Before you write an SOP, interview the person who does the job

The person who does a job every day is the best source of how it is done, and often the worst at explaining it. An AI assistant helps in two ways: it prepares the questions, and afterwards it turns your notes into structured material without losing the detail. Ask first, explain why, and record only with the person's clear agreement.

Paste the rules block at the start of every chat about the procedure, then the prompt. Replace the highlighted [placeholders]. Keep alarm codes, passwords, customer details and staff records out of the chat.

PROMPT 1 · THE RULES BLOCK

RULES FOR THIS CHAT
- You are helping me write down how work is really done in my business. Use only what I give you: interview notes, observation notes, the process map, and the rules I paste.
- Never invent steps, equipment, quantities, temperatures, times, chemicals or safety rules. If something is missing, write [ASK EXPERT: ...], [CHECK RULE: ...] or [DECISION NEEDED: ...].
- Do not state what any law, code or safety rule requires. Use only the official text I paste, and quote it when you rely on it.
- If two sources disagree (for example, two people do a step differently), show both and mark [DECISION NEEDED]. Do not blend them.
- Write steps as short actions that start with a verb. Keep our names for things exactly as written.
- Change only what I ask you to change, and list every change you made.
- When I ask for questions, options or suggestions, label them as suggestions; never present them as how we work.
- If you are unsure, say so instead of guessing.

PROMPT 2 · THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

[Paste your rules block.]
I am going to interview [role, e.g. our most experienced closer] about how they do [process]. It starts when [trigger] and ends when [end point]. The business is a small [type of business].
Write me an interview guide of 20 to 30 questions, in the order the work happens. Include:
- a walk-through of the last time they did it, step by step
- for each stage: what they look at, listen for or check to know it is done right
- what varies (busy nights, quiet nights, someone off, equipment playing up)
- what goes wrong, what they do then, and who they tell
- what new people get wrong, and what they wish someone had told them
- what they do that is not written anywhere
- anything they think we should do differently
Use plain, friendly questions. Do not suggest answers or assume any equipment or steps I have not mentioned.

DURING AND AFTER

The questions that do the most work

"Walk me through the last time you did it." A specific night brings back real steps. "How do you usually do it?" brings back the ideal version.

"How do you know it's right?" This finds the cues: the color, the sound, the reading, the feel. Cues are what new people lack.

"What's the first thing you'd check if it went wrong?" This finds the failure points and the order the expert troubleshoots in.

"What do new people get wrong?" This finds the steps a procedure must explain most carefully.

"What do you do that you've never told anyone?" Asked lightly, this often finds the most valuable step in the whole job.

"Is there anything you do because 'we always have', that you're not sure about?" This finds habits worth questioning (Chapter 16).

Listen more than you talk. Afterwards, clean up the notes or transcript (remove other people's names, customers' details and anything private), then:

PROMPT 3 · INTERVIEW TO STRUCTURED NOTES

[Paste your rules block.]
Below is a cleaned-up transcript of an interview with [role] about [process]. Turn it into structured notes. Do not add anything they did not say.
1. Steps in order, each as a short action in their own words where possible. Number them.
2. For each step: the cue or standard they use to know it is done (quote them), and any reason they gave.
3. Variations and exceptions they mentioned, and what they do in each case.
4. Equipment, materials and places they named, exactly as they named them.
5. Gaps: anything unclear, skipped or contradictory, written as [ASK EXPERT: question].
6. Anything that sounds like a safety, food safety, money or legal rule, written as [CHECK RULE: what to check]. Do not say what the rule is.
7. Ideas they had for doing it differently, kept separate.
Transcript:
[paste]

CAPTURE IS DONE WHEN

- [ ] The person who does the job has agreed to be interviewed (and recorded, if recorded).
- [ ] At least one interview and one observed run are in NOTES, cleaned of private details.
- [ ] Existing notes, signs, manuals and labels are collected, with where they came from and their date.
- [ ] "Said, seen and written" differences are listed, and each has been asked about.
- [ ] Every [ASK EXPERT] from the interview has been taken back to the expert, not answered by the assistant.
- [ ] Where two people do the job differently, both versions are recorded and the choice is in DECISIONS.

Interview notes

Process: _____ Expert: _____ Date: _____ Recorded with agreement: yes / no

No.	What they do (their words)	How they know it is right	Why	Questions [ASK EXPERT]

What the full handbook adds. “Prompt the Prompt: Procedures and Everyday Operations” is an 81-page PDF (US Letter; 79 pages in A4) in 5 parts and 17 chapters, with 22 copy-ready prompts, checklists, folder templates and 10 printable SOP pages (also as separate PDFs), plus a plain-text file of the prompts. After the interview it covers watching the work, mapping the process, drafting with gaps marked, checklists and quick cards, onboarding guides, testing with a new person, four reviews in fresh chats, and keeping a procedure alive. At mothleaf.com/product/prompt-the-prompt-procedures-and-everyday-operations.

Set for A4 (210 × 297 mm); print at 100% or read on screen. Free for personal use, at work and in your own business: copy and adapt the prompts and the page. Please share the link rather than the file. Works with any chat-based AI assistant. This sample teaches a way of capturing work; it states no legal or safety rule for any place. Steps involving dangerous equipment, chemicals, food safety, money or people's data need the official rules and a qualified person.