

# AI Starter Checklist for Non-Coders

By Jonathan Lee — [thinkingwithjon.com](https://thinkingwithjon.com) | Free 2026 Edition

## STEP 1 — GET YOUR TOOLS

- Claude Code** — AI coding assistant that builds with you (Paid)
- Ollama** — Run AI locally, no cloud, no API key (Free)
- OpenClaw** — Open-source local AI platform (Free)
- Sanity** — CMS for your blog/content (Free tier)
- Vercel** — Deploy your site, zero config (Free tier)
- Loops** — Newsletter platform for creators (Free tier)
- Cloudflare** — Domain + DNS for ~\$9/yr (Free tier)

## STEP 2 — THE REALISTIC TIMELINE

### Day 1 — Excitement

Pick your first AI tool. Run it. Watch it respond. Celebrate. Then hit your first error. Close the laptop. That's normal.

### Day 2 — The Valley

Debug. Google errors. Things break. AI gives confident wrong answers. You question everything. Keep going anyway.

### Day 3 — It Works

Something clicks. Your AI is running. You built something real. Nobody gave you permission. Worth every error.

## STEP 3 — AVOID THESE 5 MISTAKES

### 01

**"Easy setup" is a lie**  
Find guides that say "for beginners"

### 02

**Your country matters**  
Check geo-blocks before committing

### 03

**Don't panic at errors**  
Copy → Google → GitHub/Reddit

### 04

**AI gives wrong answers**  
Verify before you execute

### 05

**Budget 3 days, not 3hrs**  
Real setup takes real time

## STEP 4 — WHEN YOU'RE STUCK, GOOGLE THIS

`[error] + site:github.com`

Find the real fix from developers

`[error] + reddit`

Real people, real solutions

`[tool] + "getting started" + 2026`

Skip outdated guides

`"install [tool] on [hardware]"`

Be specific to your machine

`[tool] + alternatives + [country]`

Find what works where you live

`[error] + "solved" or "fixed"`

Filter for actual solutions

## STEP 5 — KEEP GOING

- Read the full Mac Mini story** — [thinkingwithjon.com/blog](https://thinkingwithjon.com/blog) (my complete journey)
- Get weekly AI guides** — [thinkingwithjon.com/newsletter](https://thinkingwithjon.com/newsletter) (every Friday)
- Follow @thinkingwithjon** — Instagram (daily updates)
- DM me anytime** — I read every message (seriously)