

\$39 QUICK START

The OpenClaw

Complete Beginner's Guide

From "What's a computer?" to your first AI agent

No experience required. Every step explained.

Part 1: What You Need to Know

1.1 What is OpenClaw?

OpenClaw is software that lets you create AI agents - programs that do tasks automatically using artificial intelligence. Think of it like having a smart assistant that works 24/7.

1.2 What is a Terminal?

A terminal is a text-based way to control your computer. Instead of clicking buttons, you type commands.

1 Open Terminal on Mac

1. Press Command + Space (hold Command, tap Space)
2. Type: terminal
3. Press Enter
4. A black window opens - that's your terminal

2 Open Terminal on Windows

1. Press the Windows key
2. Type: cmd
3. Press Enter
4. A black window opens - that's Command Prompt

1.3 What is an API Key?

An API key is like a password that lets software access AI services. You need API keys from AI providers (like OpenAI, Claude) so OpenClaw can use their AI models.

⚠ SECURITY WARNING: API keys are passwords. Never share them.

Never post them online. If someone gets your key, they can use AI and charge your account.

Part 2: Getting Your API Keys

2.1 OpenAI API Key (GPT-4, GPT-3.5)

1 Create Account

1. Go to: platform.openai.com
2. Click "Sign up"
3. Enter email and create password
4. Verify your email (check inbox)

2 Add Payment

1. Click your profile (top right) → "Billing"
2. Click "Add payment method"
3. Enter credit card
4. Set usage limit to \$20 (safety!)

3 Create API Key

1. Go to: platform.openai.com/api-keys

2. Click "Create new secret key"
3. Name it: OpenClaw
4. Click "Create secret key"
5. **COPY THE KEY NOW** (starts with sk-)
6. Paste it in a safe place (password manager)
7. Click "Done"

2.2 Anthropic API Key (Claude)

Get Claude API Key

1. Go to: console.anthropic.com
2. Sign up with email
3. Verify email
4. Go to "API Keys" in left menu
5. Click "Create Key"
6. Name it: OpenClaw
7. Copy the key (starts with sk-ant-)
8. Save securely

2.3 OpenRouter API Key (Multiple AIs)

Get OpenRouter Key

1. Go to: openrouter.ai
2. Click "Sign In" → "Sign Up"
3. Sign up with Google or email
4. Click "Keys" in top menu
5. Click "Create API Key"
6. Name it: OpenClaw
7. Copy the long key
8. Save securely

2.4 Google API Key (Gemini)

Get Gemini Key

1. Go to: ai.google.dev
2. Click "Get API key"
3. Sign in with Google
4. Click "Create API Key"
5. Copy the key
6. Save securely

Part 3: Installing Node.js

OpenClaw needs Node.js to run. Node.js is software that lets JavaScript programs run on your computer.

1 Check If Already Installed

1. Open your terminal (see Part 1.2)
2. Type exactly: node --version
3. Press Enter

If you see a version number like "v18.17.0" or higher, you have Node.js!
Skip to Part 4.

If you see "command not found," continue below.

3.1 Install on Mac

1. Go to: nodejs.org
2. Click the big green "LTS" button
3. Download the macOS Installer (.pkg)
4. Open Downloads folder
5. Double-click the downloaded file
6. Click "Continue" through all screens

7. Click "Install"
8. Enter your Mac password when asked
9. Wait for installation
10. Click "Close"

3.2 Install on Windows

1. Go to: nodejs.org
2. Click the big green "LTS" button
3. Download the Windows Installer (.msi)
4. Open Downloads folder
5. Double-click the downloaded file
6. Click "Next" through all screens
7. Accept license agreement
8. Click "Install"
9. Click "Yes" if Windows asks for permission
10. Wait for installation
11. Click "Finish"

3.3 Verify Installation

1. Open terminal
2. Type: node --version
3. Press Enter

You should see a version number. If yes, Node.js is installed!

Part 4: Installing OpenClaw

1 Install OpenClaw

1. Open your terminal
2. Type exactly: npm install -g openclaw
3. Press Enter
4. Wait for installation (may take 1-2 minutes)

2 Verify Installation

1. Type: openclaw --version
2. Press Enter

You should see a version number. OpenClaw is now installed!

Part 5: Initial OpenClaw Setup

When you first run OpenClaw, it will walk you through setup. Here's what to expect:

1 Start OpenClaw

1. In terminal, type: openclaw
2. Press Enter

2 Select Your Skills

OpenClaw will show a list of skills. Use arrow keys to navigate, Space to select, Enter to confirm.

For beginners, select:

- ✓ filesystem (read/write files)
- ✓ web (access websites)
- ✓ memory (remember context)

3 Select Primary Model

Choose which AI to use by default:

- **GPT-4 (OpenAI)**: Best quality, most expensive
- **GPT-3.5 (OpenAI)**: Good quality, cheaper
- **Claude (Anthropic)**: Great reasoning, mid-price

Recommendation: Start with GPT-3.5 (cheaper while learning)

4 Enter API Keys

OpenClaw will ask for your API keys one by one. Paste each key you collected in Part 2:

- OpenAI API Key: [paste your sk-... key]
- Anthropic API Key: [paste your sk-ant-... key]
- OpenRouter API Key: [paste your key]

5 Give Your Bot a Name

Type a name for your bot. Examples:

- MyAssistant
- EmailBot

- Helper

6 Set System Prompt

This tells your bot what it is and how to behave. Example:

```
You are a helpful assistant that manages emails and
schedules. You are concise and professional. You ask for
clarification when unsure.
```

Part 6: Understanding AI Models

Model	Provider	Best For	Cost
GPT-4	OpenAI	Complex reasoning, writing, analysis	Expensive
GPT-4 Turbo	OpenAI	Same as GPT-4 but faster, cheaper	Moderate
GPT-3.5	OpenAI	Simple tasks, drafts, sorting	Cheap
Claude 3 Opus	Anthropic	Long documents, complex instructions	Expensive
Claude 3 Sonnet	Anthropic	General tasks, good balance	Moderate

Gemini Pro

Google

Multilingual, coding

Cheap

 **Recommendation:** Start with GPT-3.5 or Claude 3 Sonnet. They're good enough for most tasks and much cheaper than GPT-4. Upgrade to GPT-4 only when you need the absolute best quality.

Part 7: Security & Protection

7.1 Why Security Matters

Your API keys are like credit cards. If someone steals them, they can use AI services and you'll pay for it.

7.2 Security Best Practices

DO NOT:

- Share API keys with anyone
- Post keys in emails, chats, or forums
- Store keys in plain text files on shared computers
- Commit keys to GitHub or any code repository
- Take screenshots of keys and share them

DO:

- Store keys in a password manager (1Password, Bitwarden, etc.)
- Use environment variables for keys in code
- Rotate (replace) keys every few months
- Monitor usage in your AI provider dashboards
- Set spending limits (we did this in Part 2)

7.3 Use a Separate Computer (Recommended)

For maximum security, consider running OpenClaw on a dedicated computer or virtual machine that:

- Doesn't have your personal email/social media
- Is only used for automation
- Has strong passwords
- Is regularly backed up

This prevents keyloggers or malware from stealing your API keys.

Part 8: Your First Agent

Now let's create a simple agent that actually does something useful.

1 Create Agent File

1. Open your text editor (TextEdit on Mac, Notepad on Windows)
2. Copy the code below

3. Save as: my-first-agent.md

4. Save location: Your Documents folder

```
# My First Agent ## Task Say hello and tell me the current date
## Instructions 1. Greet the user by saying "Hello! I'm your
OpenClaw agent." 2. Tell them today's date 3. Ask how you can
help ## Run this openclaw run my-first-agent.md
```

2 Run Your Agent

1. Open terminal

2. Navigate to where you saved the file: cd Documents

3. Run: openclaw run my-first-agent.md

4. Watch your agent work!

You're Ready!

You've installed OpenClaw, set up API keys, and run your first agent.

For advanced automations, upgrade to the \$97 Full System guide.