



C U R A T E D S T R E A M

A Further Look at AI

Exploring AI tools beyond ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude

How many AI tools are there?

Beyond ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude — the three chatbots you met in the first stream — there is a huge and growing landscape of generative AI tools. Each tool has its own strengths. The goal of this session is to widen your view so you can pick the right tool for the job.

1

Perplexity

Answers with sources, web search, and AI follow-ups

2

Explain Like I'm 5

Simple, plain-language explanations of any topic

3

Microsoft Copilot

Microsoft's AI assistant — chat, image generation, agents

Today we'll explore three more tools — each great at something different.

The 2026 generative AI tool landscape

Generative AI tools have multiplied since 2023. Some categories worth knowing:

Chatbots & assistants

ChatGPT (GPT-5.6), Claude (Opus 4.8), Gemini 3.5 Flash, Microsoft Copilot, Perplexity

Image generation

Adobe Firefly Image 4, FLUX.2 Pro, Midjourney v7, GPT Image 2

Video generation

Sora 2, Veo 3.1, Higgsfield AI, Kling 3.0, Seedance 2.0

Coding helpers

Claude Code, GitHub Copilot, Cursor, Windsurf, Replit Agent

On-device & mobile

Apple Intelligence + Gemini, Android's Gemini Intelligence (Android 17)

Specialist tools

Perplexity (research), Explain Like I'm Five (simplify), NotebookLM (notes)

1. Perplexity

AI-powered answers with sources

Perplexity — answers, with sources

Perplexity is an AI-powered answer engine. It searches the web in real time, then uses a large language model to summarise what it finds — citing every source.

Why people use it

- Every answer cites its sources — easy to verify
- Live web search — current, not just training data
- Suggested follow-up questions to dig deeper
- Free to use; a paid Pro tier adds more models

AT A GLANCE

URL	perplexity.ai
Free tier	Yes — unlimited basic searches
Sources	Shown on every answer
Models (2026)	Sonar default; Claude / GPT-5.6 / Gemini optional on Pro
Modes	All, Academic, Social, Video, Math, Writing
Also useful	Browser extension; mobile app with voice & camera

Try it — your first Perplexity search

1

Open Perplexity

Go to perplexity.ai in a browser tab.
No sign-in needed for basic use.

2

Ask a real question

Try: "Can you tell me three things
that Nelson, New Zealand is known
for?"

3

Check the sources

You'll see numbered citations under
each claim. Click a number to open
the original source.

TRY A FOLLOW-UP

Underneath the answer you'll see suggested follow-ups. Ignore them and type your own — for example:
"What should I do there if I enjoy swimming?"

Each follow-up keeps the context of your previous question. Use this to drill in — perfect for travel planning, learning a new topic, or comparing options.

Focus modes — narrow the search

Click "Focus" beneath the search bar to limit Perplexity's source pool. Useful when you want fewer, more reliable hits.

All

The whole web — the default

Academic

Peer-reviewed papers and journals

Social

Discussions on Reddit and forums

Video

YouTube and other video sources

Math

Wolfram Alpha for calculations

Writing

No web search — pure generation

Tip — Academic answers can be dense. Ask a follow-up like "Explain it like I'm ten" to get a plain version.

Perplexity as a browser extension

Install the Perplexity extension for Chrome, Edge, or Firefox. Once pinned, you can ask Perplexity about whatever page you're reading — without leaving the tab.

Summarise the page

Click "Summarize" in the extension.
A long article shrinks to a tight
~100-word overview.

Ask about this article only

Set Focus to "This Page" —
Perplexity answers using just what's
in front of you.

Ask about the wider web

Switch Focus to the whole web for
context the article doesn't cover
(e.g. "What were the Covid-19
lockdowns?").

EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

Reading a phone review? Open the extension, set Focus to "This Page", and ask "What is the battery life?" or "What did they think of the camera?" — quick answers pulled only from that article.

2 Explain Like I'm Five

Plain-language explanations of any topic

Explain Like I'm Five — a one-trick wonder

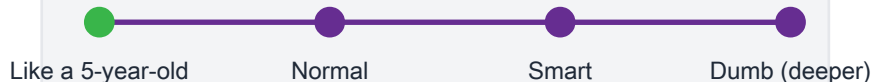
Explain Like I'm Five does one thing well: it takes a topic and explains it in simple language. No long onboarding, no settings to learn — just a prompt box and a complexity slider.

When to reach for it

- You hit a concept you've never seen before
- You want a quick mental model, not a deep dive
- You're explaining something to a friend or child
- You need a starting point before reading more

THE COMPLEXITY SLIDER

Below the prompt box you'll find a slider that tells the AI how high-level you want the answer.



"Dumb" is misleading — it actually unlocks a deeper, more detailed answer. "Like a 5-year-old" gives you the gentlest summary.

Try it — "How do black holes work?"

P R O M P T

"How do black holes work?"

Try this at the default complexity. You should get a short, plain explanation — formation, gravity, event horizon — in everyday language.

P R O M P T

"What is the main theme of Macbeth by Shakespeare?"

It will likely answer "ambition". A clean summary, but watch out — literature isn't one-answer territory.

W A T C H O U T

Simple answers leave things out. "Ambition" is one fair reading of Macbeth — guilt, fate, and gender are others. Use ELI5 to get started, then go deeper with another tool. Free tier is currently limited to three prompts per day.

3. Microsoft Copilot

Microsoft's AI assistant — chat, image, agents

Microsoft Copilot — one tool, many places

Microsoft Copilot is Microsoft's AI assistant. Like Perplexity, it cites sources. Like ChatGPT, it can write and create images. Unlike either, it's built into Microsoft 365, Windows, Edge, and Bing — so it shows up wherever you're already working.

Web Copilot

copilot.microsoft.com —
free chatbot, no login
needed for basics

Microsoft 365

In Word, Excel,
PowerPoint, Outlook,
Teams (paid)

Windows 11

Built into the taskbar;
quick access via shortcut

Edge sidebar

Summarise pages,
compose, compare — in
the browser

Under the hood, Copilot now runs on OpenAI's GPT-5 family — but you don't need to manage that. It just works.

What Copilot can do for you



Answer with sources

Like Perplexity — clickable citations on every web-grounded answer.



Generate images

Creates images via GPT Image 2 — free in the web Copilot.



Write and edit

Drafts emails, reports, summaries — paste a doc and ask for revisions.



Reason about your work

In Microsoft 365: summarise a long email thread, build a slide from a doc, draft an Excel formula.



Voice and vision

Talk to it on the phone app; share your screen for live help.



Take actions (agents)

Custom Copilot agents can book travel, fill forms, or run multi-step tasks.

From chatbot to agent — the 2026 shift

Until 2024, Copilot just answered questions. In 2025–2026 it picked up the ability to take actions — booking, filling forms, switching between apps. Microsoft calls these "Copilot agents".

Two types you'll meet

- Built-in agents — vacation planner, cooking assistant, fitness coach, image creator
- Custom agents — built in Copilot Studio for your team's specific workflow

TRY THE VACATION PLANNER

Your prompt

"I'm in Brisbane for a week. What should I do? Mid-range budget, I like food, art, and the outdoors."

What it does

Suggests attractions, restaurants, day trips — often with a map and links. It won't book for you, but it'll get you to a one-click booking page.

Pick the right tool for the job

Tool	Best for	Free?	Notable in 2026
Perplexity	Research with sources	Yes	Sonar default; voice & camera on mobile
Explain Like I'm Five	Simple explanations	3/day	Same as ever — small but useful
Microsoft Copilot	Productivity in Office; agents	Web yes	Custom agents via Copilot Studio
ChatGPT	Conversation, writing, code	Yes	GPT-5.6; voice; agent mode
Claude	Long docs, careful reasoning	Yes	Opus 4.8; 1M-token context; Claude Code
Gemini	Multimodal, Google integration	Yes	Gemini 3.5 Flash; Gemini 3.1 Pro preview

Three things to keep in mind

1

AI can be wrong, confidently

Every tool here can produce "hallucinations" — answers that sound right but aren't. Cross-check important facts. Perplexity's sources help — but skim them rather than trusting the summary blindly.

2

Don't paste sensitive information

These are public services. Your prompts may be used to improve the model. Avoid pasting personal data, passwords, client info, or anything confidential. Use enterprise-tier accounts (Microsoft 365 Copilot, ChatGPT Enterprise) for work data.

3

The landscape changes fast

These tools change month-to-month. New features, new models, new pricing tiers. Check in every few weeks — your favourite tool may have caught up, or fallen behind.

Summary — what to take away

There's no "one best AI tool"

Each tool has strengths. Try a few. Decide for yourself which suits you.

Use sources

Perplexity, Copilot, and most chatbots cite sources in 2026. Click them. Skim them. Trust the original, not the summary.

Match tool to task

Research → Perplexity. Quick explainer → ELI5.
Work in Office → Copilot. Long writing → Claude.
Conversation → ChatGPT.

Check in regularly

AI moves fast — a 6-month-old tip can already be stale. A quick monthly look keeps you current.

Keep exploring.

The AI tool landscape moves fast — a model that's a leader today may not be in six months. The skill is not memorising tools, it's knowing how to pick.

aisandbox.org.nz · Nelson AI Sandbox

Got questions? Talk to any of our team.