LangChain and LangGraph: what practitioners need to know

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LangChain and LangGraph are open-source libraries for building applications around language models. They are tools, not requirements; knowing what they do helps you decide whether you need them.

TL;DR The short version

- LangChain and LangGraph are open-source libraries for building language-model applications; they are tools, not requirements.
- They save common plumbing such as provider connections, document loading, tool calls and state, but add a layer that can hide what is sent to the model.
- Start with the model provider's own client and plain code, and adopt a framework when the plumbing justifies it.

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What they do

- **LangChain** provides building blocks: model wrappers, prompt templates, retrievers and tool interfaces.
- **LangGraph** models an application as a graph of steps with shared state, which suits agents that loop, branch and wait for people.

What they save you

Common plumbing: connecting to many model providers, loading documents, calling tools and managing state between steps.

What they cost you

- Another layer to learn and to keep up with as it changes.
- Abstractions can hide what is actually sent to the model, which makes debugging harder.

A sensible rule

Start with the model provider’s own client and plain code. Adopt a framework when you are repeating the same plumbing, and make sure you can still see every prompt and tool call. The skill that transfers is the design: tools, state, limits and evaluation.

Related credential: AI Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. LangChain documentation. python.langchain.com.
2. LangGraph documentation. langchain-ai.github.io/langgraph.

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