DAY 02 · Part 1 · What AI Is

What's a token, the 'piece' AI talks in?

Five-Minute AI Lessons · Sep 8, 2026

In the end, a sentence is a line of pieces called tokens

In a nutshell

1. The “next piece” from yesterday has a name in the AI world: a **token**.

2. A token is **not a letter and not a word** — it's a piece cut to be easy for AI to compute with, and its size changes from case to case.

3. So the same sentence gets **a different count in tokens**, and time and cost go up with that count.

One picture

Sentence → words → tokens

Example My bestie lowkey devoured nachos tbh

↓ Split into words (the unit people read)

My	bestie	lowkey	devoured	nachos	tbh

↓ Split again into tokens (the unit AI counts)

My	best	ie	low	key	dev	oured	nach	os	tb	h

6 words → 11 tokens. People and AI count in different units.

One sentence, cut three ways

7 pieces

Every character

u | w | y | d | r | n | ?

The finest cut. Lots of pieces, but they aren't units of meaning.

3 pieces

By spaces (words)

u | wyd | rn?

Easy for people, but AI finds a never-seen word strange as a whole.

5 pieces

Like tokens (mock)

u | wy | d | rn | ?

Between a character and a word: common chunks stay whole, rare ones get cut finer.

The rule for cutting text like this has a name — a tokenizer.

※ The split above is a simplified model for explaining.

Quick check

Just three questions

Q1

What is a “token”?

① Always exactly one letter
② Always exactly one word
③ A piece cut for AI's math (size varies)
④ The whole word list people set up

Q2

As the number of tokens goes up, what happens for the AI?

① It gets faster
② More to compute, and it takes longer
③ No effect at all
④ It always gets smarter

Q3

(True / False) Different AIs can split the same sentence into tokens differently.

Know the why, too

Q1

③

A token is a piece cut to make AI's computing easier. Sometimes it's one letter, sometimes a whole word — there's no fixed size.

Q2

②

More tokens means more for AI to compute, and more time (and cost). Say the same thing more briefly and the AI handles it faster.

Q3

T

True. Some AIs cut by character, others by common chunks — so the same sentence can be a different number of tokens in different AIs.

To AI, a sentence isn't letters or words — it's a line of pieces called tokens.

Tomorrow: probability and temperature — a deeper dig into yesterday's 'boldness knob.'