

# Dripstone's Hackathon AI Playbook

## 27 Free AI Tools for Building AI Projects on a \$0 Budget

This playbook is organized the way I'd actually pick tools during a 24-hour hackathon. Use it as a starting point, not a rulebook. Free tiers change frequently, so verify limits before your event.

### ■ LLM APIs

| Tool          | Rating | Why I'd Use It              | Watch Out           |
|---------------|--------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Groq          | ★★★★★  | Fastest inference for demos | Daily free requests |
| Gemini API    | ★★★★★  | General AI tasks            | Generous free tier  |
| GitHub Models | ★★★★■  | Compare models quickly      | Student-friendly    |
| OpenRouter    | ★★★★■  | Switch providers            | Credits vary        |

### ■ Voice AI

| Tool       | Rating | Why I'd Use It      | Watch Out          |
|------------|--------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Sarvam AI  | ★★★★★  | Indian voice agents | ■1000 free credits |
| Deepgram   | ★★★★■  | Speech-to-text      | Limited free       |
| ElevenLabs | ★★★●■  | Voice generation    | Small free tier    |

### ■ OCR & Search

| Tool         | Rating | Why I'd Use It         | Watch Out         |
|--------------|--------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Mistral OCR  | ★★★★★  | Extract text from docs | Great accuracy    |
| OCR.space    | ★★★●■  | Quick OCR              | Simple API        |
| Tavily       | ★★★★★  | Agentic web search     | Excellent for RAG |
| Brave Search | ★★★★■  | Search fallback        | Free quota        |

### ■ RAG

| Tool          | Rating | Why I'd Use It      | Watch Out   |
|---------------|--------|---------------------|-------------|
| FAISS         | ★★★★★  | Local vector search | My default  |
| ChromaDB      | ★★★★■  | Prototype RAG       | Simple      |
| LanceDB       | ★★★★■  | Embedded vectors    | Fast        |
| HF Embeddings | ★★★★■  | Embeddings          | Free models |

### ■ Deploy

| Tool   | Rating | Why I'd Use It | Watch Out               |
|--------|--------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Vercel | ★★★★★  | Frontend       | Easy                    |
| Render | ★★★★■  | Backend        | Sleeps after inactivity |

|                    |       |                   |           |
|--------------------|-------|-------------------|-----------|
| UptimeRobot        | ★★★★★ | Keep Render awake | Must-have |
| Cloudflare Workers | ★★★★■ | Edge APIs         | Free      |

## ■ Backend

| Tool        | Rating | Why I'd Use It      | Watch Out  |
|-------------|--------|---------------------|------------|
| Supabase    | ★★★★★  | DB + Auth + Storage | Top pick   |
| Neon        | ★★★★■  | Serverless Postgres | Free       |
| Firebase    | ★★★★■  | Realtime            | Reliable   |
| Clerk       | ★★★★■  | Authentication      | Easy setup |
| Better Auth | ★★★★■  | OSS auth            | Flexible   |
| Cloudinary  | ★★★★■  | Media               | Free tier  |
| Cursor Free | ★★★★■  | Coding              | Limited    |
| Postman     | ★★★★★  | API testing         | Essential  |

## ■ Dripstone Notes

- Groq is my go-to for live demos.
- Pair Vercel + Render + UptimeRobot for a free deployment.
- Use FAISS before paying for a hosted vector DB.
- Sarvam AI is excellent for Indian voice interfaces.
- Prototype first, optimize later.