Tutorial: Free AI Inference with OpenRouter

Important: by doing this tutorial you agree that you've read and understood the document: AI Privacy, Safety, and Ethics. If you haven't read it yet, please do so before you continue.
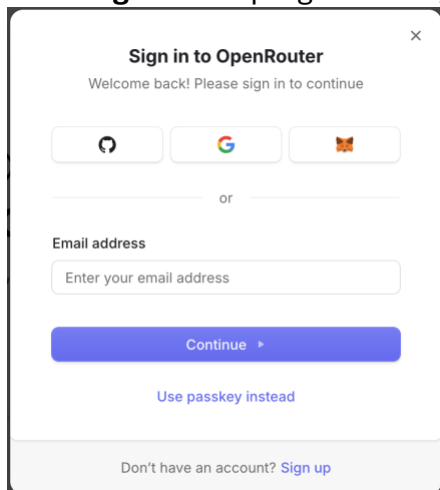
As you may know, there are many models to choose from nowadays for coding, including GPT, Claude, Qwen, and others. **OpenRouter** is a service that provides a single API interface for these models, and many more, so you don't have to sign up for each provider individually. But more importantly for this course, OpenRouter offers up to *50 free requests per day* for certain models. As far as I can tell, this is the best deal currently for free inference, but things are constantly changing so let me know if you find other good options. Unfortunately, the freeness of these models is contingent on us allowing them to save our prompts and use them for training purposes; there really is no such thing as a free lunch! Do not include sensitive or private information in your projects or prompts.

An OpenRouter API key can be used with AI-based Coding IDEs such as Cline. This tutorial will walk you through the process of getting a key. Note that you are NOT required to purchase credits or pay for this service in this course, but if you choose to do so, you are entirely responsible for the costs.

Step 1: Sign Up
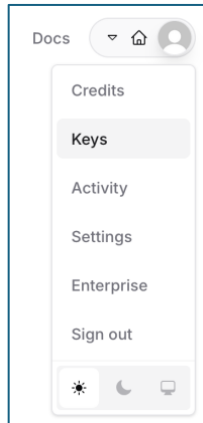
Navigate to OpenRouter's home page: https://openrouter.ai/

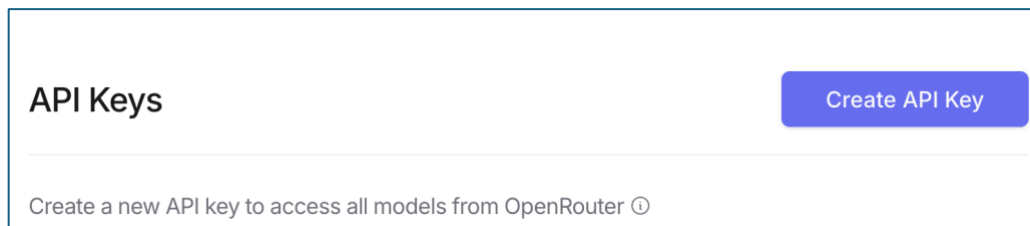Click **Sign In** at top-right corner, then **Sign Up:**

Enter your email address, make up a password, and click **Continue.** You'll be asked to verify your email.
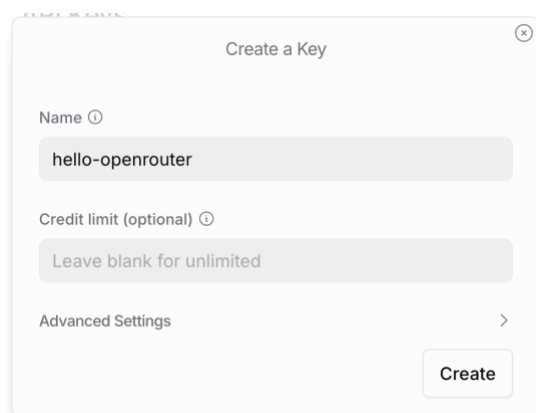
Task 2: Get an API Key

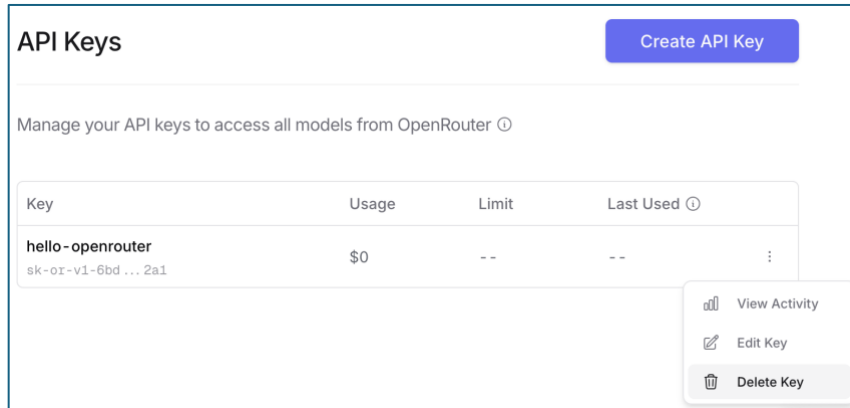From the hamburger menu button in the top-right, navigate to **Keys**:

You'll be directed to the following page; click **Create API Key:**

Go ahead and give your new key a name, then click **Create**. (You don't have to fill in the **Credit limit** field unless you plan to buy credits, which is NOT required for this course.)

A modal dialog will appear with your new API key code. Copy this and keep it somewhere safe, as the OpenRouter site will never show it to you again. However, if you lose the key code, you can simply delete the key and make a new one (you'll have to update the credentials for any application that uses the old key):

That's it, you're done! Now you can use your key to access inference API calls with coding tools like Cline.

Optional Task: Other Providers

You can also sign up for API services directly, and sometimes you can get good deals by doing so. For example, the AI company Anthropic offers a free plan which includes free use of a dashboard interface and $5.00 of free API credits for their popular model Claude: https://claude.com/platform/api. The process to get an API key is similar to the one you just completed for OpenRouter.

It's not required for this course, but you may want to try the Claude model, as it has some advanced capabilities like analyzing screenshots of web interfaces and using the browser to test the code it outputs.