

How to

PROMPT LIKE A DIRECTOR

A still template, a motion template, and fixes for the five failures that waste the most generations.

Stop describing a mood. Brief the camera.

Most prompts read like a mood board caption: cinematic, dreamy, stunning, 8K. Those words sit under millions of forgettable images, so that is what the model averages toward.

A director never briefs a crew that way. They say who is in frame, what they do, where the camera sits, where the light comes from, and the one look the whole film shares.

This guide follows one real shot from Impossible Dates, our surreal short series: two lovers on a car roof at a drive-in on the moon. You get the prompt that made it, a template for stills, a separate one for motion, and the five failures we see most.

Six slots. Fill every one.

01 **Subject**

Who the shot is about, named. 'The lovers', 'an old black sedan'. Say which one leads: in our series the car is always secondary.

02 **Action**

One physical thing, as a verb you could photograph. 'Sit on the car roof under a thin blanket.' Not 'in love'.

03 **Camera**

Shape, distance, position and what shot it. 'Native 16:9 wide frame', 'handheld Super 16'. The model reads these as a picture.

04 **Light**

A source, a direction and what it falls on. 'The screen casting warm light over lunar dust.'

05 **Place**

The set, with its one impossible rule stated plainly. 'A tiny drive-in theatre on the moon, grey dust and black sky.'

06 **Look**

The locked style block for the whole project, pasted word for word into every prompt. Never retyped, never paraphrased.

Adjectives versus a brief

ADJECTIVE SOUP

A beautiful cinematic romantic scene of a couple at a drive-in movie on the moon, dreamy, ethereal, magical atmosphere, stunning lighting, highly detailed, 8K, masterpiece.

THE BRIEF WE RAN

Native horizontal 16:9 wide frame. A tiny drive-in theatre on the moon, grey dust and black sky, an old black sedan parked in front of a glowing screen showing Earth rising in real time. The lovers sit on the car roof under a thin blanket, silhouettes only, screen casting warm light over lunar dust, plenty of dark negative space for sleep-channel calm.

The weak one lists feelings. The strong one lists things a camera could photograph: objects, a position, a light source, empty space. Feelings get averaged. Things get drawn.

Words the camera actually hears

01 **Shape first**

Open with the delivery frame: 'native 16:9 wide frame' or 'vertical 9:16'.
Generate in the shape you ship. Cropping later changes the picture.

02 **Distance**

Wide, medium-wide or close-up. Then place the subject: 'near frame centre, quiet negative space on both sides'.

03 **Position**

Put the camera somewhere real: 'from behind the car roof', 'across the aisle', 'from doorway height'. A position beats 'dynamic angle'.

04 **Lens**

Focal length and depth when they matter: '35mm, shallow depth of field'.
Leave them out on a wide where everything should read.

05 **Capture medium**

Name what shot it: 'handheld Super 16', '35mm film still', 'medium-format film', 'hard on-camera flash'. One name carries a whole look.

06 **Movement**

Video only, one per shot: slow push-in, dolly-in, handheld drift. It belongs in the motion brief, not the still.

Light is the look



String lights above, lightning below the glass floor.

'Moody lighting' is a feeling. 'One warm motel lamp behind them' is a lighting plan. Name the source, where it sits and what it falls on, and the grade follows.

If your film has two worlds, write two light blocks. On a mythology series we wrote a radiant daylight block for the gods and an ember-in-darkness block for the underworld, and never mixed them.

- Name a source: a lamp, a screen, a window, a flash.
- Give it a direction: behind them, from camera, raking across.
- Say what it hits: 'warm light over lunar dust'.

Write the look once. Paste it forever.



Same couple, same car, same grade. A diner above the clouds.

Every Impossible Dates image prompt opens with the same block: the same couple in late-1970s road-trip clothes, handheld Super 16, halation around bright sources, teal night air with peach and amber highlights. Six impossible places, one world.

Name specific things, not categories: 'faded ringer tees, flared denim', not 'retro clothes'. Change the block and you have started a different film.

OUR BLOCK, TRIMMED

Handheld Super 16 travel diary footage, imperfect framing, underexposed shadows, warm practical lights, halation around bright sources, teal blue night air with peach and amber highlights.

Name the reference. Then name the wrong one.

'Cinematic' and 'masterpiece' carry nothing. Names do. A production, a cinematographer, a camera, a painter: the model has seen their work and pulls a whole look from one name. On our mythology props, named fantasy productions and a named costume designer beat every adjective we tried.

Then ask what the model will reach for instead. We asked for a golden fleece cloak and got lion pelts, its strongest idea of a golden cloak. 'Bad quality' in the negatives does nothing. 'Lion, lion mane, animal head, fur pelt', named, breaks the pull.

ONE REFERENCE LEADS

Three image references on one face study returned near-identical faces. The redo kept the identity reference first and dropped the one fighting the colour.

The still-image brief

Fill the brackets top to bottom. The order is deliberate: shape and the one clause that must not fail go first, because late instructions get outvoted.

COPY THIS

[SHAPE: native 16:9 wide frame / vertical 9:16 / 4:5].
 [THE CLAUSE THAT MUST NOT FAIL, e.g. the object alone
 on a plain stand, no person]. [PLACE, with its one
 impossible rule], [2 OR 3 NAMED DETAILS]. [SUBJECT,
 named] [ONE PHYSICAL ACTION], [WHERE THEY SIT IN
 FRAME]. Shot from [CAMERA POSITION], [DISTANCE],
 [CAPTURE MEDIUM: handheld Super 16 / 35mm film still].
 [LIGHT SOURCE] from [DIRECTION], [COLOUR], falling on
 [SURFACE]. [WHAT THE EMPTY SPACE IS FOR]. [LOCKED
 LOOK BLOCK, pasted verbatim]. Not [NEAREST WRONG
 IDEA], not [SECOND WRONG IDEA].

- A crown kept arriving on a head. 'Floats alone against plain black', placed early, fixed it.
- Look block: same words in every prompt of the project. Paste it, never retype it.
- Negatives name the wrong idea. 'Bad quality' never fixed anything.

Motion is a different brief



Stars drift, the lovers lean closer. The motel stays upright.

When you animate a still, the frame has already answered who, where and what light. Our motion prompts ran without the look block at all: the start image carried it.

Spend the words on change. One camera move, one action, the few things in the world that move, and a line naming what must stay exactly as it is.

OUR DRIVE-IN, IN MOTION

Handheld shot from behind the car roof, drive-in screen flickers with Earthrise, lunar dust drifts slowly, the lovers sit close under a blanket, headlights dim, warm screen glow.

The image-to-video brief

Use it with a locked start frame. Every clause should carry a verb. If a line does not move, the image already said it.

COPY THIS

[ONE CAMERA MOVE: slow push-in / slow dolly-in / handheld drift / locked off, no camera shake].
[SUBJECT] [ONE ACTION, as physical beats: turns her head, leans in, rests her chin on his shoulder]. [2 OR 3 THINGS IN THE WORLD THAT MOVE: dust drifts, the screen flickers, lanterns sway]. [ONE LIGHT CHANGE, if any: headlights dim]. Keep [WHAT MUST NOT CHANGE: her face, the product label, the car] sharp and unchanged. [SAME CAPTURE MEDIUM AS THE STILL]. Natural motion, no sudden movement.

- One action per generation. Entrance, product beat and reaction are three shots.
- 'He dances' is not direction. 'Head nod, shoulder roll, quarter spin' is.
- Test a still in motion before you lock it. Pretty frames can collapse.

Five failures and their fixes

01 **Adjective soup**

Cinematic, stunning, 8K: the model averages them into a stock image. Swap each one for a name, a capture medium or a light source.

02 **The wrong idea wins**

Ask for a golden fleece cloak, get a lion pelt. Find the model's nearest wrong idea and negate it by name.

03 **Ghost lettering**

Leave room 'for a headline' and you get gibberish glyphs there. Describe the empty wall or sky instead. Regenerate, never crop around it.

04 **Smeared faces**

Our first 'faces hidden' pass came back with blurred faces. Give a physical reason instead: backs to camera, hair, distance, backlight.

05 **Overloaded video shot**

Entrance, product, reaction and exit in one prompt flattens the weakest action. Split it into shots and cut the keepers together.

Before you hit generate

DO

Write one shot: one subject, one action, one light source.

Paste the locked look block, word for word, every time.

Generate in the shape you deliver: 9:16, 4:5 or 16:9.

Test the still in motion before you call it locked.

DON'T

Use cinematic, stunning, 8K or masterpiece as a style.

Write text, caption or headline into a photoreal prompt.

Change three things between takes. Change one, then compare.

Spend video generations finding problems a still would show.

8

A model never asks a follow-up question. Write the brief so it doesn't need to.

Fable8 is a film studio. We make films for brands with AI, and build our own tools to do it. This guide is how we actually work.

MORE FIELD GUIDES · COMMENT THE WORD ON ANY OF OUR POSTS

- SHEET** The Character Sheet Kit
- BEATS** The 30-Second Beat Sheet
- FINISH** The Finish

Making something? fable8.com · [@fable8](https://twitter.com/fable8)