

MODULE 2 · WEEK 2 · LESSON 9

The Free AI Stack: Choosing Tools without Drowning

A decision frame for 100+ tools

WHAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DO

- Evaluate any AI tool with five questions
- Match tool categories to job types
- Avoid subscription traps and shiny-object churn

LESSON CONTENT

Five questions for any tool

1) What job does it do better than my current stack? 2) What does the free tier actually limit? 3) Who owns my uploads and outputs? 4) Does it export in open formats? 5) Will it exist in a year? Five questions, thirty seconds, no more FOMO.

Categories, not brands

Chat/reasoning assistants; grounded note AIs; image generators; video editors; audio/TTS; coding assistants; automation glue. Learn the category capability once and brands become interchangeable - which protects you when tools change or get priced.

The churn trap

Tool-hopping destroys depth. Rule for this course: one tool per category for four weeks. Depth in three tools beats tourism in twelve, and your portfolio shows depth.

KEY TERMS

Free tier limits	Usage caps, watermarks, export restrictions.
Data ownership	Who may use your uploads/outputs.
Open formats	Exportable standards like .docx, .csv, .mp4.
Tool churn	Constant switching that prevents mastery.

HANDS-ON TASK

Stack audit card · Tools: Your notes

1. Score your current 3 tools against the five questions.
2. Write one line per tool: keep / replace / watch.
3. Commit to your 4-week stack in writing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Before you go, three takeaways from this lesson.
- ✓ One: Evaluate any AI tool with five questions.
- ✓ Two: Match tool categories to job types.

- ✓ Three: Avoid subscription traps and shiny-object churn.
- ✓ And your hands-on task: stack audit card.
- ✓ Score your current 3 tools against the five questions.
- ✓ When it is done, mark the lesson complete on your dashboard, keep the artifact for your portfolio, and step into the next lesson.
- ✓ I will see you there.

Watch the lesson video on your dashboard, complete the task, then mark the lesson complete. Your artifact belongs in your Portfolio of Evidence.