ChatGPT, GPT Models, Codex, ChatGPT Agent, and Claude Code

A Practical Guide to Concepts and Tool Selection

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1 Conclusion First: They Are Not on the Same Layer

A common source of confusion when using VS Code, ChatGPT, or other AI tools is that the names look similar, but they belong to different layers.

- **ChatGPT**: the conversation entry point (application interface).
- **GPT-5.4, GPT-5.3-Codex, Claude Sonnet**: models (core reasoning capability).
- **Codex (AI agent)**: a workflow system for coding tasks.
- **ChatGPT Agent (AI agent)**: a workflow system for general tasks.
- **Claude Code (AI agent)**: Anthropic's workflow system for coding tasks.

In one sentence: **models do the thinking, ChatGPT handles the conversation, and agents execute tasks within permissions.**

2 Concept Layers

2.1 What Is ChatGPT

ChatGPT is OpenAI's conversational service and application interface. Its value is that it lets you express goals in natural language and get answers, drafts, suggestions, and explanations.

So ChatGPT is not the model itself. It is the interaction entry point to a model.

2.2 What Is a GPT Model

A model is the "brain" of an AI system. It understands input, reasons over it, and generates output. Different models have different strengths:

- GPT-5.4: more balanced capability across general tasks.
- GPT-5.3-Codex: more targeted for programming tasks.
- Claude Sonnet: one model line from Anthropic.

2.3 What Is Codex (AI agent)

Codex (AI agent) is oriented toward programming workflows. It does more than explain how to change code. Within authorization boundaries, it can read a codebase, modify files, run commands, and iterate based on results.

2.4 What Is ChatGPT Agent (AI agent)

ChatGPT Agent (AI agent) is a general-task workflow system suited to multi-step progress, such as research, web processes, document handling, and information synthesis.

2.5 What Is Claude Code (AI agent)

Claude Code (AI agent) is Anthropic's coding workflow system. Its positioning is similar to Codex (AI agent), emphasizing code understanding, modification, and repair in engineering context.

3 A Workplace Analogy

- GPT-5.4: the brain of a smart professional.
- ChatGPT: the meeting room (conversation interface).
- Codex (AI agent): a software engineer.
- ChatGPT Agent (AI agent): a general operations assistant.
- Claude Code (AI agent): an Anthropic-side software engineer.

The key point of this analogy: **"thinking" and "doing" are two different capability layers.**

4 Two Practical Examples

4.1 Example 1: Fixing a Code Bug

Normal ChatGPT approach:

- You ask, "How should I change this code?"
- It gives explanations and suggested edits.

Codex / Claude Code approach (within authorization):

- Read project files and understand structure.
- Locate the source of the error.
- Modify code and configuration.
- Run tests or commands for validation.
- Continue iterating on new errors until passing or convergence.

Best fit: **Codex (AI agent) or Claude Code (AI agent)**.

4.2 Example 2: Handling a Customer Complaint

Normal ChatGPT approach:

- It can quickly draft an apology email.
- But it usually does not automatically check order details, email threads, and status facts.

ChatGPT Agent approach (within authorization):

- Read customer communication and order data.
- Reconstruct delay causes and the factual chain.
- Draft a reply and compensation options.
- Ask for your confirmation before sending, and continue to track responses.

Best fit: **ChatGPT Agent (AI agent)**.

5 Why Context Materials Are Mandatory

An agent does not naturally know your project or business details. It can only work from materials you provide or allow it to access.

Common context includes:

- project code, configuration, and test files
- error logs and runtime outputs
- requirement docs and meeting notes
- customer emails, order records, spreadsheet data
- specific web content and local files

If you only say ”help me fix a bug” but provide no project or error information, results can only stay generic. If you authorize workspace access and provide concrete errors, you can get an executable, verifiable repair loop.

6 Permission Boundaries: The Core of Professional Use

Whether it is Codex, ChatGPT Agent, or Claude Code, all of them act within an **authorized scope**.

Common permission strategies:

- Read-only access to the current project directory, no other paths.
- Code edits are allowed, but key actions require confirmation.
- Running tests is allowed, deleting files is not.
- Automatic email sending, payment, deployment, and publishing are disallowed.

A professional description is: **an agent performs read, judgment, execution, and feedback iteration within your authorized context and tool boundaries.**

7 Handling Customer Communication in VS Code: Boundaries and Practical Method

In VS Code, dealing with external customers **cannot** be the same as having a true ChatGPT Agent (AI agent) fully operate email, order, and customer systems. The reason is simple: **VS Code is a development environment, not a customer management system**.

But this does not mean the task cannot be done. A practical approach is to treat VS Code as a ”customer communication case workspace”: organize customer emails, order records, delivery records, and company policy into files, then let Codex (AI agent) or VS Code Copilot Agent Mode (AI agent) analyze materials, structure facts, and generate drafts.

7.1 Key Clarification

- **VS Code Copilot Agent Mode (AI agent) is not a standalone software name**. It is a selectable mode in VS Code / GitHub Copilot Chat.
- When you select Agent Mode in VS Code Chat, it can read files in the current workspace, search materials, edit files, call tools, run commands, and continue task execution based on outcomes.

In VS Code context, you can distinguish them this way:

- **Codex (AI agent)**: OpenAI's coding workflow system, connectable to VS Code, used for reading, modifying, running, and debugging project content.
- **VS Code Copilot Agent Mode (AI agent)**: an agent workflow mode in VS Code / GitHub Copilot Chat, able to read materials, edit files, and call tools in the current workspace for multi-step tasks.

7.2 Recommended Operation Flow (6 Steps)

Step 1: Create a working folder

```
customer_case_A/
```

For example, include these files:

```
customer_case_A/
   customer_email.txt
   order_record.txt
   delivery_record.txt
   company_policy.txt
   reply_draft.md
   notes.md
```

Step 2: Add materials

- customer_email.txt: original customer email
- order_record.txt: order ID, purchase date, amount, product, customer name
- delivery_record.txt: promised delivery date, actual status, delay reason
- company_policy.txt: policy on delay, refund, compensation, coupons, and similar rules

Step 3: Open this folder in VS Code

```
File -> Open Folder -> customer_case_A
```

Step 4: Enter the task prompt in VS Code Chat / Codex

```
Please read customer_email.txt, order_record.txt,
delivery_record.txt, and company_policy.txt in the current workspace.

Do not send any email directly, and do not modify original source files.

Please complete the following tasks:
```

```
1. Summarize the core issue in the customer complaint.
2. Organize the factual timeline.
3. Judge whether the company bears responsibility.
4. Propose feasible compensation options based on company_policy.txt.
5. Draft a formal, polite, professional customer reply in reply_draft.md.
6. List which materials you relied on in notes.md.
```

Step 5: Generate drafts rather than sending externally In the ChatGPT app, this kind of end-to-end workflow is closer to ChatGPT Agent (AI agent). But in VS Code, practical options are Codex (AI agent) or VS Code Copilot Agent Mode (AI agent).

This means: in VS Code, you are not directly using a true customer-handling system that sends emails, but rather using an agent to produce analysis, handling recommendations, and reply drafts from workspace files.

Step 6: Human review before manual send Recommended workflow:

```
AI reads materials
-> AI drafts response
-> Human checks facts and tone
-> Human copies to email client and sends
```

7.3 Optional Enhancement: Add CRM Record File

If you want to get closer to real process, add crm_record.csv:

```
customer_id,name,order_id,issue,status,compensation
A001,Customer A,ORD-2026-001,Delivery delay,Pending,
```

Then request a controlled update:

```
Based on the current handling result, update Customer A in crm_record.csv:
fill status and compensation fields.
Do not delete any existing records.
```

At this point, Codex (AI agent) or VS Code Copilot Agent Mode (AI agent) can act like a "customer operations assistant" while still staying inside the **current workspace file scope**.

7.4 Professional Statement (Directly Reusable)

In VS Code, external customer communication tasks are usually not completed directly by ChatGPT Agent (AI agent). Instead, they are assisted through Codex (AI agent) or VS Code Copilot Agent Mode (AI agent). VS Code Copilot Agent Mode (AI agent), in this context, is a selectable mode in VS Code / GitHub Copilot Chat. It can read customer emails, order records, delivery records, and company policy files provided in the current workspace, and generate analysis results, handling suggestions, and reply drafts. High-risk actions, such as sending emails, accessing CRM, or modifying real customer databases, should be manually executed after user confirmation, or handled through explicitly configured external tools with permission control.

8 Most Important Difference Summary

- Normal ChatGPT: primarily for Q&A and content generation.
- Agent systems: primarily for task progression and closed-loop results.

So Codex (AI agent), ChatGPT Agent (AI agent), and Claude Code (AI agent) are not simply "smarter ChatGPT". They place a model inside an execution system that includes **tools, permissions, context, goals, and a feedback loop**.

9 Quick Selection Table

Name	**Nature**	**Best-fit scenarios**
ChatGPT	conversation entry point	asking questions, writing, translation, explanation, draft generation
GPT-5.4 / GPT-5.3-Codex / Claude Sonnet	model capability layer	general reasoning, code reasoning, text generation
Codex (AI agent)	coding task system	read/modify code, fix bugs, run tests, iterative repair
VS Code Copilot Agent Mode (AI agent)	in-VS-Code agent mode	read materials in current workspace, edit files, call tools, drive multi-step tasks
ChatGPT Agent (AI agent)	general task system	multi-step workflow execution, material integration, process execution
Claude Code (AI agent)	coding task system	engineering code understanding, modification, verification, repair

10 One-Page Closing

ChatGPT is the entry point, models are the brain, and agents are executable systems.

When a task only needs an answer, ChatGPT is enough. When a task requires continuous execution and closed-loop progress, an agent with tools and permission control is more suitable.

Tip: In enterprise settings, define authorization boundaries first, then enable automation. This is a more robust practice.