
AI OPERATOR PLAYBOOK

Running a one-person studio on LLM-assisted workflows

104 production-ready prompts · 5 standard operating procedures

10 copy-paste templates · review discipline for people who ship

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How to Use This Playbook

This is a working document, not a book about AI. It assumes you already run a studio - clients, invoices, deadlines - and want LLM-assisted workflows to carry more of the repetitive load without touching the parts clients actually pay you for: judgment, taste, and accountability. Six chapters of prompts, five operating procedures that wire them together, ten templates to paste into your own tools. Take what earns, edit what almost earns, delete the rest.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

1. The model drafts, you decide. Every prompt in this book produces a first draft, never a sendable artifact. The value is speed from zero to something worth editing. The judgment - what to promise, what to charge, what to refuse - stays with you. The moment you let output skip your review, you are no longer running an assisted workflow; you are running an unsupervised one.
2. Context beats cleverness. A plain prompt with your real call notes outperforms a clever prompt with generic filler every time. The placeholders in braces - {call_notes}, {scope_draft}, {their_message} - are where the quality comes from. Paste real material. If you find the output bland, the input was bland.
3. Placeholders are load-bearing. Do not delete placeholders to make a prompt shorter. Each one is a decision the model would otherwise make for you - badly. If a placeholder does not apply, replace it with 'not applicable' rather than removing it, so the model knows the omission was deliberate.
4. Review is the product. Clients pay for your judgment. Run the four-check review on anything that leaves your outbox: numbers (recompute every date, price, and total), names (people, companies, projects), tone (would you say this on a call?), and promises (can you actually keep each one?).
5. Kill prompts that produce slop. A prompt that hands you generic output three times in a row is not a prompt problem you fix with more adjectives. Either feed it better context or delete it. This book is a starting kit, not scripture - the version that earns its \$29 is the one you have edited into your own voice within a month.

PROMPT ANATOMY

Every prompt in this book has the same five parts. When you write your own - and you should within a month - keep the anatomy even when you change everything else:

ANATOMY · The five parts of every prompt here

ROLE	You are my proposal drafter.
CONTEXT	I run a one-person senior-engineering studio. The client is {client_name}, a {industry} business.
TASK	Draft the scope section of a proposal.
CONSTRAINTS	Every deliverable needs a measurable acceptance criterion. Plain English. No hype words.
FORMAT	Numbered deliverables, then a "Not included" list.

CONTEXT FILES

Keep four small markdown files and paste the relevant excerpt into prompts. This is the single highest-leverage habit in the book:

- clients.md - One short paragraph per active or recent client: what they do, what you built, how they like to communicate, what to never do again. Paste the relevant paragraph into any prompt that touches that client.
- rates.md - Your floor rate, target rate, minimum engagement size, deposit and payment terms, late-fee policy. Money prompts are useless without real numbers; this file is where they live.
- voice.md - Ten sentences you actually wrote and would stand behind, plus a short banned-word list. Paste it into any prompt that produces text a client will read, and add: 'Match this voice.'
- services.md - What you sell, what you explicitly do not sell, and three past engagements with one-line outcomes. This turns proposal and positioning prompts from generic to specific.

REVIEW DISCIPLINE

Nothing generated leaves your outbox until it passes four checks. They take two minutes and they are the difference between an assisted workflow and an unsupervised one:

- Numbers - Recompute every date, fee, percentage, and total. Models are confidently wrong about arithmetic more often than about prose.
- Names - Verify every person, company, and product name. A wrong name in a client email costs more trust than a slow reply.
- Tone - Read it aloud. If you would not say it on a call with this specific client, do not send it in writing.
- Promises - List every commitment the draft makes - dates, outcomes, response times. Delete any you cannot keep with margin.

CHAPTER 01

Sales and Proposals

Sales is where solo operators lose the most unbilled time: calls taken unprepared, proposals written from a blank page, follow-ups either forgotten or groveling. These prompts compress the cycle without outsourcing the judgment. The discovery verdict (S-03), the red-flag test (S-12), and the timeline check (S-13) are the three that pay for this book on their own - run them on every deal, especially the ones you want to be true.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- S-01 — Discovery-call prep from the inquiry
- S-02 — Question set by project type
- S-03 — Call notes to qualification verdict
- S-04 — Proposal outline from call notes
- S-05 — Scope-boundary wording
- S-06 — Three-tier pricing options
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S-01 · Discovery-call prep from the inquiry

When to use: The night before a first call with a new inbound lead.

You are my sales-preparation analyst. I run a one-person senior-engineering studio. A prospective client sent the inquiry below.

Read it and produce:

1. What they are actually asking for, in one sentence.
2. Three plausible business reasons behind the request, ranked by likelihood.
3. Five discovery questions I should ask on the call, ordered by importance.
4. One risk in this inquiry I should probe before quoting anything.
5. What I should NOT promise on the first call.

Inquiry from {client_name} ({company}, {industry}):
{inquiry_text}

My services: {services_summary}

S-02 · Question set by project type

When to use: You know the project category and want a call plan, not a script.

You are a discovery-call coach for technical consultants. I have a first call with {client_name} about a {project_type} project (examples: marketing site, web app, internal tool, integration, rescue/refactor).

Give me 12 discovery questions tailored to this project type, grouped:

- Business outcome (3)
- Current state and constraints (3)
- Decision process and budget (3)
- Technical landscape (3)

Each question must be open-ended and answerable in under two minutes. After the list, name the two questions that most often surface deal-breakers for this project type.

What I know about the client so far: {what_i_know}

S-03 · Call notes to qualification verdict

When to use: Within an hour after the discovery call, while the notes are warm.

You are a blunt qualification reviewer. Below are my raw notes from a discovery call with {client_name}.

Produce:

1. Verdict: PURSUE / PURSUE WITH CONDITIONS / DECLINE, with the deciding factor named explicitly.
2. Budget signal: what they said vs. what they meant.
3. Authority signal: who actually decides, based on the notes.
4. Timeline realism: their expectation vs. what the work likely requires.
5. The single strongest reason to walk away, steel-manned.
6. If pursuing: the three things my proposal must address head-on.

Call notes:

{call_notes}

My minimum engagement is {min_fee}; my earliest start is {start_date}.

S-04 · Proposal outline from call notes

When to use: You decided to pursue; this turns notes into the proposal skeleton.

You are my proposal drafter. Using the discovery notes below, draft a proposal outline for {client_name}.

Structure:

1. Their problem, restated in their own vocabulary (from the notes).
2. The outcome, stated as a business result, not a feature list.
3. Approach in 3 phases, each with a deliverable they can hold.
4. Timeline with explicit dependencies on them (content, access, decisions).
5. Investment: {pricing_structure}, with what each option includes and excludes.
6. Why me: two sentences, specific, no adjectives like "passionate".
7. Terms: deposit, milestone payments, change-order process.

Rules: no hype words, no "cutting-edge", no promises I cannot verify.

Call notes:

{call_notes}

S-05 · Scope-boundary wording

When to use: Before any proposal goes out; this is where disputes are prevented.

You are a contracts-minded editor. Below is the scope section of my proposal for {client_name}. Rewrite it so that:

1. Every deliverable has a measurable acceptance criterion.
2. There is an explicit "Not included" list covering the five most likely assumptions this client will make (infer them from the project type: {project_type}).
3. Revisions are bounded (rounds and turnaround), not open-ended.
4. Anything ambiguous becomes a stated assumption, not a silent hope.

Keep it plain English a non-technical owner can sign. No legalese, no fluff.

Scope draft:
{scope_draft}

S-06 · Three-tier pricing options

When to use: The deal is big enough that options will beat a single take-it-or-leave-it number.

You are a pricing strategist for solo consultancies. Design three engagement options for {client_name} from the discovery notes below.

Rules:

- Option 1 (Essential): the smallest scope that still solves the core problem.
- Option 2 (Recommended): the scope I actually want to run.
- Option 3 (Full): adds speed, depth, or ongoing support - never just "more stuff".
- Each option: one-line outcome, what is included, what is excluded, price, duration.
- The price gap between tiers must be justified by outcomes, not hours.

My floor is {min_fee}; my target for this engagement is {target_fee}.

Discovery notes:
{call_notes}

S-07 · Pricing-pushback reply

When to use: A prospect answered your proposal with a lower number in mind.

You are my negotiation drafter. {client_name} replied to my proposal with the message below, pushing on price.

Draft a reply that:

1. Acknowledges the constraint without apologizing for the price.
2. Restates the outcome the price buys, in one sentence.
3. Offers a scope reduction that lowers the fee (name exactly what gets removed) - never a discount for the same scope.
4. Keeps the door open and sets a specific next step with a date.

Tone: calm, senior, zero defensiveness. Under 150 words.

Their message:
{their_message}

Proposal summary: {proposal_summary}

S-08 · Scope-down instead of discount

When to use: They named a budget below your fee and you want to keep the deal honest.

A prospect asked: "Can you do it for {their_budget}?" My proposed fee was {proposed_fee} for {scope_summary}.

Draft a reply that:

1. States plainly what {their_budget} can buy: a reduced scope that still delivers {core_outcome}.
2. Lists exactly what moves to a later phase or drops.
3. Explains in one sentence why I do not discount the same scope (it punishes the clients who pay the real price).
4. Ends with a clear either/or: reduced scope now, or full scope when the budget allows.

Under 180 words. No pleading, no hedging.

S-09 · Proposal follow-up, day 3

When to use: Three business days after sending a proposal with no reply yet.

Draft a follow-up email to {client_name}, three days after I sent a proposal for {project_summary}.

Rules:

- Two short paragraphs plus a question.
- Add something useful: one observation about their {industry} situation, or one clarification of the proposal they may have missed.
- Ask a low-friction question (for example, whether the phasing matches their priorities) rather than "did you decide yet".
- No "just bumping this", no "circling back", no exclamation marks.

Proposal summary: {proposal_summary}

S-10 • Breakup email, day 10

When to use: One follow-up already sent; time to close the loop with dignity.

Draft a final follow-up to {client_name}. I sent a proposal on {sent_date} and one follow-up since; no reply.

The email should:

1. Close the loop gracefully: I am assuming priorities changed.
2. State that I will release the hold on {start_date} capacity.
3. Leave one specific door open (for example: "if this comes back in {likely_quarter}, the fastest path is a 30-minute call").
4. Be under 90 words. Warm, final, zero guilt-trip.

S-11 • Inbound referral response

When to use: Someone introduced you to a prospect; reply within a business day.

{referrer_name} introduced me to {client_name} ({company}). Draft my first reply to {client_name} that:

1. Thanks them and names the referral context in half a sentence.
2. Shows I did homework: one specific observation about {company}'s current {relevant_area}.
3. Proposes a 25-minute call with two concrete time windows ({time_options}) and a three-item agenda.
4. Under 120 words. Confident, plain, no gushing.

Referral context: {intro_email}

S-12 • Red-flag sniff test

When to use: Before investing proposal hours into an inquiry that smells off.

You are a risk reviewer for freelance engagements. Read this inquiry and my notes, then list every red flag you can find, each tagged:

- SCOPE (vague or expanding)
- MONEY (budget evasion, exposure to nonpayment)
- AUTHORITY (committee, no owner)
- RESPECT (devalues the work)
- TIMELINE (impossible or artificial urgency)

For each flag: the exact phrase that triggered it, why it matters, and one question that would confirm or clear it.

End with: proceed / proceed carefully / decline, and why.

Inquiry: {inquiry_text}

My notes: {notes}

S-13 · Timeline sanity check

When to use: Before you put dates in writing; run this on every draft timeline.

You are a delivery realist. Here is my draft timeline for {project_summary} at {client_name}:
{timeline_draft}

Stress-test it:

1. Where am I underestimating, given my constraints (solo operator, {weekly_capacity} hrs/week, other active work: {other_work})?
2. Where does the timeline depend on the client, and what happens to each date if they are one week late at that point?
3. Which phase has no slack, and why?
4. Rewrite the timeline with honest buffers, and state the buffer policy in one sentence I can paste into the proposal.

S-14 · Positioning paragraph

When to use: The 'Why me' section of a proposal; keep it to three sentences.

Write the "Why me" section of a proposal for {client_name}.

Facts about me: {facts}

(years shipping, notable outcomes, relevant domain work, how I work: weekly demos, senior-only, direct communication)

Constraints:

- Exactly three sentences.
- Sentence 1: relevant proof, with a number if possible.
- Sentence 2: how I work, framed as what that means for them.
- Sentence 3: the honest trade-off of hiring a senior solo operator (capacity, focus) stated as a feature.
- Banned: passionate, world-class, cutting-edge, seamless, synergy.

S-15 · Executive-summary rewrite

When to use: The proposal is done; make the first paragraph survive a 20-second skim.

Rewrite this proposal executive summary so a busy owner reads it in 20 seconds and knows: their problem, the outcome, the price range, the timeline.

Max 90 words. Plain sentences. Front-load the decision-relevant facts. Delete every adjective that does not carry information.

Current draft:

{summary_draft}

S-16 · Payment-terms wording

When to use: Standardize this once, then reuse it in every proposal.

Draft the payment-terms section of my proposal for {client_name}.

My rules: {deposit_pct}% deposit to reserve the start date, milestone payments at {milestones}, net {net_days}, late invoices pause work after {grace_days} days and accrue {late_fee}.

Write it in plain, firm, friendly English. Include one sentence explaining WHY the deposit exists (it reserves capacity and filters for committed clients). No apology, no legalese. Under 120 words.

S-17 · Declined-proposal grace

When to use: You lost the deal; lose it in a way that buys the next one.

{client_name} told me they are going another direction on {project_summary}.

Draft a reply that:

1. Thanks them for the decision and the process, in one sentence.
2. Offers one genuinely useful artifact: a short list of what to verify with whoever they hire ({checklist_items}).
3. Leaves the relationship open for {future_angle} without begging.
4. Under 100 words. No bitterness, no "if you change your mind" groveling.

S-18 · Budget-unknown discovery

When to use: The prospect deflected the budget question; surface a range anyway.

The prospect has not stated a budget and deflected when asked.

Give me five ways to surface a real budget range on the next call with {client_name}, each as a script I can say verbatim. Techniques should include:

- anchoring with a range
- the "what would make this a no-brainer" question
- referencing a comparable past project
- the phased-budget probe
- the direct ask, framed as respect for their time

After each script, one line on what each possible answer tells me.

S-19 · Alternatives framing

When to use: They are comparing you to an agency, a junior, a tool, or doing nothing.

The prospect is also considering {alternatives} (for example: an agency, a junior freelancer, an off-the-shelf tool, doing nothing).

Write a short proposal section (under 150 words) that:

1. Names each alternative respectfully and states when it IS the right choice.
2. States the specific condition under which I am the right choice.
3. Avoids trash-talking anyone; confidence through precision.

Project context: {project_summary}

S-20 · Post-decision debrief

When to use: After every won or lost deal; this is how the pipeline improves.

Act as my sales analyst. Here are the facts of a {won_lost} deal with {client_name}:

{deal_facts}

(first contact, calls held, proposal sent, price, decision time, their stated reason)

Produce:

1. The three moments that most influenced the outcome, in order.
2. One thing my process did well that I should standardize.
3. One leak in the process and a concrete fix (a question to add, a step to cut, a document to change).
4. If lost: whether this was winnable at my price point, honestly.

Be blunt. This is for me, not for a report.