NO PREP

Meet the Big AI Tools

ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Copilot

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

Meet the Big AI Tools: ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Copilot

Why There Are So Many Tools

In the span of roughly three years — from late 2022 through 2025 — the AI landscape went from one dominant public-facing tool (ChatGPT) to a crowded market of competing products from some of the world's largest technology companies. This happened because the release of ChatGPT in November 2022 demonstrated to the entire industry that large language models had reached a point where everyday users would actually pay for them and change their behavior around them. That proof-of-concept triggered a wave of investment and product launches that is still accelerating. Understanding the major players — who makes them, what they are good at, and how they differ — gives you a foundation for choosing and using these

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ChatGPT: The Tool That Started the Public AI Era

ChatGPT is a product of OpenAI, an AI safety company founded in 2015 that has since become one of the most influential technology organizations in the world. OpenAI's underlying model family is called GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer), with versions including GPT-3, GPT-4, and subsequent releases. ChatGPT is the consumer-facing interface that made these models accessible to the general public without requiring any technical expertise. When ChatGPT launched in

November 2022, it reached one million users in five days and 100 million users within two months: the fastest adoption of any consumer technology in history at that point. It can draft emails, write code, explain complex concepts, summarize documents, brainstorm ideas, and engage in extended conversations. As of 2026, it has incorporated web browsing, image generation (through DALL-E), voice interaction, and the ability to analyze uploaded documents. OpenAI offers a free tier with limitations and a paid ChatGPT Plus subscription with access to more capable models and features. One important thing to know about ChatGPT: its knowledge is based on its training data, which has a cutoff date. Anything that happened after that date (news events, new research, product releases) is not something the base model knows. The web browsing feature addresses this limitation but introduces its own considerations around source reliability.

Google Gemini: The Search Giant's AI Bet

Google's AI assistant, Gemini, represents the company's most significant product pivot in years. Google had been doing foundational AI research for longer than almost any company. The transformer architecture that made modern language models possible came from Google in 2017. But the company moved cautiously on consumer products partly because a mistaken AI answer could damage its core search business. ChatGPT's success forced Google's hand. Gemini is powered by Google's Gemini model family and is notable for its deep integration with Google's ecosystem: Google Search, Gmail, Google Docs, Google Drive, and YouTube. If you are already a heavy Google user, Gemini can pull context from your emails and documents to give more personalized answers. It also has stronger real-time capabilities than some competitors because of its connection to Google Search. Google offers Gemini free through its consumer apps and as a paid tier (Gemini Advanced) with access to more powerful model versions. An important distinction: Gemini is both the product name and the model family name. This can be confusing. When people say they are 'using Gemini,' they might mean the consumer app or they might mean they are accessing Gemini models through Google's API in their own software.

Claude: The Safety-First Alternative

Claude is made by Anthropic, a company founded in 2021 by former OpenAI researchers, including Dario Amodei and Daniela Amodei, who left over

disagreements about AI safety practices. Anthropic's founding philosophy centers on building AI that is safe, honest, and helpful — in that order of priority — and the company has published significant research on AI safety techniques including a method called Constitutional AI, which trains models to evaluate and revise their own outputs according to a set of principles. Claude is known for handling long documents well — it can process and reason about extremely long texts in a single conversation, making it useful for tasks like reading a contract, analyzing a research paper, or reviewing a lengthy document. Users frequently cite Claude as feeling more thoughtful and less prone to flattery or sycophancy compared to other chatbots. It is available through Claude.ai with a free tier and paid plans, and through Anthropic's API for developers. As of 2026, Claude models include Haiku (fast and lightweight), Sonnet (balanced), and Opus (most capable). Claude reflects Anthropic's safety research by declining certain types of requests, providing reasoning about its decisions, and acknowledging uncertainty rather than confabulating confident-sounding answers. This cautious approach makes it less likely to tell you what you want to hear and more likely to flag its own limitations.

Microsoft Copilot: AI Inside the Tools You Already Use

Microsoft Copilot is not a standalone AI chat tool so much as an AI layer embedded throughout Microsoft's product ecosystem: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams, and Windows itself. Microsoft made a major investment in OpenAI starting in 2019 and accelerated it in 2023, and Copilot is powered primarily by OpenAI's models. The core proposition is AI that helps you inside your workflow rather than in a separate tab. In practice, Copilot in Word can draft or improve documents based on your prompts while you are editing. Copilot in Excel can analyze your spreadsheet data and generate summaries or formulas. Copilot in Outlook can summarize email threads and draft replies. Copilot in Teams can take notes during meetings and generate action item summaries. For students in schools that use Microsoft 365, Copilot may already be integrated into the tools you use daily. There is also a standalone Copilot chat experience available free through the web and in Windows. One distinctive feature of Copilot is that it can cite its sources when it pulls information from the web, which helps address concerns about unverifiable AI outputs. This reflects a broader trend in the industry toward AI tools that link

their claims to verifiable sources rather than presenting information as coming from nowhere.

Key Information: Major AI Tools Comparison

Tool	Company / Key Facts
ChatGPT	OpenAI; launched Nov 2022; GPT model family; free + Plus paid tier
Google Gemini	Google; integrates with Google ecosystem; strong real-time search access
Claude	Anthropic; safety-first philosophy; strong with long documents; Haiku/Sonnet/Opus tiers
Microsoft Copilot	Microsoft + OpenAI models; embedded in Word, Excel, Teams, Outlook
What they share	All built on large language models (LLMs) trained on text data
Key limitation (all)	Knowledge cutoff dates; can hallucinate; no genuine understanding
Choosing a tool	Match tool strengths to your specific task and workflow needs
Cost structure	All offer free tiers; paid tiers unlock more powerful models and features

Case Study: Destiny's Research Paper

Destiny is a junior working on a 10-page research paper on climate policy. She has three AI tools available to her: ChatGPT, Claude through her school's license, and Microsoft Copilot in Word. She tries to use ChatGPT first, asking it for recent statistics on global emissions. It gives her specific numbers confidently, but when she tries to verify them using the links it suggests, she discovers they do not exist. She switches to Claude and asks it to help her organize a long policy document her teacher shared. Claude reads the entire document and gives her a clear outline with page references. Finally, she uses Copilot in Word to help her polish her draft. 'These tools are not interchangeable,' she tells her friend afterward. 'ChatGPT made up sources, Claude handled the long document really well, and Copilot was great for editing inside Word. They have different strengths.'

1. Based on the reading's descriptions of each tool, explain why each tool performed the way it did for Destiny. What feature or design choice of each tool explains its behavior in her specific task?

2. Destiny's experience illustrates the concept of matching the right tool to the right task. Based on the reading, what specific questions should a student ask before choosing which AI tool to use for a given assignment?

Multiple Choice

1. According to the reading, what distinguishes Claude from the other major AI tools?

a) It was the first AI chatbot available to the general public

b) It is powered directly by Google's own live search index, which gives it real-time answers too

c) It is embedded directly in Microsoft Office and Windows applications

d) It prioritizes safety, handles long documents well, and is made by a safety-focused company

2. What is one key advantage of Microsoft Copilot compared to standalone AI chat tools?

a) It is embedded in productivity tools like Word, Excel, and Teams

b) It was the first product to introduce large language model technology

c) It never makes mistakes or produces inaccurate information

d) It is the most powerful language model currently available

3. What important limitation do ALL of the major AI tools described in the reading share?

a) They are only available to paid subscribers with no completely free options

b) They require a strong internet connection and cannot work offline

c) They have knowledge cutoff dates and can hallucinate inaccurate information

d) They can only process text and cannot handle images or documents

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Large Language Model	A) The date after which a model has no training data and cannot know about new events
2. ___ Constitutional AI	B) When an AI system confidently generates false or invented information
3. ___ Knowledge Cutoff	C) A way for developers to access AI models programmatically in their own software
4. ___ API	D) An AI system trained on massive text data to predict and generate language
5. ___ Hallucination	E) Anthropic's technique for training AI models to evaluate and revise outputs based on principles

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. ChatGPT reached 100 million users within two _____ of its launch, making it the fastest-adopted consumer technology in history at that point.

2. Google's Gemini is notable for its deep integration with Google's _____, including Gmail, Google Docs, and Google Drive.

3. Anthropic was founded in 2021 by former OpenAI researchers who left over disagreements about AI _____ practices.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. The reading describes a distinction between the 'product layer' and the 'model layer' in AI tools. Explain this distinction and give an example of why it matters for how you use these tools.

2. Based on the reading, which AI tool would you choose if you needed to analyze a 50-page legal document, and why? Which tool would you avoid for this task, and why?

3. All of the tools described in the reading have a 'hallucination' problem — they can confidently generate false information. Why is this limitation particularly dangerous for students using AI for research, and what habits should students develop to protect against it?