

Using AI to Help Write IEP Goals

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Individualized Education Programs require careful planning, a deep understanding of a student's needs, and compliance with legal and ethical guidelines. Using artificial intelligence (AI) to write IEPs can be a time-saving tool, but it is not a substitute for professional expertise. Educators must proceed with caution, ensuring that AI-generated suggestions align with the specific needs of their students. You can download a copy of the five prompts using AI to help write IEP goals at the bottom of this post.



READ THIS FIRST ABOUT USING AI IN SCHOOLS

Before using AI to assist with IEP development, it is essential to understand the fundamentals of IEP writing and the unique needs of each student. AI is not a replacement for professional judgment. It can assist in structuring content, but only when used by educators who have a strong understanding of special education and student needs.

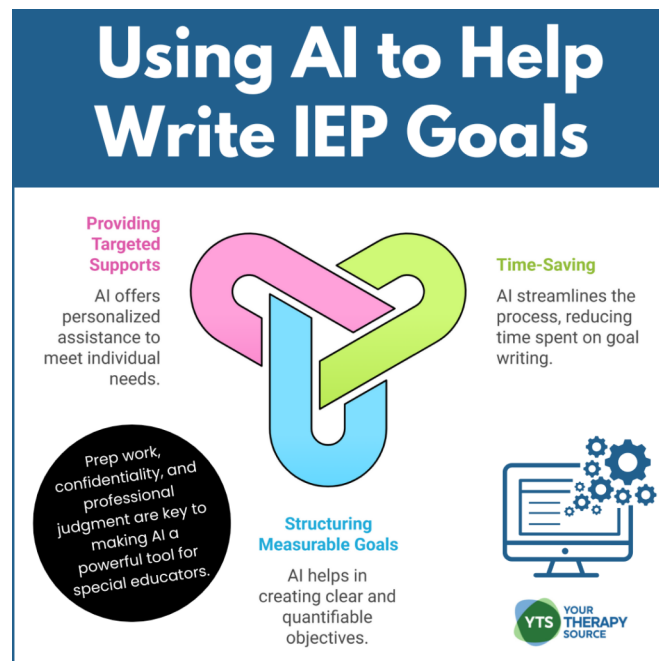
It is also important to check your school's policy regarding AI use. Some schools may have specific guidelines on whether and how AI can be used for developing IEPs. Always follow your district's policies to ensure compliance with privacy laws and ethical standards.

CONFIDENTIALITY IS REQUIRED WHEN USING AI FOR IEPs

Educators must never enter personally identifiable information, diagnoses, or sensitive student data into AI tools. Maintaining student confidentiality is a legal and ethical requirement, not just a best practice. AI should only be used for drafting general content, and all AI-generated suggestions must be carefully reviewed to ensure they align with the student's specific needs, legal requirements, and best practices.

Even experienced special educators urge caution. AI should only be used by those who have a deep understanding of both special education and technology. Educators who are unfamiliar with either may not recognize when AI-generated content is inaccurate or inappropriate. Blindly accepting AI suggestions can result in ineffective or noncompliant IEPs.

AI is a tool to assist, but it cannot replace teacher expertise. All AI-generated content should be reviewed, refined, and verified to ensure it meets the legal, educational, and functional needs of each student.



THE BENEFITS OF USING AI TO WRITE IEP GOALS

AI should always only be used as a starting point. The educator's expertise is essential to evaluate, refine, and personalize goals to ensure they are appropriate and meaningful for each student.

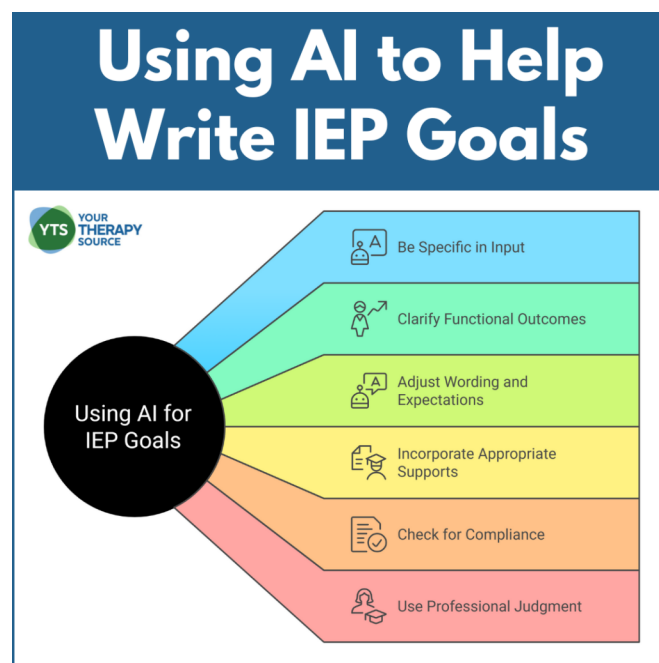
- AI can help generate draft goals that align with student needs, providing a structured starting point.
- AI can assist in organizing goals using a research-based format, ensuring clarity and consistency.

- AI can prompt thought-provoking questions to help educators consider different aspects of a student's abilities.
- AI can offer multiple variations of a goal, allowing educators to refine and select the most appropriate version.
- AI can save time in the IEP writing process, allowing teachers to focus on individualizing goals rather than drafting from scratch.

PREPARING TO USE AI TO HELP WRITING IEPS – DO THE PREP WORK

Before using AI to draft IEP goals, educators need to have a deep understanding of the student's strengths and challenges. Having clear and detailed information about the student will allow AI to generate stronger and more effective goals. Educators should take the following steps before using AI to generate goals:

- Gather assessment data from formal and informal observations, classroom performance, and testing results.
- Identify the student's strengths and areas of need.
- Determine the specific functional outcome for the goal to ensure it is meaningful and appropriate.
- Understand which supports and accommodations have been successful for the student.



HOW TO USE AN AI PROMPT

These prompts can help generate well-structured IEP goals, but they are merely a starting point. To use a prompt effectively:

- **Be specific in your input** – The more details you provide about the student’s current abilities, strengths, and areas of need, the better the AI-generated response will be.
- **Clarify the functional outcome** – Clearly define what success looks like for the student, making sure it is meaningful and measurable.
- **Adjust wording and expectations** – AI may generate goals that are too broad, too ambitious, or not fully aligned with the student’s needs. Review and modify them to ensure they are realistic.
- **Incorporate appropriate supports** – AI can suggest general strategies, but you need to ensure that the accommodations and instructional strategies align with what has been effective for the student.
- **Check for compliance** – Ensure that the goals follow legal requirements, school district guidelines, and best practices for IEP writing.
- **Use professional judgment** – AI can assist in structuring goals, but it does not replace the expertise of educators and therapists. Always review the generated goals critically before including them in an IEP.

By following these steps, AI can be a valuable tool in drafting IEP goals while still ensuring they are personalized, accurate, and beneficial for the student.



FIVE PROMPTS TO TRY WHEN USING AI TO HELP WRITE IEP GOALS

Remember, these prompts are a starting point. It is essential to review and refine them to ensure they are appropriate for each student.

1. Generate the SMART IEP Goal

A student in (elementary, middle, or high school) is working on (goal area). Their present level of skill in this area is (specific functional skill, including baseline performance). Write a SMART IEP goal that includes:

- The condition under which the goal will occur (e.g., in a specific setting, during specific tasks, with necessary supports such as prompts or visual cues).
- The functional outcome or measurable behavior expected.
- The criteria for success (e.g., accuracy, frequency, duration, trials).
- The timeframe for achieving the goal.

Include necessary supports as appropriate, but do not reference specific services or providers.

Write the goal in a one-sentence format. It should focus on one specific skill at a time and then break it down using the SMART framework.

2. Generate Accommodations, Supports, and Instructional Strategies

Based on the IEP goal provided, suggest appropriate accommodations, supports, and instructional strategies that may help the student achieve this goal.

3. Generate a Data Collection Spreadsheet, Action Plan, and Professional Resources

Create a spreadsheet specifically for this goal for data collection and provide an action plan for collecting data. Also, add suggested professional resources to measure progress.

4. Generate the Present Level of Performance for the IEP Team

Based on the IEP goal provided, write a Present Level of Performance summary for the IEP team that includes the student's strengths, the identified deficit, how it impacts them functionally, and the rationale for the goal.

5. Generate a Strengths-Based Parent Statement

Provide a strengths-based statement for parents that acknowledges the student's deficit, describes the goal, and explains the functional outcome in a way that is clear and supportive.



EXAMPLE OF USING THE FIVE PROMPTS USING AI TO HELP WRITE IEP GOALS

Let's review an example using the prompts. Here is the prep work on our imaginary student – The student is a friendly and creative learner who enjoys hands-on activities and structured routines. They are highly engaged in topics of interest and respond well to positive reinforcement. The student demonstrates strong verbal communication skills and can express their thoughts clearly when calm.

However, the student struggles with emotional regulation, particularly when faced with frustration or unexpected changes in routine. They often become overwhelmed and need adult intervention to calm down. The student currently uses a coping strategy in 1 out of 5 observed opportunities, typically after multiple prompts from an adult. They find it difficult to identify their emotions in the moment and require structured support to transition back to tasks after becoming dysregulated.

Now that we have this foundational understanding, we can use AI to assist in drafting a well-structured Individualized Education Program goal.

First Prompt: Generate the SMART IEP Goal

A student in elementary school is working on self-regulation. Their present level of skill in this area is that they struggle with emotional regulation, particularly when frustrated or when routines change. They often become overwhelmed and need adult intervention to calm down. Currently, they use a coping strategy in 1 out of 5 observed opportunities, typically after multiple prompts from an adult. They have difficulty identifying their emotions in the moment and require structured support to transition back to tasks after becoming dysregulated.

Write a SMART IEP goal that includes:

- *The condition under which the goal will occur (e.g., in a specific setting, during specific tasks, with necessary supports such as prompts or visual cues).*
- *The functional outcome or measurable behavior expected.*
- *The criteria for success (e.g., accuracy, frequency, duration, trials).*
- *The timeframe for achieving the goal.*

Include necessary supports as appropriate, but do not reference specific services or providers. Write the goal in a one-sentence format. It should focus on one specific skill at a time and then break it down using the SMART framework.

AI-Generated SMART IEP Goal

One-Sentence SMART Goal:

Within one academic year, when provided with visual cues and structured practice, the student will independently identify their emotions and use an appropriate coping strategy in response to frustration in 4 out of 5 observed opportunities, as measured by teacher observations.

SMART Framework Breakdown:

- **Specific:** The student will improve self-regulation by learning to identify their emotions and apply a coping strategy when frustrated.
- **Measurable:** Success will be determined by achieving **4 out of 5 observed opportunities** where the student independently selects and uses a coping strategy.
- **Achievable:** The goal builds on the student's **current level of 1 out of 5 observed opportunities** and incorporates structured practice and visual supports.
- **Relevant:** Developing emotional regulation skills is essential for classroom participation, social interactions, and academic engagement.
- **Time-Bound:** The goal will be achieved within **one academic year**, with progress tracked through teacher observations.

Second Prompt: AI Generated Suggestions

Based on that IEP goal provided, suggest appropriate accommodations, supports, and instructional strategies that may help the student achieve this goal.

Accommodations:

- Visual cue cards with emotion identification and coping strategies
- Access to a designated calm-down area in the classroom
- Structured breaks to prevent emotional overwhelm
- Use of a visual timer to signal transitions and prepare for changes in routine
- Sentence stems or communication boards to help verbalize emotions
- Non-verbal signal system for the student to request breaks or assistance

Supports:

- Pre-teaching and modeling of coping strategies in structured settings
- Daily check-ins using an emotion chart or self-rating scale
- Verbal prompts and guided questioning to help the student recognize emotions in real-time
- Positive reinforcement for independently using coping strategies
- Peer or teacher-led role-playing scenarios to practice self-regulation in a low-pressure setting
- Predictable classroom routines and transition warnings to reduce frustration

Instructional Strategies:

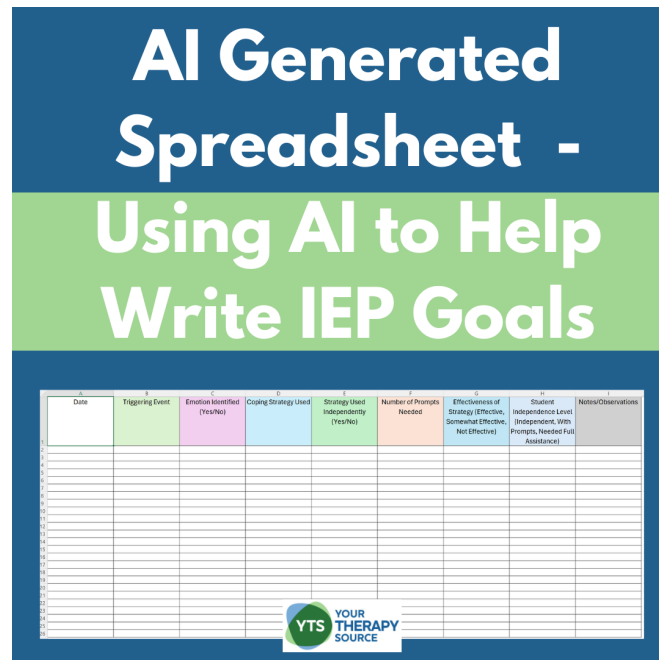
- Explicit instruction on identifying emotions and linking them to coping strategies
- Social stories or visual schedules to reinforce expected behaviors
- Use of mindfulness techniques such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation
- Gradual release of responsibility (I do, we do, you do) for practicing self-regulation strategies
- Reflective journaling or discussion to review emotional responses and identify patterns
- Use of structured games or activities to teach problem-solving and frustration tolerance

These accommodations, supports, and instructional strategies provide the student with multiple ways to develop and apply self-regulation skills across different settings.

Third Prompt: AI Generated Data and Resources

Create a spreadsheet specifically for this goal for data collection and provide an action plan for collecting data. Also, add suggested professional resources to measure progress.

I have created a data collection spreadsheet for tracking progress on the self-regulation IEP goal. You can download it here (it will provide you with a link example image below) and upload it to Google Sheets for easy tracking.



Action Plan for Collecting Data

1. Set a Data Collection Schedule
 - Collect data daily or during structured self-regulation practice sessions.
 - Track behavior across different settings such as whole group, small group, and independent work.
2. Define Observation Tasks
 - Record the triggering event that led to emotional dysregulation.
 - Track whether the student identified their emotion independently or needed assistance.
 - Document which coping strategy was used and whether it was chosen independently.
 - Note how many prompts were required before the student used the strategy.
3. Use Consistent Measurement Criteria
 - Measure success as four out of five observed opportunities where the student independently identifies emotions and applies a coping strategy.
 - Assess whether the selected strategy was effective or required redirection.
4. Include Qualitative Notes
 - Identify patterns in frustration triggers.
 - Track which strategies are most effective for the student and adjust supports accordingly.
5. Review and Adjust Strategies as Needed
 - Review progress biweekly to determine if additional supports are needed.
 - Introduce new strategies if current ones are ineffective or require further scaffolding.

Suggested Professional Resources to Measure Progress

- Zones of Regulation Curriculum or Other Self Regulation Curriculums to help students identify emotions and strategies
- Behavioral Rating Scales such as BASC-3 and SSIS for tracking emotional regulation progress
- Daily Self-Monitoring Checklists for students to reflect on emotional responses
- Social Thinking Curriculum for teaching emotional awareness and regulation strategies
- Teacher and Student Reflections to assess self-regulation in different classroom situations

Fourth Prompt: AI Generated Present Levels of Performance

PROMPT – *Based on the IEP goal provided, write a Present Level of Performance summary for the IEP team that includes the student's strengths, the identified deficit, how it impacts them functionally, and the rationale for the goal.*

Present Level of Performance Summary for the IEP Team – AI Generated: The student is a friendly and creative learner who enjoys hands-on activities and structured routines. They demonstrate strong verbal communication skills and can express their thoughts clearly when calm. The student is highly engaged in topics of interest and responds well to positive reinforcement.

However, the student struggles with emotional regulation, particularly when faced with frustration or unexpected changes in routine. They often become overwhelmed and require adult intervention to calm down. Currently, they independently use a coping strategy in one out of five observed opportunities and typically need multiple prompts to do so. The student also has difficulty identifying their emotions in the moment, which impacts their ability to self-regulate and transition back to tasks effectively.

The difficulty with self-regulation affects the student's ability to remain engaged in learning activities, participate in group work, and transition smoothly between tasks. When dysregulated, they may withdraw, avoid tasks, or display behaviors that disrupt their learning process. These challenges can lead to increased frustration, reduced academic progress, and difficulty maintaining positive peer interactions.

This goal is designed to help the student develop the ability to recognize their emotions and apply effective coping strategies with increasing independence. By strengthening their self-regulation skills, the student will be better equipped to manage frustration, stay engaged in learning, and navigate social and academic situations more successfully.

Fifth Prompt: AI Generated Parent Summary Letter

PROMPT – *Provide a strengths-based statement for parents that acknowledges the student's deficit, describes the goal, and explains the functional outcome in a way that is clear and supportive.*

Your child is a creative and engaged learner who enjoys hands-on activities and thrives in structured routines. They have strong verbal communication skills and express their thoughts clearly when calm. Your child responds well to positive reinforcement and is highly motivated when working on topics of interest.

Right now, we are focusing on helping them develop self-regulation skills so they can manage frustration more independently. Currently, they sometimes struggle to identify their emotions in the moment and may need adult support to calm down when routines change or tasks become challenging. They are working toward using coping strategies more consistently, with fewer prompts, to help them transition back to learning activities.

To support this growth, their goal is to independently recognize their emotions and use a coping strategy in four out of five opportunities when faced with frustration. This will help them stay engaged in learning, participate in group activities, and handle challenges with confidence. As they build these skills, they will be better able to navigate social and academic situations in a way that supports their success. We look forward to partnering with you to support their progress.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR USING AI TO HELP WRITING IEP GOALS

- AI can help generate structured, measurable goals and targeted supports for students.
- AI-generated content can save time and provide a clear roadmap for progress.
- Educators must do the prep work to ensure goals align with the student's strengths and challenges.
- AI is a starting point, not a final product—professional judgment is essential for reviewing and refining content.
- Confidentiality is required—never enter personally identifiable student information into AI tools.
- AI can be a valuable tool when used responsibly and thoughtfully, ensuring that IEPs remain individualized and meaningful.

Need Examples of IEP Goals?

Here are some helpful resources with IEP goal examples:

[List of Student Strengths and Weaknesses for IEPs](#)

[Self-Advocacy IEP Goals](#)

[Self-Regulation IEP Goals](#)

Executive Functioning IEP Goals

Perspective-Taking IEP Goals

Independent Functioning IEP Goals

AI can be a powerful tool for writing IEPs, but it must be used responsibly. Educators must always review and refine AI-generated content to ensure it is appropriate, individualized, and legally compliant. AI can support the process, but the expertise of the teacher is what ultimately creates meaningful and effective IEPs.