‘You are a helpful mail assistant,’ and other Apple Intelligence instructions

Apple’s latest developer betas launched last week with a handful of the generative AI features that were announced at WWDC and are headed to your iPhones, iPads, and Macs over the next several months. On Apple’s computers, however, you can actually read the instructions programmed into the model supporting some of those Apple Intelligence features.

They show up as prompts that precede anything you say to a chatbot by default, and we’ve seen them uncovered for AI tools like Microsoft Bing and DALL-E before. Now a member of the macOS 15.1 beta subreddit posted that they’d discovered the files containing those backend prompts. You can’t alter any of the files, but they do give an early hint at how the sausage is made.

In the example above, an AI bot for a “helpful mail assistant” is being told how to ask a series of questions based on the content of an email. It could be part of Apple’s Smart Reply feature, which can go on to suggest possible replies for you.

a:hover]:text-gray-63 [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63 dark:[&>a]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray”>Screenshot: Wes Davis / The Verge

This brief prompt summarizes emails, with a careful instruction not to answer any questions.

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>Rest in peace, little buddy.

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>“It will not be helpful.” a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>“Hey, Ajax.”