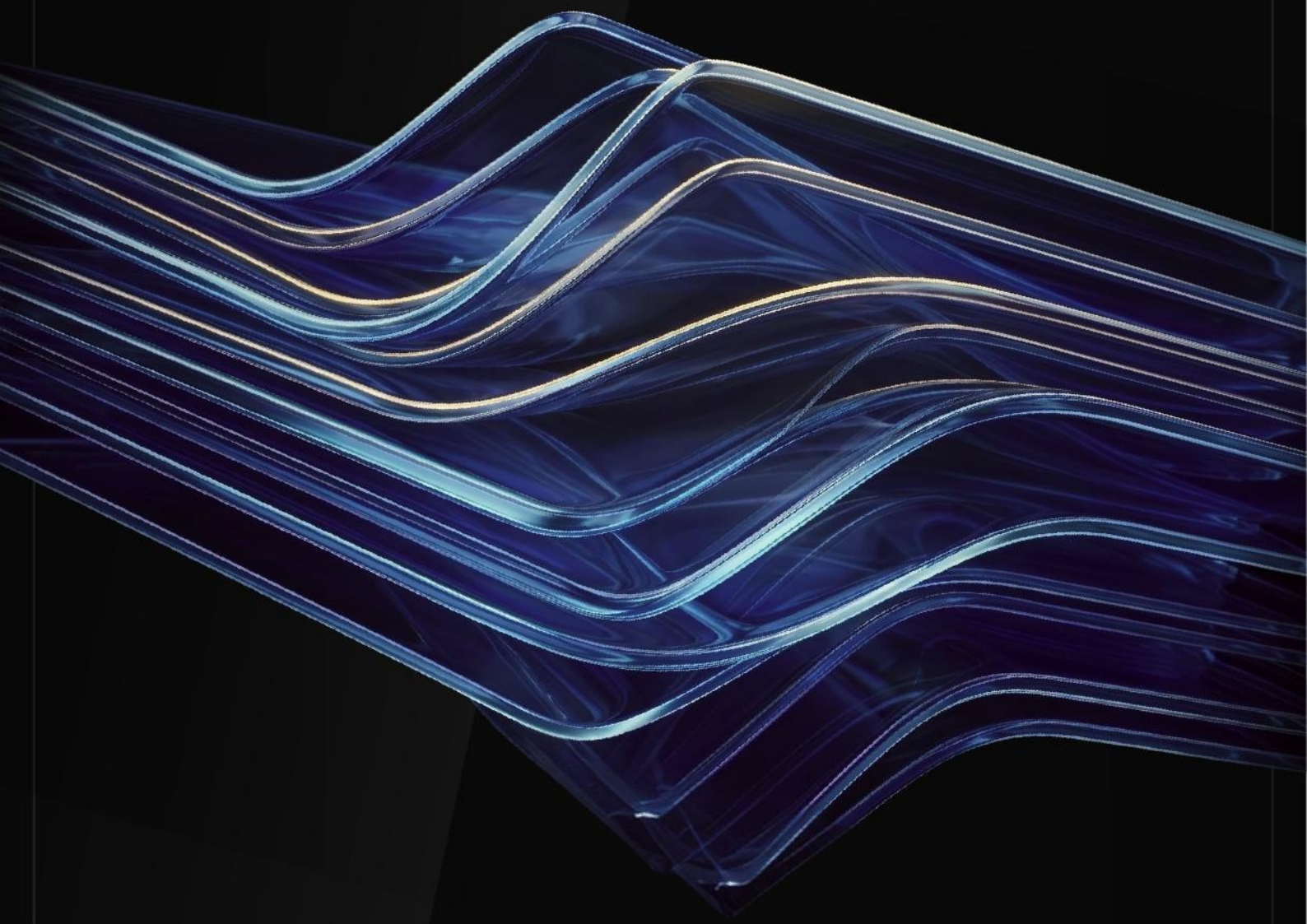
Workflow automation in n8n

Workshop handout · Maastricht University, 4 November 2026 · Marrallisa Kreijkes



Maastricht University · 4 November 2026 · with MAIN and TCM

Choose well, build small, launch, improve.

Most automation fails because people automate the wrong thing. The real skill is choosing what deserves a workflow before you build one. That is why this evening started with qualifying ideas and only then opened n8n.

This handout follows the four things you leave with: how to select and filter automation cases, the essentials of building in n8n, how to turn an idea into a working proof of concept, and how to keep improving it once real people use it. The fields at the end are for your own notes.

By **Marrallisa Kreijkes**, Founder of Viralistic and official n8n Ambassador

01 The evening at a glance

Two hours, three parts, one working tool per student.

Time	Block	Focus
18:30	**Welcome**	Why automate, and what you leave with
18:40	**Part 1: Qualify**	Crazy 8s, cost vs impact, pick one idea
19:05	**Part 2: Build**	The AI intake assistant, node by node
20:00	**Part 3: Launch**	Go live, swap forms, fix bugs
20:25	**Close**	Certificate and next steps

02 Your Crazy 8s

Eight minutes, eight boxes. In each box, one repetitive task you would pay to never do again, written as trigger to action (for example: new client email to drafted reply). Speed beats polish: the goal is volume.

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8

03 Cost vs. impact

Place your eight ideas. Pick from the bottom right: high impact at a low cost. Top left, high cost for little impact, is where a one-time dataset clean ends up.



04 Four filters before you build

Run your best idea through all four. If it fails one, shrink or swap it.

- [ ] **Impact vs risk**
  Start with high impact and low risk.
- [ ] **Frequency**
  Automate the recurring, skip the one-off. Value = time saved × how often it happens.
- [ ] **Rule vs judgment**
  Automate the rule-based steps. Keep real judgment calls human, or add a human-in-the-loop check.
- [ ] **The 30-minute test**
  Can a first version be built in n8n in half an hour? If not, shrink the idea until it can.

05 The build: an AI intake assistant

Four nodes, one AI key at most. A form takes text, an AI step works on it, a Data Table logs it and the result shows on screen.

- [ ] **On form submission (Form Trigger)**
  Name the form "Smart Intake". Fields: a dropdown "What should I do with this?" (Summarize, Categorize, Draft a reply, Proofread), a required long-text field "Your text", an optional "Your email". Check: submit a sample.
- [ ] **Message a model (AI node)**
  Connect your AI credential. Prompt: do the task named in the dropdown on the submitted text, return a short clear result, then a new line starting with "Category:" and one word. Check: run the node once and read the output.
- [ ] **Insert row (Data Table)**
  A Data Table "Submissions" with the columns created, action, input, result and email. Map the form fields and the AI output. Check: submit again and see the new row.
- [ ] **Show the result (Form completion)**
  Send the AI result back on the completion screen, so you need no email key. Check: submit once more and read the result.
- [ ] **Go live**
  Activate the workflow and open the production form URL. Check: the live form runs end to end.

06 Make it yours

Same skeleton, different form and prompt. Change the form fields and the prompt; nothing else in the workflow moves.

Faculty	Paste into the form	What the AI returns
Law	A contract clause	A plain-language explanation plus risk flags
Medicine or health	Rough notes	A patient-friendly summary
Business or economics	An inbound lead message	A score and a drafted reply
Science or data	A paper abstract	A three-bullet summary
Humanities	A paragraph of writing	Proofread text with suggested edits
Anyone	A quick note or task	Sorted into to-do, idea or reference, saved to the table

07 Launch and improve

A workflow is not real until someone else uses it. Let a neighbour submit real input through your form, then fix what that exposes.

- [ ] **Empty or junk input**
  Make the text field required, or add a default value.
- [ ] **A missing field**
  Check the field names in the form match what the AI node and the Data Table expect.
- [ ] **The AI returns too much text**
  Add one line to the prompt: keep the answer under a set number of sentences.
- [ ] **A row does not save**
  Check the column mapping in the Data Table node, then submit again.
- [ ] **No AI key**
  Swap the AI node for a Switch or Edit Fields node. The form, the Data Table and the confirmation still work.
- [ ] **Keep the first version small**
  A complex workflow may stop running after the trial ends. One working tool beats a half-finished system.

08 Reflect

Fill this in tonight or this week, while it is fresh.

The idea I built

As trigger to action.

What it saves

Minutes per run × runs per week.

What broke, and how I fixed it

Where a human stays in the loop

My next improvement

09 Keep building

- [ ] **Take the official n8n Academy courses**
  Start with N8N101 Essentials: Your First Workflows at docs.n8n.io/courses.
- [ ] **Keep your workflow running**
  The n8n trial plus the hosting licence of about 1 euro per month gives you roughly 1.5 months of free use.
- [ ] **Run your own instance later**
  When you outgrow the trial: managed n8n hosting in Europe at hoasted.com.
- [ ] **Share what you built**
  Tag @marrallisa and link to viralistic.nl.

Any questions?
Get in touch.

Scan to connect with Marrallisa on LinkedIn

Plan a strategic call: **calendly.com/marrallisa/30min**

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