validate your ideas, and rarely push back on its own. These five prompts are specifically designed to counter that tendency. They force the AI to be honest about what it knows, what it doesn't know, and what the other side of the argument is. Use them every time something matters.