

Using Claude for Legal Research Brainstorming

Sharon Persons

Course Subject:	2 Law courses on research and writing
Student Level:	Upper-level law students
Number of Students:	3 in one course, 6 in the other)
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What the Students Did

After reviewing provided lists of both general audience and legal scholarship sources to become familiar with AI's capacity to generate such lists, students who were preparing to write research articles practiced crafting prompts for initial brainstorming of sources for their projects. . Students then tested their prompts individually in Claude, reviewed the results, and discussed their findings in pairs or small groups. They compared strategies and reviewed the results, identifying ways to improve the prompts for better results.

Purpose

This activity introduced law students to writing prompts to begin identifying sources for legal research. This was a first "handshake" with the technology in a low-stakes classroom setting. The activity was designed to help students understand that the complexity, tone, and assigned role within a prompt directly shape the quality and specificity of the response. By comparing a basic prompt with a refined prompt that used role, setting, and deliverable specifications appropriate for legal scholarship, students learned how prompt design influences output. The broader goal built students' comfort and critical awareness with generative AI as one tool in the early stages of legal research.

Assessment

This in-class activity was assessed through meaningful participation rather than a formal grade. The instructor evaluated effectiveness by observing whether the paired discussions and group share-outs produced genuine insights about prompt design and AI output quality. The shared insights from each pair were expected to spark further discussion, and the instructor watched for and highlighted broader concepts and strategies that emerged from the conversation.

Faculty Reflections

Because I designed this as a brief introduction that took place in a single session, I wasn't expecting expert-level work or miracles. The goal was exposure and initial awareness, and on that front, it delivered.

Students were motivated in part because they got to investigate their own chosen topics rather than a prescribed one. They also got to talk to peers and had to report back, which added a layer of accountability without making it feel high-stakes. I considered grading it, but sticks are not my preferred motivator.

Step-by-Step Directions

Step	Directions
Step 1	Review two provided prompts: : o
Step 2	Review the two sample prompts provided by the instructor (one that is prompt should be more basic and leaning away from advanced disciplinary language, and the other with richer detail and language. Note the differences: the first prompt is general and returns results suited for a high school or undergraduate audience; the second prompt includes a role (e.g., "law librarian" or "law student"), a setting ("progressive law school"), and specific deliverables ("faculty research project" and "law review article"), producing results geared toward legal scholarship.
Step 2	Revise the current version of your abstract for this exercise to align with the stronger prompt model for legal scholarship. Use your abstract as the basis for crafting your own prompt.
Step 3	Open Claude (claude.ai) and enter your prompt. Review the response carefully, paying attention to the tone, specificity, and audience level of the results.
Step 4	Pair up with one or two classmates to share your prompts and results. Compare strategies and discuss: What role or context did you include? How did the phrasing of your prompt affect what Claude returned? Discuss suggestions for improving each other's prompts.
Step 5	Reconvene as a class. In your pairs/groups, share one unique insight about prompt design, AI output quality, or strategies for getting better results from generative AI for legal research.

NOTE: This activity works best when students have already developed an abstract or identified a research topic before the session. The instructor should prepare and upload demonstration examples of prompt/response sessions to Canvas in advance, along with any relevant prompt engineering resources.

Related Materials

- Sample prompts:
 - Basic Prompt: I am researching executive abuse of power and the strategies available to respond and create accountability. Brainstorm legal questions that

will help explore this topic as well as possible relevant examples for each one and suggestions for further reading to help advance your ideas.

- Refined Prompt: I am a law librarian at a progressive law school. I am researching executive abuse of power and the strategies available to respond and create accountability for a faculty research project resulting in writing a law review article. Brainstorm legal questions that will help explore this topic as well as possible relevant examples for each one and suggestions for further reading to help advance your ideas.
- Claude prompt/response session demonstrating both prompts:
<https://claude.ai/share/8b92e294-a4ff-4899-afbf-5cf977e90141>