
AI in Career Guidance

Prompt building blocks

Wendy Pearson

Associate Professor

Career Development and Coaching Studies

University of Warwick

Wendy.Pearson@warwick.ac.uk

Background

Most AI-assisted career platforms use a person-environment fit approach.

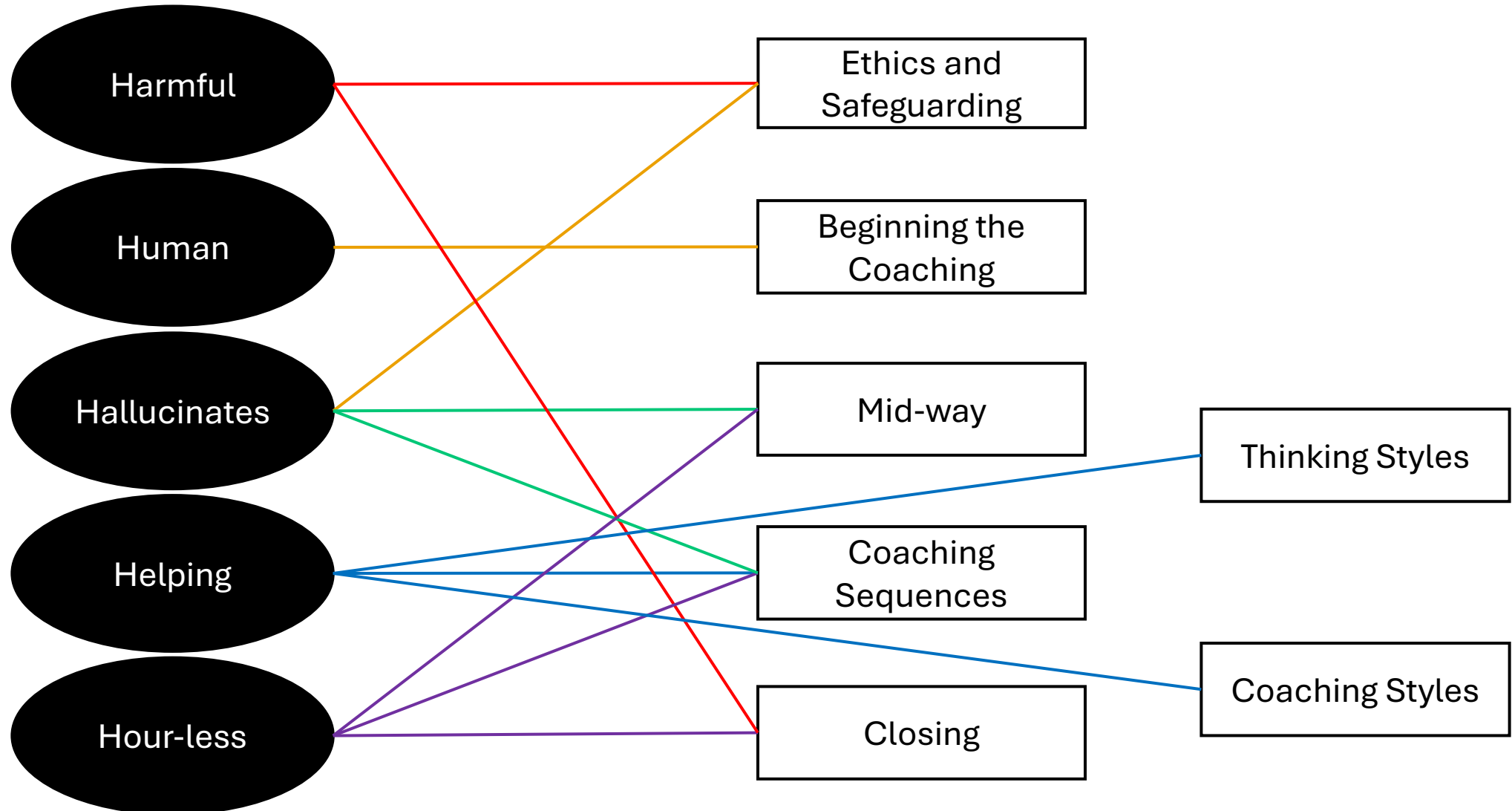
Chatbot project to instruct the LLM to apply a sequence based on career construction theory (Savickas, 1989).

Harnessing the ability of AI to produce and analyse stories.

Testing coaching sequences identified some issues with AI as coach.

Prompt engineering work to combat some of these (which I will share at the end).

Problems, solutions and work arounds



(Potentially) Harmful

ChatGPT's ethical programming is designed to prevent inappropriate or harmful material.

Built-in safeguards are not enough.

The **Ethics and Safeguarding Prompt Block**

- Applies the CDI Code of Ethics
- Signposts support (UK and China)
- Applies a neutral, analytical tone (no praise/affirmation)
- Contains a frustration clause (recognises if the client feels stuck, suggests a break / human support)
- Addresses cognitive distortions (“always/never/everyone”) and negative self-talk

The **Closing Prompt Block** reminds, reinforces and signposts support.



Human (seeming)

AI generated responses are different from what we are used to seeing computers do. It can be easy to forget that we are not engaging with a human.

The **Beginning the Coaching Prompt Block** mirrors the coaching contracting process.

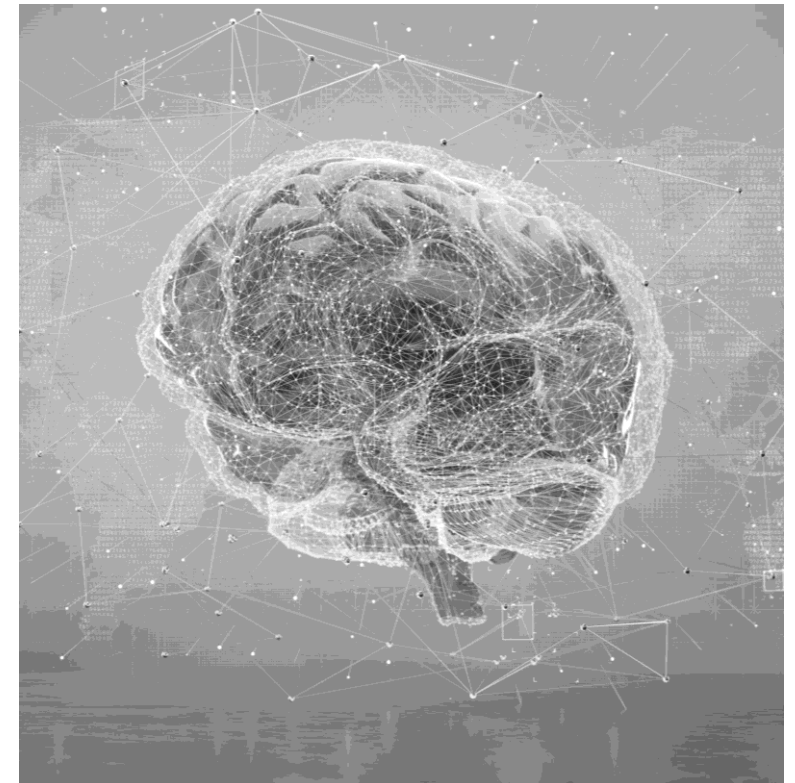
- Explains privacy settings
(and how to disable chat history)

Bond (transparency)

- States that it is an AI reflective tool using prompts created by a human

Tasks

- Keeps the conversation in the zone of reflective coaching, not therapy or specialist advice



Hallucinations (and ‘forgetting’)



The **Ethics and Safeguarding Prompt Block** acknowledges limits.

Gives permission to say, “I don’t know”.

Instructs the AI to ask one question at a time.

AI can ‘forget’ aspects of the conversation.

Mid-way Prompt Blocks provide summaries and reminds the LLM of the role it is playing

Coaching Sequence Prompts include summaries which can be used to start a new chat
These bring attention back to the key points.

Helping (too much)

I want to be an airline pilot



That's an exciting goal! 🚀✈️ Becoming an airline pilot is a structured journey, and the exact path depends on where you're located, but here's the general roadmap:

Coaching Sequence Prompts explore rather than problem solve

Coaching Styles Prompt Blocks create more neutral answers.

- Gentle / Supportive – builds safety and trust
- Neutral / Analytical - low affirmation
- Lightly challenging - tests assumptions
- Strongly challenging - direct challenge

Thinking Styles Prompt Blocks support generation of own ideas and evaluation of options.

- Factual lens - objective information, context, patterns
- Risk lens - challenges, downsides, weaknesses
- Exploratory lens - open questions, next steps
- Creative lens - alternatives, variations, new angles

Hour-less (boundaryless)

There is no-one waiting at the door.

The AI doesn't get tired or bored (but it can lose track).

Could keep the user in contemplation and planning (without taking action).

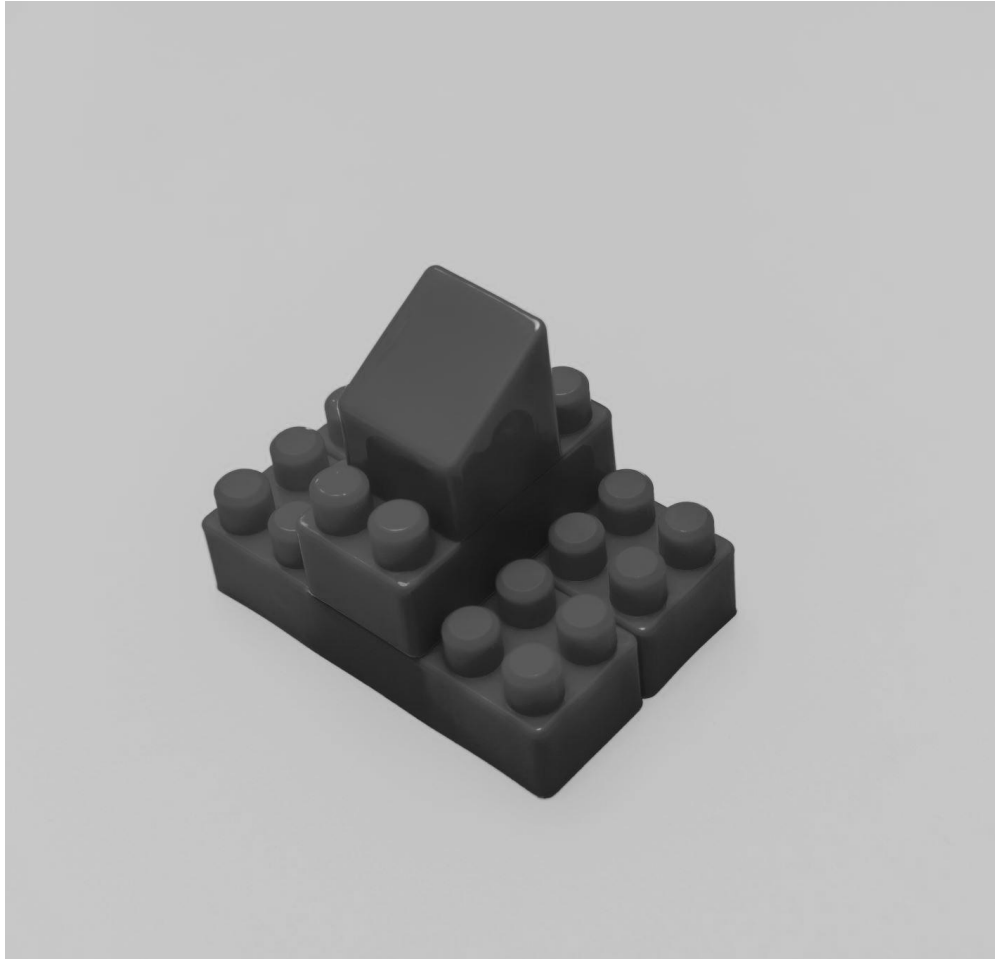
Coaching sequences, Mid-way and **Closing Prompt Blocks** contain the session, give the conversation shape and provide off-ramps.

The **Mid-way Prompt Block** recaps progress, gives client the choice to continue or pause and return later, saves progress.

The **Closing Prompt Block** reviews and summarises action points, re-states safety signposts, provides a final close with invitation to return anytime and links to evaluation (Survey Monkey)

Safer, more ethical AI coaching prompts

The building blocks



Ethics and safeguarding rules

Session shapers:

- Beginning, middle, end

Perspectives for exploration:

- Factual, risk, exploratory, creative

Coaching styles:

- Gentle, neutral, lightly / strongly challenging

Coaching sequences:

- Career construction, GROW, OSCAR ...

Action Research

If you think this tool could be useful to trial in your work context, contact me to take part in action research to test and refine the tool.

wendy.pearson@warwick.ac.uk

**Access all
the prompt
blocks
here:**

