

What does it mean for AI to 'learn' something?

Five-Minute AI Lessons · Sep 10, 2026

Training isn't a lightbulb moment — it's fixing a little, over and over

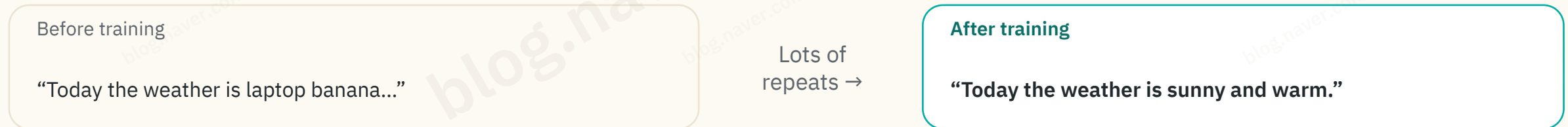
In a nutshell

- 1 For AI, learning isn't **understanding** the way it is for people — it's a process of nudging numbers (weights) a little at a time so they get closer to the right answer.
- 2 The method is simple: hide part of a sentence, have it guess the next word, then **tweak the weights slightly** by however much it was off.
- 3 Do this on internet text and **repeat it hundreds of billions of times**, and you get a bundle of numbers with grammar and common sense melted right in.

Training: these 4 steps, repeated



🔄 These 4 steps, repeated hundreds of billions of times = training



Key idea: not 'understanding' — it's fixing by the error, over and over.

One training cycle, step by step

Human learning

Riding a bike

- 1 You fall over
- 2 You balance a little
- 3 You ride a bit longer
- 4 You ride without falling

Getting better by trial and error

One training round

Guessing the next word

- 1 Hide part of a sentence
- 2 Predict the next word
- 3 Measure the error
- 4 Tweak the weights a tiny bit

These 4 steps are one 'round' of training

All of AI training

Hundreds of billions of repeats

- 1 One small chunk of text
- 2 Repeat the same 4 steps
- 3 Process hundreds of billions
- 4 Patterns build up in weights

More repeats = more training

Swap even one step and it's not 'training' anymore — just 'recording'.

※ Real training repeats in much smaller units than whole sentences.

Just three questions

Q1

What exactly does it mean when AI 'learns'?

- ① Understands meaning, like a person
- ② Nudges weights a bit toward the right answer
- ③ Saves the whole internet
- ④ Memorizes a fixed table of rules

Q2

(True / False) Training means making big fixes so it gets the answer exactly right in one go.

Q3

What happens if training runs just once?

- ① It gets smart right away
- ② Almost nothing changes
- ③ It actually gets worse
- ④ Training is finished

Know the why, too

Q1

②

Training isn't 'understanding' — it's nudging the weights a little at a time by however much it was off, again and again.

Q2

F

It only fixes a little at a time. That way it doesn't wreck what it learned from other sentences.

Q3

②

One fix is tiny. That's why it takes hundreds of billions of repeats before you notice anything.

**Training isn't a 'lightbulb moment' —
it's 'fixing a little,' over and over.**



Tomorrow: 'parameters' — just how many of those numbers are there?