☰ Start Here › **Personal Assistant Setup**

Start Here

Personal Assistant Setup

OpenClaw is a WhatsApp + Telegram + Discord + iMessage gateway for **Pi** agents. Plugins add Mattermost. This guide is the “personal assistant” setup: one dedicated WhatsApp number that behaves like your always-on agent.

⚠️ Safety first

You’re putting an agent in a position to:

- run commands on your machine (depending on your Pi tool setup)
- read/write files in your workspace
- send messages back out via WhatsApp/Telegram/Discord/Mattermost (plugin)

Start conservative:

- Always set `channels.whatsapp.allowFrom` (never run open-to-the-world on your personal Mac).
- Use a dedicated WhatsApp number for the assistant.
- Heartbeats now default to every 30 minutes. Disable until you trust the setup by setting `agents.defaults.heartbeat.every: "0m"` .

Prerequisites

- Node **22+**
- OpenClaw available on PATH (recommended: global install)
- A second phone number (SIM/eSIM/prepaid) for the assistant

```
npm install -g openclaw@latest
# or: pnpm add -g openclaw@latest
```

From source (development):

```
git clone https://github.com/openclaw/openclaw.git
cd openclaw
pnpm install
pnpm ui:build # auto-installs UI deps on first run
pnpm build
pnpm link --global
```

The two-phone setup (recommended)

You want this:

```
Your Phone (personal)          Second Phone (assistant)

┌─────────────────┐           ┌─────────────────┐
│ Your WhatsApp   │ ────────▶ │ Assistant WA    │
│ +1-555-YOU      │  message  │ +1-555-ASSIST   │
└─────────────────┘           └────────┬────────┘
                                       │
                              │ linked via QR
                              ▼
                     ┌─────────────────┐
                     │ Your Mac        │
                     │ (openclaw)      │
                     │   Pi agent      │
                     └─────────────────┘
```

If you link your personal WhatsApp to OpenClaw, every message to you becomes “agent input”. That’s rarely what you want.

5-minute quick start

1. Pair WhatsApp Web (shows QR; scan with the assistant phone):

```
openclaw channels login
```

2. Start the Gateway (leave it running):

```
openclaw gateway --port 18789
```

3. Put a minimal config in `~/.openclaw/openclaw.json` :

```
{
  channels: { whatsapp: { allowFrom: ["+15555550123"] } },
}
```

Now message the assistant number from your allowlisted phone.

When onboarding finishes, we auto-open the dashboard with your gateway token and print the tokenized link. To reopen later: `openclaw dashboard` .

Give the agent a workspace (AGENTS)

OpenClaw reads operating instructions and “memory” from its workspace directory.

By default, OpenClaw uses `~/.openclaw/workspace` as the agent workspace, and will create it (plus starter `AGENTS.md` , `SOUL.md` , `TOOLS.md` , `IDENTITY.md` , `USER.md`) automatically on setup/first agent run. `BOOTSTRAP.md` is only created when the workspace is brand new (it should not come back after you delete it).

Tip: treat this folder like OpenClaw’s “memory” and make it a git repo (ideally private) so your `AGENTS.md` + memory files are backed up. If git is installed, brand-new workspaces are auto-initialized.

```
openclaw setup
```

Full workspace layout + backup guide: **Agent workspace** Memory workflow: **Memory**

Optional: choose a different workspace with `agents.defaults.workspace` (supports `~`).

```
{
  agent: {
    workspace: "~/.openclaw/workspace",
  },
}
```

If you already ship your own workspace files from a repo, you can disable bootstrap file creation entirely:

```
{
  agent: {
    skipBootstrap: true,
  },
}
```

The config that turns it into “an assistant”

OpenClaw defaults to a good assistant setup, but you’ll usually want to tune:

- persona/instructions in `SOUL.md`
- thinking defaults (if desired)
- heartbeats (once you trust it)

Example:

```
  logging: { level: "info" },
  agent: {
    model: "anthropic/claude-opus-4-5",
    workspace: "~/.openclaw/workspace",
    thinkingDefault: "high",
    timeoutSeconds: 1800,
    // Start with 0; enable later.
    heartbeat: { every: "0m" },
  },
  channels: {
    whatsapp: {
      allowFrom: ["+15555550123"],
      groups: {
        "*": { requireMention: true },
      },
    },
  },
  routing: {
    groupChat: {
      mentionPatterns: ["@openclaw", "openclaw"],
    },
  },
  session: {
    scope: "per-sender",
    resetTriggers: ["/new", "/reset"],
    reset: {
      mode: "daily",
      atHour: 4,
      idleMinutes: 10080,
    },
  },
}
```

Sessions and memory

Session files: `~/.openclaw/agents/<agentId>/sessions/{{SessionId}}.jsonl`

Session metadata (token usage, last route, etc): `~/.openclaw/agents/<agentId>/sessions/sessions.json` (legacy: `~/.openclaw/sessions/sessions.json`)

- /new or /reset starts a fresh session for that chat (configurable via resetTriggers). If sent alone, the agent replies with a short hello to confirm the reset.
- /compact [instructions] compacts the session context and reports the remaining context budget.

Heartbeats (proactive mode)

By default, OpenClaw runs a heartbeat every 30 minutes with the prompt: `Read HEARTBEAT.md if it exists (workspace context). Follow it strictly. Do not infer or repeat old tasks from prior chats. If nothing needs attention, reply HEARTBEAT_OK.` Set `agents.defaults.heartbeat.every: "0m"` to disable.

- If `HEARTBEAT.md` exists but is effectively empty (only blank lines and markdown headers like `# Heading`), OpenClaw skips the heartbeat run to save API calls.
- If the file is missing, the heartbeat still runs and the model decides what to do.
- If the agent replies with `HEARTBEAT_OK` (optionally with short padding; see `agents.defaults.heartbeat.ackMaxChars`), OpenClaw suppresses outbound delivery for that heartbeat.
- Heartbeats run full agent turns — shorter intervals burn more tokens.

```
{
  agent: {
    heartbeat: { every: "30m" },
  },
}
```

Media in and out

Inbound attachments (images/audio/docs) can be surfaced to your command via templates:

- `{{MediaPath}}` (local temp file path)

- `{{MediaUrl}}` (pseudo-URL)
- `{{Transcript}}` (if audio transcription is enabled)

Outbound attachments from the agent: include `MEDIA:<path-or-url>` on its own line (no spaces). Example:

```
Here’s the screenshot.
MEDIA:https://example.com/screenshot.png
```

OpenClaw extracts these and sends them as media alongside the text.

Operations checklist

```
openclaw status          # local status (creds, sessions, queued ev
openclaw status --all    # full diagnosis (read-only, pasteable)
openclaw status --deep   # adds gateway health probes (Telegram + Discord)
openclaw health --json   # gateway health snapshot (WS)
```

Logs live under `/tmp/openclaw/` (default: `openclaw-YYYY-MM-DD.log`).

Next steps

- WebChat: **WebChat**
- Gateway ops: **Gateway runbook**
- Cron + wakeups: **Cron jobs**
- macOS menu bar companion: **OpenClaw macOS app**
- iOS node app: **iOS app**
- Android node app: **Android app**
- Windows status: **Windows (WSL2)**
- Linux status: **Linux app**
- Security: **Security**

‹ Pairing

Showcase ›