Lesson: What AI Agents Are #gts0001

Lesson Summary

Category: Getting Started
Difficulty: Beginner
Estimated Time: 10–15 minutes

You Will Learn:

- Understand what an **AI agent** is
- Understand the difference between **AI chat and AI agents**
- Learn the **basic components of an AI agent system**
- Understand how agents interact with **tools, APIs, and data**
- See examples of **real-world AI agent tasks**

Overview

Artificial Intelligence Agents (also called assistants) are computer programs that can **observe information, make decisions, and perform actions automatically** in order to accomplish goals.

Unlike traditional software that simply waits for a user to click buttons or run commands, an AI agent can operate **semi-independently**. It can receive instructions, gather information from tools or APIs, process that information using an AI model, and then decide what action to take next.

Modern AI agents are typically built around **large language models (LLMs)** such as those provided by OpenAI (ChatGPT), Anthropic (Claude), Google (Gemini), Meta (Llama), Grok (xAI), Alibaba (Qwen). These models allow the agent to understand human instructions, reason about problems, and generate responses or actions.

In the course developed at http://AIAgentLessons.com we will be working with **OpenClaw**, an AI agent framework that allows you to create agents capable of interacting with tools, files, APIs, and messaging systems such as Telegram.

By the end of this course, you will be able to create agents that perform useful real-world tasks such as:

- Gathering daily news
- Monitoring stock prices
- Sending automated messages
- Managing notes and reminders
- Interacting with external APIs

This lesson introduces the **core idea of AI agents** so that the rest of the course will make sense.

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Chapter 1

The Difference Between AI Chat and AI Agents

Many people are familiar with AI through chat interfaces such as ChatGPT. In this environment, the AI waits for a user to type a prompt and then responds with text. This interaction pattern is called **prompt-response AI**.

Example:

User prompt:
What is the weather in Los Angeles today?
AI response:
The weather in Los Angeles is sunny with a high of 72°F.

This type of interaction is powerful, but it is **limited**. The AI only works when a user is actively asking questions.

AI agents take this concept further.

Instead of simply answering questions, an AI agent can:

- run on a schedule
- gather information from APIs
- analyze the information
- perform actions automatically

For example, an AI agent could:

- check the weather every morning
- collect stock market updates
- summarize news headlines
- send a daily report to Telegram

This transforms AI from a **tool you use occasionally** into a **system that works for you automatically in the background.**

Chapter 2

What Makes Something an AI Agent

An AI agent usually contains several key components.

AI Model
The AI model is the intelligence behind the agent. It interprets instructions and decides what actions should be taken.
Examples of models used by agents:

- OpenAI GPT models
- Codex models

- Claude
- Local models

Agent Framework
The framework provides the **structure that allows the AI to operate**.
Examples:

- OpenClaw
- LangChain
- AutoGPT

These frameworks manage how the agent communicates with tools, files, and APIs.

Tools
Agents become powerful when they can use **tools**.
Examples of tools include:

- web search
- reading files
- writing files
- accessing APIs
- sending messages

Without tools, an AI model can only generate text. With tools, it can **interact with the world**.

Memory
Many agents store information so they can remember things over time.
Examples of memory:
• notes the agent has saved
• past conversations
• data from previous tasks
Memory allows an agent to **improve decisions over time**.

Chapter 3

A Simple Example of an AI Agent
Imagine a simple morning briefing agent.
Every morning at **7:00 AM** it does the following:

1. Checks the weather for your city
2. Fetches the latest news headlines
3. Looks up stock market data
4. Sends the results to your phone

The agent might produce a message like this:

Example
Good Morning Alan – it is 7:00 AM

Weather in San Diego, CA - Sunny, 68°F

News Headlines
• Global markets rise after inflation data
• New technology breakthrough in AI chips
• Major airline announces new routes

Markets
S&P 500 +0.8%
NASDAQ +1.2%
Dow +0.5%

This type of automation is exactly what we will build later in this course.

Chapter 4

The Basic Flow of an AI Agent
Most AI agents follow a similar workflow.
Step 1 — Receive Instructions
The agent receives instructions from:
• a user message
• a scheduled task
• another program

Step 2 — Gather Information
The agent collects information using tools such as:
• search APIs
• weather APIs
• financial APIs
• databases

Step 3 — Reason About the Information
The AI model analyzes the data and determines what to do next.

Step 4 — Perform Actions
The agent may:
• generate a report
• update a file
• send a message
• trigger another automation

Chapter 5

Why AI Agents Are Becoming Important

AI agents represent a shift in how people interact with software.

Instead of constantly operating software manually, users can **delegate tasks to intelligent systems**.

In the coming years, AI agents are expected to automate many common tasks such as:

- information gathering
- data analysis
- content creation
- personal scheduling
- customer support

Learning how to build AI agents today puts you ahead of a major technological shift.

What We Learned

In this lesson you learned:

- What AI agents are
- How agents differ from simple AI chat systems
- The core components of an agent system
- How agents gather information and perform tasks
- Why agents are becoming an important technology

This understanding will help you as we begin **building real agents in later lessons**.

Next Lesson

#gts0003 - How This Website Is Organized

In the next lesson we will explore how the AI Agent Lessons website is structured so you can easily follow the learning path and find the resources needed to build your first AI agents.

Previous Lesson

#gts0001 - What Agents Are

There is no previous lesson as this is the first in the entire series. What was covered was what AI agents are, how agents differ from simple AI chat systems, the core components of an agent system, how agents gather information and perform tasks, and why agents are becoming an important technology.

Resources

OpenClaw Documentation https://github.com/openclaw

Official repository and documentation for the OpenClaw agent framework.

OpenAI API Documentation https://platform.openai.com/docs

Lesson: What AI Agents Are #gts0001

Official guide for working with OpenAI models and APIs.

Brave Search API https://brave.com/search/api
Search API that allows agents to retrieve web results programmatically.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this lesson.

Lesson Information

Lesson Category:	**Getting Started**
Lesson Subcategory:	**Introduction**
Lesson Title:	**What AI Agents Are**
Estimated Time:	10–15 minutes
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Course Path

Course: Getting Started

Sections

Introduction

1. What AI Agents Are ← **Current Lesson**
2. What OpenClaw Is
3. How This Website Is Organized
4. The Skills You Will Learn

Requirements

5. Hardware and Computer Requirements
6. Software You Need Before Starting
7. Installing WSL
8. Installing Ubuntu
9. Installing Node and Python

First Agent

10. Installing OpenClaw
11. Creating Your First Agent
12. Understanding the Gateway
13. Running Your First Test Command

First Automation

14. Creating a Morning Daily Brief
15. Connecting Telegram
16. Adding Weather Information
17. Adding News Headlines

Learning Path

18. Suggested Learning Order
19. Beginner to Intermediate to Advanced Roadmap

20. Recommended APIs to Add First
21. Common Beginner Mistakes