

The Prompt Cards

Twenty habits, one card each

For business professionals who use Claude to analyse data and want to know when they can trust the results. Each card gives you one simple idea, a prompt you can use today, a quick check, and a task to try with your own data.

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How to use the cards

There are twenty data analysis habits, with one habit on each card. The cards are split into five groups of four. They follow the main steps of an analysis: understand your data, check the results, ask better questions, find the key message, and clean up messy data.

 **Before you ask** · cards 1 to 4

 **Check the results** · cards 5 to 8

 **Better questions** · cards 9 to 12

 **Finding the story** · cards 13 to 16

 **Messy data** · cards 17 to 20

-  Read one card at a time.
-  Try the prompt with your own data today. Replace the words in square brackets with your exact sheet and column names. Card 1 shows you how to find them.
-  Complete the check to see if you can trust the result.
-  Keep the cards that improve how you work. Three useful cards are better than reading all twenty once.

About the tool: You need a paid Claude plan, Pro or higher. You can use every prompt in a Claude chat with your file attached, or in a Claude Cowork project with your file in a linked folder.

Claude is a trademark of Anthropic, PBC. Excel is a trademark of Microsoft Corporation. The column names used in the examples are not real.

01

Check what is in the file before asking questions

WHY THIS MATTERS

Before asking Claude to analyse your data, ask what it can see in the file. Claude will list the sheet names and column headings. This also helps you quickly check that you attached the correct file.

THE PROMPT

I have attached [file name]. For each sheet, list the sheet name and the column headings. Do not analyse anything yet.

CHECK THE RESULT

Compare Claude's list with the file. If a sheet is missing or a column name looks wrong, stop and check why before continuing.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Try this with the spreadsheet you use most. Copy the column names exactly as Claude shows them, because you will need them in the prompts that follow.

02

Always say which sheet to use

WHY THIS MATTERS

Most workbooks have several sheets. If you do not name the sheet, Claude has to guess. It may choose the wrong one or mix data from different sheets, while still sounding confident. A short sentence at the start of the chat prevents this.

THE PROMPT

For the rest of this chat, use the [Sales] sheet of [file name] unless I ask for a different one.

CHECK THE RESULT

Ask a simple question and check whether Claude says which sheet it used. If it does not, ask which sheet it used.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Open your file and count the sheets. If it has more than one sheet, add this line to the first message in every new chat.

03

Check what your data really includes

WHY THIS MATTERS

You may think you know what is in your file, but it is worth checking. Ask for the number of rows, the earliest and latest dates, the different values in each text column, and the smallest and largest numbers. This quick check can stop you spending hours analysing the wrong data.

THE PROMPT

Describe the [Sales] sheet. List every column and say whether it holds text, numbers or dates. Give the row count and the earliest and latest [Order Date]. List the different values in [Region] and [Category] with a count for each. Give the smallest and largest value in each number column. Present it as a short report.

CHECK THE RESULT

Check four things: Is the number of rows what you expected? Do the dates cover the correct period? Is the same category spelled in different ways? Does any number look too high or too low to be correct?

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Run this check on your own file and write down anything unexpected. The first surprise is often the best place to start looking.

04

Explain the calculation, not just its name

WHY THIS MATTERS

Some files include the information needed to calculate a figure, but not the final figure itself. For example, a sales file may have quantity and unit price but no revenue column. If you ask for total sales, Claude must guess how to calculate it. It will often explain its choice, but it is safer to give the exact calculation in your prompt.

THE PROMPT

Using the [Sales] sheet, calculate total revenue. Revenue is [Quantity] multiplied by [Unit Price] for each row, added up. Give me one figure to two decimal places and say how many rows you included.

CHECK THE RESULT

Start a new chat and ask the same question without giving the calculation. Ask, "What is total sales?" Check what Claude assumed. If its calculation is different from yours, this shows why you need to define the calculation.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

List two or three figures your team often disagrees about. Write the exact calculation next to each one, and include that calculation in every prompt that uses the figure.

05

Sounding confident does not mean the answer is correct

WHY THIS MATTERS

Claude can sound confident even when the answer is wrong. It may estimate instead of calculate, or use the wrong column. Before trusting an important result, check one simple number yourself.

THE PROMPT

How many rows of data are in the [Sales] sheet? Give the number and say exactly how you counted it.

CHECK THE RESULT

Open the file and go to the last row. Subtract one from the row number to allow for the heading row. Compare this number with Claude's count. If they match, you can trust the next results more. If they do not, stop and find out why before trusting anything else in the chat.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose one figure in your file that you can check in ten seconds. Make it the first thing you ask for in every new chat.

06

Ask Claude to show how it worked out the answer

WHY THIS MATTERS

Before sharing a figure, you should know how it was calculated. Claude uses code to do the calculation. Ask it to show the code and explain the steps in simple language. This gives you a result you can explain and support in a meeting.

THE PROMPT

Show me how you calculated [total revenue]. List the steps, say what formula you applied to each row, and show the code you ran.

CHECK THE RESULT

Read the steps rather than the code. Check that Claude used the calculation you asked for, included the correct rows, and did not add any filters you did not request.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Take the last figure Claude gave you from your file and ask it to show the steps. Check the work as carefully as you would check a colleague's work.

07

A chart shows calculations as a picture

WHY THIS MATTERS

A wrong chart can look more believable than a wrong number, which makes it more risky. Before sharing a chart, ask Claude to show the figures behind it in a table. Then compare one figure with the original file.

THE PROMPT

Show the monthly figures behind that chart as a table, with the month, the value, and the number of rows that went into each month.

CHECK THE RESULT

Choose one month. Filter the spreadsheet to show that month, add up the values, and compare the total with Claude's table. If the totals match, you can trust the chart more. If they do not, do not share the chart until you know why.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose a chart you have already shared. Ask Claude for the table behind it and check one value. Do this before sharing every new chart.

08

A problem is not fixed until you check the numbers

WHY THIS MATTERS

Claude may say it has fixed a problem when it has not. Dates are a common example. Do not rely only on its reply. Ask for numbers you can check: how many values changed, how many are still stored as text, and the earliest and latest dates.

THE PROMPT

Change every [Order Date] to a real date. These are UK dates, so the day comes first. Tell me how many values you changed and how many are still stored as text. Then show the earliest and latest date.

CHECK THE RESULT

No dates should still be stored as text, and the earliest and latest dates should look correct. If either check is wrong, the problem has not been fixed, even if Claude says it has.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose a column you do not trust. Ask Claude to fix it and show proof that the fix worked in the same prompt. Check the proof before reading the rest of the answer.

09

Most work questions fit into four types

WHY THIS MATTERS

Most questions at work ask for one of four things: one number, a comparison between groups, a trend over time, or a ranking from highest to lowest. Once you know these four types, you can create almost any analysis. The prompt below compares groups. Ask for the answer in a table and say how you want it sorted.

THE PROMPT

Compare revenue by [Region], where revenue is [Quantity] multiplied by [Unit Price]. Show a table from highest to lowest, with each region's share of the total as a percentage in a second column.

CHECK THE RESULT

The percentages should add up to 100%. The totals for all regions should also match the overall total you checked earlier. If they do not, ask Claude what data was missed.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Write down the last three questions your manager asked. Decide whether each question needs one number, a comparison, a trend, or a ranking. Then ask Claude to show the answer in that format.

10

Use the same table for a different time period

WHY THIS MATTERS

The same data can tell a different story when you view it by year, quarter, month, or week. A yearly view shows the overall direction, while a monthly view is often better for planning. In a spreadsheet, changing the time period may mean rebuilding the report. With Claude, you can change it with one sentence because the chat remembers your earlier request. Use the prompt below after running an analysis by quarter.

THE PROMPT

Same analysis, but by month instead of quarter.

CHECK THE RESULT

Use the longest time period that still answers your question. If the monthly view is unclear, use the quarterly view instead.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose a figure you report often. View it over a longer and a shorter time period than usual. Choose the view that is most useful for your audience.

11

Define a figure once and use the same definition again

WHY THIS MATTERS

In a long analysis, the same figure may be calculated in different ways. Explain the calculation once, give it a name, and ask Claude to use the same definition later. This keeps the results consistent and helps everyone use the same calculation.

THE PROMPT

Define a measure called margin percentage: [Order Value] minus [Cost], divided by [Order Value], as a percentage. Show margin percentage by [Category], and use this exact definition whenever I ask for margin percentage later in this chat.

CHECK THE RESULT

Later in the same chat, ask for margin percentage by another group. Check that Claude uses the same definition. A new chat may not remember it, so give the definition again or add it to your project instructions.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose one figure your team calculates in different ways. Write one clear definition, give it a name, and use that name every time.

12

Ask Claude to suggest useful questions

WHY THIS MATTERS

Most prompts ask Claude a question. This prompt asks Claude to suggest questions you could explore. It works with any file. Treat the answers as ideas to investigate, not as proven facts.

THE PROMPT

Explore this data and tell me three things worth knowing. Show the evidence for each one.

CHECK THE RESULT

Choose the finding that surprises you most. Ask one more question to check whether it is true. Until you check it, treat it only as an idea to explore.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Start with the open question. Then try more specific questions, such as three risks, three things a new manager should know, or three things that have changed since last year.

13

A difference between the average and median can reveal something important

WHY THIS MATTERS

The mean is the average: add all the values and divide by how many there are. The median is the middle value when the values are sorted from smallest to largest. If the mean is much higher than the median, a few very large values are raising the average. In that case, the average alone may give the wrong impression.

THE PROMPT

Give me a full descriptive summary of [Order Value]: the mean, the median, the quartiles and the standard deviation. Explain each term in plain English as you go, as if I have never studied statistics.

CHECK THE RESULT

Compare the mean and the median. If they are very different, ask Claude to show the ten largest values. Then choose which figure is more useful for your audience.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Run this check on the figure your team uses most often. If you usually report only the average, you may decide to report a different figure.

14

Do not remove an outlier just because it is large

WHY THIS MATTERS

An outlier is a value that is very different from the others. The prompt uses a standard box plot rule to find these values. But the rule cannot tell you whether a value is wrong or is simply a very large order. Check each outlier before removing it, and only remove a value when you can prove it is wrong.

THE PROMPT

Find the outliers in [Order Value] using the standard box plot rule. Tell me how many there are, then show the six largest as a table with [Date], [Customer], [Product], [Quantity], [Unit Price] and [Order Value].

CHECK THE RESULT

Review the six largest values. Keep them if the quantities and prices look correct and you recognise the customers. Remember that very large values can raise the average. If a price was entered twice by mistake, correct it and record the change.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Find the outliers in your main figure and decide what to do with each one. Write a clear reason for every decision so you could explain it to an auditor.

15

If a correlation surprises you, check each group

WHY THIS MATTERS

Correlation is a number from minus one to one. It shows how closely two sets of values move together. One result for all the data can hide what is happening in each group. For example, mixing low-cost and high-cost products may hide a strong link within each category. If a correlation surprises you, check it separately for each group before sharing it.

THE PROMPT

What is the correlation between [Quantity] and [Order Value] across all rows? Then give the same correlation within each [Category], as a table, and explain any difference in business terms.

CHECK THE RESULT

If the overall result is different from the results for each group, the group results usually give a clearer picture. Remember that a link between two values does not prove that one causes the other. Ask what else could affect both.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose two number columns that you think are linked. Check the correlation across all rows, then check it again for each main group.

16

Choose the categories before counting written comments

WHY THIS MATTERS

Reviews, survey comments, and complaint notes are written text, so you cannot simply add them up. Claude can suggest useful themes, but the themes may change each time you ask. For counts you can repeat and explain, choose the categories first. Then ask Claude to place every comment into one category.

THE PROMPT

Put every row in [Reviews] into exactly one of these categories, based on the main subject of [Review Text]: Product Quality, Delivery, Ease of Use, Value for Money, Customer Service, Other. Add the result as a new column, show the full table, and count the rows in each category.

CHECK THE RESULT

Before sharing the totals, read three comments and check that you agree with their categories. You chose the categories and Claude applied them, so you must decide where unclear comments belong.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose a text column that your team often disagrees about. Create a clear list of categories, then ask Claude to place every row into one category.

17

Find the problems before fixing them

WHY THIS MATTERS

If Claude fixes everything at once, it is difficult to check the changes. Start by asking it to list the problems without changing anything. Then compare its list with the problems you noticed during a quick check of the file.

THE PROMPT

I have attached [export file]. Do not fix anything yet. Check the [Sales Data] sheet and list every data quality problem you can find, with the number of rows affected by each. Check for duplicate rows, blank rows, numbers stored as text and inconsistent spellings. Show the findings as a table.

CHECK THE RESULT

Check for problems that Claude may have missed. For example, does the total always equal quantity multiplied by price? Looking through the file yourself and using Claude's list will find more problems than either method alone.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose a file you do not trust. Look through it first and write down any problems you see. Then run the prompt and compare Claude's list with your own.

18

Fix one column at a time and check each change

WHY THIS MATTERS

Use a separate prompt and check for each fix. This takes longer than cleaning everything at once, but it is easier to check. If something goes wrong, you will know which step caused the problem.

THE PROMPT

Change the [Region] column so every value is exactly North, South, East or West. Treat EAST, east, E and East Region as East, and do the same for the other regions. Leave blanks blank for now. Then show the number of rows for each [Region] so I can check the result.

CHECK THE RESULT

The count should include only North, South, East and West, plus any blanks you left unchanged. If anything else appears, Claude missed a spelling or guessed a blank value.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Choose the messiest column in your file and fix only that column. Check the count before moving to the next one.

19

Keep a record of every decision

WHY THIS MATTERS

Cleaning data means making choices the data cannot make for you. If two copies conflict, which one is correct? Should you recalculate a saved total from its parts? Is a negative cost a typing mistake? Make each decision, record it, and share the list with the person who manages the system.

THE PROMPT

Where an [Order ID] appears more than once, keep the first one and delete the rest, and list every affected [Order ID] with the [Status] shown on each copy. Then work out [Order Value] again as [Quantity] multiplied by [Unit Price], and list the rows where the stored value was different before you overwrite them.

CHECK THE RESULT

Read both lists before Claude changes the data. Keep a record of the affected order IDs and the rule you used. This record shows what you changed and helps people trust the cleaned data.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

As you clean the data, write one sentence for each decision. At work, send these notes to the person who manages the system with the corrected file.

20

Show that the data is clean

WHY THIS MATTERS

Do not just say the data is clean. Show what changed, check for any problems that remain, and provide the corrected file. Then show how cleaning the data changed the answer to a business question.

THE PROMPT

Summarise the clean. Show a before and after table with the number of rows, the number of different [Order ID] values, the number of different [Product] names, the blank cells in each column, and the total [Order Value]. Then check the cleaned data again for any remaining problems and tell me plainly if anything is still wrong.

CHECK THE RESULT

A truthful answer may show that some problems remain, such as rows with no region. Cleaning cannot fill in missing facts, but it can make the gaps clear and countable. That is still a successful result.

TRY IT WITH YOUR DATA

Ask one business question using the original file. Then ask the same question using the cleaned file. The difference between the answers shows why careful data cleaning matters.

How these cards were created

These cards are based on twenty years of helping people work better with data, as well as the questions people now ask about using Claude. Each card shares a habit that can turn an answer people doubt into one they can trust.

Each week, I publish a video showing how to use Claude to answer a common work question. New cards are based on these videos. My free five-day challenge, Spreadsheet to Answer, brings all the habits together. It guides you through the full method using a sample file and then your own data. Start at ianlittlejohn.com/claude.

If one of these cards improves how you work, I would like to know which one. Reply to any of my emails or email me at ian@ianlittlejohn.com.

www.ianlittlejohn.com/claude