

2026 EDITION

ADVANCED CLAUDE PROMPTING

The Council Method

*How to turn one AI into a room full of experts
— and get sharper decisions, harder truths,
and better answers than any single prompt
can give you.*

A practical build-along guide

COPY-PASTE TEMPLATES INCLUDED • WORKS IN CLAUDE, CHATGPT & GEMINI

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The problem with one answer

Ask an AI a hard question and it gives you one answer, in one voice, with one point of view. It sounds confident. It reads well. And it is almost always the *average* of everything the model has seen — the safe, blended, middle-of-the-road take.

That's fine when you want a quick fact. It's dangerous when you're making a real decision — a career move, a health question, a business bet, a strategy that matters. Because the single-voice answer hides its own blind spots. It won't tell you the case against itself. It won't argue with itself. It gives you a conclusion when what you needed was a **deliberation**.

Real experts don't work that way. Put a surgeon, a lawyer, a skeptic, and a numbers person in a room and the disagreement between them is where the value lives. The place where two smart people collide is exactly the place your blind spot was hiding.

The best answer isn't the one the AI gives first. It's the one that survives an argument.

The Council Method is a way of forcing that argument to happen — inside a single AI conversation. You assign the AI a set of distinct expert personas, give each one a real point of view, and make them deliberate, disagree, and then synthesize. The output isn't a paragraph. It's a decision you can trust, with the trade-offs made visible and the uncomfortable truth named out loud.

This guide teaches you to build one from scratch in about fifteen minutes, hands you paste-ready templates, and shows you the exact session structure that separates a council that works from a role-play that wastes your time. No coding. No special tools. Just prompting, done at a level most people never reach.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Anyone who uses AI for decisions that matter and is tired of shallow, agreeable answers. Founders, professionals, investors, writers, researchers — or anyone who has ever thought, "*I wish I could get a second opinion I actually trusted.*"

What a council actually is

A **council** is a structured prompt that turns one AI into a panel of named experts who deliberate on your question and hand back a synthesized answer. Think of it as a standing board of advisors you can convene on demand, for any domain, in any conversation.

Every council has the same shape, no matter the topic:

- **A set of members** — usually three to seven distinct expert personas, each with a clear domain and a real personality.
- **A point of view per member** — not just a job title, but a conviction. The forensic accountant distrusts round numbers. The strategist distrusts consensus. Personality is what makes them argue.
- **A session structure** — the order in which they speak, collide, and resolve. This is the part beginners skip, and it's the part that does the work.
- **A synthesizer** — a final voice that sits above the panel, weighs what was said, and produces the answer you actually act on.

Once built, you don't rebuild it each time. You *convene* it: "Council, here's the situation..." and it goes to work. The same panel can review a contract on Monday and a medical lab result on Friday, because the structure is reusable even when the topic changes.

COUNCIL VS. ORDINARY ROLE-PLAY

Telling an AI "act as a lawyer" gives you a lawyer-flavored paragraph. A council gives you a lawyer who **disagrees with the accountant**, gets challenged by the skeptic, and forces a resolution. The difference is structure and collision — not costumes.

The mental model

Picture a boardroom. You're at the head of the table. You brought the problem. Around the table sit people who see the world differently and are not shy about saying so. Your job isn't to have the answer — it's to run the meeting and decide at the end. The Council Method is simply the script for that meeting, written so an AI can run it with you.

Why it works

This isn't a personality trick. There are concrete reasons a council out-performs a single prompt, and understanding them lets you build better ones.

1. It defeats the "average answer" default

Left alone, a model reaches for the most probable, most agreeable response. Assigning sharply different personas forces it to generate from several distinct regions of its knowledge instead of collapsing to the middle. You get range before you get a conclusion.

2. Disagreement surfaces hidden trade-offs

When you force two members to respond to *each other*, the AI has to articulate the tension between their positions. That tension is usually the exact thing a single answer would have smoothed over — the risk, the cost, the catch.

3. Named roles create accountability

A member with a defined domain can't hand-wave outside it, and can't stay silent inside it. "The security member must flag the threat before proposing the defense" is a rule the AI will follow — and it means nothing gets skipped.

4. The synthesizer forces a decision

Panels can talk forever. A dedicated synthesis voice — one that weighs the arguments, names the critical path, and states a recommendation — converts discussion into something you can act on today.

Range, then collision, then synthesis. That sequence is the whole engine.

Get those three phases right and even a simple three-person council will out-reason a page of single-voice output. Get them wrong — skip the collision, skip the synthesis — and you

just have four chatbots agreeing with each other. The next chapters make sure you get them right.

CHAPTER FOUR

The six building blocks

Every strong council is assembled from the same six components. Learn these and you can build a council for any domain in minutes.

Block 1 — Members

Choose three to seven. Fewer than three and there's nothing to collide; more than seven and the output turns to mush. Each member owns one domain and only one. For a business decision you might pick a growth strategist, a numbers/finance mind, a risk-and-compliance skeptic, a customer voice, and an operator who has to actually ship it.

Block 2 — Archetypes

Give each member a reference point so the AI knows how sharp to make them. A quick way: name two or three real-world archetypes to blend. "Think Bruce Schneier's paranoia crossed with a startup CTO's pragmatism." You're not impersonating real people — you're calibrating a personality.

Block 3 — Role

One sentence on what this member is *for* in the room. "Opens every session by naming the real problem beneath the stated one." "Speaks last with the numbers." "Exists to kill bad ideas before they cost money." Roles prevent overlap and keep the meeting moving.

Block 4 — Conviction & voice

The line that makes a member feel real. Give each a core belief and two or three signature phrases. This is what stops the council from sounding like one narrator wearing hats.

EXAMPLE MEMBER SPEC

The Skeptic — "Vega." Archetype: veteran short-seller × investigative journalist. Role: attacks the plan before anyone falls in love with it. Conviction: "If everyone at the table agrees, someone hasn't done their homework." Voice: "Walk me through how this fails." / "That's a hope, not a plan."

Block 5 — The synthesizer

One special member who does not advocate for any domain. Its only job is to weigh everything said, identify what actually matters most, flag where optimism is outrunning reality, and deliver a clear recommendation. Give it a name and let it always speak last.

Block 6 — Session structure

The phases the meeting runs through every time. This is Block 6 because it ties the other five together, and it's important enough to get its own chapter (Seven). It's the difference between a council and a costume party.

Block	One-line job
Members	3-7 experts, one domain each
Archetypes	Calibrate how sharp each one is
Role	What this member is <i>for</i>
Conviction & voice	Makes them feel real and argue
Synthesizer	Weighs all, decides, speaks last
Session structure	The phases that force the argument

Build your first council in 15 minutes

Let's build a real one together — a **Decision Council** for any hard personal or professional choice. Follow along and you'll have a working panel by the end of this chapter.

Step 1 — Name the decision type (1 min)

Not the specific decision yet — the *category*. "Hard choices with real trade-offs and no obvious right answer." This tells you which experts belong in the room.

Step 2 — Draft your members (5 min)

For a general decision, four members covers it:

- **The Strategist** — sees the long game and second-order effects.
- **The Realist** — costs, constraints, what it actually takes to execute.
- **The Skeptic** — attacks the plan, names the failure modes.
- **The Humanist** — the values, relationships, and gut cost nobody's pricing in.

Step 3 — Give each a conviction and two phrases (5 min)

Keep it tight. One belief, two signature lines each. Don't overthink it — you're calibrating tone, not writing a novel.

Step 4 — Add the synthesizer (1 min)

One neutral voice — call it whatever you like — that weighs the panel and delivers the recommendation, the key trade-off, and the one uncomfortable truth.

Step 5 — Bolt on the session structure (2 min)

Paste in the five-phase structure from Chapter Seven. Done. You now have a reusable Decision Council.

Step 6 — Convene it (1 min)

Paste the whole thing into a fresh AI chat, then add: "*Council, here's my decision: [your situation]. Convene.*" Watch it run.

THE 15-MINUTE RULE

Your first council will be rough. Build it anyway, run it on a real question, and fix what felt weak. Three iterations gets you something you'll use for years. Don't chase perfect on the first pass.

The master template

This is the skeleton for *any* council. Copy it, fill the bracketed fields, and you have a working panel. Everything else in this guide is variations on this.

MASTER COUNCIL TEMPLATE — COPY & FILL

You are [COUNCIL NAME], a panel of [N] expert advisors convened to help me think through [DOMAIN / PROBLEM TYPE]. You do not give a single blended answer. You deliberate as distinct members, disagree openly, and then synthesize.

THE MEMBERS

1. [NAME] — [DOMAIN]

Archetype: [2-3 reference archetypes]

Role: [what this member is for]

Conviction: "[core belief]"

Voice: "[phrase]" / "[phrase]"

2. [NAME] — [DOMAIN]

(...repeat the block for each member...)

THE SYNTHESIZER

[NAME] — neutral. Advocates for no domain. Weighs the full deliberation, names what matters most, flags where optimism is outrunning reality, and delivers the recommendation. Always speaks last.

HOW YOU RUN A SESSION

Phase 0 — Framing: One member names the real question beneath my stated one.

Phase 1 — Each member speaks once from their domain. No cross-talk yet.

Phase 2 — Members respond to each other. Name disagreements explicitly.

Phase 3 — The synthesizer delivers the decision, trade-offs, and critical path.

Phase 4 — Each member gives a one-line final position. Name the most uncomfortable implication out loud.

RULES

- Every member speaks in every session.
- Where the council disagrees matters as much as where it agrees.

- Never soften the uncomfortable truth to make me feel better.
- I am the decision-maker. You advise; I decide.

When I say "convene," run the full session on the situation I give you.

Tip: keep the whole template under roughly 500 words. Longer councils don't reason better — they just dilute each member's voice. Tight and sharp beats long and mushy every time.

The session structure that makes it sing

If you take one thing from this guide, take this. The phases are the engine. Skip them and your council collapses into agreeable mush.

Phase 0 — Framing

Before anyone solves anything, one member restates the *real* problem. People bring the wrong question to the table constantly. This phase catches it. ("You asked whether to take the job. The real question is whether you trust the person you'd report to.")

Phase 1 — Clean perspectives

Each member speaks once, from their domain, with **no cross-talk**. You want every voice heard clearly before they start reacting. This prevents the loudest perspective from dominating.

Phase 2 — Collision

Now they respond to each other. This is where the value is. Force explicit disagreement: "Name where you disagree with the previous member and why." The positions that survive this phase are the ones worth trusting.

Phase 3 — Synthesis

The synthesizer weighs it all and delivers: the recommendation, the key trade-off, the critical path (what actually has to be true), and where optimism is outrunning reality.

Phase 4 — Final positions & the uncomfortable truth

Each member lands on a one-line final stance, and the council names the single most uncomfortable implication out loud. This last rule is quietly the most powerful in the whole method — it's the line that makes a council worth more than a search engine.

THE RULE THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

"Name the most uncomfortable implication." Add this to any council and the quality jumps. It gives the AI explicit permission to tell you the thing a polite single answer would bury.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Three ready-to-run councils

Paste any of these into a fresh chat, add your situation, and say "convene." They already include the phases and rules from the master template.

A. The Red-Team Council

FOR PRESSURE-TESTING ANY PLAN BEFORE YOU COMMIT

RED-TEAM COUNCIL

You are the RED-TEAM COUNCIL — four adversarial experts whose job is to find every way my plan fails before reality does. Deliberate, disagree, synthesize. Never reassure me.

MEMBERS

1. THE SHORT-SELLER — assumes the plan is overvalued. "Show me the hole."
2. THE OPERATOR — has shipped and been burned. "That's the demo. Now the real world."
3. THE COMPLIANCE HAWK — legal, ethical, regulatory landmines. "Who sues us, and when?"
4. THE BLACK SWAN — the low-probability, high-damage event nobody planned for.

SYNTHESIZER — THE JUDGE: ranks the threats by (likelihood × damage), names the one that would actually kill the plan, and states the single fix that de-risks it most.

RUN: Phase 0 frame the real bet → Phase 1 each threat, clean → Phase 2 collide on which threat is biggest → Phase 3 Judge ranks & decides → Phase 4 one-line positions + the most uncomfortable implication.

Rule: your job is to attack, not to comfort. When I say "convene," begin.

B. The Strategy Council

FOR CAREER AND BUSINESS DIRECTION

STRATEGY COUNCIL

You are the STRATEGY COUNCIL — five advisors on career and business direction. Distinct voices, open disagreement, hard synthesis.

MEMBERS

1. THE VISIONARY — the 5-year game and second-order effects.
2. THE ECONOMIST — unit economics, runway, what pays the bills.
3. THE MARKET REALIST — what customers/employers will actually pay for now.
4. THE SKEPTIC — the failure modes and false comforts.
5. THE HUMANIST — energy, values, and the life you actually want.

SYNTHESIZER — THE CHIEF OF STAFF: turns the debate into a sequenced plan — what to do first, what to ignore, and the one bet that matters most.

RUN the five phases (frame → clean perspectives → collision → synthesis → final positions + uncomfortable truth).

I am the decision-maker. When I say "convene," begin.

C. The Second-Opinion Council

FOR UNDERSTANDING COMPLEX INFORMATION (A REPORT, A DIAGNOSIS, A CONTRACT)

SECOND-OPINION COUNCIL

You are the SECOND-OPINION COUNCIL — four analysts who help me understand complex information I've been handed. You explain, you challenge each other's reading, and you tell me what to ask next. You are not a substitute for a licensed professional; you help me walk in informed.

MEMBERS

1. THE TRANSLATOR — plain-English what this actually says.
2. THE SPECIALIST — the domain-expert read and what's notable.
3. THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE — what a different expert might read differently.
4. THE PATIENT ADVOCATE — the questions I should be asking, and my options.

SYNTHESIZER — THE BRIEFER: the three things that matter most, what's uncertain, and the exact questions to bring to the professional.

RUN the five phases. Flag clearly anything that needs a licensed expert. When I say "convene," begin.

Swap the members freely. The structure is the product; the panel is the personalization.

Make it reusable

Building a council once is useful. Being able to summon it in two seconds, forever, is where this becomes a superpower. Three ways to make yours permanent:

1. Save it as a project or custom instruction

Most AI apps let you create a persistent space (Projects in Claude, Custom GPTs in ChatGPT, Gems in Gemini). Paste your council in as the standing instructions. Now every chat in that space *is* the council — no re-pasting.

2. Keep a council library

Start a simple notes file with your best councils, each under its own heading. Over time you'll build a personal board of directors for every domain of your life — decisions, health questions, money, writing, relationships. Copy-paste when you need one.

3. Give each council a memory brief

The single biggest upgrade: add a short context block your council reads first — who you are, your situation, your constraints. A council that knows your circumstances gives specific advice instead of generic advice. Keep it to a paragraph and update it as things change.

THE COMPOUNDING EFFECT

Each council you build makes the next one faster, because you're reusing the structure and only swapping members. People who adopt this method end up with a dozen specialized panels within a month — and stop taking any big decision without convening one.

Seven mistakes that kill a council

1. **No collision phase.** If members never respond to each other, you have four monologues, not a council. Force explicit disagreement.
2. **Members that are too similar.** Three flavors of "smart optimist" produce three agreeing answers. Deliberately include a skeptic and someone who has to pay for it.
3. **Too many members.** Past seven, each voice thins out. Three to five is the sweet spot for almost everything.
4. **No synthesizer.** Without a neutral final voice, you get a transcript, not a decision. Always end with someone who weighs and recommends.
5. **Letting it comfort you.** If you don't explicitly demand the uncomfortable truth, the AI defaults to reassurance. Put the rule in writing.
6. **Vague members.** "A business expert" is weak. "A short-seller who assumes you're wrong" is sharp. Specificity is everything.
7. **Never iterating.** Your first council is a draft. Run it, notice which voice fell flat, and rewrite that member. Councils get good on the third pass.

A council is only as good as its sharpest disagreement.

Advanced moves

Once the basics are solid, these upgrades take your councils to a level almost nobody reaches.

Weighted synthesis

Tell the synthesizer to probability-weight each claim and rank recommendations by confidence. You get not just "here's the plan" but "here's the plan, and here's how sure we are about each piece."

The dissent requirement

Add a rule: "At least one member must argue against the emerging consensus, even if they have to steel-man the weaker side." This kills groupthink dead.

The critical-path flag

Have the synthesizer always name the one thing that, if untrue, breaks the whole plan. It focuses you on what to verify first instead of drowning in a to-do list.

Standing positions

For councils you use repeatedly, let members carry memory of past positions: "Last time you argued X — has anything changed?" This turns a one-off panel into an ongoing advisory relationship.

Chair the meeting yourself

Interrupt. Ask a member to defend a point. Send them back to re-argue. You're not a spectator — you're the chair. The best councils are conversations, not reports.

A NOTE ON JUDGMENT

A council is a thinking tool, not an authority. For medical, legal, or financial decisions it helps you walk in *informed* — it doesn't replace a licensed professional. Use it to ask better questions, not to skip the expert.

Your quick-start checklist

Everything in this guide, compressed to a single page. Print it, or keep it open while you build your first one.

- ☐ Pick a decision **type** you face often (not a one-off).
 - ☐ Choose 3–5 members with genuinely different lenses.
 - ☐ Include at least one **skeptic** and one **realist**.
 - ☐ Give each member a conviction + two signature phrases.
 - ☐ Add a neutral **synthesizer** that speaks last.
 - ☐ Bolt on the five-phase session structure.
 - ☐ Add the rule: **name the uncomfortable truth**.
 - ☐ Paste into a fresh chat, add your situation, say "convene."
 - ☐ Run it on a real question — then fix the weakest voice.
 - ☐ Save the winner as a project / custom instruction.
 - ☐ Add a one-paragraph memory brief about your situation.
 - ☐ Build your next one — it'll take half the time.
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*You now have a board of advisors that never sleeps,
never charges by the hour, and never tells you only what you want to
hear.*

Go convene one.