



Chapter 3

Understanding Nodes and Data Flow

Introduction

Now that you have n8n installed and have created your first basic workflow, it's time to dive deeper into the fundamental building blocks: nodes and data flow. Understanding how nodes work and how data moves through workflows is essential to becoming proficient with n8n.

What Are Nodes?

Node: A self-contained unit in an n8n workflow that performs a single, specific action. Nodes are connected together to create automated processes.

Think of nodes as LEGO blocks. Each piece has a specific purpose, and by connecting them in different ways, you can build incredibly complex structures.

The Three Categories of Nodes

1. Trigger Nodes

Trigger nodes are the starting point of workflows. They 'listen' for specific events and initiate the workflow when those events occur.

Trigger Type	Description
Schedule Trigger	Runs at specified times
Webhook	Triggered by HTTP requests
Email Trigger	Monitors inbox for new messages
Manual Trigger	Click "Execute" to start

2. Action Nodes

Action nodes do the actual work. They perform operations like sending emails, updating databases, creating files, or calling APIs.

Category	Examples	Common Uses
Communication	Gmail, Slack, Twilio	Send messages, notifications
Data Storage	Google Sheets, Airtable	Store, retrieve records
CRM/Marketing	HubSpot, Mailchimp	Manage contacts, campaigns
E-commerce	Shopify, Stripe	Process orders, payments

■ **The HTTP Request Node:** If n8n doesn't have a dedicated node, the HTTP Request node can connect to virtually any web service with an API.

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