

Working with AI: A Personal Guide for Decathletes

What I've learned working with Claude — shared so you can hit the ground running with Microsoft Copilot

THE FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT

Most people approach AI like a search engine — type a question, get an answer, move on. That's the lowest-value use of the tool. *The shift that changed everything for me:* **treat Copilot as a thinking partner, not a search engine.**

A good thinking partner needs context. It needs to know who you are, what you're trying to accomplish, and what success looks like. Give it that, and the output changes dramatically.

5 PRINCIPLES FOR A PRODUCTIVE AI RELATIONSHIP

- 1 Context is King**
Copilot knows nothing about you, your role, or your goals until you tell it. Brief it like a smart new hire: who you are, what you're working on, and what success looks like.
- 2 The First Draft is Never Final**
Your first output is a starting point. Push back, refine, and redirect. Say: "That's close — now make it more concise and pull out the 3 key points for a VP audience."
- 3 Give It a Role**
Assigning a role anchors the AI's expertise. "Act as a supply chain expert reviewing this vendor proposal" produces far better output than "review this vendor proposal."
- 4 Specify the Output**
"Summarize this" is vague. "Give me 3 bullets for a 5-minute briefing, written for a non-technical VP" is specific. Always define length, tone, and format upfront.
- 5 Ask for Its Opinion**
This is the one most people miss. "What am I missing?" and "Do you agree with this approach?" turn Copilot from a transcriptionist into a thinking partner. It will surprise you.

THE PROMPT FORMULA

[ROLE] + [CONTEXT] + [TASK] + [FORMAT]

Example: "Act as a program manager at a defense manufacturer. I'm preparing for a quarterly business review with my division VP. Draft a 2-minute opening statement covering Q1 performance, top risk, and the one decision I need from leadership. Keep it confident and direct."

Putting It to Work: Copilot at GD-OTS

USE CASES — REAL PROMPTS FOR YOUR WORLD

SITUATION	TRY THIS PROMPT
Stakeholder Communication Delivering difficult news to leadership	<i>"Act as a program manager at a defense manufacturer. Write a brief email to my VP delivering a 6-week schedule delay. Be direct: state the problem, root cause in one sentence, and recovery plan. No excuses."</i>
Team Leadership Coaching a high-performer with a deadline problem	<i>"Prepare me for a coaching conversation with a team member who produces quality work but consistently misses deadlines. Give me a direct opener and 3 diagnostic questions to understand the root cause."</i>
Operations & Supply Chain Communicating supplier risk to leadership	<i>"Act as a supply chain analyst. Review the data I'll share and identify the top 3 supplier risk indicators for my Monday briefing. Format as a 5-bullet executive summary."</i>
Strategic Thinking Stress-testing a proposal before you present it	<i>"I'm about to present this proposal to our leadership team. Play the role of a skeptical VP and give me the 5 strongest objections I should be ready to answer. Be specific."</i>
Meeting Prep Getting ready for a customer QBR	<i>"Act as an executive coach. I have a quarterly business review with [customer] in 2 days. Given the context I'll share, help me identify what I most need to prepare for and draft my opening statement."</i>
Simplifying Complexity Making technical content land with a non-technical audience	<i>"Rewrite the following technical summary for a VP with no engineering background. Lead with business impact, use plain language, and limit it to 150 words."</i>

THE GOLDEN RULES

DO THIS	AVOID THIS
✓ Brief Copilot like a smart new hire — context first	✗ Submit first-draft output without reviewing it
✓ Push back when the output misses the mark	✗ Accept vague output — demand specificity
✓ Ask 'What am I missing?' to stress-test your thinking	✗ Use it for sensitive HR, legal, or classified matters
✓ Specify your audience, length, and tone upfront	✗ Forget to tell it who will read or hear the output
✓ Iterate — quality compounds with each exchange	✗ Treat it as a one-shot transaction

One last thought: The biggest unlock isn't any particular technique — it's the willingness to engage in a genuine conversation. The best outputs aren't from a single perfect prompt. They came from back-and-forth exchanges where you push, redirect, and ask for Copilot's perspective. Start there and let the quality compound.