

AI ETIQUETTE

From the dopamine loops in our brains to the massive data centers straining the planet, every prompt has a hidden cost. AI systems are seductive—affirming your choices and validating your productivity until, without noticing, you've outsourced your judgment.

This isn't a system failure; it's exactly how it was designed to work. Conscious prompting means reclaiming your digital sovereignty. Below are 10 principles for the intentional use of AI. Do not take these rules too serious, but stay curious! Enjoy!

#01

Do Not Prompt as Your First Move.

"Human first, AI second" is the sequence. For core problem-solving and navigating early ambiguity, you cannot outsource raw observation and human presence. Starting with a prompt locks you into a machine's logic before you have even stepped into the real world to interview your audience, speak with your client, or collaborate with a teammate.

Be present first. Step away from the screen to observe, listen, and define the problem frame. Sketch 2–3 core concepts with your team or users to establish a true human baseline and protect your project from algorithmic anchoring. Bring AI into the loop only after this foundation is built—using it strictly for speed, scaling variations, or controlled exploration.

Your opening move dictates who controls the project. If you prompt directly from the start without a grounded intent or real-world goal, you will get lost in the machine's parameters. Let human dialogue and lived observation do the heavy creative lifting; let the AI handle execution.

#02

Do Not Prompt to Outsource Your Judgment.

AI is great at rapid-fire ideas, but its polished output creates a trap: it looks finished, so your brain stops questioning its logic. This creates an immediate anchoring bias, making it hard to think outside the machine's initial suggestions.

When Diverging: Frame your problem space before you prompt. Use AI to expand options, but rely on your own vision to separate the noise from actual signal.

When Converging: Set your own success criteria before narrowing down. Use AI only to stress-test or organize your choices, never to make the final selection.

Deciding which ideas are worth it and why is the core of design thinking. If you let the system curate your choices, you've outsourced your authority. Remember: Your judgment is irreplaceable!

#03

Do Not Prompt When Ethics or Cultural Sensitivity Matter.

AI systems hallucinate, embed cultural bias, and misrepresent minority aesthetics.

Ethical responsibility cannot be delegated. Stay accountable. When representing marginalized communities, dealing with trauma, or creating culturally embedded symbols, work human-only. The designer remains responsible.

#04

Do Not Prompt When Authorship or Craft Matters.

Your creative identity and personal style are what make you a design leader. Leadership comes from a unique perspective, so you need to build that foundation yourself.

Study artists deeply. Explore new media. Create moodboards. Build your own library of references, styles, visual vocabularies, textures, graphics, and inspirations. Or work entirely without AI. Your hand, your time, and your curiosity are part of the craft.

Authorship is about meaning, not just producing finished files. If AI generates your style, you risk becoming an editor of the machine's taste rather than the author of your own. Anyone can copy a style. To develop a recognizable voice, you have to do the work of finding it yourself.

#05

Do Not Prompt When You Need Situated Knowledge.

You cannot outsource observation. Real users, materials, spatial contexts, lived constraints—these require embodied presence. Interview, speak to your audience, listen, observe, be curious. Be present. When conducting fieldwork, UX observation, user testing, or responding to a client's specific constraints—observe and listen without AI mediation.

#06

Do Not Prompt When Confidentiality Is Required.

Many systems pose privacy and IP risks. Data may be logged, cached, or used for model improvement. Protect what's sensitive. When working under NDAs, designing prelaunch products, or handling protected materials—keep AI out of the loop.

Many commercial AI systems pose privacy risks, as your data can be logged or used to train future models. When working under NDAs, designing pre-launch products, or handling proprietary client materials, keep cloud-based AI out of the loop. If you must use AI, build a secure workaround: run open-source models locally on your own machine entirely offline, or use private enterprise APIs that contractually guarantee data privacy.

Once you paste sensitive data into a standard cloud prompt, you lose control of it forever. If your setup isn't running locally or securely sandboxed, keep the work entirely human-only.

#07

Do Not Prompt to Perfect.

The most insidious cost is invisible: designer dependency. Each prompt confirms competence; each output invites another prompt, an endless prompt loop! You cycle through variations chasing increasingly specific results from inherently stochastic systems, unaware you are participating in energy extraction and the gradual outsourcing of your judgment.

Recognize the seduction. If you find yourself prompting repeatedly to "get it right," stop. The system is working as designed—and you are the extraction.

#08

Do Not Prompt Blind to the Hidden Supply Chain.

Every prompt triggers a massive, invisible global footprint of material extraction and human labor. GenAI queries consume roughly 10 times more energy than a standard online search, alongside vast amounts of water for data center cooling.

Beneath this environmental toll lies a grueling layer of digital labor—specifically, underpaid data labelers and content moderators screening toxic material behind the scenes.

* The Reality: A prompt is never just an abstract computational act; it actively draws on fragile power grids, natural resources, and exploited labor.

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Conscious design requires looking past the smooth, instant interface. Before you hit enter, practice strategic restraint and ask yourself: Is this specific query worth its planetary and human cost?

#09

Stop Prompting When AI Begins to Drive the Direction.

You are the designer. AI is the collaborator. If the system is making the creative decisions and you are choosing between its outputs, you have reversed the relationship. Reclaim authority. Stop. Go back to human thinking. Reassert your judgment!

#10

Do Not Prompt When You Seek the Unexpected.

GenAI works on probability—it predicts the most likely next pixel or word based on a mathematical average of what already exists. Prompting for creative breakthroughs inherently funnels your work into a statistical mean. There is nothing new happening here!

If you want truly innovative, novel, disruptive, or avant-garde design, you must look outside the latent space of existing internet data. True innovation lives in the statistically improbable.

Do not take these rules too serious, but stay curious!