

M A V E R I C K A I

ChatGPT Chat vs Work vs Codex

WHEN TO USE EACH ONE (IN PLAIN ENGLISH)

ChatGPT now has three modes and almost nobody knows which is which. Here's the simple version: Chat is for answers, Work is for finished projects, and Codex is for building software. This guide shows you exactly when to use each, and where to find them.

What each of the three modes actually does

The one-line rule for picking the right one

Exactly where to find and switch between them

Real examples of what to hand each mode

A decision table: 'if you want X, use Y'

A one-page cheat sheet

2026 Edition

The One-Line Answer

ChatGPT used to be one thing: a chat box. Now it has three modes, and once you know what each is for, choosing is easy. Here's the whole thing in one line:

THE SIMPLE RULE

Chat is for answers. Work is for finished projects. Codex is for building software. That's it. If you remember nothing else, remember that.

At a glance

Mode	Think of it as	Use it for	Where
Chat	Your assistant	Quick answers, ideas, drafts, learning	Anywhere
Work	Your operator	Finished files: sheets, decks, reports, sites	Best on desktop
Codex	Your engineer	Building apps, tools, and code	Desktop only

ALL THREE ARE FREE ON THE DESKTOP APP

On the ChatGPT desktop app, Chat, Work, and Codex are available on every plan, including the free one. On web and mobile the rollout is more staged, so if you don't see Work or Codex, the desktop app is the surest way in.

Chat: Your Everyday Assistant

This is the ChatGPT you already know and probably already use. It's fast, conversational, and free. You ask, it answers. Nothing here has changed, and for a huge chunk of what people do with AI, this is still the right tool.

Use Chat when you want to

Ask a quick question, bounce around ideas, get a fast answer, write something short, or learn a new topic. If what you want is an answer or a quick bit of text, Chat is your mode. It's the one you reach for a dozen times a day.

WHAT CHAT IS GREAT FOR

Examples of good Chat asks

Explain compound interest like I'm 12.

Give me 10 name ideas for a coffee brand.

Reword this email to sound friendlier: ...

What's a good weeknight dinner with chicken and rice?

Where to find it

It's the normal ChatGPT. On the desktop app, there's a **Quick chat** button in the left sidebar, and on web or mobile it's just the standard chat you already open. Nothing to switch on.

Work: Your Operator

This is the big new one. Work is powered by ChatGPT's newest model, and instead of answering in the chat, it takes on a whole project and hands you finished work. You give it an outcome, and it goes and does it, for as long as the job takes.

Hand Work a big task and it breaks the project into steps, pulls from your connected apps and files, and works in the background, sometimes for hours, until it hands you the finished thing: a real spreadsheet, a full slide deck, a written report, even a working website. Not a draft in a chat box you have to copy out. An actual file.

THE ONE SENTENCE THAT EXPLAINS WORK

Chat gives you answers. Work gives you deliverables. If you'd normally take ChatGPT's answer and then go do the actual work yourself, Work is the mode that does that part too.

WHAT WORK IS GREAT FOR

Examples of good Work tasks

Take the files in this folder and build me a spreadsheet with totals by category, then a 5-slide summary of the key numbers.

Research these 5 competitors and build me a one-page comparison of their pricing and positioning.

Where to find it / how to turn it on

On the desktop app, click **ChatGPT Work** in the top-left corner to switch into it. On mobile, tap the dropdown at the top that says Chat or Work and pick Work. On web, choose Work when you start a conversation. Same account, just a different mode.

TIP

Work shines when you point it at real material, a folder of files, your connected apps, or specific links, and tell it exactly what finished thing you want. The clearer the brief, the better the deliverable.

Codex: Your Engineer

Codex is the mode for when you actually want to build software. An app, a tool, a website, or fixing something inside an existing codebase when it breaks. And here's the part that matters for most people: you do it by talking in plain English. You do not need to have written a single line of code in your life.

Use Codex when you want to

Build an app or a tool, spin up a working website, or fix and change existing code. If the end result is a piece of working software, Codex is your mode. For everything that isn't code, Work or Chat will serve you better.

WHAT CODEX IS GREAT FOR

Examples of good Codex asks

Build me a simple website where people can sign up for my newsletter.

Something in my app broke and it won't load. Find the problem and fix it.

Where to find it

Codex works best in the **ChatGPT desktop app**. Go to the top-left and choose **Codex**. It's not available on mobile, this one really lives on your computer.

DON'T LET THE WORD 'ENGINEER' SCARE YOU

You talk to Codex the same way you talk to Chat, in normal words. It handles the actual code. If you've ever thought "I wish I could just build a little tool for this," this is the mode that makes that possible without a course.

Which One Do I Use?

When you're not sure, run down this list. Find what you're trying to do, and it tells you the mode.

If you want to...	Use
Get a quick answer or explanation	Chat
Brainstorm, or draft something short and fast	Chat
Learn about a new topic	Chat
Turn a big project into a finished file	Work
Build a spreadsheet, deck, or report from your data	Work
Have it pull from your apps and work for hours	Work
Build an app, tool, or website	Codex
Fix or change something in code	Codex

THE TELL, IF YOU'RE STILL STUCK

Ask yourself what you want back. Want an ANSWER (words on screen)? That's Chat. Want a THING (a finished file you'd otherwise build yourself)? That's Work. Want SOFTWARE (something that runs)? That's Codex.

The One-Page Cheat Sheet

Screenshot this. It's the whole guide on one page.

	CHAT	WORK	CODEX
It's your	Assistant	Operator	Engineer
Best for	Answers, ideas, drafts, learning	Finished projects and files	Building software
You get back	A reply in the chat	A real file (sheet, deck, report, site)	Working code / an app
Where	Anywhere (Quick chat)	Top-left: ChatGPT Work	Desktop only, top-left: Codex
One word	Answers	Deliverables	Software

YOUR ACTION PLAN

1. Open the ChatGPT desktop app so you have all three. 2. Keep using Chat for quick stuff, nothing changes there. 3. Next time you'd normally spend an hour building something, switch to Work and hand it the whole task. 4. If you've got a little tool or site in mind, try Codex and just describe it.

That's the whole thing. Chat for answers, Work for finished projects, Codex for building software. Now you're in the 1% who actually knows when to use each.

Want More AI Tips Like This?

I post daily AI content, tool breakdowns, and simple guides that actually help you get more done.
Follow me for the latest.

@MavGPT

TikTok | Instagram | Facebook

Chat for answers. Work for projects. Codex for software. Simple as that.