

A PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

API, MCP, CLI, decoded.

The three tech acronyms you keep hearing in AI, in plain English, with examples you have already touched.

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API

Application Programming Interface

WHAT IT IS

How two apps talk to each other.

PICTURE THIS

Like a **waiter** in a restaurant. You place your order, the waiter carries it to the kitchen and brings your food back out. An API is that messenger running between two pieces of software, both directions.

3 PLACES YOU HAVE ALREADY SEEN IT

- 1 **"Sign in with Google"** buttons. The app asks Google through an API to confirm it is you, so you skip making yet another password.
- 2 **The weather in your phone.** Your app is pulling live conditions from a weather service through its API.
- 3 **A "Pay with PayPal" or Apple Pay button.** The store talks to the payment company's API to handle your card safely.

THE TAKEAWAY

Almost every app you touch is quietly talking to other apps through **APIs**. It is the plumbing of the internet.

MCP

Model Context Protocol

WHAT IT IS

An open standard that lets AI use your apps and data.

PICTURE THIS

Like a **universal plug** for AI. Once it is plugged in, the AI can pull your information in **and take actions** for you, like drafting an email or updating a file, instead of you copying and pasting everything by hand.

3 PLACES IT SHOWS UP

- 1 Connecting Claude to your Gmail** so it can read a thread and draft the reply, no copy-paste.
- 2 Pointing it at your Google Drive** so it can open the exact document you name and work from it.
- 3 Wiring it to Slack or your calendar** so it can post an update or book the meeting for you.

THE TAKEAWAY

Those **connectors** you see in Claude and ChatGPT run on MCP. It is how an AI plugs into your world instead of guessing at it.

CLI

Command Line Interface

WHAT IT IS

Running your computer by typing commands instead of clicking.

PICTURE THIS

That **black window full of text** you see in movies. You type an instruction, your computer does it. The trade is buttons for speed: instead of clicking to rename 100 files one by one, you type **one line** and it does all 100 at once.

3 PLACES YOU HAVE ALREADY SEEN IT

- 1 **Terminal on a Mac, Command Prompt on Windows.** Same idea, both come built in.
- 2 **Claude Code.** You type what you want in plain language and it does the work. That runs in a CLI.
- 3 **Any setup that says "paste this command."** The moment you paste that line and hit enter, you are using a CLI.

THE TAKEAWAY

A CLI looks intimidating and is really just a **faster way to tell your computer what to do**. One line can replace a hundred clicks.

THE WHOLE THING IN ONE BREATH

None of it is as scary as it sounds.

API **Apps talking to each other.** The plumbing behind almost everything you use.

MCP **A universal plug for your AI.** The standard behind those connectors.

CLI **Typing instead of clicking.** Intimidating to look at, fast once you use it.

Follow for more plain-English AI, decoded.

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