

n8n basics: triggers, expressions, items and webhooks on one page

An n8n workflow is a chain of steps called nodes. These are the words and settings every free Stepthrough n8n lesson uses.

The words you'll meet

Trigger

The event that starts a workflow: **On a schedule**, **On chat message**, **On webhook call** or Gmail's **On message received**. Nothing runs until it fires.

Node

One step on the canvas, like **Filter** or **Gmail: Send a message**. Open it, set it, close it.

Item

One record, like one sheet row or one email. A node runs once per item.

Execution

One run of the workflow, with the data each step saw. A failed one points at the red node.

Expressions pull in data

- Anything in double curly brackets is filled in from an earlier step. `{{ $json.Time }}` becomes 8:00 AM for the first job.
- A simple name takes a dot: `{{ $json.Tech }}`.
- A name with a space takes brackets and quotes: `{{ $json["Tech Email"] }}`.
- Form data sent to a webhook sits under body: `{{ $json.body.name }}`.
- A typed address in **To** sends every job to one person. An expression sends each one to its own.

Items in action

- Google Sheets: Get row(s) in sheet** returns six items, one per row.
- A **Filter** set to **is not empty** on Tech passes five. The job with no tech is dropped.
- One Gmail step runs five times, one email per job. You never write a loop.

Test, publish and the clock

Workflow timezone

Set it first: ⋮, **Settings, Timezone**. It defaults to New York, so 7am can be the wrong 7am.

Test step, Test workflow

Runs it now while you watch, so you don't wait for the schedule to find a mistake.

Publish

Hands the workflow to its trigger so it runs on its own. Older guides say "activate".

Test URL vs Production URL

The test URL only works while you test in the editor. A live form gets the **Production URL**, after you publish.

Remember: Set the timezone, test each step, then publish. Anything live points at the Production URL of a published workflow.

Practice it free: Daily Job Alerts: Email Each Tech Their Jobs from Google Sheets with n8n at learn.ynteractive.com/modules/job-alerts. This sheet: learn.ynteractive.com/content/cheat-sheets/n8n-basics. Rapid Flow Plumbing is a made-up business from the lesson. By Robert Breen, October 1, 2026.