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Train Your Brain to Work Creatively with Gen AI

by [Brian Solis](#) November 27, 2024



Illustration by Brian Rea

Summary.

When most people prompt generative AI, they do so within the paradigm of how *they think about what could or should come next*. For example, when searching Google, users may ask a question, search for the best Thai restaurant “near me,” or insert specific criteria based on filtered output, such as “best downhill mountain bike for intermediate riders.” That approach is often carried into prompting. The results build on a linear path of thinking, research, and decision-making based upon the world as we know it. However, where AI starts to “come alive” is when you create something unique — something that wouldn’t have been achieved without a human and machine collaboration. This requires challenging your own conventions around how you think GenAI should work, and also the outcomes you think are expected or possible. This article offers 12 exercises to help you expand the way you think about prompting GenAI. Leaders who foster these mindshifts within their teams will find themselves cultivating a culture where “the impossible” becomes a daily challenge — and achievement.

There are countless articles on how to use generative AI (gen AI) to improve work, automate repetitive tasks, summarize meetings and customer engagements, and synthesize information. There are also scores of virtual

libraries brimming with prompting guides to help us achieve more effective and even fantastical output using gen AI tools. Many common digital tools already feature integrated AI co-pilots to automatically enhance and complete writing, coding, designing, creating, and whatever it is you're working on. But there is so much more to generative AI beyond enhancing or accelerating what we already do. With the right mindset shift, or mindshift, we can train our brains to creatively rethink how we use these tools to unlock entirely new value and achieve exponential outcomes in what's becoming an AI-first world.

When most people prompt, they do so within the paradigm of how they think about what could or should come next. For example, when searching Google, users may ask a question, search for the best Thai restaurant "near me," or insert specific criteria based on filtered output, such as "best downhill mountain bike for intermediate riders." That approach is often carried into prompting. The results build on a linear path of thinking, research, and decision-making based upon the world as we know it. This is perfectly normal and effective. In fact, it's how today's generative AI models largely work.

Generative AI relies on natural language processing (NLP) to understand the request and generate relevant results. It's basically pattern recognition and pattern assembly based on instructions to deliver output that completes the task at hand. This approach aligns with our brains' default mode: pattern recognition and efficiency-seeking, which favors short, straightforward prompts to get immediate, predictable results.

If most people use gen AI in this way, then no matter how powerful the tools, we inadvertently create a new status quo in how we work and create. Training our brains to challenge our thinking, our assumptions of AI capabilities, and our expectations for predictable results starts with a [mindshift](#), to recognize AI not as just a tool, but as a partner in innovation and exploring the unfamiliar.

AI Enhances Today's Work While Also Unlocking Tomorrow's Opportunities, Today

My friend Dharmesh Shah, co-founder and chief technology officer of HubSpot, once [shared online](#) that "you're competing with A.I."

"That's right," people agreed. They went on to share other reactions including, "AI is going to take jobs," with some harboring more dystopian outlooks, such as: "AI is going to destroy us."

However, that wasn't Shah's intended meaning. He challenged people to read the statement from a different angle: "You're competing *with* A.I." His point was that you can enhance, amplify, and even augment your potential by doing so. In other words, AI can make you more competitive.

There's a saying that you've probably heard many times and will probably hear many times more, "[AI won't likely take your job, but people who use AI will.](#)"

AI empowers you to take what you do today and make it more efficient, more scalable, less expensive, and more automated. More so, AI supercharges your capabilities to do what you couldn't do yesterday to augment your performance. It's this part that requires imagination, creative and repetitive training, and a willingness to step beyond your comfort zone and explore the unknown (and have fun while you're at it).

Break Free from Linear Transactions to More Creative Outcomes

Where AI starts to "come alive" is when you create something unique, something that wouldn't have been achieved without that human and machine collaboration.

For example, you may have an idea for a specific pasta dish to cook for dinner, but you don't have all the ingredients at home and don't feel motivated to visit the grocery store for everything else you need. A creative human/AI collaboration could look at new outcomes that would not have been considered otherwise.

One idea is to share the ingredients you do have with gen AI: "I have two red tomatoes, chicken breast, olive oil, salt, and white onion. What are some recipes I can consider for making dinner for two tonight?"

The alternatives sound appetizing:

- Chicken Breast with Tomato and Onion Sauté
- Tomato and Chicken Stir-Fry
- Chicken and Tomato Salad
- Tomato Chicken Skillet

Not only did alternative ideas come up in the moment, but easy-to-follow recipes were also included.

You don't have to stop there. If you're not 100% satisfied with the results, you could ask it to regenerate ideas or guide it with more specific details or nuances, i.e., provide recipes under X number of calories, only recipes for baking or air frying, etc.

You can also experiment in fun ways by adding your personality into the mix and exploring unconventional, radical, or previously impossible requests. This makes the output more creative, surprising, and mind-blowing. For example, add details like country or region, style, cooking time, or lifestyle preferences. Or take it to the next level by asking for recipes to help you cook in the style of your favorite celebrity chef, from any century (just as long as they're in the [LLM](#)!). Then, ask it to provide a personal note from the chef to motivate and guide you, and voilà, the chef's kiss. Suddenly gen AI becomes your personal cooking coach. The idea here is to think about your interactions creatively, to practice by challenging your own conventions around how you think gen AI should work, and also the outcomes you think are expected or possible.

Rethinking Collaboration with AI for More Creative, Innovative Outcomes

Changing your mindset to more creatively and openly collaborate with AI is about the willingness to explore the unknown and the capacity to learn, unlearn, and experiment. Plus, it's a lot of fun.

I often say that using AI delivers its best potential and results when I, along with my cognitive biases, step aside. I ask myself, with a smile, "WWAID?" or "What would AI do?" I acknowledge that my unconscious manner of using gen AI tools might default to predictable inputs and outputs. But by asking WWAID, I open myself up to new exchanges and experiences, which can yield unexpected results.

Tapping into AI's creative and transformative potential and training your brain for an AI-first world requires us to mindshift our prompting style, engaging AI as a collaborative partner, rather than just a tool.

12 Exercises to Train Your Brain to Work More Creatively With AI

Here are a dozen ways to train our brains to achieve broader, more innovative outcomes with gen AI:

1. Set a daily “exploratory prompting” practice

Begin each day with an open-ended prompt that pushes you to think big. You might try, “What trends or opportunities am I not seeing in my industry?” or “How might I completely redefine my approach to a key challenge?”

2. Frame prompts around “What if” and “How might we” questions

Instead of asking direct questions, prompt with open-ended possibilities. For instance, instead of asking, “How can I improve productivity?” try, “What if I could approach productivity in an unconventional way — what might that look like?”

3. Embrace ambiguity and curiosity in prompts

Training ourselves to prompt without a precise endpoint in mind allows AI to generate responses that might surprise us. Prompts like “What might I be overlooking in my approach to X?” open doors to insights we hadn’t considered.

4. Use prompts to explore rather than to solve

Many prompts focus on solutions. Shifting toward exploration allows for deeper insight generation. For example, “Let’s explore the future of leadership if AI had a seat on the board or in the C-Suite — what changes might we see in our work, roles, and in corporate culture?”

5. Chain prompts to develop ideas iteratively

Rather than stopping at the first answer, ask follow-up questions that deepen the response toward more complex and visionary responses. If AI suggests an idea, build on it with questions like, “What would this look like in 5 years?” or “How might this approach change the future of how companies operate?”

6. Think metaphorically or analogically

Training our brains to use metaphor or analogy in prompts open up creative pathways. For instance, instead of asking for productivity tips, prompt AI with, “Imagine productivity as a dance — how might my approach change?”

7. Prompt for perspectives, beyond facts

Ask AI to take on different perspectives to broaden the creative capacity for unpredictable results. For instance, “How might an artist, a scientist, and a philosopher each approach the challenge of leading in a tech-driven world?” prompts AI to combine diverse viewpoints, offering a richer pool of ideas, and inspiring you in ways not possible before.

8. Experiment with “role-play” prompts

Train yourself to consider multiple perspectives by asking AI to generate responses from the mindset of the world’s best experts from any industry or genre — you can even include fictional personas. For instance, try prompting AI with, “How would an innovative CEO, an artist, and a futurist each solve this problem?” Personally, I’ve interacted with the AI’s take on two of my favorites — Steve Jobs and Walt Disney — on many occasions.

9. Ask for impossibilities and involve experiential scenarios

Open new avenues to reimagine the problem itself, uncovering solutions that others might overlook. Prompt AI for ideas that would “completely eliminate the need for [whatever you’re working on],” or “solutions that solve problems we haven’t even imagined yet.” And go further by prompting AI to create “a day-in-the-life scenario where this [solution or effort] becomes indispensable in every moment of [insert person]’s life.”

10. WWAID — Reimagine AI’s role in the solution itself

Ask questions that treat AI as a partner in innovation: “How would you, as an AI, design this service or solution to [accomplish A, B, or C] in ways only an AI could perceive?”

11. Establish a weekly “future-driven prompt” session

Devote one session per week to focus on large-scale, future-oriented prompts, such as “What will my industry look like in 10 years, and how can I stay at the forefront?” or “What radical shifts might cause disruptions or redefine success in my field?”

12. Keep a journal of “breakthrough prompts”

Though AI tools retain a history of your prompts, document those that yield surprising, innovative, or particularly valuable insights and results. Reviewing this log regularly can inspire new ways to phrase future prompts.

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Generative AI is not just a tool; it's a catalyst to rewire our thinking patterns, break free from the constraints of linear logic, and unlock creative insights we didn't know we were capable of. A mindshift rewires us to abandon outdated thinking, embrace curiosity, and activate exponential potential by asking better, more audacious questions. To harness its power in innovative ways, the first step is to adopt what I call "exponential curiosity," which allows us to move from merely using AI to actively co-creating with it.

A mindshift paired with Generative AI rewires our brains to work toward an alternate future that we can scarcely imagine — a future that's filled with awe-inspiring, meaningful breakthroughs that redefine industries, experiences, and the very nature of human potential.

By asking AI questions that challenge assumptions and venture into the unknown, you not only get creative responses but develop a mindset that primes you to see possibilities that others miss. Leaders who foster these mindshifts within their teams will find themselves cultivating a culture where "the impossible" becomes a daily challenge — and achievement.

Give yourself permission and space to excel in an AI-first world.

Brian Solis is the Head of Global Innovation at ServiceNow and the author of *Mindshift: Transform Leadership, Drive Innovation, and Reshape the Future*, a USA Today bestseller. Brian has authored nine award-winning books, published more than 60 industry research reports covering the future of business, digital transformation, and corporate innovation, and keynotes conferences globally. In his role at ServiceNow, he helps organizations navigate the intersection of technology, market shifts, and leadership, guiding executives to drive growth and business transformation.