Building a Conversational Agent

Grace Hopper Conference 2017

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Quick Links

For your reference:

Github repo Includes the backend for the webhook we've prepared

Quote database The quote database from which our webhook pulls quotes and bios

<u>List of topics</u> The full list of topics that appear in our quote database

<u>List of authors</u> The full list of authors that appear in our quote database

API.AI docs Basic documentation for getting started with API.AI

Group Work

Welcome! This workshop will focus on building a conversational agent on the API.AI platform. Our agent will be able to tell us quotes and fun facts from awesome women in STEM!

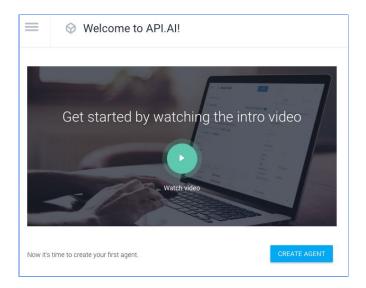
We will go through Step 1-5 together. The rest of the workshop will be self-paced. Don't worry about getting through every step. You can always come back later!

Note: The naming of certain variables and parameters matters as we go through the course. We'll try to call out explicitly when a name is important. In general, the course will be easier to understand if you follow our naming conventions.

Step 1: Create a new agent!

Your first task is to create a new **Agent** on **API.AI**. An **Agent** is a Natural Language Understanding module that helps users get a set of tasks done with conversation.

When you log in to the site, you'll see a blue button that says **CREATE AGENT**. Click the button to get started.

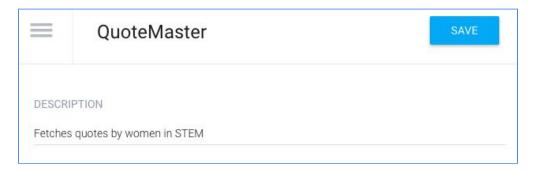


Let's start by naming our agent and adding a description. We've named our version QuoteMaster. You can name yours the same or pick something else fun!

Add a simple description:

Fetches quotes by women in STEM.

You can always come back and add more detail later.

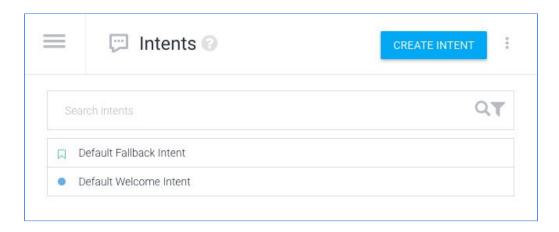


Hit SAVE. (Note: the **SAVE** button will become **Working...** – give it a moment.)

Step 2: Change the Welcome and Fallback Intents.

To start, let's make sure our users know how to interact with our agent properly. Once you've created your agent, you should see a page called **Intents**.

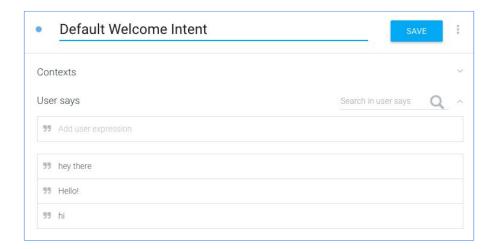
An **Intent** represents a mapping between what a user says and what action should be taken by your software.



Click on **Default Welcome Intent**. This is how we greet our users when the first start using our agent.

First, give the agent some examples of how people might start interacting with it.

Hi Hello! Hey there.

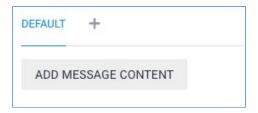


Go ahead and delete the existing **Text response** messages. Add one that will help your users understand what your agent can do. For example:

Welcome! Talk to me to hear cool quotes from awesome women in STEM. For example, you can say, "Tell me a quote by Grace Hopper."

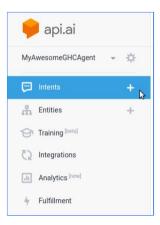


If you accidentally deleted the entire **Text response** box, click on **Add message content > Text response** to create a new one:



Hit **SAVE** at the top.

Now, navigate back to the Intents page by clicking **Intents** on the left hand side of the page.



This time, click on **Default Fallback Intent**. Here is where we manage what our agent will say to users when it doesn't know how to help them.

Again, go ahead and delete the existing **Text response** messages. Enter your own fallback message:

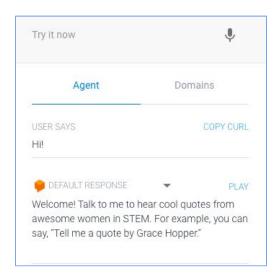
Sorry, I don't know how to help with that. Try saying, "tell me a quote"!



Hit **SAVE**.

Now we can try out our agent. Try typing some things into the **Try it now** box on the righthand side of the page.

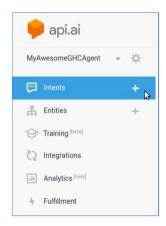
Hi Who is Grace Hopper?



Step 3: Create your own Intent.

Right now our agent can only welcome us and tell us that it can't help us. Let's add some real features!

On the left hand side of your page, you will see a tab called **Intents** with a + sign next to it. Click the + sign to create a new intent.



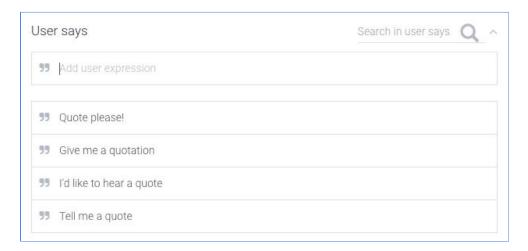
Let's name this intent *quote*.



First, we need to give our agent some examples of how people might ask for a quote. Try adding some user expressions. Don't worry about capitalization for these examples; your agent will learn to handle both uppercase and lowercase variants.

Tell me a quote I'd like to hear a quote Give me a quotation Quote please!

Can you think of more variations? You can add others as well.



Now we need to tell our agent how to respond! First, we'll just enter a placeholder response. Eventually, we will get the quote by looking it up in our quotes backend.

Add a simple **Text response** for now (we will flesh this out with real functionality later):

Grace Hopper once said, "Hi! I'm Grace!"



Hit **SAVE**. Now you can try out your agent!

Try typing some things into the **Try it now!** box:

Tell me a quote I'd like to hear a quote

What happens if you ask for a slight variation of your original quote examples?

Please tell me a cool quote I want to hear a quote

What happens if you ask for something irrelevant?

Fly me to the moon!

Your agent should now know how to respond with the simple Grace Hopper quote to your original examples plus other similar queries, but it won't give that response if you ask for something else.

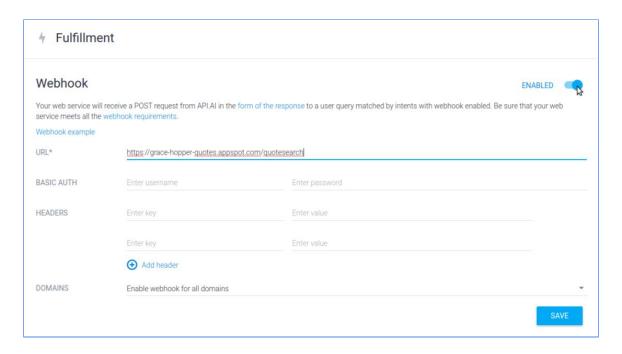
Be sure to **SAVE** your agent before proceeding to step 3.

Step 4: Add in your webhook.

Our agent would be a lot cooler if it could tell us *real* quotes. To do this, we need to hook up our agent to our quotes backend. Click on the **Fulfillment** tab on the lefthand side. (If you don't see this, press the hamburger symbol = in the top left to reveal the menu.)

Enable the Webhook and copy in the URL for our backend:

https://grace-hopper-quotes.appspot.com/quotesearch



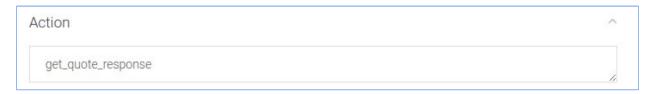
Under **Domains**, change the setting to **Enable webhook for all domains**.

Hit **SAVE**.

Optional You can play around with our webhook in the terminal to get a sense for how it works by using curl to send some json requests. The code and documentation are available at https://github.com/juliar/quotes-agent. Our webhook takes a json request with a "result" object that has several fields: action: mandatory. parameters: object with the optional fields: author subject Try a few requests with the get_quote_response action: curl -X POST https://grace-hopper-quotes.appspot.com/quotesearch \ -d '{"result": {"action": "get_quote_response"}}' \ -H "Content-Type: application/json" curl -X POST https://grace-hopper-quotes.appspot.com/quotesearch \ -d '{"result": {"action": "get_quote_response", "parameters": {"author": "Marie Curie" }}}' \ -H "Content-Type: application/json" curl -X POST https://grace-hopper-quotes.appspot.com/quotesearch \ -d '{"result": {"action": "get_quote_response", "parameters": {"subject": "technology" }}}' \

Now we need to update our *quotes* intent to send our queries to the webhook.

Navigate back to the *quotes* intent. Fill in the **Action** field with the text *get_quote_response*. An **Action** is the step your application takes when an intent is triggered. *Make sure to copy this name exactly*. This will tell our backend what kind of step to take.



Then, delete your text response by clicking the trashcan symbol next to the text:



Click Fulfillment and check Use webhook.



Now hit **SAVE**.

Try typing "tell me a quote" into the **Try it now** box.



To see the format of the request we send to our webhook and the response we get back, click the **SHOW JSON** button:

```
"id": "0bde6dc5-5c5b-4dc8-b1a9-5fc75421e87a",
"timestamp": "2017-09-06T16:46:15.053Z",
"lang": "en",
"result": {
  "source": "agent",
  "resolvedQuery": "tell me a quote",
  "action": "get_quote_response", # this matches the action we added to our quote intent
  "actionIncomplete": false,
  "parameters": {},
  "contexts": [],
  "metadata": {
    "intentId": "72ad9641-5621-414f-b6e2-2bdedcf31eec",
    "webhookUsed": "true", # we are using our webhook!
    "webhookForSlotFillingUsed": "false",
    "webhookResponseTime": 74,
   "intentName": "quote" # our quote intent
  "fulfillment": {  # our backend sends back the text our agent will speak and display
    "speech": "Here is a quote by mary somerville: Mathematics are the natural
              bent of my mind.",
    "displayText": "Here is a quote by mary somerville: Mathematics are the
                   natural bent of my mind.",
    "messages": [
      {
        "type": 0,
        "speech": "Here is a quote by mary somerville: Mathematics are the
                  natural bent of my mind."
   ]
  },
  "score": 1
"status": {
  "code": 200,
  "errorType": "success" # good!
},
"sessionId": "fb4093ce-ab34-4a8f-9c98-c372159c3fbd"
```

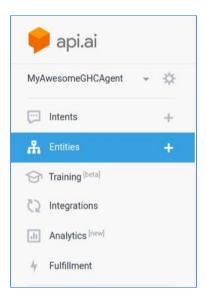
The first fields in the result object are actually the ones we sent to our backend. You can see that we set action = get_quote_response and sent empty parameters object. Later we will add some parameters to this request.

The response from our backend is the fulfillment object, where both speech and displayText fields have been filled out. This tells our agent what to say back to our user and what to display as a response. Later we will see how to get our backend to return structured data in place of speech and displayText.

Step 5: Add some entities.

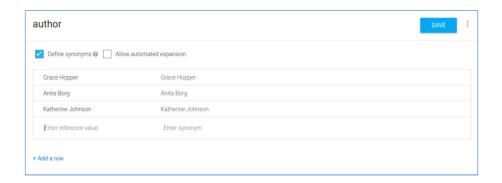
Our database has quotes from a lot of cool women in STEM. Let's update our agent so that users can ask for quotes from a *particular author*.

For this we will create an **Entity**. An **Entity** represents a category of things in the world. They are powerful tools used for extracting parameter values from natural language inputs. Our category will be women in STEM who authored interesting quotes.



Click the + sign by the **Entity** tab on the left. Start by adding a new *author* Entity, and add some sample values of authors. You can see our full list of authors <u>here</u> – make sure anyone you add is part of this list. For now, just enter a few. For the purposes of the demo, make sure to add **Grace Hopper**:

Grace Hopper Ada Lovelace Katherine Johnson your choice...

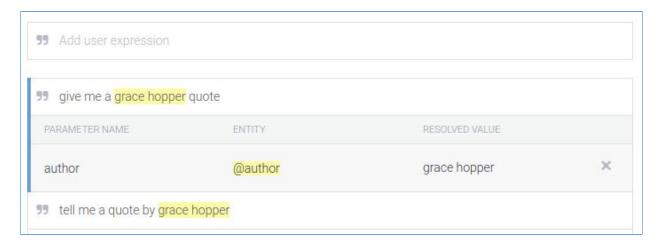


Hit **SAVE**. Now we need to give our agent some examples of users asking for quotes by an author.

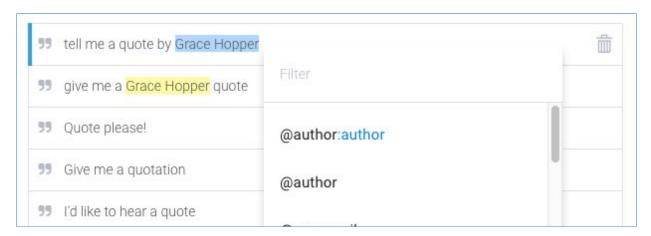
Navigate back to **Intents > quote**. Add some more **User says** examples:

Give me a quote by Grace Hopper. Tell me a Grace Hopper quote.

For now, we'll just give Grace Hopper examples. Notice how API.AI understands which portion of the example refers to our author.



If for some reason the author's name is not automatically highlighted, you can do it yourself by selecting the text and choosing @author from the drop down:



Under the Action section, we also now have a table that shows that *author* is now one of the parameters to our backend request.



Hit **SAVE** and try it out. What happens when you ask:

Give me a quote by Grace Hopper.

What about:

Give me a quote by Katherine Johnson.

Notice that we didn't have to give our agent any examples with Anita. It already knows about all our *authors* that we listed under **Entity**!

We also didn't need to change anything about the link to our backend, which is also already set up to handle the *author* parameter.

Self-Paced Exercises

Great work! The following exercises are for you to try on your own. You can choose which ones you want to try; some will indicate other exercises as prerequisites.

Get creative and try adding new functionality to your agent! Flag down a facilitator if need any help.

Exercise 0: Debugging.

API.AI offers some debugging output that will be useful as you make your way through the exercises. Start by typing the following into the **Try it now** box:

Give me a quote by Grace Hopper.

Below the response, you should see some additional output:



The output contains a few fields with the values filled:

INTENT: quote

ACTION: get_quote_response

PARAMETER: author **VALUE**: Grace Hopper

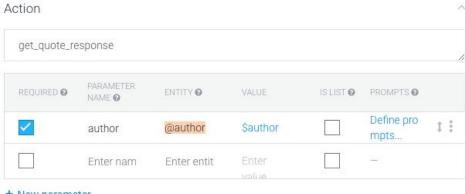
You can use this to check what intent your agent identified, and whether it correctly identified the *author*.

For more detailed debug output, you can click **SHOW JSON** to see how all fields have been filled.

Exercise 1: Play with mandatory parameters.

Navigate to **Intents > quote** (if you're not already there).

What happens when you make the *author* a **Required parameter** by checking the checkbox on the left hand side of the parameter?

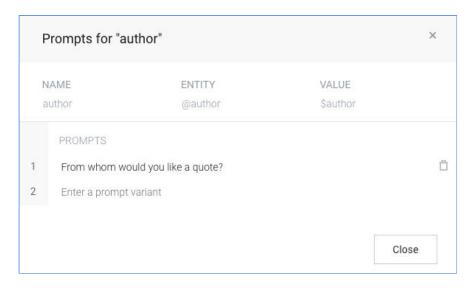


+ New parameter

Click **Define prompts** on the right hand side of the table and try to come up with some good prompts for the agent to ask the user to specify who they want a quote from.

For example:

From whom would you like a quote?



Click **Close**. Now, you should see your the beginning of your prompts in the rightmost prompt column:



Hit **SAVE** and try out your updated agent. What happens now if you only ask for a quote without specifying who the author should be?

Tell me a quote please!

What do you think is better: An interface where *author* is required, or where *author* is optional? **This is your decision to make for your agent!**

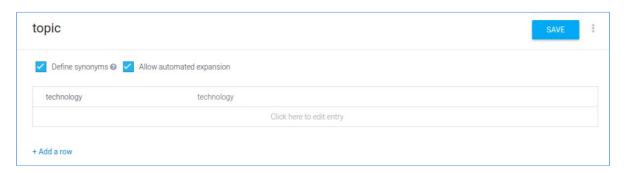
Note as well that if you ask for a quote by an author who does not exist in our database, the agent may continue to ask whose quote you would like to hear.

Exercise 2: Add a topic field.

Our backend also has the ability to search for quotes by topic. For example, you could ask for a quote about computers, biology, or education.

Create a new **Entity**. Name this entity *topic*. (**Make sure to use this name**). Give it just one example: *technology*.

Next, you will need to check Allow automated expansion. This will let your agent learn examples of topics on the fly, instead of being restricted to the list you provide.



Then **SAVE**. We will train our agent to understand what a *topic* is by pointing out topics within examples queries, rather than giving it a list of all subjects.

Now let's train our agent to recognize the subject parameter. Go back to the *quote* intent and start by adding an example:

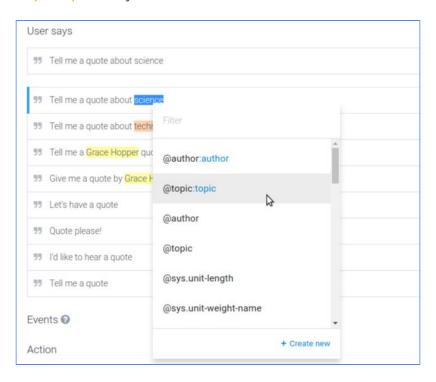
Tell me a quote about technology.

Note that *technology* is already recognized as a *topic* entity. Now we'll teach it some other words that can be topics. (The full list of topics our backend supports is <u>here</u>.)

Give the agent a **User says** example that it might not recognize:

Tell me a quote about science.

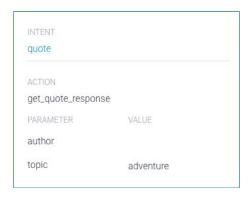
We need to tell it that *science* is also a topic. Double click on the word *science* to highlight it, and select the @topic:topic entity.



Hit **SAVE**. What happens when you try the following in the **Try it now** box:

Tell me a quote about adventure

You should see that the *topic* parameter has the value *adventure* when you look at the debug output:



What are some other ways you could ask for a quote about a particular topic? Do any of these examples work? Check the debug output to see if the topic parameter was properly identified.

Give me a quote about diversity Give me a technology quote

Give me a mathematics quote
I want a quote on invention
I want to hear a quote about language

Add some more training examples to make your agent more robust and get all of these examples working. Let the person next to you stress test your agent with some creative examples.

Exercise 3: Ask for a bio.

Our webhook also has the ability to give us bios of our awesome STEM women.

Optional

Try out a curl command in any command line (i.e., terminal) to get a bio from our backend:

Use your knowledge from the previous steps to create a new **Intent** that can give you a bio.

HINT: The **Action** for this **Intent** should be called *get_bio_response*.

HINT: You may want to make the *author* parameter mandatory for this intent.

HINT: Make sure to enable the webhook for this intent.

Stuck? Head to the **Answers** section at the end of the doc for the instructions.

Exercise 4: Use context.

After hearing one awesome quote by a woman in STEM, our users will probably want more. Let's add functionality that lets users ask for "another one" to get another quote.

We can do this with API.AI using **Contexts**. You can read about **Contexts**, and what they mean on the **API.AI** platform, in the <u>API.AI</u> docs.

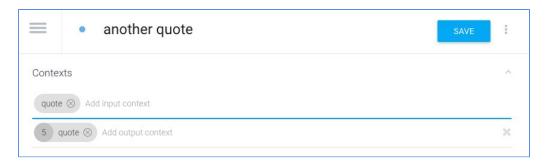
Navigate to your *quote* intent and click **Contexts**. A context is a way of recording previous intents. In **Add output context**, write *quote* and hit enter.



Note that the number "5" that automatically gets populated next to the *quote* output context.

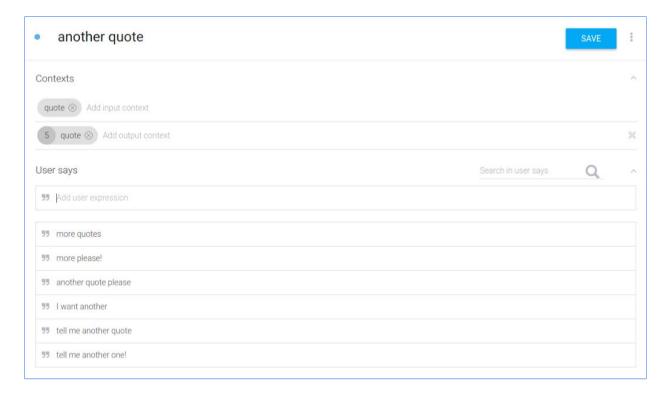
What we've just done is set a context token that will be passed around for the next 5 turns the user takes in the conversation. For the next 5 things the user asks the agent, the agent will be able to access the context token *quote* to know that the user previously asked for a quote. If you want to adjust the length of the agent's memory, you can click on the 5 to change it to another number. We will revisit this later.

Now let's use this context. Create a new intent called *another quote*. Click **Context** and add *quote* as its **input context**. This means that the intent will *only* be triggered if the quote intent was triggered in the last 5 turns. Notice a *quote* output context automatically gets populated. You can decide later if you want this or not.



Give some examples of a user asking for another quote. For example:

another one another quote more quotes please i want to hear another

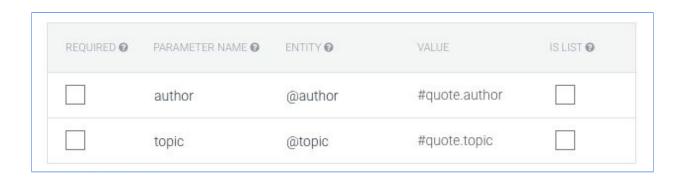


We still need to tell the agent what to do when this intent is triggered. We want to perform the same action as in the *quote* intent: telling the user a quote. Copy the Action from the *quote* intent: get_quote_response. Under Fulfillment, check Use webhook.

Finally, we can even grab our parameter values from the *quotes* intent. Add two parameters to the table below **Action** (you will need to type this in manually):

Parameter name	Entity	Value
author	@author	#quote.author
topic *	@topic	#quote.topic

* If you completed Exercise 2 (Add a topic).



We use #quote to refer to parameters from the quote context. Any parameters that were set while the quote context was in action can be accessed this way.

Hit **SAVE** and try it out!

give me a quote by katherine johnson another one please!

Note that the *quote* context lasts for 5 turns after the user initially asks for a quote. Is this reasonable? Would you change it? You can do so by clicking on the "5".

Note that in the current implementation, we will always give our user quotes from the same author and topic as the previous quote. You can change this by removing parameters from the *another quote* intent.

Exercise 5: Use Events.

Events are a feature that allows you to invoke intents from your backend.

In our current setup, we ask for a quote and receive a blob of display text and speech output back from our backend as the reply.

We can change the settings so that we pass some structured data instead, in the form of the author and the quote itself, to a new **Intent**. This way we control how we phrase our response to the user, or even add some variation in how we respond.

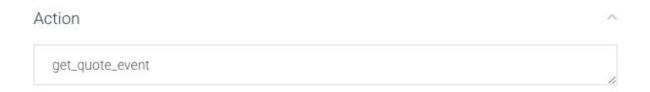
Optional

Under the quote intent, if we change the action parameter to our webhook, we can get a structured response:

Backend response:

When we change the **Action** from get_quote_response to get_quote_event, the reply from our backend takes the form of a followupEvent object.

We need to make a few changes to our agent to use this structured data in the follow-up event. First, navigate to your *quote* intent and change the **Action** to get_quote_event:



Hit SAVE.

We now need to create a new intent that uses the structured data returned from our backend.

Create a new **Intent**. Call this intent *respond with quote*.

Click on the **Event** field and name this event *respond_with_quote*.



This means that our new *respond with quote* intent will be triggered whenever our backend returns a *followupEvent* object with name *respond_with_quote*.

You can leave the **User says** fields blank.

Now we need to create a response from our agent that uses the data from our backend. Add a couple of **Text response** messages

I found you a quote by #respond_with_quote.author: "#respond_with_quote.quote". Sure, here's a quote from #respond_with_quote.author: "#respond_with_quote.quote".



Note the use of #respond_with_quote. This allows us to refer to parameters from the followupEvent json object from our backend.

Hit **SAVE** and try it out!

Give me a quote by Ada Lovelace.

It should still work when you ask the agent:

tell me another one

Exercise 6: Play time!

What are some other actions you could implement for your agent? Think about some things the user might want to ask. For example, "What can you do?" or "How do I hear a quote?"

Have fun. You could have your agent tell a joke, tell you how it's doing, whatever you want!

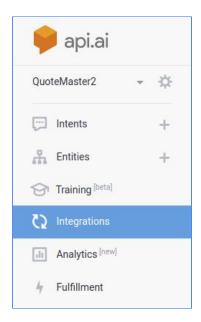
Appendix

Vocabulary

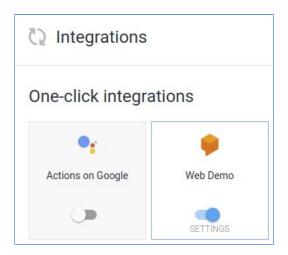
- **Agent** Natural Language Understanding module that helps users get a set of tasks done with conversation. I.e., Panera agent on Google Assistant..
- **Intent** Mapping between what a user says and what action should be taken by the software. I.e., *add_food_to_cart* intent.
- **Action** The step your application takes when an intent is triggered. I.e., Adds the last mentioned food item to the backend shopping cart (list).
- **Entity** Represents a category of things in the world. I.e., *food* entity allows the agent to process any food parameter in the same way, instead of having to learn separate intents/actions for "soup" vs. "sandwich.

Integrating your agent with other platforms

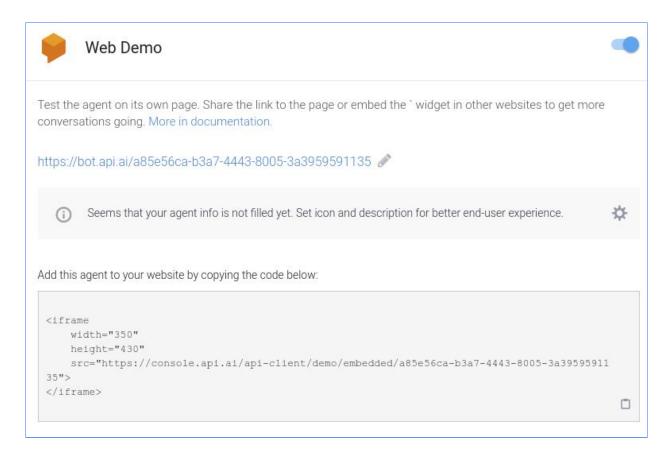
API.AI offers one-click integrations with a number of platforms. Click the **Integrations** tab on the right hand menu to see what's available.



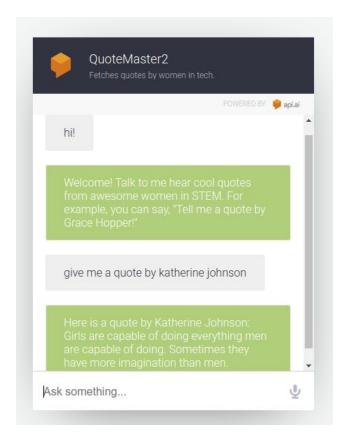
You'll see toggles that let you easily integrate with Actions on Google, the API.AI Web Demo, and more. A fun one to try right away is the **Web Demo**. Click the toggle to enable it:



A window will pop up with a link to a page just for your agent:



Follow the link to try out the Web Demo of your agent!



Building your own backend

Interested in setting up your own backend? Start by reading the **API.AI** docs on <u>Fulfillment</u>. These will step you through setting up a webhook.

You can see the code for our backend at https://github.com/juliar/quotes-agent.

Answers

Answer to Exercise 3: Ask for a bio.

Start by creating a new **Intent**. You can call this intent *bio*. Fill in the **Action** field with the value *get_bio_response*.

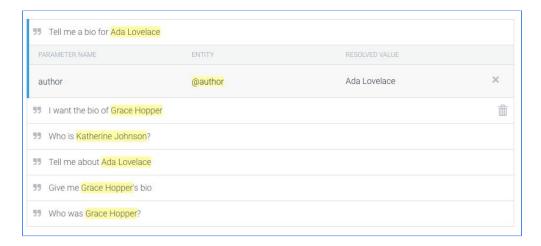


Now add some **User says** expressions:

Who was Grace Hopper?

Give me Grace Hopper's bio.
Tell me about Ada Lovelace.
Who is Katherine Johnson?
I want the bio of Grace Hopper.
Tell me a bio for Ada Lovelace.

Your agent should recognize the *author* parameter in all of these statements.

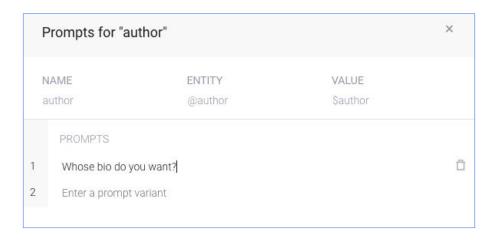


Now scroll down to the parameter table under Action and check the **Required** box by the *author* parameter.



Click Define prompts and add a prompt:

Whose bio do you want?



Finally, at the bottom of the page, click **Fulfilment** and select **Use webhook**.



Hit **SAVE**.

Now try a few expressions in the **Try it now** box:

Who was Ada Lovelace? What is the bio for Grace Hopper? Tell me about Katherine Johnson.

You should receive the bio for each of these women.