

PRODUCTIVITY · 15 min read · August 24, 2026

The Best AI Tools for Every Task Right Now

Eleven everyday tasks, the app most people default to, and the app that beats it. Why each one wins, a real example of it working, a copy-paste starter for each, and which two to pick if you only have time for two.

You saw the cards go by in 30 seconds. This is the slow version, and it's built to be used, not read once. Every pick from the video gets the same treatment: what it is, why it beats the app you're using now, when the app you're using is still the right call, a real example of the switch paying off, a starter you can paste in tonight, and the one thing that trips new users up.

A rule I used the whole way through: the app you're already using isn't wrong. It's the default. The other card is the one that does the same job noticeably better right now, and "right now" is doing real work in that sentence. This list will look different in a year, and I'll redo it when it does.

THE WHOLE LIST ON ONE CARD

Writing: ChatGPT · **Brainstorming:** ChatGPT · **Research:** Perplexity · **Learning something new:** NotebookLM · **Building a website:** Claude Code · **Presentations:** Gamma · **Automating tasks:** Claude Cowork · **Content creation:** Opus Clip · **Images:** ChatGPT Images 2.0 · **Video:** Higgsfield · **Learning more about AI:** Of course, follow me!

Task	You're probably using	The pick
Writing	Claude	ChatGPT
Brainstorming	Gemini	ChatGPT
Research	Wikipedia, Google	Perplexity
Learning something new	YouTube	NotebookLM
Building a website	Lovable	Claude Code
Presentations	PowerPoint	Gamma
Automating tasks	Make	Claude Cowork
Content creation	Canva	Opus Clip
Images	Nano Banana 2	ChatGPT Images 2.0
Video	Runway	Higgsfield
Learning more about AI	Coursera	This account

Every app here has a free way in. Pricing changes too often to print, so check the app's own site before you pay for anything.

01 • WRITING

Claude is good. ChatGPT is insane right now.

CLAUDE



CHATGPT

What it is. The chat assistant you already know, and the job it's quietly gotten best at is short writing that has to sound like a person.

Why it wins. For a long time, AI writing had a sound. Every sentence the same length, every paragraph tidy, a “moreover” where a human would say “also,” and it all read like a press release. Claude broke that pattern first, which is why writers loved it. ChatGPT’s recent models have caught up and passed it on one specific thing: holding your voice across a whole conversation. Give it three samples of how you write and it stays in that voice for the tenth message, not just the first. That’s the difference between an assistant and a template.

Stick with Claude when the piece is long and structured, a 3,000-word guide, a report, anything with sections. Claude still holds a long document together better and is more careful about not inventing details when you hand it source material. This guide was drafted in Claude. The captions for the video were drafted in ChatGPT. Right tool, right length.

Paste this first. Do it once in a new chat, then everything after it comes out in your voice:

PROMPT

Here are three things I wrote myself. Read them and describe my voice in five bullet points: sentence length, how formal I am, words I use a lot, words I'd never use, how I open and close. Then keep that voice for everything you write for me in this conversation.

[paste three real things you wrote]

IN PRACTICE

A hairstylist pasted in three of her own Instagram captions and one text she'd sent a client. ChatGPT came back with: short sentences, no exclamation points, you say "honestly" a lot, you never say "amazing," you sign off with a first name only. Then she asked it for a caption about a color correction she'd done. Before the voice prompt, it wrote: "Transformation Tuesday! Check out this stunning color correction, swipe to see the amazing before and after!" After: "Honestly this one took four hours and I'd do it again. Swipe. Before is on the right. Kel." She posted the second one without editing a word.

The trap. Skipping the voice step and complaining the output sounds generic. It sounds generic because you gave it nothing to match. Every "AI sounds fake" complaint I've ever heard came from someone who never told it how they sound.

02 • BRAINSTORMING

Gemini is bad. ChatGPT is a genius.

GEMINI



CHATGPT

What it is. Same app, different job. Brainstorming is asking for options before you've decided anything, and it's where ChatGPT and Gemini split hardest.

Why it wins. Gemini is built to be helpful and safe, and in a brainstorm that's a weakness. Ask for ten ideas and you get the ten a careful employee would put in a memo. ChatGPT will do those ten, then keep going into the ones that are a little strange, and if you tell it to argue against its own favorite, it will, with real reasons. Brainstorming is a numbers game. The tool that generates more, and stranger, wins, because idea number fourteen is usually the one you use.

Stick with Gemini when the brainstorm needs your Google life pulled in. Gemini can read your Calendar, Drive, and Gmail, so “give me ideas for the offsite and check what dates the team is free” is a Gemini job. That advantage is about access, not ideas.

Paste this first.

PROMPT

Give me 20 ideas for [the thing]. Number them. Make the first 5 the obvious ones so we can get them out of the way. Make 6 through 15 ideas a smart friend would suggest. Make 16 through 20 ideas that are a little risky or strange. Then tell me which three you'd pick and why.

IN PRACTICE

A dog groomer wanted a name for a new mobile van. She'd asked Gemini and gotten "Pawfect Mobile Grooming," "Happy Tails on Wheels," and eight more like that. She ran the prompt above in ChatGPT. Numbers one through five were the same kind of thing. Number 12 was "The Wash Wagon." Number 17 was "Fur Real, We Come to You." Number 19 was just her own last name plus "Mobile," which she'd never considered and ended up choosing because it was already on her business cards. The prompt didn't make ChatGPT smarter. It gave it permission to stop being safe.

The trap. Accepting the first list. Say “keep going,” or “now argue against your top pick,” or “which of these would a competitor never dare use.” The second round is where the word genius gets earned.

Wikipedia is trash. Perplexity is amazing.

WIKIPEDIA



PERPLEXITY

What it is. A search engine that reads the results for you, writes the answer in plain English, and shows every source it used with a link. The answer and the receipts on one screen.

Why it wins. Wikipedia is one page, written by committee, frozen until someone edits it, and it doesn't know what happened last week. Google gives you eleven links and leaves the reading to you. Perplexity does the reading, across the live web, and tells you where each piece came from, so you can check the one that matters. Trash is a strong word for Wikipedia, and I'd defend it for background on anything that hasn't changed in fifty years. For anything with a date on it, a price, a rule, a product, what's true this month, Wikipedia isn't even in the race.

Stick with Wikipedia when you want the long, stable overview on a settled topic. The history of a city. What a medical term means. Perplexity is better at "what's true today." Wikipedia is fine for "what's been true for a long time."

Paste this first.

PROMPT

[Your question]. Give me the answer in plain English first, then list the three most important sources you used with one sentence on why each is trustworthy. If sources disagree, say so.

IN PRACTICE

A woman opening a food truck asked Perplexity what a mobile food vendor permit costs in her city this year. She got a number, the link to the city's own fee page it came from, and a note that a local blog post quoted a different, older number. She'd spent forty minutes on Google the night before and found the blog post. Perplexity found the city page in under a minute and told her the blog was out of date. That note, "sources disagree," is the feature. It's the thing Google can't do.

The trap. Trusting the answer without opening a source. It's right most of the time. Clicking one link is what makes it safe the rest of the time, and the prompt above puts the link right there so you have no excuse.

04 · LEARNING SOMETHING NEW

YouTube is okay. NotebookLM will make you a genius.

YOUTUBE



NOTEBOOKLM

What it is. Google's study tool. You give it material, a PDF, your notes, a link, a YouTube video, and it answers only from that material. Then it turns the material into ways to learn it: a two-host podcast you can interrupt with questions, flashcards that remember which ones you keep missing, quizzes you can turn into a study guide.

Why it wins. YouTube is where everyone learns, and it works, right up to the moment you have to remember any of it. Watching is passive. NotebookLM makes you do something with the material: answer a quiz, flip a card, ask the podcast hosts to explain the part you didn't get. And because it only answers from what you gave it, it can't wander off into generic internet advice. If your certification manual says one thing and the internet says another, NotebookLM sides with the manual. That's what makes it safe to study from.

Stick with YouTube when you don't know what you're looking for yet. YouTube is how you discover a topic. NotebookLM is how you master one you've already picked.

Do this first. Open notebooklm.google, make a new notebook, upload one thing you've been meaning to read. Click Audio Overview. Play it on your next drive. When the hosts say something you want more on, tap the interrupt button and ask.

IN PRACTICE

A woman studying for a real estate license had a 300-page prep book she'd read twice and couldn't retain. She split it into chapters, uploaded them, and asked "what are the ten things on the exam I'm most likely to get wrong based on how this book emphasizes them?" It gave her ten, with the chapter each came from. She generated flashcards for just those ten, ran the quiz every morning for a week, and the flashcards kept resurfacing the three she kept missing until she stopped missing them. Two reads of the book did less than one week of that.

The trap. Treating it like ChatGPT and getting annoyed that it won't answer from the open internet. That limit is the whole point. It's the reason you can trust what it says about your material.

05 • BUILDING A WEBSITE

Lovable is okay. Claude Code is unreal.

LOVABLE



CLAUDE CODE

What it is. Claude, working directly on the files of a website on your own computer. You describe what you want in plain English, it writes the site, you look at it, you ask for changes, it makes them. The site you're reading this on was built that way, by me, with no coding background.

Why it wins. Lovable gets you a good-looking site fast, and I used it first. The problem showed up later: everything lived inside Lovable's platform, every change had to go through their builder, and the site was theirs to host. Claude Code builds the site as plain files you own. You can put them online anywhere, change anything, and there's no builder standing between you and your own website. It also does exactly what you say. Ask a template for "a green button in the top right" and you get whatever the template allows. Ask Claude Code and you get a green button in the top right.

Stick with Lovable when you want a site this afternoon with zero setup and you're fine with it living in their platform. It's the faster start. Claude Code is the better home. I have a separate beginner guide for the full setup, and it's less than most people expect.

Paste this first. Open Claude Code in an empty folder and say:

PROMPT

```
Build me a one-page website for [your business]. It's for [who your customers are]. The headline should say what I do in plain words. Include: a short paragraph about me, three services with a one-line description each, and one button that says "[what you want them to do]" and links to [your email or booking link]. Keep it simple and mobile-friendly. Show me the result before adding anything else.
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IN PRACTICE

A house cleaner typed the prompt above with her three services and her booking link. Two minutes later there was a page. She said "make the button green and put my phone number at the very top." Done. "Add a section with three reviews, I'll paste them in." Done. "The headline sounds corporate, say it the way I'd say it: I clean houses in Franklin and I'm good at it." Done. Forty minutes from empty folder to a site she'd send to a customer, and she can change any word of it forever by asking.

The trap. Asking for everything at once. Get one page you like, then add to it. Claude Code is fast, but it's fastest when you can see each change and say yes or no.

PowerPoint is bad. Gamma is mind blowing.

~~POWERPOINT~~



GAMMA

What it is. A deck builder that starts from a sentence. You describe the presentation, Gamma writes the outline, designs every slide, adds images, and hands you something you edit instead of something you build. The same content flips into a one-page website or a document with one click.

Why it wins. PowerPoint makes you do design work you're not trained for. You pick a template, then fight it for an hour, then it still looks like a template. Gamma starts from your content and designs around it, so the slides look like a designer made them, because the layout decisions were made by something that has seen a million decks. The other thing nobody expects: you can paste in a whole document and it turns it into slides, or paste in slides and it turns them into a page. The format stops being a decision.

Stick with PowerPoint when your company lives in it and the file has to open on their machines, or the deck is 60 slides of data tables that any template would fight.

Paste this first. In Gamma, choose Generate, paste:

PROMPT

A 10-slide presentation titled "[title]" for [audience]. Slide 1 is the title. Slides 2 through 8 each make one point with a short headline and two or three lines of support. Slide 9 is what I want them to do next. Slide 10 is contact info. Warm, plain language, no jargon.

IN PRACTICE

A bookkeeper needed a "what to bring to your first meeting" deck for new clients. She'd been sending a Word doc nobody read. She typed the prompt above with her ten items and got ten designed slides in about a minute, each with a clean headline and an icon that matched the point. She swapped two images, fixed one headline, exported it, and it's now the thing every new client gets. Then she clicked one button and turned the same deck into a web page she links from her email signature. One prompt, two deliverables.

The trap. Accepting the first design. Gamma has a Theme button. Try three themes before you settle. The content is done. The look takes another thirty seconds.

07 · AUTOMATING TASKS

Make is terrible. Claude Cowork is awesome.

MAKE



CLAUDE COWORK

What it is. Cowork is the middle tab in the Claude desktop app, between Chat and Code. You give it a job in plain English, connect it to the tools you already use (Gmail, Google Drive, Calendar, Notion, Slack, and more), and it does the job, on a schedule if you want, as long as your computer is awake and the app is open.

Why it wins. Make is a flowchart. You drag boxes, connect them with lines, and every box is a decision you have to get right, and when something breaks you're reading error messages at midnight. It's powerful, and it's built for people who enjoy that. Cowork replaces the flowchart with a sentence. You describe the job the way you'd describe it to a new assistant, and Claude figures out the steps. When it's unsure, it asks you instead of failing silently. The difference in who can use it is the whole story: Make needs a technical person, Cowork needs someone who can write an email.

Stick with Make when you need something that runs while your laptop is closed, or that connects apps Cowork doesn't have a connector for yet. Make is a machine you build once. Cowork is an assistant you brief.

Do this first. Open the Claude desktop app, click Cowork, click the plus, choose Add plugin, and install the Marketing one from Anthropic. Type a slash and you'll see a working set of skills you didn't have to write. Then go to Settings, Connectors, and connect Gmail.

IN PRACTICE

A wedding photographer gets forty inquiry emails a week and kept losing track of who she'd answered. With Gmail connected, she said: "every weekday at 8am, list any email from the last 24 hours that asks me a question I haven't replied to. One line each: who, what they asked, how long it's been waiting." She clicked Schedule. Now there's a list on her screen every morning. Setting that up in Make would have been a trigger, a filter, a formatter, and an hour of testing. In Cowork it was one sentence, and when it wasn't sure what counted as a question, it asked her.

The trap. Closing the laptop and expecting the schedule to run. Scheduled tasks need the app open. That's the trade for it being this easy to set up.

08 · CONTENT CREATION

Canva is okay. Opus Clip will make you go viral.



What it is. Give Opus Clip one long video, a podcast, a talk, a Zoom recording, a 20-minute ramble into your phone, and it hands back the short clips, already cut, captioned, and sized for TikTok and Reels, with a score on which ones are most likely to travel.

Why it wins. Canva is where graphics get made, and I use it every week for thumbnails and carousels. It's not the tool for turning one long recording into a week of short videos, and that's the job that grows an account. Opus Clip does one thing Canva can't: it listens to the whole recording, finds the moments with a hook in the first sentence, cuts them, captions them, and ranks them. The ranking is the part that changed how I work. It finds the clip you'd have skipped because you were there when you said it and it didn't feel special.

Stick with Canva when the job is graphics, thumbnails, carousels, anything that isn't cutting video. They're not competing. They do different jobs, and the video only put them next to each other because "content creation" is the phrase people search.

Do this first. Upload the longest video you have. Don't touch the settings. Post the clip it ranks highest, exactly as it gave it to you. Then post one you'd have picked yourself. Compare in a week.

IN PRACTICE

A business coach recorded a 25-minute workshop on Zoom and uploaded it. Eight clips came out, each captioned, each opening on a line that worked as a hook. The one Opus ranked first was a 40-second answer to an audience question she thought was a throwaway, where she said "nobody buys the thing, they buy the after." She'd never have cut that clip herself. It did more in a week than the polished intro she'd have chosen. Eight clips from one recording, and the best one was the one she didn't see.

The trap. Uploading on the free plan and losing the clips because you didn't download them right away. Download the same day, every time.

Nano Banana 2 is good. ChatGPT Image 2 will blow your mind.

~~NANO BANANA 2~~

CHATGPT IMAGES 2.0

What it is. ChatGPT Images 2.0 arrived in April 2026 and it's the first image model that thinks before it draws. Text inside the image comes out spelled right. You can ask for eight matching images in one go and the same character or product stays consistent across all of them. It outputs at 2K.

Why it wins. For two years, the tell on AI images was the text. Signs with made-up letters, labels that almost said a word. Every other model, including Nano Banana 2, still stumbles on it sometimes. ChatGPT Images 2.0 reads your prompt, plans the image, then draws it, and the difference shows up exactly where it matters for anyone making something real: a menu board, a product label, a social graphic with a headline. The other thing is consistency. Ask for the same mug in six settings and it's the same mug. That used to take a designer.

Stick with Nano Banana 2 when you're already inside Gemini, or you want quick edits to a photo you already have. It's good. This was the closest call on the whole list, and if you already use it, you're not wrong.

Paste this first.

PROMPT

Create a [product / sign / label / social graphic] that says exactly "[your text]" and nothing else. Style: [clean and modern / warm and handmade / bold and simple]. Colors: [your two colors]. No extra words, no watermark, no border.

IN PRACTICE

A coffee shop owner asked for "a chalkboard sign that says exactly 'Fresh scones 8am, gone by 9' in white chalk lettering, nothing else." Her first try in another tool had spelled scones wrong and added a second line she never asked for. ChatGPT Images got every letter right the first time, and when she asked for the same sign in four seasonal versions, the handwriting matched across all four. She printed them. That's a \$60 sign order she didn't place.

The trap. Vague prompts. The more exact you are about the words and what NOT to add, the better it behaves. "Do not add any other text" is the most useful sentence in image prompting right now.

10 • VIDEO

Runway is horrible. Higgsfield is crazy.

RUNWAY



HIGGSFIELD

What it is. A video generator that puts the newest models in one place with camera moves and effects built in. You start from a still image or a sentence and get a short clip that looks like a crew shot it.

Why it wins. Runway was the name everyone learned first, and it earned that. What changed is that the best video models now come from several companies and they leapfrog each other every few months. Higgsfield doesn't bet on one model. It gives you the current best ones under one roof, plus the camera moves as buttons: push-in, orbit, crash zoom, handheld. You're choosing a shot, not writing a paragraph describing one. For someone who isn't a filmmaker, that's the difference between usable and not.

Stick with Runway when you already pay for it and know it. If you're starting from zero, start here instead.

Do this first. Upload one still photo of your product or your space. Ask for a slow push-in, five seconds. That's the cheapest possible test of what it can do, and it's the shot you'll use most.

IN PRACTICE

A candle maker uploaded one product photo shot on her phone and asked for "slow push-in, warm light flickering." The five-second clip that came back opened her next Reel, and the comments asked who filmed it. Nobody filmed it. Then she did the same with four more products and had an intro for every post that week, from photos she already had.

The trap. Making something ambitious on the first try. Expect to generate a clip three to five times before you get the one you keep. Start with the five-second push-in, learn what it does with your images, then get ambitious.

11 · LEARNING MORE ABOUT AI

Coursera is bad. Of course, follow me!

~~COURSERA~~



@KELLYSTRATTON.AI

What it is. Coursera teaches AI the way a textbook does, over eight weeks, and by the time you finish, the tools have changed. I post one thing you can use the same day, every day, and every video comes with a free guide like this one.

Why it wins. Look at this guide. Three of the eleven picks didn't exist a year ago. A course written in January is wrong by June. The only way to keep up with this stuff is somebody who's in it every day, testing the new thing the week it comes out, and telling you in plain language whether it matters. That's the job here.

Do this first. You're already here. Pick the next guide from the resources page.

If you only have time for two

Nobody needs eleven apps. Pick your two from your own list, not mine:

If you're new to AI: ChatGPT and NotebookLM. One for doing, one for learning. Master those before you add anything.

If you work for yourself: ChatGPT and Claude Cowork. Writing and brainstorming in one, and the recurring chores handed off in the other.

If you run a small business with a storefront or clients: Perplexity and Gamma. One tells you what's true about your market this week. The other makes you look like you have a designer.

What all of them are bad at

- **Being right every time.** Every tool on this list makes things up occasionally, confidently. The ones with sources (Perplexity, NotebookLM) make it easy to check. Check anyway.
- **Knowing your business.** Every one of them meets you as a stranger until you tell it who you are. The paste-this-first prompts above exist for that reason.
- **Privacy by default.** Anything you paste into a free plan may be used to train the model. Don't paste client data, contracts, or medical anything into a free tier. Paid plans usually let you turn training off. Find the setting before you paste.

A few things to watch for

- "Free" always means limits, watermarks, or both. Every free tier is enough to find out whether you'll use the tool. None of them are enough to run a business on.
- The "bad" card isn't worthless. It's the default. If it's doing the job for you, you don't owe anyone a switch.

- Picks checked on August 24, 2026. Three of these apps didn't exist a year ago. Expect this list to move.

The takeaway

You don't need eleven apps. You need to know which one wins for the two or three tasks you do most, and then get good at those. Pick your two from the list above, open them tonight, and run the paste-this-first prompt for each. That's the whole assignment, and it takes less time than the video took you to find.

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