

OpenAI vs Claude: which model should you use?

A simple field guide for founders, operators, and creators who want to pick the right model without memorizing every benchmark.

Simple rule: use the cheaper fast model for drafts and repeated work. Use the stronger model when the task is ambiguous, high-value, or needs careful reasoning.

The short version

USE CASE	START HERE	WHY
Writing, rewriting, summaries, customer emails	Claude Sonnet or OpenAI mini/standard models	Fast enough, strong language quality, lower cost for daily work.
Complex strategy, coding, agents, messy workflows	OpenAI GPT-5.2 / GPT-5 or Claude Opus / Sonnet	Better for multi-step reasoning, debugging, and planning.
Large documents, research packs, long transcripts	Claude long-context models or OpenAI long-context models	Both can handle big context windows; test with your real files.
Cheap high-volume classification or extraction	Haiku / mini / nano style models	Use small models when the task is clear and repeatable.

How to think about OpenAI

Best for

- Agent workflows with tools and structured outputs.
- Coding, debugging, app-building, and automation logic.
- Tasks where you want control over reasoning effort.

Model ladder

- **GPT-5.2 pro:** stronger, more precise responses for high-value work.
- **GPT-5.2:** strong workhorse for coding, agents, and business tasks.
- **GPT-5 mini / nano:** cheaper repeated tasks, extraction, tagging, drafts.

How to think about Claude

Best for

- Clear writing, rewriting, analysis, and long-form documents.
- Reading a lot of context and turning it into useful structure.
- Thoughtful business, product, and content feedback.

Model ladder

- **Opus:** hardest reasoning and deep coding.
- **Sonnet:** best balance of intelligence, speed, and price.
- **Haiku:** fastest and cheapest for simple repeated jobs.

My practical workflow

1. **Draft with a fast model.** Use cheaper models for first drafts, outlines, extraction, and simple transformations.
 2. **Upgrade only when stuck.** Move to GPT-5.2, GPT-5, Claude Opus, or Claude Sonnet when the task needs reasoning.
 3. **Keep the prompt stable.** Test the same prompt on two models before deciding which is better.
 4. **Judge by output, not vibes.** The winning model is the one that saves time or creates a better result for your exact workflow.
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Decision cheat sheet

IF YOU NEED...	TRY...
A client email, landing page rewrite, or content polish	Claude Sonnet first, then compare with OpenAI standard/mini.
A no-code automation plan or API workflow map	OpenAI GPT-5.2 or Claude Sonnet.
A difficult code or agent debugging session	OpenAI GPT-5.2 pro or Claude Opus.
Thousands of simple rows to classify	Haiku, mini, or nano models.

Prompt to compare models

Paste the same prompt into two models:

You are helping me choose the best model for this workflow. Complete the task, then score your output from 1-10 on accuracy, usefulness, clarity, and how much editing I would need before using it.

Sources checked May 15, 2026: OpenAI API model comparison docs and Claude API model overview docs. Model names, prices, and limits change; always check the official docs before building production systems.

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