Cochise College Center for Lifelong Learning

Boost Your Business with AI

Practical AI for Small Business Owners

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Introduction

Welcome to **Boost Your Business with AI.**[1] You are already past the starting line. You have used AI, you know what a prompt is, and you have seen what these tools can produce. Today is about applying that experience strategically to the work you actually do every day as a business owner.

Running a small business in southern Arizona means wearing many hats. You write your own emails, manage your own marketing, handle customer concerns, and make decisions without a team of analysts behind you. AI will not run your business for you, but it can work alongside you in all of those roles, and do it at any hour, at no cost beyond your time.

What You Need

- A computer with a web browser
- **DuckDuckGo AI Chat** (`https://duck.ai`) — no account required

A Note on Tools

You may have seen this class described as covering "GPT tools." Today we will work with **Claude** and **DuckDuckGo AI Chat**, but the prompting skills you learn apply to any AI chat tool, including ChatGPT, Gemini, and others. Once you know how to write an effective prompt, that skill moves with you. Use whichever tool fits your budget and workflow.

Safety First

A few reminders before you start typing:

- **Check facts.** AI can state incorrect information confidently. Verify anything specific — a law, a statistic, a name, a date — before you rely on it.
- **Keep sensitive information out.** Do not paste customer data, employee records, financial account numbers, or anything genuinely private into a public AI tool.
- **You own the final product.** Review everything before it goes to a customer, a vendor, or the public. Your name is on it.

[1] Written by George Self with assistance from Claude and ChatGPT. It was formatted with LaTeX.

A Quick Reminder: The Prompt Blueprint

From your Power Prompting class, you know that a strong prompt has four parts:

- **Role** — tell AI who to be for this task
- **Background** — give context about your specific situation
- **Request** — state exactly what you want produced
- **Format** — specify length, format, tone, and any exclusions

Every activity today uses this structure. The more specific you are about your own business in the Background step, the more useful the results will be.

Learning Goals

By the end of this session, you will:

- Use AI to draft and improve business communications in minutes
- Generate and vary marketing content across multiple formats
- Build a customer persona and extract insights from real feedback
- Use AI as a thinking partner when working through business decisions
- Understand what custom AI tools can do and when they are worth pursuing

Big Idea

AI is most valuable when you give it your real situation. Generic prompts produce generic results. Specific prompts produce work you can actually use.

Module 1: Writing That Works

Most small business owners spend more time writing than they expect. Emails to customers, responses to reviews, social media posts, announcements, proposals, follow-ups. The writing itself is not hard, but it takes time, and time is the one thing you cannot get more of.

AI is particularly good at writing tasks because language is exactly what it was built to handle. It can draft a message from a few bullet points, rewrite something

you wrote quickly, adjust the tone for a different audience, or give you five variations of the same post so you can pick the one that feels right.

Business Communications

The most common business writing task is also one where AI adds immediate value: responding to customers. Whether you are following up on a quote, handling a concern, or thanking someone for their business, AI can give you a solid first draft in seconds.

Activity 1.1: Draft a Customer Email From Scratch

Think of an email you have been putting off writing, or one you write repeatedly. Use The Prompt Blueprint to prompt DuckDuckGo AI Chat. Here is a starter example you can adapt to your own situation:

```
You are a professional business writer for a small HVAC company in
  Sierra Vista, Arizona. I need to follow up with a customer who
received a repair estimate two weeks ago and has not responded. I
want to check in, remind them the estimate is still valid, and offer
to answer any questions. Write a brief, friendly email. Keep it to
three short paragraphs. Use a professional but warm tone. Do not
                    include a subject line.
```

Replace the business type and scenario with your own. After you read the result, try these follow-up prompts:

- `Make it shorter and more direct.`
- `Rewrite this in a more casual tone, as if I know this customer personally.`
- `Add a sentence that creates a gentle sense of urgency without being pushy.`

What changed with each follow-up? Which version would you actually send?

Activity 1.2: Respond to a Difficult Customer Message

Copy and paste this message into DuckDuckGo AI Chat and ask it to draft a response for your business:

```
I am going to paste a customer complaint message. Please help me
write a professional, calm response that acknowledges their concern,
apologizes without admitting fault, and offers a path to resolve it.
```

```
Here is the message: "I have been waiting three weeks for a callback.
Nobody returns my calls and I am starting to wonder if your company
even cares about customers anymore. I will be leaving a review."
```

After reading the draft:

- Does the tone match how you want your business to sound?
- Is there anything in the response you would remove or change?
- How long did it take AI to produce this compared to writing it yourself?

Marketing Content

Creating content for social media, newsletters, or your website is one of the most time-consuming parts of running a small business. AI can produce multiple variations quickly, which means you spend your time choosing and refining rather than staring at a blank page.

Activity 1.3: Generate Social Media Content Variations

Write one social media post about your business and paste it into DuckDuckGo AI Chat with this prompt:

```
I run a small landscaping business in Bisbee, Arizona. Here is a
social media post I wrote: [paste your post here]. Please rewrite
this post in five different styles: (1) friendly and conversational,
(2) professional and informative, (3) brief and punchy (under 20
words), (4) question-based to encourage comments, and (5)
storytelling style that opens with a customer scenario.
```

If you do not have a post ready, use this placeholder: “We offer year-round landscaping services for homes and businesses in the greater Sierra Vista area. Call today for a free estimate.”
Compare the five versions:

- Which one sounds most like you?
- Which one would you most likely stop and read if you saw it in your feed?
- Could you use different versions on different platforms (Facebook vs. LinkedIn)?

Module 1 Checklist

1. Drafted or improved a real business email using DuckDuckGo AI Chat
2. Generated at least five variations of a social media post
3. Identified which voice and tone best matches your business

Module 2: Knowing Your Customers

Every business decision you make is really a question about your customers: What do they want? What bothers them? What would make them choose you over a competitor? Traditionally, answering those questions required surveys, focus groups, or expensive market research. AI does not replace that research, but it can help you think more systematically about customers you already know, and extract patterns from feedback you already have.

Building a Customer Persona

A customer persona is a detailed profile of your ideal customer. Marketing professionals use them to focus their messaging, but any business owner can use one. The more specifically you can describe who you are trying to reach, the more useful the persona becomes.

Activity 2.1: Build a Customer Persona for Your Business

Describe your best or most typical customer to DuckDuckGo AI Chat and ask it to build a persona. Here is an example prompt:

```
You are a marketing consultant. I own a small dog grooming salon in
Sierra Vista, Arizona. My best customers are women between 40 and 65
who own one or two small-to-medium dogs. They care a lot about how
their dogs are treated, not just how they look. They have been burned
by groomers who rushed the job. Build a detailed customer persona for
this type of customer. Include their demographics, what they value,
what frustrates them, where they find businesses like mine, and what
would make them choose one groomer over another.
```

After reading the persona, ask these follow-up questions:

- `Based on this persona, what is the single most important thing I should emphasize in my marketing?`
- `What would this customer's main hesitation be about trying a new groomer for the first time?`

- `Write three sentences I could put on my website that would speak directly to this customer's concerns.`

Analyzing Customer Feedback

If you have received online reviews, emails from customers, or survey responses, you are sitting on useful information. Reading through it all takes time, and it is easy to focus on the most recent review or the loudest voice. AI can read all of it at once and surface patterns you might miss.

Activity 2.2: Extract Insights From Customer Reviews

Copy and paste the entire block below into DuckDuckGo AI Chat as a single message. It combines six sample reviews for a fictional Tombstone, Arizona pottery studio with the instructions for analyzing them. (In your own business, you would replace the reviews with your actual reviews from Google, Yelp, or Facebook.)

```
I am going to give you six customer reviews for my small business, a pottery studio in Tombstone, Arizona. Please analyze them and give me: (1) the top three things customers appreciate most, (2) the top three complaints or concerns, (3) one thing I should fix immediately, and (4) one opportunity to grow my business based on what customers are asking for. Here are the reviews. Review 1: "Wonderful experience. The instructor was patient and never made me feel bad for being a beginner. My bowl turned out crooked but I love it. Will definitely come back." Review 2: "The studio is charming but parking was a nightmare. We had to park two blocks away. Inside, everything was great, friendly staff and good instruction." Review 3: "Bought a gift certificate for my daughter. She loved it. The staff remembered her name when she came in. That personal touch is rare these days." Review 4: "Classes fill up fast and the website doesn't show which ones are full until you try to book. Wasted 20 minutes trying to register. Fix the website." Review 5: "Third time taking a class here. The beginner class is the same every time, I wish there were more advanced options for people who have been coming for a while." Review 6: "Great location, right in the heart of Old Town. Prices are fair for the experience you get. The only thing I'd change is adding more evening hours."
```

After reading the analysis:

- Did DuckDuckGo identify anything you would not have noticed by reading the reviews yourself?

- DuckDuckGo AI Chat lets you switch models in the same conversation. Look below the response for the **Switch Model** button, choose a different model, and run the same prompt again. Which analysis is more actionable?
- How would you use this kind of analysis on your own real reviews?

Module 2 Checklist

1. Built a customer persona specific to your own business
2. Generated marketing language tailored to that persona
3. Used DuckDuckGo AI Chat to analyze customer reviews and identify patterns
4. Compared responses from two different models using DuckDuckGo's Model Switcher

Module 3: Thinking Through Hard Decisions

Running a business means making decisions with incomplete information. Should you hire someone or stay solo? Raise prices? Drop a service that is not profitable? Add a new one? Move locations? These decisions have real consequences and they are often made under pressure, without time to think carefully.

AI is not a decision-maker. It does not know your finances, your market, or your customers the way you do. But it can be a useful thinking partner: helping you structure the question, surface considerations you might have overlooked, and pressure-test your reasoning before you commit.

AI as a Thinking Partner

The most useful thing you can ask AI to do in a decision is not to tell you what to do. It is to help you think better. That means asking it to play devil's advocate, list what could go wrong, or identify the assumptions you are making that might not be true.

Activity 3.1: Walk a Business Decision Through AI

Choose a decision you are currently weighing in your business, or use this scenario: *You run a two-person landscaping company and are considering hiring a third employee for the first time.*
Work through the decision with DuckDuckGo AI Chat using this sequence of prompts:
Step 1 — Get the lay of the land:

```
I own a small landscaping business in the Sierra Vista area with two
```

```
employees including myself. I am considering hiring a third person
full-time. What are the most important factors I should think through
before making this decision?
```

Step 2 — Challenge your assumptions:

```
I am leaning toward hiring. Play devil's advocate. What are the
strongest arguments against hiring right now?
```

Step 3 — Find the blind spots:

```
What are the things most small business owners overlook when they
hire their first non-family employee?
```

Step 4 — Get a framework:

```
Give me five questions I should be able to answer confidently before
I decide to hire. If I cannot answer them, I am probably not ready.
```

After working through the sequence:

- Did any of the responses surface something you had not considered?
- Was the devil's advocate response genuinely challenging, or did it feel generic?
- How is this different from searching for articles about hiring?

Activity 3.2: Ask AI to Pressure-Test Your Plan

Think of something you have already decided to do in your business, or a plan you are fairly confident about. Ask DuckDuckGo AI Chat to push back:

```
I have decided to [describe your plan]. I am fairly confident this is
the right move. I want you to play the role of a skeptical business
advisor. Give me the three strongest arguments that this plan could
fail, and for each one, tell me what I would need to have in place to
reduce that risk.
```

This kind of prompt is valuable precisely because you are confident. The point is not to talk yourself out of your decision. It is to identify the risks worth preparing for.

Custom AI Tools: What They Are and What They Can Do

The following is an instructor demonstration. You will watch this section rather than follow along on your own computer.

So far, every activity has started with you writing a fresh prompt in DuckDuckGo AI Chat. That works well, but it has a limitation: you have to set the context every time. You have to tell AI what role to play, describe your business, and specify the format you want, for every session.

A **Claude Project** is a workspace inside Claude (claude.ai) that has been pre-configured with custom instructions and your own uploaded files, such as a price list, a style guide, or samples of your past writing. Instead of writing a full Prompt Blueprint prompt from scratch, you open the Project and every conversation inside it already knows your business, your tone, and the material you gave it.

What the Instructor Will Show

- A Claude Project configured as a customer service assistant for a small retail shop, with custom instructions and a few uploaded reference files
- How the same question produces very different results in a plain Claude conversation versus one inside the configured Project
- How to create a Project (requires a Claude subscription, Claude Pro, approximately $20 per month)
- A quick look at Claude **Skills**: pre-built, reusable capabilities, including ready-made Skills for working with Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and PDF files, that Claude can use automatically once added to a conversation
- A free alternative: writing a reusable "master prompt" you save and paste at the start of each session

The Free Alternative: A Reusable Master Prompt

If you do not have a Claude subscription, you can get most of the benefit by saving a master prompt in a notes app or document. At the start of any AI session, paste it in first:

```
For this entire conversation, you are a marketing assistant for [Your Business Name], a [type of business] in [your city]. My customers are [brief description]. My tone is [warm/professional/casual]. When I ask for written content, always match this tone and keep it specific to my business.
```

Save this once, update it when your business changes, and paste it at the

start of any session where you want AI to know your context from the beginning.

Module 3 Checklist

1. Walked a real or simulated business decision through a multi-step AI conversation
2. Used the devil's advocate prompt to challenge a plan
3. Observed the Claude Project demonstration
4. Drafted or identified a master prompt for your own business

Ready-to-Use Prompt Library

Copy any of these prompts and fill in the brackets with your own business details. Each prompt is written using The Prompt Blueprint.

Communications

Price increase announcement:

```
You are a professional business writer. I own a [type of business] in [city]. I need to announce a [X]% price increase effective [date]. My customers are [brief description]. Write a brief, honest email explaining the change and thanking them for their loyalty. Keep it under 150 words. Professional but warm tone.
```

New service announcement:

```
You are a marketing copywriter for small local businesses. I am adding [new service] to my [type of business] in [city]. Write a short announcement I can post on Facebook and send as an email. Two versions: one for Facebook (casual, 50 words), one for email (professional, 100 words). Include a call to action in both.
```

Responding to a negative review:

```
You are a customer service specialist. I own a [type of business]. A customer left this review: [paste review]. Write a professional, empathetic public response. Acknowledge their experience, do not get defensive, and invite them to contact me directly to resolve it. Under 75 words.
```

Marketing

Monthly newsletter content ideas:

```
You are a content strategist for small businesses. I run a [type of business] in [city]. My customers are [description]. Give me five newsletter content ideas for [month]. For each idea, give me a one-sentence subject line and a two-sentence summary of what the article would cover.
```

Google Business profile description:

```
You are a local SEO copywriter. I own [business name], a [type of business] in [city, state]. I serve [description of customers]. Write a Google Business profile description that is 150-200 words, includes the city name and business type naturally, and ends with a call to action.
```

Seasonal promotion:

```
You are a marketing copywriter. I run a [type of business] in [city]. Create a [season/holiday] promotion idea including: a promotion concept, a short name for it, a Facebook post announcing it (60 words), and a brief email subject line. Keep it relevant to customers in southern Arizona.
```

Customer Analysis

Understand a customer complaint pattern:

```
You are a business analyst. I am going to paste several customer complaints I have received. Please identify the top three underlying issues, explain what each one likely signals about my business processes, and suggest one concrete fix for each. Here are the complaints: [paste complaints]
```

Write survey questions:

```
You are a customer research specialist. I own a [type of business] and want to send a short survey to understand why some customers do not return after their first visit. Write five survey questions. Keep them brief and easy to answer. Include one open-ended question and four multiple-choice or rating questions.
```

Decision Support

Evaluate a vendor or partner:

```
You are a business advisor. I am considering [describe the vendor or partnership arrangement]. Give me ten questions I should ask or research before committing. Flag any that are especially important for small businesses.
```

Write a simple business case:

```
You are a business analyst. I am considering [describe the investment or
change]. Help me build a simple one-page business case. Include: what
problem this solves, estimated costs, expected benefits, biggest risks, and
a go/no-go recommendation framework. Keep the language straightforward, not
corporate.
```

Going Further

Tools Used in This Class

- **DuckDuckGo AI Chat** (`https://duck.ai`) — No account required. Gives you a choice of underlying models in the same conversation via the Switch Model button.
- **Cochise AI** (`https://cochiseai.com`) — Local AI consulting resources for small businesses and nonprofits in the Cochise County area.

Continue Learning

- **A.I. Power Prompting** — If you have not taken this class, it covers The Prompt Blueprint in depth and is a strong complement to this one.
- **georgeteaches.com** (`https://georgeteaches.com`) — Handouts, resources, and upcoming CLL class schedules.
- **Anthropic Help Center** (`https://support.claude.com`) — Official documentation for Claude, including how to set up Projects and Skills.
- **Anthropic Academy** (`https://anthropic.com/learn`) — Free courses from the makers of Claude, open to anyone, not just Claude users. Includes AI Fluency: Framework and Foundations, which teaches the 4-D Framework (Delegation, Description, Discernment, Diligence) referenced in A.I. Power Prompting.

A Note on AI Reliability

AI tools are useful, but they are not infallible. Keep these guidelines in mind as you use them in your business:

- **Check facts.** AI can state incorrect information confidently. Any specific fact — a law, a statistic, a name, a date — should be verified from a primary source before you rely on it.
- **Keep sensitive information out.** Do not paste customer data, employee records, financial account numbers, or anything genuinely private into a public AI tool.
- **You own the final product.** AI produces drafts. Review everything before it goes to a customer, a vendor, or the public. Your name is on it.

- **Your judgment is the one thing AI cannot replace.** It can help you think, but it does not know your community, your relationships, or the things that matter most to your customers. Those belong to you.

Quick Reference Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy while you work.

The Prompt Blueprint

- **Role** — who should AI be for this task?
- **Background** — what is your specific situation?
- **Request** — what exactly do you want produced?
- **Format** — length, format, tone, and any exclusions

Two Prompts You Can Use Anywhere

To draft anything from scratch:

```
You are a [role] for a [type of business] in [city]. I need [what you want]. My customers are [brief description]. Write it in a [tone] tone and keep it under [length].
```

To improve something you already wrote:

```
Here is a draft: [paste your text]. Rewrite it to be [shorter / more casual / more persuasive / etc.].
```

Three Safety Rules

- **Check facts** before you rely on them.
- **Keep private information out** of public AI tools.
- **You own the final product** — review it before it goes out.