



ARC BOOST WORKBOOK

You don't need to sound formal. You do need to be intentional.

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This is the offline companion to the  ARC Boost online tool.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This isn't a reference manual.







-  Use as a practice tool organized by AI workflow stage (BEFORE/WHILE/AFTER).
-  Look for  markers for easiest wins.
-  Check boxes as you try.
-  Build your own on Page 13.

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AI OPTIMIZATION WORKBOOK



What this is: A collection of 20 ready-made optimizations that create productive friction when quality matters. These push you past your first idea by making AI challenge your thinking instead of just executing.

This workbook also walks you through building your own custom optimizations step by step — so you're not limited to what's here.

This workbook:

- Is the **offline** companion to the  [ARC Boost](#) online tool — same philosophy, different format.
- Is similar to the online tool which walks you through building a custom boost from scratch via an interactive web tool.
- Provides you with 20 pre-built techniques plus a guided path to create your own.

Who this is for: Anyone using AI for work where getting it right matters more than getting it done fast. Complex decisions, strategic thinking, high-stakes deliverables.

When to use it: When depth beats speed.  [SPARKS Builder](#) gives you clarity.  [ARC Boost](#) online lets you build custom techniques. *This workbook gives you 20 ready to go — pick one and apply it.*

Why it works: Your first idea is rarely your best idea. These techniques push you past the obvious answer by inviting challenge, exposing gaps, and generating alternatives.

SAME IDEA, THREE WAYS (Language ≠ Results)

Formal: “I am considering the following approach. Please evaluate it critically and identify weaknesses. Recommend improvements or alternatives.”

Plain: “Here’s what I’m thinking. Tell me where this might fall apart and help me make it stronger.”

Everyday: “Here’s my plan—talk me out of it if it’s shaky and help me improve it.”

THE ARC METHOD

A = AIM: What are you actually trying to accomplish? What should the result do or feel like?

R = RESIST: Is AI pushing back, or just agreeing? Invite challenge and resistance.

C = COLLABORATE: Work together to make the result stronger than your first pass.

ARC Test:

If the result feels more thoughtful and specific than a basic prompt, ARC worked.

SEE THE PROGRESSION

LEVEL 1 - Basic Prompt:

“Write website copy for my L&D consulting practice.”

→ AI writes generic corporate consulting copy that could be anyone’s

LEVEL 2 - With [SPARKS Builder](#):

“I need website copy for my L&D consulting practice. It should sound like how I actually talk— direct, practical, a little funny, slightly sarcastic, no corporate speak. My audience is HR leaders and L&D managers who are tired of fluff. Context: I focus on AI fluency education through hands-on tools, not theory.”



→ AI writes something closer to your voice, more specific, actually useful

LEVEL 3 - With ARC:

“I need website copy for my L&D consulting practice. It should sound like how I actually talk— direct, practical, a little funny, slightly sarcastic, no corporate speak. My audience is HR leaders and L&D managers who are tired of fluff. Context: I focus on AI fluency education through hands-on tools, not theory. If what you write could work on anyone’s L&D website, call it out and try again. Give me 2-3 versions with different approaches, then help me figure out which one actually sounds like me.”

→ AI gives you multiple strategic options, pushes back if something’s generic, helps you evaluate which approach actually captures your personality

The difference:

-  [SPARKS Builder](#) = You include what you know upfront
-  [ARC Boost](#) = You add friction that pushes AI past the first obvious answer

HOW MANY OPTIMIZATIONS SHOULD YOU USE?

Simple tasks: 1-2 total. • Medium complexity: 3-5. • High stakes: 5-8.

Start small, add as needed.

⚠️ ARC WORKS BEST WHEN:

- Quality matters more than speed
- Real consequences if you get it wrong
- Your first idea probably isn't your best
- Feel free to use for practice on simpler tasks

⚠️ IF AI ISN'T PUSHING BACK:

Try adding: "If you can't find genuine weaknesses, tell me and we'll discuss why this approach might actually be solid."

AI is designed to be helpful, which usually means agreeable. It won't push back on its own — you have to explicitly build that permission into your prompt. That's not a flaw in AI, it's just how it's wired. Your job is to override the default.

OPTIMIZE - BEFORE AI CREATES OUTPUT

Goal: Prevent wasted work.

Philosophy: 5 minutes of questions saves 30 minutes of back-and-forth.

⚠ *Already using your favorites? Try one you've been avoiding this week.*

★ □ "What am I missing?"

What to do: After you give AI context or a plan, ask this exact question before it starts working.

Why it matters: Catches blind spots you didn't know were there.

Example: *"I'm launching a website for my L&D consulting practice. What am I missing?"*

Try this: Anytime you're starting something new or making a decision with lots of moving parts.

What to notice: *Did the answer surprise you, or confirm what you already suspected? If it surprised you — that's the tool working.*

□ "If this doesn't make sense, say so"

What to do: Give AI permission to tell you when your instructions are unclear or contradictory.

Why it matters: You find out fast if what's in your head didn't translate into words.

Example: *"Here's my outline for the training. If this doesn't make sense or seems all over the place, say so."*

Try this: When you're working through something complex and you're not 100% sure you explained it right.

What to notice: *Did AI flag something? That gap between what you meant and what you wrote is where your clarity lives. Getting it pointed out is the win, not a failure.*

★ □ "Before you respond, what questions do you have?"

What to do: Flip the script — make AI ask YOU questions before it starts working.

Why it matters: Prevents AI from making assumptions; surfaces what you forgot to include.

Example: *"This is for my website. Before creating anything, what questions do you have?"*

Try this: Beginning of projects or when you know you're missing context but don't know what.

What to notice: *What questions surprised you? Those are the things you assumed were obvious but weren't. File those away for next time.*

□ "Ask questions one at a time"

What to do: Tell AI to ask clarifying questions one at a time, not all at once.

Why it matters: Prevents overwhelm; lets you think through each question properly.

Example: *"Before you draft this, ask me questions one at a time so I can think through each answer."*

Try this: Complex projects where you need to work through details methodically.

What to notice: *Notice how each answer leads to a clearer picture. By the time AI starts, you've already done half the thinking.*

□ "What am I not asking that I should?"

What to do: After giving context, ask what questions you're missing.

Why it matters: Reveals blind spots in your thinking; uncovers questions you didn't know to ask.

Example: *"I'm planning this workshop. What am I not asking that I should?"*

Try this: Complex projects where you suspect you're missing something but don't know what.

What to notice: *The questions AI surfaces here are a window into your assumptions. If they're obvious in hindsight, that's useful data about where your default thinking goes on autopilot.*

OPTIMIZE - WHILE AI WORKS

Goal: Create productive friction.

Philosophy: First ideas are rarely best ideas.

⚠ *Already using your favorites? Try one you've been avoiding this week.*

★ □ "Don't just agree — challenge this"

What to do: Tell AI explicitly not to be agreeable; make it poke holes.

Why it matters: Breaks AI out of 'helpful assistant' mode.

Example: *"I think I should apply to pharma roles even though I have no experience. Don't just agree — challenge this."*

Try this: When you have a hypothesis but you're not totally confident it's right.

What to notice: *Was the pushback actually useful, or did it feel generic? If it felt generic, that's a signal — try adding more specificity to your setup next time. The more context you give AI about your actual situation, the more targeted the pushback gets. Generic in, generic out.*

★ □ "Show me 3 options"

What to do: Instead of asking for one solution, ask for multiple approaches with tradeoffs.

Why it matters: Prevents settling for the first idea; gives you actual choices to evaluate.

Example: *"Show me 3 different ways to structure this presentation and explain the tradeoffs."*

Try this: When you're not locked into one approach yet and want to see possibilities.

What to notice: *Which option surprised you? The one you didn't think of is often where the most useful thinking lives.*

□ "Here's my thinking. Where is it weak?"

What to do: Present your hypothesis or approach and explicitly ask AI to find the weaknesses.

Why it matters: Tests your logic before you commit.

Example: *"Here's my thinking on how to structure my portfolio site. Where is it weak?"*

Try this: When you have a plan but want to stress-test it before executing.

What to notice: *How did you react to what it found? Defensive reactions are worth examining — they usually point to the thing you knew wasn't quite right but were hoping to get away with.*

□ "If you were skeptical, what would you push back on?"

What to do: Ask AI to roleplay as someone who disagrees with you.

Why it matters: Surfaces objections you haven't considered; prepares you for real pushback.

Example: *"If you were a hiring manager skeptical about career changers, what would you push back on in this cover letter?"*

Try this: When preparing for interviews, pitches, or anything where you'll face questions.

What to notice: *Were any of the objections ones you'd secretly already thought of? That means you knew the weak spot. Now you can address it instead of hoping no one notices.*

□ "Talk me out of this"

What to do: Present your idea, then ask AI to convince you it's wrong or needs rethinking.

Why it matters: Breaks attachment to your first thought.

Example: *"I want to cold email 50 companies with this template. Talk me out of it."*

Try this: When you're leaning hard toward one option but haven't validated if it's actually best.

What to notice: *Did you come out more convinced or less? Either answer is useful — if more convinced, your idea held up to pressure. If less, you saved yourself from a mistake.*

□ "What would someone experienced notice that I'm overlooking?"

What to do: Ask AI to bring an expert lens you don't have yet.

Why it matters: Identifies things beginners miss; fast-forwards your learning.

Example: *"What would an experienced L&D consultant notice that I'm overlooking in this proposal?"*

Try this: When you're doing something for the first time or in an area where you lack deep expertise.

What to notice: *File the most useful things it surfaces. Over time, you'll start anticipating them yourself — that's experience building in real time.*

□ "Create a decision matrix"

What to do: When choosing between options, ask AI to structure the analysis with criteria and tradeoffs.

Why it matters: Makes invisible tradeoffs visible; removes emotion from decision-making.

Example: *"Create a matrix comparing these 3 job offers: salary, growth potential, commute, team size."*

Try this: Complex decisions with multiple factors you need to weigh systematically.

What to notice: *Did the matrix change your thinking, or confirm what you already felt? If it confirmed it — now you have reasoning you can articulate to others. If it changed it — that's the tool doing its job.*

□ **"What would [specific person] say about this?"**

What to do: Ask AI to roleplay the perspective of someone relevant to your situation.

Why it matters: Helps you see through others' eyes; prepares you for real conversations.

Example: *"What would a hiring manager think about my cover letter approach?"*

Try this: When you need an outside perspective you don't have easy access to.

What to notice: *How different was that perspective from your own? The gap between how you see your work and how others might see it is exactly what this optimization is designed to close.*

OPTIMIZE - AFTER AI CREATES OUTPUT

Goal: Refine what exists.

Philosophy: Good enough is the enemy of excellent.

⚠ *Already using your favorites? Try one you've been avoiding this week.*

□ "Assume I'm wrong somewhere. Find it."

What to do: Tell AI to operate from the assumption that you made a mistake.

Why it matters: Changes AI's scanning mode from 'support' to 'audit'.

Example: *"Here's my analysis of this job market data. Assume I'm wrong somewhere. Find it."*

Try this: Before submitting important work or making big decisions based on your analysis.

What to notice: *What did it find? If nothing — you're solid. If something — that's exactly what this is for. Notice how it feels to have a mistake caught before it matters instead of after.*

□ "Build on this, don't start over"

What to do: Explicitly tell AI to iterate on what exists rather than recreating from scratch.

Why it matters: Preserves good elements while improving weak ones.

Example: *"This cover letter is 90% there — refine paragraph 2, don't rewrite the whole thing."*

Try this: When you like most of the output and just need targeted improvements.

What to notice: *Did AI respect the boundary you set, or did it drift toward a full rewrite anyway? If it drifted, you may need to be more explicit. That specificity is a skill worth building.*

★ □ "Spot the weaknesses in my [deliverable]"

What to do: Ask AI to actively look for problems rather than asking for general improvements.

Why it matters: Focuses on flaws that could cost you opportunities.

Example: *"What are the 3 weakest parts of this cover letter that could cost me the interview?"*

Try this: Before submitting anything high stakes where flaws have consequences.

What to notice: *Were the weaknesses things you already sensed, or genuinely new? If you sensed them — you're developing the instinct. Trust it more next time.*

□ "Explain what works and what doesn't"

What to do: Ask AI to evaluate the output and tell you what's strong and what needs work.

Why it matters: Teaches you evaluation skills.

Example: *"Look at this email draft. Explain what works and what doesn't."*

Try this: When you want to understand the quality of output, not just improve it.

What to notice: *What's the pattern in what works? Over time you'll start producing that automatically and spending less time in revision.*

□ "Show your reasoning"

What to do: Ask AI to make its thinking visible — why it made certain choices.

Why it matters: Transparency helps you learn.

Example: *"Show me your reasoning for why you structured the presentation this way."*

Try this: When you want to understand the 'why' behind AI's decisions.

What to notice: *Do you agree with the reasoning? If not, say so and push back. That's collaboration. If yes — you just learned something you can apply next time without asking.*

★ □ "Summarize with clear next steps"

What to do: Ask AI to distill everything into actionable next steps.

Why it matters: Turns information into action; prevents analysis paralysis.

Example: *"Summarize our conversation about my career strategy with 3 clear next steps."*

Try this: End of long conversations or when you need to move from thinking to doing.

What to notice: *Did the summary capture the most important thing, or did it miss something? If it missed something, that's a signal about what you actually care most about — add that next time.*

□ "Give me 2-3 ways to make this stronger"

What to do: After getting output, ask for specific improvement suggestions.

Why it matters: Gets you targeted refinements that make good work great.

Example: *"This presentation outline is solid. Give me 2-3 ways to make it stronger."*


Try this: When the output is good, but you sense it could be better with small tweaks.

What to notice: *Which suggestion resonated immediately? That instinct is you knowing more than you thought you knew. Trust it.*

AI OPTIMIZATION WORKSHEET - CREATION

CREATE YOUR OWN OPTIMIZATION

You've seen 20 optimizations. Time to build one that solves **YOUR** specific problem.

This is what the  [ARC Boost](#) online tool does interactively — walks you through building a custom AI optimizer step by step. Here, you'll follow the same process on paper. What you build here IS your custom boost. The 20 techniques you just browsed? Those were boosts someone else built. Now you're building yours.

EXAMPLE

The problem: I keep asking AI to help with my website copy, but it sounds generic and corporate. I need it to sound like me.

Step 1 — AIM: “I want website copy that sounds like how I actually talk—direct, practical, no corporate fluff.”

Step 2 — RESIST: “If the copy sounds like it could be on any L&D consultant’s website, call it out.”

Step 3 — COLLABORATE: “Give me 2-3 versions with different approaches, then help me pick what actually sounds like me.”

The optimization I created:

“I need website copy for my L&D consulting practice. It should sound like how I talk - direct and practical, no corporate speak. If what you write could work on anyone’s website, call it out and try again. Give me 2-3 versions with different tones, then help me figure out which one sounds like me.”

✓ **ARC Test Passed:** This is way more specific than ‘write website copy for me.’ It sets clear direction (AIM), invites challenge (RESIST), and creates a back-and-forth process (COLLABORATE).

NOW YOU TRY

What **problem** are you trying to solve with AI?

A = AIM: What are you actually trying to accomplish?

R = RESIST: How can you invite AI to push back or challenge?

C = COLLABORATE: How will you work together to make it better?

PUT IT ALL TOGETHER — Write your full optimization:

ARC TEST

- Is this more specific than a basic prompt?
- Does it set clear direction (AIM)?
- Does it invite challenge (RESIST)?
- Does it create a process for improvement (COLLABORATE)?

If you can check 2 of 3 ARC components, you've passed. If you got all 3, even better.

Only hit 1? Don't start over. Just look at which component you missed and layer it in. AIM missing — add what you're trying to accomplish. RESIST missing — add a line that invites pushback. COLLABORATE missing — add how you want to build on the result together. One addition. Same prompt. Try again.

"I love it when a plan comes together."

— Colonel Hannibal Smith, The A-Team

You're ready to create your own optimizations and work with AI as a true thought partner.

A NOTE ON MASTERY

The goal isn't to need this workbook forever. Use these optimizations until you internalize the patterns — then build your own system.

If you're still using this in six months: Great, it's working.

If you've built your own approach: Even better, you got it.

NEXT STEPS

Keep this workbook at your desk. Check off optimizations as you try them. Add your own as you discover what works.

THIS IS PART OF THE SPARKS METHOD ECOSYSTEM

Ignition Point (1 minute)

A decision tree that stops you from using AI when you don't need to.

michelledeshotels.com/sparks-ignition-point/

SPARKS Builder (3-4 minutes)

A structured prompt generator that gets what's in your head onto the page.

michelledeshotels.com/sparks-builder/

ARC Boost (5-7 minutes)

Designed friction that pushes you past your first idea when quality matters.

michelledeshotels.com/arc-engine/

Want more tools and resources? www.michelledeshotels.com

BUILD YOUR ROTATION

Week 1: Start with the  markers — pick one from each stage

Week 2: Try new ones you haven't checked off yet

Week 3: Revisit your favorites + add one you avoided

Week 4: Build your own (use the worksheet on page 6)

The pattern to avoid: Using only 2-3 favorites forever. Keep rotating to build range.

QUICK WINS TO START TOMORROW

Start with any 🌟 'Start Here' optimizations:

- 'What am I missing?' (from BEFORE)
- 'Before you respond, what questions do you have?' (from BEFORE)
- 'Don't just agree — challenge this' (from WHILE)
- 'Show me 3 options' (from WHILE)
- 'Spot the weaknesses' (from AFTER)
- 'Summarize with clear next steps' (from AFTER)

Pick 1-2 to try this week. Then add more as you build confidence.

WEEKLY PRACTICE TRACKERS

WEEK _____ PRACTICE TRACKER
Date: _____

This week I'm trying:

- _____ (from BEFORE)
- _____ (from WHILE)
- _____ (from AFTER)

What worked:

What did this make me realize?
(About your thinking, your assumptions, how you set up the task — not about AI)

What I'll try next week:

WEEK _____ PRACTICE TRACKER

Date: _____

This week I'm trying:

_____ (from BEFORE)

_____ (from WHILE)

_____ (from AFTER)

What worked:

What did this make me realize?

(About your thinking, your assumptions, how you set up the task — not about AI)

What I'll try next week:

WEEK _____ PRACTICE TRACKER

Date: _____

This week I'm trying:

- _____ (from BEFORE)
- _____ (from WHILE)
- _____ (from AFTER)

What worked:

What did this make me realize?

(About your thinking, your assumptions, how you set up the task — not about AI)

What I'll try next week:

ARC BOOST REFERENCE CARD

WALL HANGING

Keep this page separate so it's visible while you work

BEFORE YOU START

- “What am I missing?” ★
- “If this doesn’t make sense, say so”
- “Before you respond, what questions do you have?” ★
- “Ask questions one at a time”
- “What am I not asking that I should?”

WHILE AI WORKS

- “Don’t just agree — challenge this” ★
- “Show me 3 options” ★
- “Here’s my thinking. Where is it weak?”
- “If you were skeptical, what would you push back on?”
- “Talk me out of this”
- “What would someone experienced notice that I’m overlooking?”
- “Create a decision matrix”
- “What would [specific person] say about this?”

AFTER YOU GET OUTPUT

- “Assume I’m wrong somewhere. Find it.”
- “Build on this, don’t start over”
- “Spot the weaknesses in my [deliverable]” ★
- “Explain what works and what doesn’t”
- “Show your reasoning”
- “Summarize with clear next steps” ★
- “Give me 2-3 ways to make this stronger”

★ = *Start Here optimizations (easiest wins for beginners)*

More resources: www.michelledeshotels.com