

n8n for beginners: triggers, nodes, items, expressions and the Execute buttons on one page

How n8n thinks and the buttons you use every day, from the free n8n for Beginners course.

How n8n thinks

Workflow

A chain of steps (**nodes**) that n8n runs the same way every time.

Trigger

The first node: what starts it. **Trigger manually, On a schedule, On form submission, On webhook call, On app event.**

Action

Every node after the trigger: Edit Fields, Google Sheets, Gmail, OpenAI, If, Switch.

Item

One record. Most nodes run once per item: 5 in, 5 out.

Data and expressions

Output views

Schema, Table and **JSON** show the same items three ways.

set mock data

Paste test JSON on a node's OUTPUT. It is pinned for test runs.

Expression

`{{ $json.client }}` = this item's client. Drag a field from INPUT to make one.

Earlier node

`{{ $('Node name').item.json.from }}` : drag from that node in INPUT.

Number field

Switch the value to **Expression** before typing a formula.
Round with `.round(2)`.

Test vs production

Execute step

Runs one node, using the data before it.

Execute

The button under the canvas: runs the whole workflow once, as a test.

Test URL

Forms and webhooks: listens only while you test in the editor.

Publish

Turns the workflow on. The **Production URL** and schedules only work after it.

Where it runs and what it costs (Oct 2026)

- **n8n Cloud**: free trial, no card. Starter \$20 a month billed annually for 2,500 runs; Pro \$50 for 10,000.
- **Self-hosted Community Edition**: free software, you run and update the server.
- n8n counts a whole workflow run as one execution, however many steps it has.
- Apps you connect (OpenAI, for example) bill you separately for what you use.

Remember: Build with test data, check where the result lands, then Publish. Keep keys in credentials, never in fields.

Practice it free: n8n: What Is n8n? Build Your First Workflow at learn.ynteractive.com/modules/n8n-what-is-n8n-first-workflow. This sheet: learn.ynteractive.com/content/cheat-sheets/n8n-beginner. Clearview Bookkeeping is a made-up business from the lesson. By Robert Breen, October 17, 2026.