



Writing Effective Family History A.I. Prompts

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THE GENEALOGIST'S A.I. TOOLBOX

1. Chatbots

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| ChatGPT (OpenAI) | https://chat.chatbot.app/gpt5 |
| Gemini (Google) | https://gemini.google.com/app |
| Claude (Anthropic) | https://claude.ai/login |
| Perplexity | https://www.perplexity.ai/ |
| Copilot (Microsoft) | https://copilot.microsoft.com/ |
| Grok (X) | https://grok.com/ |

2. Create/Edit images

- ChatGPT (GPT-4o) (limited free plan)
- Nano Banana (Google Gemini 2.5 Flash) (limited free plan)
- Reve (free plan available)
- Ideogram (limited free plan available)

3. Image Transcription:

- Transkribus: <https://www.transkribus.org/>

4. Audio Transcription

- TurboScribe: <https://turboscribe.ai/>

PROMPT WRITING BASICS

The **R-G-C-T-F** formula for Prompt Writing

- Role** Define its role. Example: You are an professional genealogist with expertise in ...
- Goal** Define its goal - including the target (audience)/tone when applicable.
- Context** Provide adequate context. This can include uploaded files and images for A.I. to use to complete the task.
- Task** Identify the task A.I. is to perform. Be specific; provide details, and include appropriate constraints and hallucination guardrails.
- Flask**
 - Describe the format in which you want to A.I. respond: bulleted list, table, image, timeline, narrative story, section subtitles, etc
 - Define any length limitations: e.g. 500 words or less; or give three examples

The "Golden Prompt" Rule

If AI gives you a bad result, look at your RGCTF components.

Usually, the **Context** is too thin, or the **Task** is too vague.

Refine and submit AS A NEW CHAT.

HALLUCINATION GUARDRAILS

1. Ground A.I. with Constraints
 - Assign a role
 - Provide explicit instructions. Examples include:
 - "Do not speculate"
 - "Identify any ideas for which no specific source citation is provided as hypotheses"
 - Provide an escape hatch: "If the answer is not in the document, say you do not know or I am uncertain or I don't have that information."
2. Structure A.I. Reasoning
 - Chain-of-thought (CoT): "Think/analyze in a step-by-step process to reach a conclusion and then formulate a response."
 - Step-Back Prompting: "First identify the high-level principles (or broader context) before answering."
 - Few-Shot Prompting: Provide 2 or 3 examples of the input and desired output format you expect. These could be attached as images/documents to the initial or follow-up prompts.
 - Constrain Output Format: Provide templates or specific word counts to limit the AI creative drift.
3. Require A.I. Self-Verification (Factchecking)
 - Chain-of-verification (CoVe): Tell A.I. "Formulate an answer, then create verification questions to check your own work for accuracy before responding."
 - Confidence Score: Tell A.I. "Rate your confidence on a scale of 0-10 for each claim or idea presented in your response."
 - Specify use of reliable sources: Tell A.I. "Only use reliable sources. Provide detailed source citations for each statement in your response and format your citation following *The Chicago Manual of Style* or Elizabeth Shown Mills *Evidence Explained* first reference note format."
 - Self-Correction: Following A.I.'s initial response, follow-up with "Review your previous answer for any factual errors or inconsistencies"

CREATING/USING CUSTOM PROMPTS/GPTS¹

1. Diana Elder's "Locality Guide Builder" : <https://chatgpt.com/g/g-Y7oqvFVmP-diana-s-genealogy-locality-guide-builder>
2. Mark Thompson's "Locality Guide for Genealogical Research" : <https://chatgpt.com/g/g-TpLAIvCzD-mark-thompson-s-locality-guide-research-assistant>

¹ GPT stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer, a type of AI developed by OpenAI that understands and generates human-like text.



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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

RGCTF-in-Action

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| ChatGPT (OpenAI) | https://chat.chatbot.app/gpt5 |
| Gemini (Google) | https://gemini.google.com/app |
| Claude (Anthropic) | https://claude.ai/login |
| Perplexity | https://www.perplexity.ai/ |
| Copilot (Microsoft) | https://copilot.microsoft.com/ |
| Grok (X) | https://grok.com/ |

Here are some prompts for tasks we commonly perform as genealogists/family historians. Try them out with your own research. You can prepare your prompts in a text document (e.g. Microsoft Word, Google Doc, etc.); then, cut [or copy] and paste the instructions into the prompt field of the selected Chatbot.

Experience 1: Transcribe/Abstract-a-Document

1. Select a 19th or 20th century handwritten document to be transcribed. Crop the document image to eliminate portions of any other unrelated documents. Attach the image(s) to the chatbot using the + [plus] sign. Each image should be only one page. If the original image has two pages on the image, create a copy of the image then crop each image so that each only includes one page of the document. Attach as many images as needed to include the entire document.
2. Prepare your prompt:
 - **R:** You are a professional genealogist with expertise in _____ [country, e.g. American] paleography and the transcription and abstraction of 19th [or 18th, 20th, etc.] century handwritten _____ [type of document] documents
 - **G:** Your goal is to prepare an extract transcription and abstract of the document provided.
 - **C:** The attached image is a handwritten _____ [year the document was written] _____ [the document type: will, deed, probate, court record] from _____ [the location in which the document was created, e.g. Onondaga County, New York.]
 - **T:** Following the genealogical principles of document transcription transcribe the attached document verbatim. Provide the spelling, capitalization and punctuation exactly as it is presented in the original document. Make no corrections. If unsure about specific words or letters in a word, insert bracketed question mark [?] to denote uncertainty about a specific letter or bracketed comments to denote uncertainty regarding entire words [uncertain] and explain why it is illegible [illegible - page tear], [illegible - ink smudge], etc. Then, create an abstract of the document and include quotation marks " " when using extracts of 3 words or more as they appear in the document, such as quoting land description or bequeathed personal property.

WRITING EFFECTIVE FAMILY HISTORY A.I. PROMPTS

- **F:** Format your response in two sections: Section 1: Transcription. The transcript should be presented as a line-by-line exact transcription providing line breaks, hyphenations, strike-through words/phrases, inserted words/phrases, and spacing exactly, or as closely as possible, to how it appears in the original document. Section 2: Abstract narrative.

Experience 2: Summarize-a-Document

[NOTE: If the document you selected for summarization is handwritten, perform the Transcription exercise and then use the following as a layered prompt after the AI response/transcribed document.]

1. Select the document, or a transcript of the document, and attach the image(s) (or PDF/ Doc) to the chatbot using the + [plus] sign (e.g. obituary, deed, court record, will).
2. Prepare your prompt:
 - **R:** You are a professional genealogist and archivist with expertise in the use and analysis of _____ [the document type].
 - **G:** Your goal is to prepare concise and factual summary of this document.
 - **C:** Analyze and summarize the attached ____ page(s) of a _____ [type of document and name of person it pertains to, e.g. War of 1812 combined military service record for John Winslow].
 - **T:** Identify all information pertaining to the soldier's service include enlistment, movements, injuries, discharge, etc. and any other individuals identified in the record with their relationship to the soldier. If a relationship is not specifically defined within the document, speculate possible relationships and indicate those as possible relationships. Analyze the document in a step-by-step process to reach a conclusion and then formulate a response to avoid speculation. Review your response to ensure all information included in the response is accurate and verifiable.
 - **F:** Prepare an executive summary of no more than 2 pages. Provide bulleted lists of details under corresponding headings of the types of information found. Provide exact quotes or citations from the document for details included in the summary. Identify any information within the document that appears speculative or that needs additional research.

Experience 3: Extract-and-Analyze Data

1. Select census record and attach the image(s) to the chatbot using the + [plus] sign.
2. Prepare your prompt:
 - **R:** You are a professional genealogist with expertise in data analysis.
 - **G:** Your goal is to extract and analyze the data in this document in well organized and technically accurate format.
 - **C:** The uploaded document image.
 - **T:** Extract every person in the _____ [identify the family of interest] household. Calculate the approximate birth year based upon age for each household member. Identify any stated or possible relationships between household members and explain your reason for the "possible" relationships. Provide any demographic or biographical information found within the record for each individual in the household. Examine neighboring households for possible relationships to the _____ household members.

WRITING EFFECTIVE FAMILY HISTORY A.I. PROMPTS

- **F:** Present the extracted information in a markdown table with columns for: |Name | Gender | Age | Estimated Birth Year | Other information

Experience 4: Compare/Curate-Document-Data

1. Select the documents to be compared and attach the images to the chatbot using the + [plus] sign (e.g. vital records, church records, obituary, deeds, court record, will, etc).
2. Prepare your prompt:
 - **R:** You are a professional genealogist with expertise in the application and use of the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS).
 - **G:** Prepare a critical and objective comparison of the data found in these documents.
 - **C:** Information about _____ [identify person of interest] was found in multiple sources that need to be compared to ascertain validity of the conclusions and to identify any discrepancies between the sources.
 - **T:** Compare the information found in these sources. Evaluate the reliability of the information based upon source type and identity and relationship of the informant to the person of interest. Identify any conflicting information among the sources.
 - **F:** Prepare a genealogical biographical summary based upon the information found in these records. Identify any conflicting information and prepare a "Conflict Resolution Summary" weighing the pros and cons of each source. If no direct evidence addresses the person's dates and places of birth, marriage and death, provide a "Genealogical Proof Summary" which outline any indirect evidence supporting your conclusions.

Experience 5: Analyze-a-Photo

1. Select a tombstone image and attach it to the chatbot using the + [plus] sign.
2. Prepare your prompt:
 - **R:** You are a professional genealogist researcher experienced at reading historical handwritten documents, tombstones and old photographs.
 - **G:** Your goal is to analyze a tombstone photograph and extract information of genealogical or historical value.
 - **C:** Use the attached image
 - **T:** Analyze this image and 1) provide a complete transcription of all visible text; 2) provide a description of the physical condition (evidence of damage, weathering or wear and tear); 3) clearly separate what you can confidently read from what you are guessing; 4) identify any text that is partially illegible by providing your best reading with [brackets] around any uncertain portions; and 5) note any symbols, decorative elements, or other non-text features and their meaning - identifying any meanings that you have hypothesized. Do not describe what "should" be there based on context. Only describe what is visible in the image.
 - **F:** Present a transcription of visible text and bulleted statements about analysis of image condition, text and assessment confidence, and description/analysis of any iconography.