PERSONAL FINANCE × AI · GUIDE 04

Pay Off Your Student Loans

Federal loans have options private loans don't. These prompts help you find out what you actually have before you make a decision you can't undo.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Build my student loan payoff strategy
- Compare my federal repayment plan options
- Should I refinance?
- What extra payments actually do
- Public Service Loan Forgiveness walkthrough
- Pay the loans down or invest instead?
- ...and 1 more

7 PROMPTS · 1 INTERVIEW-STYLE

WORKS WITH CHATGPT AND CLAUDE · NO CODING REQUIRED

How to Use These Prompts

Federal loans have options that private loans don't. Know which you have before you do anything irreversible.

START HERE

Build my student loan payoff strategy is the one to run first. It's an interview prompt — instead of dumping a wall of questions on you, the AI asks one question at a time and uses each answer to decide what to ask next, the way a good advisor would. Everything else in this guide builds on what that conversation produces.

Six rules that make these work

Use real numbers

Vague inputs get vague outputs. Pull up your actual bank app before you start.

Net, not gross

Use what lands in your checking account after taxes and deductions — not your salary.

Turn on memory

In your ChatGPT or Claude settings. Then you stop re-explaining your situation every chat.

Stay in one chat

Keep this topic in its own conversation so context builds instead of resetting.

Answer honestly

These prompts tell the AI to push back on you. That only works if your inputs are real.

Don't stop at the first answer

Ask follow-ups. The second and third response is usually where it gets specific.

The Prompts

01	Build my student loan payoff strategy	INTERVIEW PROMPT
02	Compare my federal repayment plan options	DECISION PROMPT
03	Should I refinance?	DECISION PROMPT
04	What extra payments actually do	ANALYSIS PROMPT
05	Public Service Loan Forgiveness walkthrough	DECISION PROMPT
06	Pay the loans down or invest instead?	DECISION PROMPT
07	Clean up my loan inventory	ANALYSIS PROMPT

PRO TIP

Paste the prompt exactly as written, including the bracketed placeholders. The instructions telling the AI to ask one question at a time, push back on vague answers, and give you a specific deliverable are doing most of the work — deleting them is why generic prompts return generic advice.

01

Build my student loan payoff strategy

INTERVIEW PROMPT

The flagship student loan prompt.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
You're going to help me build a student loan payoff strategy.

Interview me one question at a time. Ask one question, wait for the answer, then decide
what to ask next. Don't send me a list of questions.

Find out: each loan's balance, interest rate, servicer, and whether it's federal or
private; my current repayment plan; my income and how it's likely to change; my field of
work and employer type; my other debts; my other financial goals; and how I feel about
carrying this debt versus other priorities.

Ask specifically whether I work for a government or nonprofit employer, because that
changes the entire strategy.

When you have enough, give me:
1. A clear inventory of what I owe, separated into federal and private
2. My total interest cost under my current plan
3. A recommended strategy with the reasoning
4. Any federal program I might qualify for, with what I'd need to verify
5. The order to attack the loans in, and my projected payoff date
6. The specific first step to take this week

Important: federal repayment and forgiveness programs change frequently and the details
matter enormously. For anything program-specific, tell me exactly what to verify at
studentaid.gov or with my servicer before I act. Do not state program rules as settled
fact.
```

02

Compare my federal repayment plan options

DECISION PROMPT

The default plan you were auto-enrolled in is often not the best one.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I have federal student loans and I want to understand my repayment plan options.

My situation:
- Loan types and balances: [details]
- Interest rates: [rates]
- Current plan: [plan]
- Gross annual income: [amount]
- Family size: [number]
- State: [state]
- Employer type: [for-profit / nonprofit / government]

Walk me through the repayment plans I may be eligible for. For each one, explain:
1. How the monthly payment is calculated
2. Roughly what my payment would be
3. The repayment term
4. Total interest over the life of the loan
5. Whether any balance is forgiven at the end and whether that forgiveness is taxable
6. Who this plan is actually best for

Then tell me which two or three are worth my serious consideration and why.

Critical: federal repayment plan rules change often and several have been revised or
replaced in recent years. Flag clearly which details I must verify at studentaid.gov
before relying on them, and where your information could be out of date. Do not guess at
current program names or terms.
```

03

Should I refinance?

DECISION PROMPT

Refinancing federal loans is a one-way door.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I'm considering refinancing my student loans. Here's my situation:
- Loans, balances, and rates: [details]
- Federal or private: [which are which]
- Refinance offer: [rate, term, lender]
- My income and job stability: [details]
- Employer type: [for-profit / nonprofit / government]

Analyze it:
1. Monthly payment and total interest now versus refinanced
2. Total dollars saved or lost over the full term
3. Whether the new term extends how long I'm paying

Then the part that matters most: if any of these are federal loans, list every protection
and program I would permanently give up by refinancing into a private loan — income-driven
repayment, deferment and forbearance options, forgiveness eligibility, and anything else.
Explain what each is worth in a realistic bad scenario, like a job loss or an income drop.

Give me a clear recommendation. If the answer is "refinance the private loans and leave
the federal ones alone," say exactly that.

Note where your knowledge of current federal protections may be outdated and what I should
verify first.
```

04

What extra payments actually do

ANALYSIS PROMPT

Makes the abstract concrete.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
Here are my student loans:
[each loan: balance, rate, minimum payment]

Show me the impact of paying extra. For extra monthly payments of $50, $100, $250, and
$500:
1. New payoff date
2. Total interest saved
3. Months cut off the term

Then tell me which specific loan the extra should go to, and why.

Also model these one-time scenarios:
- A $1,000 lump sum applied today
- A $5,000 lump sum applied today
- Putting my annual tax refund toward it every year

Last thing, and be specific: tell me exactly how to make sure extra payments are applied
to the principal of the loan I want and not just advancing my due date. Include what to
say to my servicer.
```

05

Public Service Loan Forgiveness walkthrough

DECISION PROMPT

If you work for a government or nonprofit, run this.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I want to understand whether Public Service Loan Forgiveness could apply to me.

My situation:
- Employer and type: [details]
- Job title and hours per week: [details]
- Loan types: [details]
- How long I've been in this job: [time]
- Payments made so far and under which plans: [details]

Walk me through:
1. The eligibility requirements as you understand them — employer, loan type, repayment plan, and payment count
2. Where my situation appears to fit and where it may not
3. What documentation and certification I'd need to file, and how often
4. What forgiveness would be worth to me in dollars if I qualified
5. How pursuing this would change my optimal repayment strategy
6. The specific risks — what would disqualify me, and what happens if I change jobs partway through

Then give me a checklist of exactly what to verify and where.

This program's rules have changed multiple times and continue to be litigated and revised. Be explicit about which details I must confirm at studentaid.gov and with my servicer rather than taking from you. Flag where your information may be out of date.
```

06

Pay the loans down or invest instead?

DECISION PROMPT

Interest rate math, then the part that isn't math.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I have [amount] per month I could put toward either extra student loan payments or
investing. Help me decide.

My situation:
- Loans, balances, rates: [details]
- Federal or private: [which]
- Employer 401k match: [details, and whether I'm capturing it fully]
- Current retirement savings: [amount]
- Emergency fund: [amount]
- Age and rough timeline: [details]
- Tax bracket: [bracket]

Give me:
1. The pure math — guaranteed return from paying down debt at my rates versus a reasonable
long-run expected return from investing, and be clear that one is guaranteed and one isn't
2. Whether I'm leaving employer match money on the table, because that changes the answer
immediately
3. Any student loan interest tax deduction I might be getting and how it affects the
effective rate
4. A recommended split rather than an all-or-nothing answer
5. What would change your recommendation

Also address the non-math side honestly: what the debt costs me in flexibility and stress,
and whether that's worth paying a premium to eliminate.
```

07

Clean up my loan inventory

ANALYSIS PROMPT

Do this before any of the other prompts. Most people don't know what they actually have.

COPY & PASTE INTO CHATGPT OR CLAUDE

```
I'm not fully sure what student loans I have. Help me build a complete inventory.

First, tell me exactly where to find this information — which websites, which accounts,
what to look for — for both federal and private loans. Be specific about the steps.

Then give me a template I should fill in for each loan, covering everything that matters
for strategy: servicer, loan type, whether it's subsidized, original balance, current
balance, interest rate, whether the rate is fixed or variable, current repayment plan,
monthly payment, and status.

Then tell me the five things people most commonly discover when they do this that change
their plan — for example, loans they forgot about, rates they misremembered, or being on a
plan they never chose.

Once I paste my completed inventory back, summarize it and tell me the single most urgent
thing to address.
```

THE BIG IDEA

Most people get bad answers from AI because they ask bad questions — one vague sentence, no numbers, no context. These prompts fix that by making the AI gather the context first.

The output is only as good as what you feed it. Give it real numbers, answer the questions honestly, and let it tell you things you'd rather not hear. That's the whole point.