



Guiding the AI Model with System Prompts

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WHAT?

System prompts are an important component in any AI, especially LLMs. They determine the way AI models interpret and respond to user prompts. System prompts ensure that the generated outputs align with the intended goals.

WHY?

Learn to create effective system prompts to receive expected and appropriate responses.

EFFORT

Less than 30 minutes of reading.

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<https://documentation.suse.com> 

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1 Benefits of using system prompts

System prompts enhance the performance and user experience of AI models. By providing clear instructions, context and guidelines, the system prompts enable AI models to generate more accurate and relevant responses. The following use cases include example system prompts.

Maintaining personality

When AI models must act as a specific persona, for example, a virtual assistant or a teacher, maintaining the persona is important for consistent user experience.

EXAMPLE 1.1: DEFINING PERSONA

You are an enthusiastic biology teacher named Thomas. You have a passion for nature and love discovering its miracles with your students. Your communication style is friendly and informative.

Avoiding attempts to break character

In certain cases, users may (intentionally) ask questions that are outside the scope of the AI's persona and knowledge. Without proper guidance, the AI model may generate responses that are inconsistent and inappropriate.

EXAMPLE 1.2: AVOIDING TOPICS OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

If a user asks about topics outside your expertise, such as medical advice or legal matters, inform them that you are not qualified to provide relevant responses. Suggest that they should consult with the appropriate professionals.

More creative behavior

By prompting the AI model to use varied language, analogies and storytelling techniques, you can guide the AI model towards generating more engaging and creative outputs.

EXAMPLE 1.3: CREATIVE WRITING

When generating stories or poems, use figurative language with metaphors, similes and personification to make your writing more vivid and engaging. Use a wide range of literary techniques, such as symbolism and irony, to create depth and layers of meaning.

Targeting audiences

By specifying the language, tone and approach outlined in the system prompt, you can create AI models that are optimized for particular target audiences.

EXAMPLE 1.4: CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL CHATBOT

When interacting with young learners, use simple language appropriate to their age. Explain complex concepts in a clear and simple manner. Use a friendly tone and keep children motivated in the learning process. Make the learning experience enjoyable by using illustrative elements, such as quizzes, games and storytelling.

1.1 For more information

- Find good examples of user prompts in [AI Preventing Hallucinations \(https://documentation.suse.com/suse-ai/1.0/html/AI-preventing-hallucinations/index.html\)](https://documentation.suse.com/suse-ai/1.0/html/AI-preventing-hallucinations/index.html) ↗.

2 How does a system prompt work?

System prompts serve as a map that guides the AI model through the complexities of natural language understanding and generation. Describing the task, the desired output format, and setting limits to the AI's behavior helps AI models generate accurate and relevant responses.

System prompts are processed before the user input. This placement ensures that the AI has access to the necessary context, instructions and guidelines before processing the user's prompt.

2.1 Content of a system prompt

A typical system prompt contains the following elements:

Context

This part sets the scene or provides the necessary information for the AI to understand the situation.

Example: "You are a travel agent recommending vacation destinations."

Task

A clear instruction on what the AI should do. This is the core of the system prompt, directing the AI to perform a specific task.

Example: "Generate text summaries and annual reports."

Guidelines

These are rules that the AI must follow. They might limit the output format, length, tone or other criteria.

Example: "The recommendations should be less than 150 words each, and they should appeal to adventure travelers."

Format

If you want the response in a particular structure, the system prompt should mention that. It can be a list, a paragraph, a dialog or a code block.

Example: "Respond in a bullet point list."

Tone

You can instruct the AI to generate responses with a particular tone, such as formal, casual, humorous or technical.

Example: "Write in a friendly, conversational tone."

Example

System prompts may include examples of expected outputs to guide the AI in the right direction.

Example: "For example, 'Bali: a tropical paradise with beautiful beaches and rich culture. Perfect for relaxation and adventure.'"

EXAMPLE 2.1: A FULL SIMPLE SYSTEM PROMPT

"You are an experienced travel guide. Suggest three vacation destinations for a family looking for sunny weather, outdoor activities and cultural experiences. Each suggestion should be 100-150 words, written in a friendly and conversational tone. Present the suggestions as a numbered list."

EXAMPLE 2.2: A COMPLEX SYSTEM PROMPT THAT USES A TEMPLATE

Assume your task is to create a customer-facing report that follows these guidelines:

- **Direction:** Set the tone as professional and informative.
- **Format:** Specify output as a formal report.
- **Examples:** Provide a template or previous reports as examples.
- **Quality:** Use a checklist to ensure accuracy and relevance.
- **Labor:** Divide sections into executive summary, detailed findings and conclusions.

The resulting prompt that corresponds to the above guidelines may look similar to the following example. You can copy and paste the whole text into an AI-driven chatbot prompt.

Direction:

Adopt a professional and informative tone throughout the report. The content should be clear, concise, and tailored to a business audience.

Format:

The output should be in the form of a formal report, structured with headings, subheadings, and bullet points where necessary. Use professional language and adhere to business writing standards.

Examples:

Here is a template of the report structure to follow:

Executive Summary:

- Overview of key findings and recommendations.

Detailed Findings:

- Section 1: [Topic]
- Section 2: [Topic]
- Section 3: [Topic]

Conclusions:

- Summary of findings and next steps.

Please refer to previous reports, such as [Report A] and [Report B] for style and formatting guidelines.

Quality:

Use the following checklist to ensure the report's accuracy and relevance:

1. Verify all data and statistics are correct and up to date.
2. Ensure the report is free of grammatical and typographical errors.
3. Cross-check that all sections are consistent and logically structured.
4. Validate that the report meets the customer's objectives and addresses their concerns.

Labor:

Divide the report into the following sections:

1. Executive Summary: Summarize the main findings and key recommendations in a concise manner.
2. Detailed Findings: Provide in-depth analysis and data for each key area of focus, divided into logical subsections.
3. Conclusions: Offer a summary of the findings and suggest actionable next steps for the customer.

Glossary

AI, artificial intelligence

Refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are designed to learn and solve problems like humans. Enables computers to understand language, make decisions and improve from experience.

Air gap

A security measure where a computer network is physically isolated from unsecured networks, including the public Internet.

Batch size

The number of samples processed simultaneously during model inference, affecting processing speed and resource utilization.

BYOC, bring your own certificate

A practice allowing users to provide their own SSL/TLS certificates for securing communications instead of using default or auto-generated ones.

CA, certification authority

An entity that issues digital certificates to verify the identity of certificate holders and ensure secure communications.

Chain-of-thought (CoT) prompting

A prompting technique that guides AI models to break down complex problems into step-by-step reasoning processes, improving response accuracy and transparency.

Chat template

A structured format for organizing conversations between users and AI models, defining how system prompts, user inputs, and AI responses are formatted and processed.

Context window

The maximum amount of text (tokens) that an AI model can process at once, including both the input prompt and generated response.

CRD, custom resource definitions

Extensions of the Kubernetes API that allow users to define custom resources and their controllers in a Kubernetes cluster.

CUDA, Compute Unified Device Architecture

NVIDIA's parallel computing platform and programming model used to accelerate AI workloads on GPU hardware.

Data leakage

The unintended exposure of sensitive information through AI model responses, potentially compromising data security and privacy.

Embeddings

Numerical representations of data (text, images, etc.) in a high-dimensional space that capture semantic relationships and enable AI models to process information effectively.

Fine-tuning

The process of further training a pre-trained AI model on specific data to adapt it for particular tasks or domains, improving its performance for targeted applications.

GenAI, generative AI

A type of artificial intelligence that can create new content such as text, images or music.

GPU, graphics processing unit

Specialized hardware designed for parallel processing. In AI applications, GPUs accelerate model training and inference tasks.

Hallucination

An AI behavior where the model generates false or unsupported information that appears plausible but has no basis in provided context or real facts.

Helm

A package manager for Kubernetes that helps install and manage applications. Helm uses charts to define, install and upgrade complex Kubernetes applications.

Helm chart

A package format for Kubernetes applications that contains all resource definitions needed to deploy and configure application workloads.

IaC, infrastructure as code

The practice of managing and provisioning infrastructure through machine-readable definition files rather than manual processes.

Inference

The process of using a trained AI model to make predictions or generate outputs based on new input data.

Kubernetes pods

The smallest deployable units in Kubernetes that can host one or more containers, sharing networking and storage resources.

LLM, large language model

An advanced AI model trained on amounts of text data to understand and generate human-like text. Can perform tasks like translation, summarization and answering questions.

Model weights

The learned parameters of an AI model that determine how it processes inputs and generates outputs. These weights are adjusted during training to optimize model performance.

NLG, natural language generation

A process of automatically generating human-like text from structured data or other forms of input. Designed to convert raw data into coherent and meaningful language easily understood by humans.

NLU, natural language understanding

A process AI uses to analyze and understand the meaning of the input query.

NVIDIA GPU driver

Software that enables communication between the operating system and NVIDIA graphics hardware, essential for GPU-accelerated AI workloads.

NVIDIA GPU Operator

A Kubernetes operator that automates the management of NVIDIA GPUs in container environments, handling driver deployment, runtime configuration, and monitoring.

Ollama

An open source framework for running and serving AI models locally. Ollama simplifies the process of downloading, running and managing large language models.

OpenGL

A cross-platform API for rendering 2D and 3D graphics, commonly used in visualization applications and GPU-accelerated computing.

Prompt Engineering

The practice of crafting effective input queries to AI models to obtain desired and accurate outputs. Good prompt engineering helps prevent hallucinations and improves response quality.

Prompt injection

A security vulnerability where malicious inputs attempt to override or bypass an AI model's system prompt or safety constraints.

Quantization

A technique to reduce AI model size and computational requirements by converting model parameters to lower precision formats while maintaining acceptable performance.

RAG, retrieval-augmented generation

A technique that enhances AI responses by retrieving relevant information from a knowledge base before generating answers, improving accuracy and reducing hallucinations.

RBAC, role-based access control

A security model that restricts system access based on roles assigned to users, managing permissions and authorization in Kubernetes clusters.

Semantic search

A search method using AI to understand the meaning and context of queries rather than just matching keywords, enabling more relevant results.

System prompt

Initial instructions given to an AI model that define its behavior, role and response parameters. System prompts help maintain consistent and appropriate AI responses.

Temperature

A parameter controlling the randomness in AI model outputs. Lower values produce more focused and deterministic responses, while higher values increase creativity and variability.

Token

The basic unit of text processing in AI models, representing parts of words, characters or symbols. Models process text by breaking it into tokens for analysis and generation.

Top-K

A parameter that limits token selection during text generation to the K most likely next tokens, helping control output quality and relevance.

Top-P

Also known as nucleus sampling, a parameter that selects from the smallest set of tokens whose cumulative probability exceeds P, providing dynamic control over text generation diversity.

Vector database

A specialized database designed to store and efficiently query high-dimensional vectors that represent data in AI applications, enabling similarity searches and semantic operations.


Vector store

A specialized storage system optimized for managing and querying vector embeddings, essential for semantic search and RAG implementations in AI applications.

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