

# CLAUDE COWORK: THE FULL SETUP

How to Go From Chatting With AI to AI Doing Your Work

## WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

How to set up Claude Cowork from scratch. The folder structure, the core files, the global instructions, and the exact prompts that make it work. Plus - you can feed this entire guide into Cowork and it'll set everything up for you.

## WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

\$830 billion got wiped off the American stock market recently. Mainly SaaS companies. Software stocks. The reason? AI stopped chatting with us and started doing the work. Most people haven't caught up to this yet. They're still typing prompts into ChatGPT like it's 2024. This guide gets you set up properly in 30 minutes.

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# WHY THIS MATTERS RIGHT NOW

There have been four big moments in AI from a user perspective.

## **GPT-3.5.**

The first "oh, what's this?" moment. It hallucinated, no web search, made stuff up. A lot of people tried it and bounced off.

## **GPT-4.**

The first model you could actually use professionally. Should have been the first consumer release, honestly.

## **The Reasoners.**

Spring 2025. Models that think step by step, prompt themselves, reason through problems. Deep think modes and research modes came from this.

## **Agents.**

December 2025. AI that doesn't just chat with you - it does the work. This is where we are right now. And Cowork is part of it.

### **THE KEY SHIFT**

For the last couple of years we've been chatting. We talk to AI. It tells us what to do. That's changed. Now when I give AI a task, it doesn't just give me a plan. It puts together the plan, and then it goes and does the plan. We're not talking about the task with AI anymore. It's getting on and doing the thing.

# WHAT COWORK IS (AND ISN'T)

## It's not a chatbot.

With Claude Chat, you type a question and get an answer. With Cowork, you point Claude at a folder on your computer. It reads everything in it. Then you give it a task and it goes and does it. Creates documents. Builds spreadsheets. Writes reports. Saves finished files directly to your computer.

You're directing a worker, not prompting a chatbot.

## The Claude product line, in short:

- **1. Claude Chat** like ChatGPT. You type, it replies.
- **2. Claude Projects** still Chat but separated into individual projects.
- **3. Claude Code** for developers to build software faster.
- **4. Claude Cowork** for knowledge workers. The one we're setting up today.
- **5. Claude Skills** teach Claude repeatable workflows.
- **6. Claude Connectors** plug Claude into Slack, Gmail, Google Drive, Notion, and 50+ other tools.
- **7. Claude Plugins** pre-built skill packs for specific roles (marketing, legal, sales, etc).

## THE KEY DIFFERENCE

Chat answers questions. Cowork does work. It has real read/write access to files on your computer. It creates actual deliverables. And it gets better the more context you give it through files - not longer prompts.

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# WHAT YOU NEED

Three things before we start.

## 1. The desktop app.

Cowork only runs in the Claude desktop app. Not the website. Not your phone. Download it from [claude.ai/download](https://claude.ai/download). Mac or Windows.

## 2. A paid plan.

You need Claude Pro at minimum (\$20/month, or \$17/month if you pay annually).

If Cowork becomes your main workflow, consider Max (\$100/month). Cowork sessions use significantly more resources than regular chat. On Pro, you'll feel the limits within a week of daily use.

## 3. The right model settings.

Inside the app, always select:

- **Model:** Opus 4.6
- **Extended Thinking:** ON

This is the smartest model Claude has. Don't use Sonnet or Haiku for Cowork tasks. The difference in output quality is massive.

# FILES OVER PROMPTS

**This is the most important concept in this entire guide.**

ChatGPT trained you to write better prompts. Longer prompts. More detail. More instructions. Forget that.

With Cowork, the game is text files. Take everything you know - your writing style, your company's rules, your best examples, your past work - and put it in text files. Drop them in the folder. Point Claude at that folder.

The more context you give it as files, the less prompting you need. The output goes from "generic AI" to "this actually sounds like someone who works here."

Think of it like onboarding a new employee. You give them their workspace, their context, their tasks, their tools. Then they get on with it.

## THE SHIFT

Stop writing better prompts. Start building better context. One good markdown file about who you are and how you write is worth more than 50 carefully crafted prompts.

# BUILD YOUR FOLDER

Create a dedicated folder on your computer. Call it "Claude Cowork" or whatever makes sense to you. Inside, create four subfolders:

- **ABOUT ME** - Your identity files. Who you are, how you write.
- **PROJECTS** - Live work. One subfolder per project. The brief, the references, the drafts.
- **TEMPLATES** - Finished work so good you want to reuse the structure. Not the content - the pattern.
- **CLAUDE OUTPUTS** - Where Cowork delivers everything it creates. The **ONLY** folder Claude writes to.

```
CLAUDE_COWORK/  
ABOUT_ME/  
about-me.md  
anti-ai-writing-style.md  
PROJECTS/  
project-name-1/  
project-name-2/  
TEMPLATES/  
newsletter-template.md  
report-template.md  
CLAUDE_OUTPUTS/
```

## WHY THIS STRUCTURE MATTERS

Cowork has real read/write access to whatever folder you share. If something goes wrong, you want the damage contained. Separating read-only context from the write folder keeps things clean and safe. Takes five minutes to set up.

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# CREATE YOUR CORE FILES

Two files that change everything. Both go in your ABOUT ME folder.

## File 1: about-me.md

This is who you are. Not a CV. Not a LinkedIn bio. Write it like you'd explain yourself to a new colleague on their first day.

Include:

- What you do for work
- Who your audience or clients are
- Your current priorities (what matters right now)
- How you like to communicate (direct? formal? casual?)
- One example of writing you're proud of - paste it in

A markdown file is just a plain text file saved with .md instead of .txt. Open any text editor (even TextEdit or Notepad), write your content, save as about-me.md. Claude reads these better than Word docs or PDFs.

## File 2: anti-ai-writing-style.md

Because AI writing sounds like AI writing. And your audience can smell it. Tell Claude exactly what NOT to do:

- No "in today's fast-paced world"
- No corporate jargon or filler words
- Contractions always (it's, don't, you're - not "it is", "do not")
- Short sentences and paragraphs
- Your specific pet peeves about AI writing

## PROMPT YOU CAN USE

I need to create two context files for Claude Cowork.

File 1: about-me.md

Ask me questions about who I am, what I do, who my audience is, and my current priorities. Use the AskUserQuestion tool. Then write the file.

File 2: anti-ai-writing-style.md

Ask me what I hate about AI writing. What phrases make me cringe. How I actually write vs how AI writes. Use the AskUserQuestion tool. Then write the file.

Save both to my ABOUT ME folder.

**One great context file is worth more than 50 random uploads. Be intentional.**

# SET GLOBAL INSTRUCTIONS

Go to: **Settings > Cowork > Edit Global Instructions**

This is a persistent prompt Claude reads before EVERY Cowork session. Set it once. Runs every time. Never type it again.

## COPY AND PASTE THIS:

### PROMPT YOU CAN USE

```
# GLOBAL INSTRUCTIONS

## BEFORE EVERY TASK

1. Read ABOUT ME/. No task starts without reading
both files.

2. If the task relates to a project, read everything
in the matching PROJECTS/ subfolder first.

3. If the task involves a content type that has a
matching pattern in TEMPLATES/, study that
template's structure first.

## FOLDER PROTOCOL

Read-only (never edit):

- ABOUT ME/ - Identity and writing rules.
- TEMPLATES/ - Proven structures to reuse.
- PROJECTS/ - Briefs, references, finished work.

Write folder (deliveries go here):

- CLAUDE OUTPUTS/ - Everything you create goes
here. One subfolder per project.

## NAMING CONVENTION

project_content-type_v1.ext
Examples: Newsletter_v1.md, Report_v2.docx

## OPERATING RULES

- If unclear, use AskUserQuestion. Don't guess.
- Don't over-explain. Deliver the work.
- Never delete files anywhere.
```

**Combined with your core files, your prompts can now be 10 words long and still produce work that sounds like you.**

# THE FEATURE NOBODY EXPLAINS PROPERLY

This changed how I work. And I haven't seen anyone explain it properly.

Add this to any prompt: **"Ask me questions using the AskUserQuestion tool before answering."**

What happens: Cowork generates a form. Buttons. Clickable options. Instead of you writing the perfect prompt, AI asks YOU the right questions first.

I showed this on my livestream. I said "I want to build a system where I drop invoices and you sort, order, and send to my bookkeeper." Basic prompt. Cowork asked me: Where do you want to drop invoices? What format? How should they be sorted? How do you want them sent?

I clicked answers. It built the entire system. Folder structure, PDF reading skill, processing script, scheduled monthly task. Done.

Previously, Chat would have given me a plan. Cowork built the thing.

**AI prompts you. Not the other way around.**

## The One Prompt For Everything

80% of my Cowork sessions start with this:

### PROMPT YOU CAN USE

```
I want to [TASK] to [SUCCESS CRITERIA].
```

```
First, explore my Claude Cowork folder. Then, ask me questions using the AskUserQuestion tool. I want to refine the approach with you before you execute.
```

## Examples

**Newsletter:** "I want to write my next newsletter on [TOPIC]. Explore my folder. Ask me questions first."

**Consulting report:** "A client just sent a brief. It's in /projects/client-x/. Read the brief, my template, and my past examples. Create a first draft. Ask me questions first."

**Research:** "I uploaded 4 competitor articles to /projects/research/. Read all of them. Create a comparison table of what each covered and what they missed. Ask me questions first."

Same pattern every time. Short task. Point to the folder. "Ask me questions first." Only the context changes.

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# WHAT I'VE ACTUALLY BUILT WITH IT

Quick examples from my own business.

## The TikTok Comment Bot

You know when I post a video and say "comment GUIDE for the PDF"? Hundreds of people comment. Previously I'd go in there and respond manually.

Now Cowork goes into TikTok Studio, finds the unanswered guide comments, sends rotating link messages. Max 40 per run. Waits 20 seconds between each. Runs hourly. I didn't have to write that prompt more than once. It's just running.

ManyChat does this on Instagram already. But it doesn't work on TikTok, LinkedIn, or YouTube. Cowork fills that gap. And it cost me nothing beyond my subscription.

## The Invoice Sorter

I said "I want to drop invoices in a folder and have you sort, order, and send them to my bookkeeper." Cowork asked me a few questions. Then it built the folder structure, a PDF reading skill, a processing script, and a scheduled monthly task. The whole system. From one sentence.

## Newsletter Writing

My folder has my writing style guide, past newsletters, and reference material. I give Cowork a topic and tell it to ask me questions first. It asks about angle, depth, audience, format. I click answers. It drafts. I edit. What used to take 3 hours takes 45 minutes.

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# CHAT VS COWORK VS CODE

This confuses people. Here's how they work together.

## **Chat is for thinking.**

"I'm considering doing this. What would it look like?" Back and forth. Decision making. It's cheaper, so don't waste Cowork credits on quick questions.

## **Cowork is for automation.**

Once I know what I want, I take it to Cowork. Set up the task once, give it context files, schedule it. It runs without me.

## **Code is for building.**

If I need actual software - a database, a hosted app - I move it to Claude Code. But I always start simpler. Most things don't need full software.

### **MY PROGRESSION**

Start in Chat to work out what I actually want. Move to Cowork for the basic automation. If it needs more, move to Code. Most things stay in Cowork. I think eventually they'll all merge into one interface.

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# PLUGINS

Anthropic released official plugins for specific job functions. Each one gives Cowork specialised skills and workflows for that domain.

## Available plugins include:

- Marketing (content drafting, campaign planning)
- Sales (prospect research, outreach)
- Legal (contract review, clause analysis)
- Finance (modelling, analysis)
- Data (CSV analysis, dashboards, SQL)
- Product Management (roadmaps, specs)
- Customer Support (ticket analysis, knowledge base)
- Productivity (task management, workflows)

## How to install

1. Open Cowork. 2. Click **Customize** in the left sidebar. 3. Click **Browse plugins**. 4. Pick one. 5. Click Install. It's free. 6. Type / in the chat to see available slash commands.

You can customise each plugin for your specific company. Cowork asks you setup questions and remembers the answers.

## Example: Marketing plugin

Type: `/marketing:draft-content`

"Write a LinkedIn post about [topic]. Use my voice profile. Target [audience]."

Claude reads your about-me.md, drafts a post that sounds like you, suggests hook variations. Five minutes instead of thirty.

## Example: Data plugin

Type: `/data:explore`

Drop a CSV into the folder. Claude summarises every column, flags anomalies, suggests analyses, and can build charts. It writes SQL in plain English.

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# WHERE IT FALLS SHORT

Honest section. You should know this going in.

## **Burns through usage.**

One Cowork session uses significantly more than a regular chat conversation. On the Pro plan (\$20/month), you'll hit limits within a week of daily use. Budget accordingly. But if you're running a business, compare it to the time it saves.

## **Desktop only.**

Close the Claude app and the session dies. No mobile version. No web version. Your computer needs to be on and the app needs to be open. I use a Mac Mini that just sits there running tasks.

## **Still a research preview.**

Anthropic says this explicitly. It can misread files. It sometimes takes odd approaches. Always review what it produces before sending to a client.

## **Not for quick questions.**

If you want to know the capital of France, use Chat. Cowork is designed for multi-step tasks that produce real deliverables.

## **Agents can be unpredictable.**

For complex tasks, Cowork runs multiple agents in parallel. 90% of the time it's fast and accurate. Sometimes one agent goes in a weird direction. Keep an eye on it.

It's not perfect. But it's getting better every week.

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# YOUR FIRST 30 MINUTES

Open your calendar. Book 30 minutes. Here's how to spend them.

## **Minutes 0-5: Install.**

Download from [claude.ai/download](https://claude.ai/download). Sign in. Click the Cowork tab. Done.

## **Minutes 5-10: Build your folder.**

Create the Claude Cowork folder with four subfolders: ABOUT ME, PROJECTS, TEMPLATES, CLAUDE OUTPUTS.

## **Minutes 10-15: Create your core files.**

Don't write them yourself. Open Cowork, select your folder, and use the prompt from Section 06. Let Cowork ask you questions and create the files.

## **Minutes 15-20: Set Global Instructions.**

Go to Settings > Cowork > Edit Global Instructions. Paste the template from Section 07 of this guide.

## **Minutes 20-25: Run your first real task.**

Give Cowork something you'd actually need for work this week. Use the one prompt from Section 08.

## **Minutes 25-30: Review and adjust.**

Open the file Cowork created. Edit it. Use it. Notice how much less prompting you needed compared to regular chat.

# THE CHEAT CODE

**Feed this guide to Cowork and it sets everything up for you.**

You can take this entire PDF and paste it into a Cowork session. Tell Cowork to read it and build everything.

## PROMPT YOU CAN USE

```
I just read this Cowork setup guide and I want you  
to help me set everything up. Read the guide I've  
pasted below.
```

```
Then walk me through setting up my folder structure,  
creating my core files, and configuring everything.
```

```
Use AskUserQuestion to learn about me and my work  
before creating any files.
```

```
[PASTE THIS ENTIRE GUIDE HERE]
```

Cowork reads the guide, asks you the right questions about who you are and what you do, then creates your `about-me.md`, your `anti-ai-writing-style.md`, and your folder structure. All you have to do is set the Global Instructions manually (that part needs to be done in Settings).

**AI setting up your AI. That's where we are now.**

# THERE'S A LOT MORE

Cowork is one piece of a much bigger ecosystem. Once you're comfortable with the basics, here's what to explore next:

- **Skills** - Teach Claude repeatable workflows. Like Neo getting kung fu plugged into his head. Anthropic just published a 33-page guide on building them.
- **Connectors** - Plug Claude directly into your tools. Slack, Google Drive, Gmail, Notion, Figma, and 50+ others. Free.
- **MCP (Model Context Protocol)** - The protocol that lets Claude connect to external tools and data sources. This is where things get properly powerful.
- **Claude Code** - For developers and increasingly for non-coders. People are building entire apps and products with it. Massive.

Each one of these deserves its own guide. We'll cover them in future newsletters and livestreams.

**For now, Cowork is where you start. Get the folder set up. Run one real task. See what happens.**

## READY TO GO DEEPER?

Join the daily AI newsletter: [aiwithkyle.com/ai-news](https://aiwithkyle.com/ai-news)

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