PROTOTYPING APPLICATIONS WITH CLAUDE

Turn a task you do every week into a tool you can use.

futuristmatt.com

No code needed. Start with a problem from your own work and follow the steps on both sides.

1 Pick your idea

Look for something you do repeatedly that currently lives in your head, on paper, or in a spreadsheet nobody else understands. If you can finish this sentence, you have a first prototype:

A tool that _____ so I can _____.

Good first builds

- Take what you type in, apply your rules, give you a result
- Are used by one person at first: you
- Need nothing from other systems

Leave for later

- Logins and user accounts
- Live data from your CRM or the web
- Several people editing at once, or sending emails

Claude will draw these on screen, but they won't work.

2 Write the brief

The brief decides most of what you get back. Claude fills every gap you leave with a guess. Open a new chat, paste this in, and replace each **[bracket]**.

ROLE	You are an expert web app designer and developer. I'm not technical, so explain things in plain English.
GOAL	Build **[name of tool]**, a simple interactive tool that **[what it does]** for **[who uses it]**. What I enter: **[the information I type in or pick]** How it's worked out: **[my rules: criteria, points, weightings, thresholds]** What I get back: **[a score, ranking, label, or summary I can copy]** It should look like: **[e.g. one clean screen, result at the top]**
CONSTRAINTS	No logins, no database, no connections to other systems. Everything works inside this one tool. No buttons that don't do anything.
OUTPUT	One complete, working interactive artifact. No placeholders or unfinished sections.
VERIFY	Before you show me, check that **[the thing most likely to go wrong]**.
FIRST	**Don't build anything yet. Ask me any questions you need answered, then describe in plain English what you plan to make. Wait for me to say "go".**

Your rules matter most
They are how the job is done well, and why your tool beats a generic one. Write them as you would for a new starter.

Read the plan first
It takes two minutes. Correct wrong guesses there, before they are built in. Then say "go".

Describe the look simply
"One screen, big result at the top" works better than colours and fonts. Polish comes later.

3 Worked example: a lead scoring tool

WEAK **"Build me a lead scoring app."** Claude has to invent the criteria. You get something that looks finished and scores nothing that matters to your business.

STRONG Role, Constraints, Output and First stay as on the template. Only the Goal and Verify change.

GOAL Build "Lead Scorer", a simple interactive tool that scores new sales leads so my team knows who to call first.

What I enter: company name, number of staff, sector, contact's job title, how they found us, whether budget is confirmed, and when they plan to buy.

How it's worked out: a score out of 100.

- **50 to 500 staff: 25 (else 10)**
- **Target sector: 20 (else 5)**
- **Budget confirmed: 10**
- **Director level or above: 20 (else 8)**
- **Referral 15, event 10, website 5**
- **Buying within 3 months: 10**

Target sectors are manufacturing, logistics and professional services. 70 or more is Hot, 40 to 69 is Warm, below 40 is Cold.

What I get back: the score, a Hot / Warm / Cold label, a one-line reason, and a ranked list of every lead I score in this session.

It should look like: one clean screen I can fill in while I'm on a call.

VERIFY Check that the highest possible score is exactly 100 and that changing any input changes the score.

GO FURTHER Once it works, add one thing per message: "Let me adjust the points with sliders." Then: "Add a button that copies the ranked list into an email." Then: "Let me download the list as a spreadsheet."

4 Improve it without breaking it

One change per message
Get it working before you make it look good. Mixing the two in one request is how working features get lost.

Report problems in three parts
"I did ___. I expected ___. Instead ___." "It's broken" makes Claude guess, and it may rewrite parts that were fine.

Two tries, then go back
If a fix hasn't worked after two attempts, return to the last version that worked (Claude keeps earlier versions) and ask a different way.

Long chat, fresh start
If features start to disappear, ask Claude to "write a full description of this tool as it stands". Open a new chat and paste that in.

5 Use it, share it

It's ready when it does the one job you built it for, with your real information, without breaking. It doesn't need to be pretty.

Publish it to get a link colleagues can open, or download the file to keep. Use it for a week before you add anything.

Check your organisation's AI policy before you enter customer or confidential data.

6 Same pattern, other jobs

Supplier evaluation. Score suppliers on price, quality, reliability and support. Get a ranked shortlist.

Project prioritisation. Rank competing projects by impact, effort and strategic fit.

Yours. A tool that _____ so I can _____.

Matt O'Neill, The Optimistic Futurist