



ChatGPT Explained

The world's most-used AI tool, in plain language

A beginner's guide to the GPT-5.6 era — July 2026



What Is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is an AI assistant made by OpenAI, launched publicly in November 2022. You type (or speak) a request in ordinary language, and it writes back an answer.

Under the hood it is a large language model: it was trained on enormous amounts of text and learned to predict what words should come next. That simple mechanism turns out to be enough to summarize, draft, translate, explain, code, and reason.

Think of it as a very well-read assistant who has read a huge portion of the internet but has never met you – so the quality of what you get depends heavily on what you tell it.

Why It Matters: The Scale

900M

Weekly Active Users

Worldwide as of early 2026, up from 500 million in March 2025.

62.5%

Consumer AI Spend

Of all consumer AI subscription spending goes to ChatGPT – no competitor exceeds 6% market share.

50M

Paying Plus Subscribers

Plus 5+ million business and enterprise seats.

34%

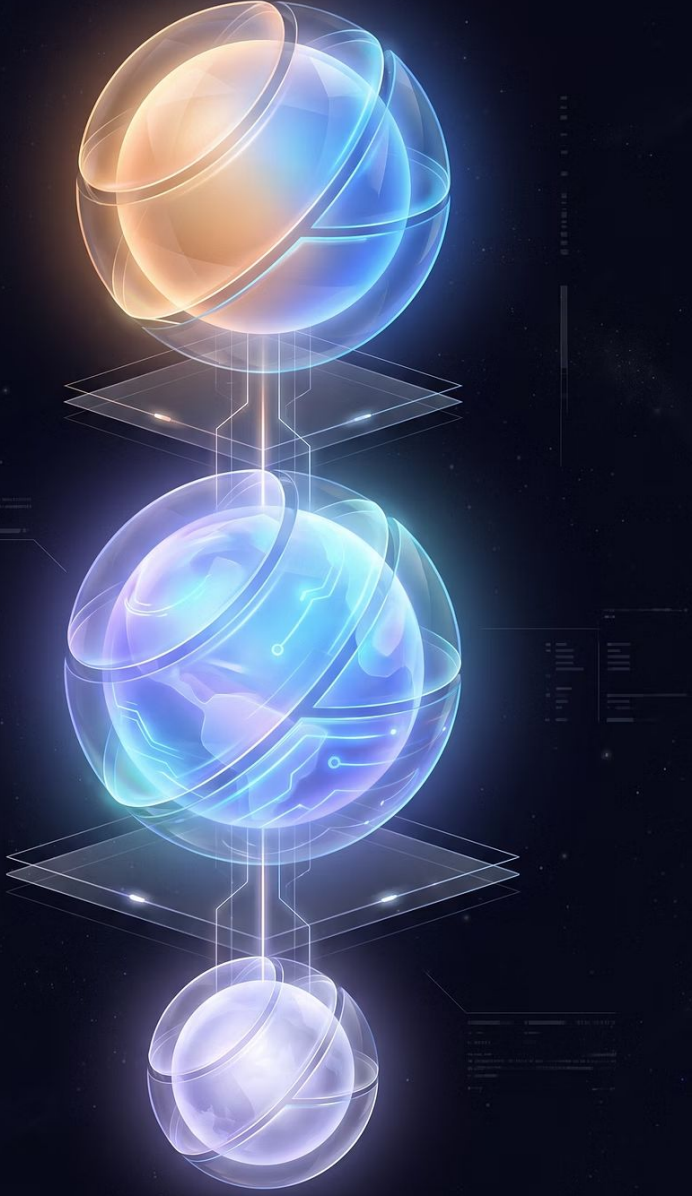
American Adults

Have used it; 58% of those aged 18–29.

12.5

Avg. Session (min)

Average web session length in minutes.



The 2026 Model: GPT-5.6

GPT-5.6 launched on 9 July 2026 as OpenAI's flagship model family. The number is the generation; the names are capability tiers that stay consistent across generations:

Sol

The flagship reasoning model for complex work.

Sol Pro is the highest-capability version.

Terra

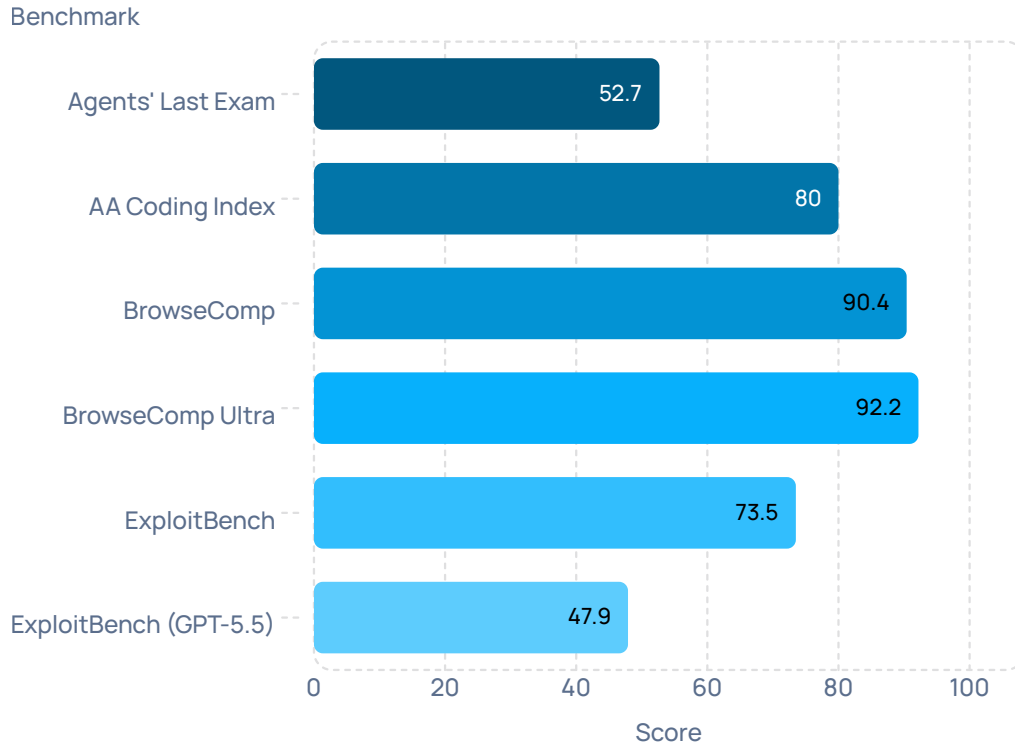
Balanced capability, speed and cost. Powers Work and Codex.

Luna

The fastest and cheapest in the family.

GPT-5.5 Instant remains the default fast model for everyday questions.

How Good Is It? (Benchmarks)



What the Numbers Mean

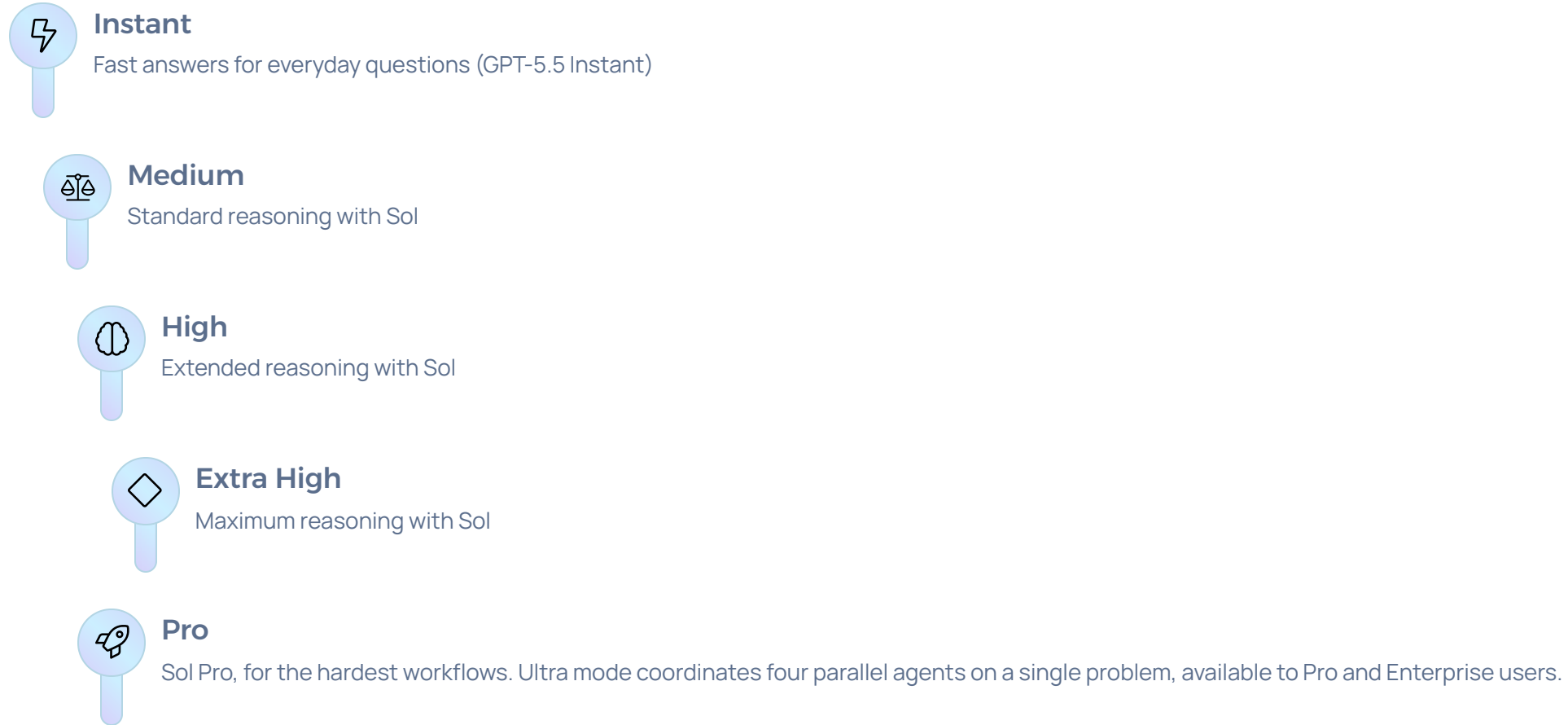
- **Agents' Last Exam** (real professional workflows): Sol scores 52.7%
- **Artificial Analysis Coding Index**: 80 — best in class at launch
- **BrowseComp** (web research tasks): 90.4%, rising to 92.2% in ultra mode
- **ExploitBench** (cybersecurity): 73.5%, up from GPT-5.5's 47.9%
- Tool-call refusal rate on agent benchmarks fell below 4%, down from roughly 12% on GPT-5.5



Translation for beginners: it fails less often, and it finishes more of what you ask it to do.

Reasoning Effort: Choosing How Hard It Thinks

One of the biggest 2026 changes is that you control how much thinking you buy.



❏ Rule of thumb: use Instant for quick questions, higher effort when accuracy matters more than speed.

The Features That Actually Matter

Projects

Persistent workspaces with their own instructions, files and isolated memory, so work doesn't bleed between topics.

Memory

An editable profile of facts it remembers about you. You can view and delete entries in settings.

Deep Research

A multi-step agent that runs sequential web searches, reads the pages, and returns a cited report.

Canvas

Side-by-side editing, so output becomes a document you revise rather than a chat message.

Voice

The new experience launched 8 July 2026 (GPT-Live-1) listens and speaks at the same time with natural turn-taking.

Universal Search

Search across all your chats, projects, images and documents.

Custom Instructions

Now up to 5,000 characters for paid tiers.

ChatGPT Work: The Agent Era

Launched 9 July 2026, ChatGPT Work is an agent built for long, involved tasks rather than single answers.

Research & Read

It researches across the web, reads your files, and connects to your apps.

Real Deliverables

Produces documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and hosted Sites.

Scheduled Tasks

Let it run work on a recurring basis without you present.

Unified Desktop App

Now unifies Chat, Work and Codex in one interface, with a clear switcher between them.

Related: Codex, the coding agent, reached 5 million weekly users and added Goal Mode and remote control.



What It Costs

Plan	Price	What You Get
Free	\$0	Limited GPT-5.5-class access with caps. No GPT-5.6 Sol. Ads shown in the US.
Go	~\$8/mo	Roughly 10x the free limits.
Plus	\$20/mo	GPT-5.6 Sol at medium and high effort, Deep Research, Advanced Voice, Canvas, custom GPTs, no ads.
Pro	\$100–\$200/mo	\$100/month for 5x Plus limits, or \$200/month for 20x limits, Extra High and Sol Pro effort, extended context and far more Deep Research runs.
Business	~\$25/seat/mo	(\$20 annually, 2-seat minimum.) Shared workspace, admin console, SSO, and no training on your data.
Enterprise	Custom	Custom pricing, with SCIM provisioning and data residency options.

 For most beginners, Plus at \$20 is the sensible starting point.

How to Prompt It Well

The Principles

- **Give context, not just a command.** Say who you are, who the output is for, and what good looks like.
- **Assign a role:** "You are a hiring manager reviewing this CV."
- **Specify format and length:** bullet points, 200 words, a table, a formal email.
- **Show an example** of the style you want — one good example beats three paragraphs of description.
- **Ask it to think step by step** for anything involving logic, numbers or multiple constraints.
- **Iterate.** Your first answer is a draft; say what to change rather than starting over.

Weak Prompt

"Write about marketing."

Strong Prompt

"Write a 150-word LinkedIn post for small-bakery owners explaining why email beats Instagram for repeat orders, warm and practical, no jargon."

The Limits: What to Watch For



Hallucination

It can state wrong things confidently. Always verify names, numbers, dates, laws, citations and medical or legal claims.



Not a Search Engine

Without browsing or Deep Research, it answers from training data with a knowledge cutoff.



Privacy

Don't paste secrets, client data or credentials into consumer tiers. Business and Enterprise plans contractually exclude training on your data.



Model Opacity

The model behind a given answer is often auto-selected and not shown, so quality can vary between sessions.



Bias

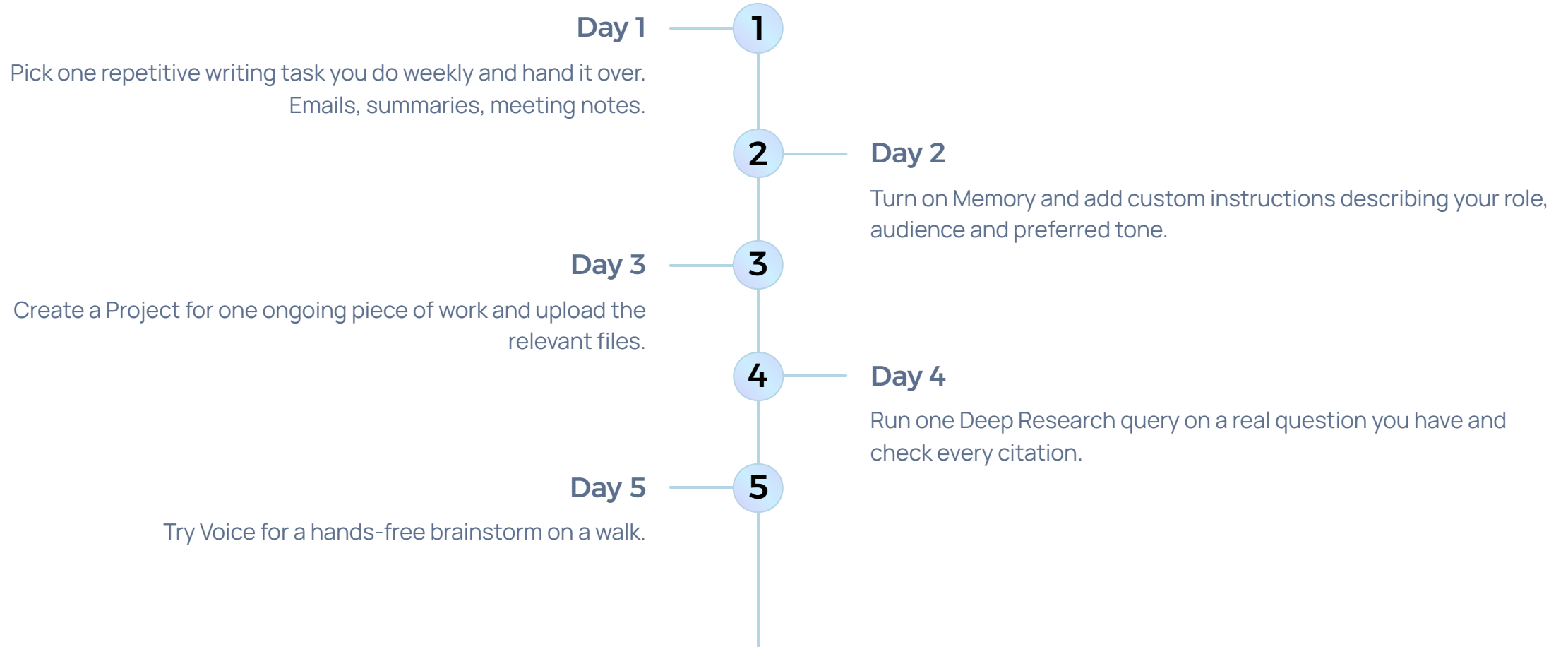
It reflects patterns in its training data.



Confidence ≠ Evidence

It is confident by design. Confidence is not evidence.

Getting Started This Week



❏ The habit that matters: treat every output as a first draft from a fast, well-read, occasionally wrong colleague.

Sources

- OpenAI: GPT-5.6 announcement and Help Center model release notes
- OpenAI ChatGPT release notes, June–July 2026
- Backlinko ChatGPT statistics, 2026
- Independent pricing and feature roundups, July 2026

Figures accurate as of 30 July 2026. AI products change fast — verify pricing before purchasing.