Prompting Matters in the Legal Use of AI

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The integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into legal workflows has resulted in a growing body of literature emphasizing the sheer importance of well-crafted inputs, which are commonly referred to as "prompts", to the reliability and ethical soundness of AI outputs[1]. Importantly, Scholars and practitioners alike have drawn analogies between legal writing and prompt engineering, suggesting that the same attention to clarity, structure, and specificity are essential to both avenues[2]. According to guidance from DLA Piper, this "AI input revolution" requires legal professionals to recognize prompt design as a critical skill in legal technology use, not just for success but also to avoid sanctions. Id. At 1. As such, recent commentary from the American Bar Association (ABA) has underscored the ethical duty of attorneys to understand how their interactions with AI tools affect both the scope and quality of output[3].

Prompt engineering involves the deliberate crafting of effective language inputs in order to elicit accurate, relevant, and useful responses from large language models (LLMs)[4]. To illustrate, this framing is supported by recent industry reports from vendors such as LexisNexis and ContractPodAI, who have noted that poorly constructed prompts significantly increase the risk of generating hallucinated or misleading content[5]. Conversely, well-crafted prompts are crucial for ensuring that AI tools generate precise and actionable insights, making them invaluable assets in legal analysis and unlocking remarkable efficiency[6]. As such, this post will report on leading

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[1] https://www.dlapiper.com/en-MA/insights/publications/2025/03/why-lawyers-should-pay-attention-to-ais-input-revolution

[2] https://www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/insights/blogs/corporate/how-to-write-effective-legal-ai-prompts.page

[3] https://www.contractpodai.com/resources/blog

[4] https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4842188

[5] https://www.eve.legal/resource-library/generative-ai-for-legal-work-the-art-of-prompt-engineering

[6] https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/legal-ai-prompting-step-by-step-guide-prompt-included-chen-friedman-s87bc/

commentary in the field, focusing on three core areas: how lawyers are improving their prompts, how to mitigate common AI errors with prompting, and these changes implicit implications for legal education.

Anatomy of an Effective Prompt

A number of commentators have noted that lawyers already engage in a form of prompt engineering when constructing Boolean searches in legal research platforms like Westlaw and Lexis. Id. At 4. The Colorado Bar Association, among others, has pointed out that small changes in syntax or specificity in legal search terms produce material differences in outcomes; this concept holds equally true for utilizing LLMs safely and efficiently. Id. As described in a LexisNexis briefing on AI best practices, effective prompting is not merely about using longer inputs but about communicating structured and contextually rich instructions. Id.

Michael Murray, in his academic paper "Prompt Engineering and Priming in Law" (2024), categorizes several high-performing prompting techniques relevant to legal practice[7]. These include role-based prompting, which refers to instructing the model to respond as a corporate attorney or a similar professional occupation. Id. Another is chain-of-thought prompting, which encourages stepwise legal reasoning and can be achieved by forcing the model to articulate the steps behind it reaching the conclusion. Id. Additionally, another recommendation is few-shot prompting, which revolves around providing examples to guide output format and content. Id. Further, Murray also identifies self-refinement prompting as a mechanism to improve logical coherence by instructing the model to evaluate or revise its own output, as this method can result in the model itself catching any potential errors. Id. Importantly, experts establish that these techniques mirror patterns already familiar to lawyers trained in frameworks like IRAC (Issue,

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[7] https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4909532

Rule, Application, Conclusion), which will make the transition from legal writing to prompt engineering more intuitive than it may initially appear as a result[8].

To enhance prompt quality, other experts recommend structured frameworks like the ABCDE Framework and the RICE Framework[9]. According to Mastering AI Prompts for Legal Professionals in 2025, the ABCDE Framework guides prompt creation by defining the AI's (A)udience/Agent: the role and expertise desired, then providing (B)ackground Context: including case details and legal standards, followed by offering (C)lear Instructions: the type deliverables and desired format, but also making sure to set (D)etailed Parameters: relevent to the scope, tone, and length, and finally including (E)valuation Criteria: as a means to check for response quality. Id. Accordingly, these experts establish that this approach transforms vague requests into precise prompts, and substantial improve the potential for review-ready drafts directly from the output[10]. Similarly, Prompt Engineering 101 for Lawyers highlights the RICE Framework (Role, Instructions, Context, Expectations) as a foundational technique[11]. As such, it also involves telling the AI to role-play, and setting expectations for the tone of outputs received. Id. Importantly, both frameworks establish clear context and guide the AI's behavior, ensuring accurate, relevant, and reliable outputs by moving beyond implicit assumptions to explicit instructions. Id.

Safeguarding Against AI Misfires: Hallucinations, Bias, and Legal Risk

Multiple sources have raised concerns about the risks posed by vague or poorly defined prompts in legal contexts. According to a memorandum issued by Thompson Hine LLP, prompting without appropriate legal scope or jurisdictional constraints can increase the likelihood of

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[8] https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/blog/writing-effective-legal-ai-prompts/
[9] https://contractpodai.com/news/ai-prompts-for-legal-professionals/
[10] https://cl.cobar.org/departments/genai-prompting-tips-for-lawyers/
[11] https://www.ncbar.org/nc-lawyer/2024-08/prompt-engineering-101-for-lawyers/

hallucinated case law or statutory interpretation errors[12]. Similarly, commentary from the ABA and others has noted that generative AI tools may, in the absence of structured guidance, generate fictitious citations or conflate legal doctrines from disparate jurisdictions[13].

Prompt engineering has accordingly been described as a form of risk mitigation. Scholars and practitioners have emphasized techniques such as instructing the model to operate within a closed set of documents or to cite only verifiable authority, with these approaches now embedded in platforms like Casetext CoCounsel and Lexis+ AI[14]. These tools often include guardrails such as pre-built prompt templates or source-verification instructions (e.g., "Only cite from the uploaded documents"). Id. As noted in ContractPodAI's industry guide, such safeguards are becoming common features of enterprise-grade legal AI tools. Id at 9. Taken together, these developments suggest that prompt quality is not merely a matter of output optimization but also a key element of legal ethics and malpractice avoidance. Id at 13.

Building a Future-Proof Legal Skillset: Prompting as the New Legal Writing

Industry observers have increasingly suggested that prompt engineering may become a core legal skill alongside traditional competencies such as legal research and writing. According to ContractPodAI's 2025 legal tech trends report, firms are already seeking professionals with hybrid expertise in law and AI prompt design. Id. At 9. Similarly, a recent post by legal technologist Chen Friedman has proposed that prompt-writing be formally incorporated into legal education curricula, arguing that it mirrors the logical structuring already required in legal analysis. Id. At 6.

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[12] https://www.thelawforlawyerstoday.com/2024/12/most-recent-aba-opinion-provides-comprehensive-ethics-guidance-on-generative-ai-use/

[13] https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2024/07/aba-issues-first-ethics-guidance-ai-tools/

[14] https://www.lexisnexis.com/community/insights/legal/b/thought-leadership/posts/how-to-write-effective-legal-ai-prompts

Legal academics and practitioners appear to agree that the capacity to interact meaningfully and safely with generative AI systems is no longer a speculative advantage but a professional imperative. Some institutions, including the Colorado Bar and DLA Piper, have advocated for internal training programs and formalized usage protocols that teach attorneys how to design and evaluate AI prompts. Id. At 10. The emerging consensus, reflected across academic, industry, and regulatory commentary, is that effective prompting is not an ancillary technical skill but a core component of legal competence in a technologically mediated practice environment. Id. At 9. In that context, legal educators and professional organizations are being urged to adapt accordingly. Id. At 2.