


GUIDE

# Text-to-video vs image-to-video

*Text-to-video builds a clip from a written prompt. Image-to-video animates a still you supply. The right choice depends on the material you have and how much control you need.*

Updated November 13, 2026

# Contents


What text-to-video does well ····· 5

What image-to-video does well ····· 5

A practical split ····· 5

Combine them in one workflow ····· 5

Check the terms for your use ····· 5

Two input modes cover most AI video work. Text-to-video takes a written prompt and invents the scene, the camera and the motion. Image-to-video takes a still image you supply and animates it. They solve different problems, and picking the wrong one wastes credits on retries.

## What text-to-video does well

A text-to-video model reads your prompt and generates a clip from nothing. It suits abstract scenes, mood pieces, backgrounds and ideas where you have no source material. The prompt is the whole brief, so the quality of the result depends on how precisely you describe subject, action, camera and style.

The weakness is control. The model invents details you did not specify: the product label, the face, the room layout. For a product ad, that means the generated video may show a product that is not yours. For brand work, you usually want your own material in the frame.

Runway, Pika, Kling and Luma all describe text-to-video generation on their sites, with paid plans priced per credit or per month. Runway's pricing page, checked 2026-11-13, prices Gen-4.5 generations at 60 credits per 5 seconds on its paid plans.

## What image-to-video does well

Image-to-video starts from a still: a product photo, a generated image, a frame from your footage. The model keeps the composition and animates motion, camera moves and atmosphere around it. For a small shop, this is often the better path: photograph the product once, then animate several angles without reshooting.

Luma Dream Machine is built around this workflow and adds camera-motion controls. Runway and Kling also accept source images for generation. The trade-off is that the still limits the scene: whatever is in the image stays roughly in the image, and awkward stills produce awkward motion.

## A practical split

Use text-to-video when:

- You have no source material and want atmosphere, backgrounds or abstract motion.
- The clip is a small part of a larger edit and exact content does not matter.
- You are exploring ideas cheaply before committing to a shoot.

Use image-to-video when:

- The video must show your actual product, place or person.
- You already have good stills and want motion added cheaply.
- Brand consistency matters more than scene invention.

## Combine them in one workflow

A common pattern for product video: write the shot list, generate or photograph the key stills, animate each still into a 5 to 10 second clip, then assemble and caption the clips in an editor. This keeps your product accurate while still letting AI do the motion work. The cost estimator on this site can price the generation step; your editor handles the rest.

## Check the terms for your use

Whichever mode you pick, the commercial-use terms apply to the output, not the input type. Pika's pricing page states that paid plans include a commercial license and the free plan has no watermark; HeyGen's free plan produces watermarked videos up to 1 minute. Read each vendor's terms before you publish client work.

## Frequently asked questions

**Can I get the same result from both?**

Sometimes, but not reliably. Text-to-video invents the whole scene. Image-to-video keeps your image's composition and moves it, which suits product shots and characters you already have.

**Which is cheaper?**

It depends on the tool and the credit cost per generation, not on the input type alone. Compare the per-clip cost on each vendor's pricing page.

**What if I have neither text nor an image?**

Generate a still first in an image tool, then animate it. Many vendors sell both steps in one subscription.

## Sources

Runway AI video generator (fetched 2026-11-13) — https://runwayml.com/ai-video-generator
Luma Dream Machine (fetched 2026-11-13) — https://lumalabs.ai/dream-machine
Pika pricing (fetched 2026-11-13) — https://pika.art/pricing
Kling AI (fetched 2026-11-13) — https://klingai.com/global/