

A STORYBOARD IN 6 FRAMES

Prompting is not the skill you think it is

*asked nicely.
never checked.*

ALWAYS.
NEVER.
YOU MUST.

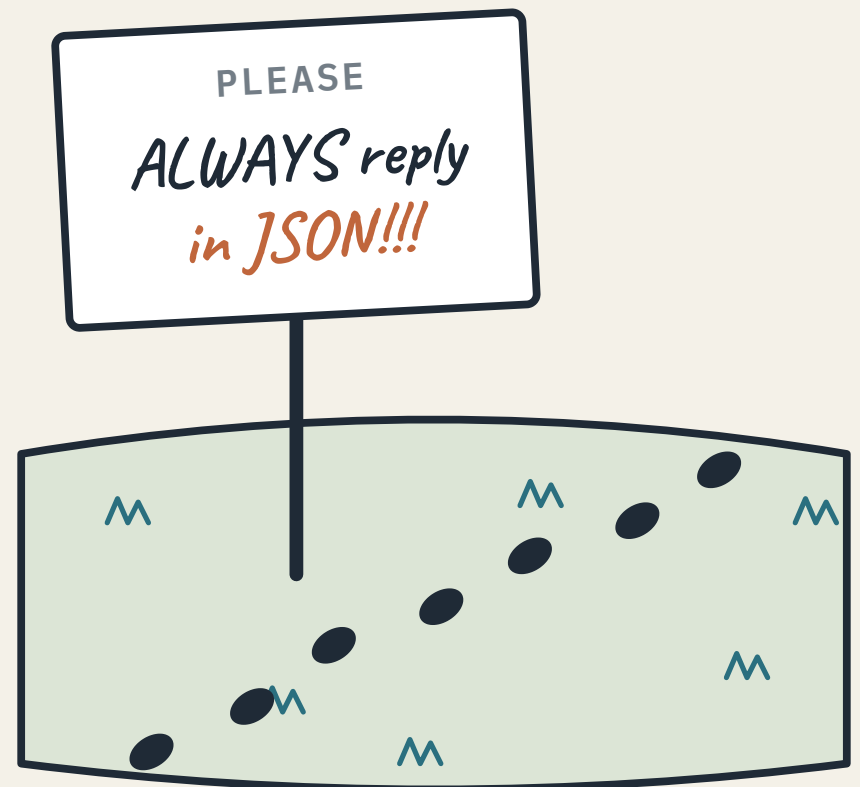
MORE INPUT

≠



REJECT

A CHECK OUTSIDE THE PROMPT



a sign isn't a fence

A prompt shapes what the model is likely to produce.
Shaping isn't enforcing, so anything that must hold needs a
check that lives outside the prompt.

Five things a prompt can say.

1

Intent

what you're trying to achieve (the part skipped most)

⋮

2

Constraints

what must not happen

⋮

3

Examples

two or three showing the pattern

⋮

4

Requested shape

the format you want back

⋮

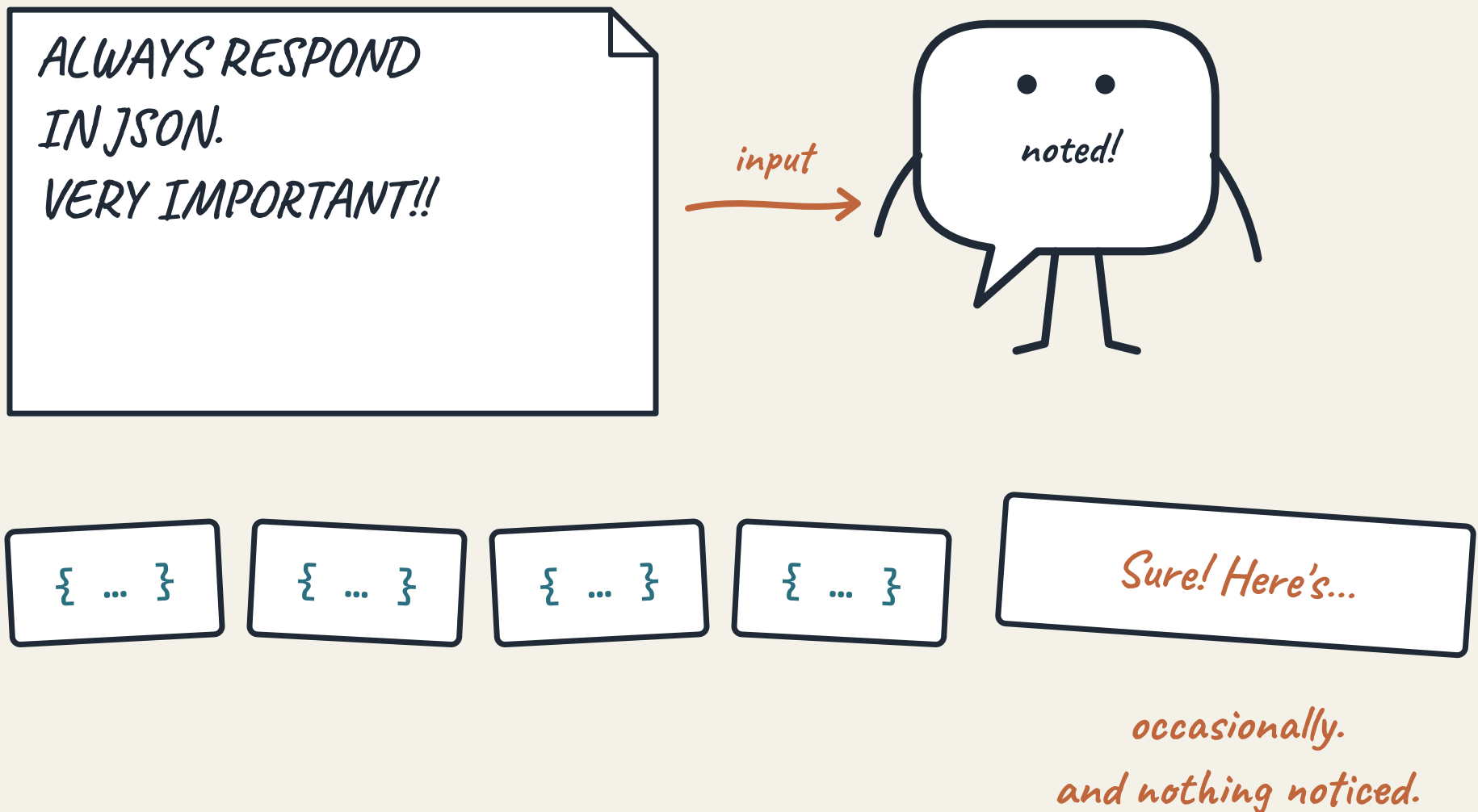
5

Priorities

what wins when instructions pull apart

Each of these narrows the field of likely answers. None of them closes it.

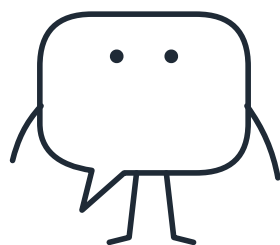
Shouting isn't checking.



~~“ALWAYS”~~ → **a validator**

“Always” and “never” are more input, and more input is not a check. If you want a step that notices and objects, you have to build it.

Ask, or check?



A prompt

*tells the model
what you want*

- ☒ order_id: string
- ☒ amount: number
- ☐ reason: string



A contract

*gives software
something to check*

Plain language can be the human-facing interface. Something checkable still has to sit underneath it.

Read the gap, then pick a fix.

asked: 3 slogans



got: 7, and a poem

the skill is reading this gap

Wrong tone, length

*say the thing
you didn't say*

Wrong shape

*now and then? use
a schema + validator*

Wrong facts

*trace the evidence
before the wording*

Mostly right

*wrong sometimes?
design for that*

Right most of the time and wrong occasionally, in ways that matter:
that's when to stop editing the prompt.

Treat a prompt like code.

prompt.md

v7: shorter

v6: tone fix

v5: examples

IN GIT

- ☒ refund request
- ☒ angry customer
- ☒ empty input
- ☐ very long thread

*rerun the same set
after every edit*

If a prompt does real work, handle it like code: keep it in version control, note what a change should do, and rerun a small fixed set of inputs after every edit.

Read the whole explanation

[pruningmypothos.com/systems/
prompting-is-not-the-skill-you-think-it-is/](https://pruningmypothos.com/systems/prompting-is-not-the-skill-you-think-it-is/)

