

STARTER GUIDE

How to get started with **AI and agents**

The minimum you need to know so the year doesn't get away from you. No jargon, no tool catalog, no promises.

Current as of July 2026

The model landscape shifts every quarter. Section 2 carries its own cutoff date.

Neurya

The intelligent operations firm

1. The three that matter

There are thousands of AI tools on the market and almost all of them are built on top of the same three companies. Understand these three and you understand 90 percent of the market.

Each one has its own chat app, its free tier and its paid individual plan. All three paid plans run around twenty dollars a month, though the price changes by country and by season: check the link before you buy. The three apps work in the browser, on your phone and on the desktop.

COMPANY AND PRODUCT	WHERE YOU USE IT AND DOWNLOAD IT	WHAT IT IS GENUINELY BEST AT
OpenAI Product: ChatGPT	chatgpt.com Download: chatgpt.com/download Pricing: chatgpt.com/pricing	The most complete product for everyday use. Beyond writing, it generates images and video, has a voice mode and connects to other applications. It is also the most widely used in the world, so there is an enormous amount of material to learn from and your team probably already knows it.
Anthropic Product: Claude	claude.ai Download: claude.com/download Pricing: claude.com/pricing	The strongest at long-form writing, dense document analysis and coding. It is the one most used inside companies for serious technical work, and the one that best sustains long tasks without losing the thread.
Google Product: Gemini	gemini.google.com App on Android and iOS Pricing: one.google.com › AI plans	The one that already lives where you work. If your company runs on Google Workspace, Gemini reaches into Gmail, Docs and Drive with nothing to configure. That closeness to your data is its real advantage, more than its raw capability.

THE RULE THAT GETS BROKEN MOST

Start with one, not with three. The urge to buy all three and compare them is normal, and it is a mistake. Switching tools every week doesn't make you a better judge, it makes you learn none of them. Pick one, use it thirty days straight on real work, and only then form an opinion.

HOW TO PICK WHICH ONE

If your company lives in Google Workspace, start with Gemini for zero friction alone. If your priority is writing, reviewing contracts or checking code, start with Claude. If you want the most versatile product with the biggest crowd around it to help you, start with ChatGPT. None of the three is a hard decision to reverse.

2. The flagship models today

The app and the model are not the same thing. ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini are the box you type into. Inside runs a model, which is the engine, and each company has several of them with different power and different cost.

FAMILY	THE MOST CAPABLE	THE EVERYDAY ONE	THE FAST AND CHEAP ONE
GPT-5.6 OpenAI · July 2026	Sol The most powerful in the house for reasoning and technical work.	Terra The middle ground between capability and cost.	Luna Built for speed and high volume.
Claude 5 Anthropic	Fable 5 The most capable for demanding reasoning and long-horizon tasks.	Opus 5 and Sonnet 5 Opus for coding and agent work; Sonnet balances speed and intelligence.	Haiku 4.5 The fastest and cheapest for simple tasks.
Gemini Google · July 2026	2.5 Pro Its deep reasoning model. Google has not released a new-generation Pro.	3.6 Flash The newest in the house. Balances speed and intelligence on multimodal and agent tasks.	3.5 Flash-Lite The cheapest of its generation.

HOW TO READ THIS TABLE SIX MONTHS FROM NOW

The names above will be out of date soon, and that doesn't matter. **The pattern is the part that holds:** all three companies always offer a big model to think with, a mid-size one for daily work and a small one for volume. Don't memorize names, learn to ask which of the three you are running and what it costs. That question will still be the right one in 2027.

IF YOU USE THE APP AND DON'T BUILD ON IT

You can ignore the whole table. The three apps pick the model for you and they almost always pick well. This starts to matter when someone in IT wires AI into your processes: there, choosing the small model where it is enough is the difference between a bill of hundreds of dollars and one of thousands.

When text is not enough: the specialists

The big three do a bit of everything reasonably well. For voice, image and video there are dedicated tools that do one single thing far better.

Voice · ElevenLabs

The industry standard for synthetic voice. It produces narration that doesn't sound robotic and clones voices with consent. For narrating courses, handling calls or producing audio at volume, nothing comes close.

elevenlabs.io

Image · Nano Banana 2

Google's image generator, available inside Gemini. For product photography, sketches and campaign visuals. ChatGPT also generates images and serves most uses well.

Video · Sora and Omni Flash

Sora is OpenAI's and comes included with the paid ChatGPT plans. Gemini Omni Flash is Google's answer for generating and editing video fast. Both are still better for short pieces than for long-form production.

Research · NotebookLM

From Google, free. You give it your documents and it answers only from what is in them, citing the source. It is the most underrated tool on the market for working with your own material without the model making things up.

So what is an agent, then?

It is the most used and worst explained word of the moment, and it is the difference between what you have seen so far and what can change your operation.

A chat answers you. An agent acts. When you type into ChatGPT you ask a question and it replies: the conversation starts and ends there, and you carry out whatever you decided. An agent takes a goal, breaks it into steps, uses tools to run them and only comes back to you when it is finished or when it is stuck.

A CHAT

"Draft the reply to this customer complaint." You copy the text and paste it into the email yourself.

You ask it for information and it gives it to you. The work is still yours to do.

AN AGENT

It spots the complaint as it arrives, looks up the order in the system, checks the delivery date, drafts the reply and sends it. It escalates only the odd cases to you.

It has access to your systems and permission to act within limits that you define.

That difference is also what separates the two kinds of project. Adopting the chat is a matter of licenses and training, and you can do it this month. Putting an agent into operation requires your data to be reachable, someone to define what it can and cannot decide on its own, and a way to switch it off. That is what the next section is about.

3. How to start in your company

Up to here it was all about choosing a tool. That is the easy part and the one that decides the least about the outcome. What separates the companies that get value out of AI from the ones that only pay for licenses starts here.

The right question is not which AI we should use

Almost every project that fails starts from the wrong question. Someone in leadership asks “which AI tool do we buy?” and the team spends three months comparing platforms. Nobody was clear on what problem they were solving.

The right question is where your money is leaking out. Where your people redo work, where you wait two days for an answer that should take two hours, where a mistake surfaces too late and has already cost you. That inventory of leaks is your list of candidates, and it comes out of talking to the people who do the work, not out of a vendor catalog.

Start with a process where you already know the number: how many hours, how much money, how many days. If you can't measure it beforehand, you won't be able to prove it improved either.

Your data: what to put in order before automating anything

An AI agent is only as good as the information it can reach. Most companies find out halfway through the project that their information is not where they thought it was, or that it only exists in one person's head. Before automating, answer four questions for each process you want to touch.

Where does the data live?

Which system, which folder, which spreadsheet. If the answer is “in several places and they don't always agree,” that is your first job, and it is not an AI job.

Who owns it?

A named person who answers for that data being correct and up to date. With no owner, nobody fixes what breaks.

What format is it in?

A scanned PDF, an email and a database do not read the same way. You can work with all three, but they cost differently and it pays to know that before promising deadlines.

What lives only in someone's head?

The unwritten rules. “This customer always gets fifteen extra days.” That is what carries the most value and what nobody ever wrote down.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Don't hold the project until all your data is perfect. That tidiness never arrives and it is the favorite excuse for not starting. Put in order the data of the process you are going after first, and nothing more. The rest gets sorted out when its turn comes.

Who does what: the four minimum roles

You don't need to hire a team of data scientists and you don't need an AI committee. You need four people identified by name. They can be people you already have, and none of the four is full time at the start.

ROLE	WHAT IT ANSWERS FOR, AND WHY THE PROJECT STALLS WITHOUT IT
DECIDES Executive sponsor	Someone in leadership who can approve budget and unblock other departments. Without this role, the project dies the day it needs something from a department that reports to nobody on the team.
KNOWS Process owner	The person who does the work today and knows where the exceptions are. This is the most important of the four and the one who almost always gets left out for being too busy.
GUARDS Data owner	Answers for the information being correct and grants the access. Without this role the project sits still for three weeks waiting on a permission nobody knows who grants.
BUILDS Technical profile	Someone who connects systems and assembles the solution. Can be internal or external. It is the only role you can outsource without losing control of the project.

THE COMMITTEE TRAP

A twelve-person AI committee that meets every other week produces nothing and burns through everyone's enthusiasm. Four people with names and one decision to make each week get further in a month than a committee does in six.

How to bet: small, measurable and reversible

The fastest way to lose credibility inside the company is to announce a full transformation and have nothing to show by the end of the quarter. The right bet looks like this.

One process, not a department

Not "let's transform sales." One concrete process with a beginning and an end, like quoting or following up on an order.

Ninety days, not eighteen months

If you can't show something working within a quarter, the scope is cut wrong. Cut it again.

One number, before and after

Hours, money or days. Measure it before you touch anything. Without the baseline, any result is a matter of opinion.

It can be switched off

If the agent fails, the process goes back to how it was and nobody notices. That is what lets you take a real risk.

A pilot that saves eight hours a week on a single process buys you permission for the next one. An announced transformation that delivers nothing in six months shuts the door on you for two years.

The first six weeks

This is what an orderly start looks like. You don't need a big budget for the first four weeks: you need time from the right people.

WEEKS 1 AND 2 **Map where the money goes**

Talk to the people who do the work, not to the ones who supervise it. Collect between eight and twelve leaking processes, and for each one write down the number: hours, money or days. By the end of week two you have a list with figures on it, not opinions.

WEEKS 3 AND 4 **Pick one and put its data in order**

From that list, choose the one that combines high pain with reachable data. Not the biggest: the clearest. Apply the four data questions to that process alone and name the four people on the team.

WEEKS 5 AND 6 **Build the pilot and measure it**

Something working that the process owner uses on real work, even if only halfway there. At the close of week six, compare against the number from week one and decide with data whether you continue, adjust or switch it off.

THE MOST EXPENSIVE SCHEDULING MISTAKE

Almost everyone wants to jump straight to week five. **The first four weeks are the ones that decide whether the project is worth anything**, and they are the only ones that can't be outsourced: nobody from outside knows your leaks or your unwritten rules.

Signs you are going wrong

If you recognize three or more of these, stop and go back to week one. They cost less now than they will in the fourth quarter.

- ! You have spent more than a month comparing tools and haven't touched a real process.
- ! Nobody can say what number the process had before you started.
- ! The process owner found out about the project at the kickoff meeting.
- ! The scope has grown twice since you started and nobody cut anything in exchange.
- ! The decision to continue or stop rests on a demo, not on a measurement.
- ! They bought licenses for the whole company before having a single case working.

TO CLOSE

What you can do on Monday

You don't need budget or a vendor to take the first three steps. You need two hours and the right people in the room.

1

Open an account and use it on real work

One single tool, thirty days. You and the two or three people who write, analyze or quote the most in your company. The standing to have an opinion about AI is earned by using it, not by reading about it.

2

Make the list of leaks

One sheet, eight to twelve processes, one number for each. With the people who do the work. That sheet is worth more than any vendor demo you will be shown this year.

3

Name the four people

Sponsor, process owner, data owner and the one who builds. First and last name. Without that, everything else stays an intention.

AND WHAT YOU DON'T NEED, WHATEVER THEY SELL YOU

A Chief AI Officer

A committee

An enterprise platform

Perfect data

Hiring data scientists

Migrating your systems

None of this is a requirement for the first case. It all comes later, if the first case worked, and by then you will know which of these things you genuinely need and which one was only being sold to you.

And if you want to skip the learning curve?

At Neurya we walk exactly that path with leadership teams: we find where the margin is leaking, choose the first case and leave it working and measured. Write to us and let's talk about your operation.

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