

How to Ask AI a Good Question

Vague questions get vague answers. Here's how to get something you can actually use.

AI will answer almost anything you ask it — but the quality of what you get back depends almost entirely on how you ask. A sloppy question gets a paragraph of mush. A specific question gets something worth bringing back to class.

THE FOUR PARTS OF A STRONG QUESTION

PART	WHAT IT DOES	SOUNDS LIKE
Be specific	Names the exact person, event, sign, or topic	“the 1988 Deaf President Now protest” not “Deaf history”
Set the size	Tells it how long the answer should be	“in four sentences” · “list five” · “one paragraph”
Say who it's for	Controls the reading level and tone	“for a high school class” · “in plain language”
Say what you need	Points it at the part you actually care about	“focus on what the students were demanding”

WEAK VS. STRONG — REAL EXAMPLES

WEAK QUESTION	STRONG QUESTION
✗ Tell me about Deaf history.	✓ Explain the 1988 Deaf President Now protest at Gallaudet University in four sentences for a high school student. Include what the four student demands were.
✗ Who are famous Deaf people?	✓ List five Deaf inventors or scientists from the 1800s and 1900s. For each one, give a single sentence on what they're known for.
✗ What's Black ASL?	✓ In plain language, explain how Black ASL developed and name two ways researchers say it differs from other varieties of ASL.
✗ Tell me about this sign.	✓ Are there known regional variations for the ASL sign BIRTHDAY? If so, describe how they differ and what regions they're associated with.
✗ Is Milan 1880 important?	✓ What was decided at the 1880 Milan conference on deaf education, and why do Deaf people today still talk about it? Answer in one short paragraph.

FIVE FOLLOW-UPS THAT MAKE THE ANSWER BETTER

The first answer is rarely the good one. Ask a second question:

- **“Where does that information come from?”** — forces it to name sources you can go check.
- **“How confident are you about that? What might be wrong?”** — often gets it to admit shaky spots.
- **“What did you leave out?”** — surfaces the part of the story that got flattened.
- **“Do Deaf people disagree about this?”** — the community is not one voice, and AI tends to write like it is.
- **“Say that more simply.”** — if you can't explain it to the class, you don't have it yet.

RED FLAGS IN AN ANSWER

Slow down and verify if the answer:

- Names a person but gives no dates, places, or specifics
- Confidently describes a **handshape, movement, or facial expression** — this is where AI is least reliable
- Gives a statistic with no year and no source attached
- Speaks for “the Deaf community” as if everyone agrees
- Uses outdated language like “hearing impaired” or frames deafness only as a medical problem

Remember: A good question gets you a solid *starting point* — never a finished answer. Whatever AI hands you, the next step is the same: check it against a Deaf source, then bring it to the class.