



STOP PROMPTING. START BUILDING CONTEXT.

The Claude Cwork Setup Guide

Everything you need to go from install to your first real deliverable in 30 minutes.

A guide by
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Folder structure
Global instructions
Plugins & prompts

What is Claude Cowork?

You just switched from ChatGPT to Claude. But you're still not using **Cowork**.

When Claude released it, software stocks lost \$830 billion in 6 days. People keep asking: *"I installed Claude. But how do I actually start using Cowork?"*

Cowork is a mode inside the Claude desktop app. It reads files from a folder on your computer, learns how you work, and produces real output directly into that folder.

If you don't code, you must master Claude Cowork now. Here's the product line:

CLAUDE "CHAT"

Like ChatGPT. You type, Claude answers. Probably the only one you know.

CLAUDE "COWORK"

Like Claude Code but for knowledge workers. Reads your files, delivers real output. **This is what you need.**

CLAUDE "PROJECTS"

Still Chat, but separated as individual projects with persistent context.

CLAUDE "CONNECTORS"

Plug Claude into Slack, Calendar, Gmail. It reads, writes, and acts inside your tools.

Chat vs Cowork vs Projects

Same AI. Three different ways to use it. Here's how to pick:

Claude: Chat vs Cowork vs Projects

Same AI. Three different ways to use it. Here's how to pick:

	Chat	Cowork	Projects
What it is:	You type, Claude answers. Like a chatbot.	Claude sits on your desktop. It reads your files, creates new ones.	A saved workspace. You upload your stuff once, Claude remembers it.
Access:	Browser, phone, or desktop app.	Desktop app only (click the Cowork tab)	Browser, phone, or desktop app.
Setup:	Zero. Open and start typing.	~10 minutes. Download app, pick a folder, add your files.	~5 minutes. Create a project, upload files, write instructions.

	Chat	Cowork	Projects
What it can do:			
Answer questions	Yes	Yes	Yes
Create real files (Excel, Word, Slides, PDF)	Yes. Files can be saved or downloaded	Yes. Files appear in your folders, ready to open.	Yes. Files can be saved or downloaded
Build interactive things (calculators, trackers, charts)	Yes, via Artifacts	Yes, via Artifacts	Yes, via Artifacts
Use plugins (extra skills for sales, marketing, data)	No	Yes, install from a library. Use slash commands.	No
Connect to your tools (Slack, Google Drive, Notion)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Search the internet	Yes	Yes	Yes
Think before answering (Extended Thinking)	Yes, you turn it on manually	On by default	Yes, you turn it on manually

Chat:

The skill you need: clear prompts

Output quality: generic unless you prompt very well

The vibe: texting a very smart stranger

Cowork:

The skill you need: clear context files (your style, your rules, your examples)

Output quality: sounds like you. Because it read your files.

The vibe: working with an assistant you read every brief

Projects:

The skill you need: picking the right files and clear instructions

Output quality: sounds like you. Because it has your guides.

The vibe: a team member who knows your playbook

Start with Chat if...

- You have a quick question.
- You want to brainstorm.
- You don't need it to know your style.
- You want an answer, fast.

Use Cowork when...

- You're doing real work (analysis, spreadsheets).
- You want Claude to create actual files.
- You want it to sound like you, not AI.
- You need long, deep sessions that don't break.

Set up a Project when...

- You do the same task every week (newsletter, reports).
- You're tired of repeating yourself.
- You want your context saved forever, not just for one session.

	CHAT	COWORK	PROJECTS
YOUR IDENTITY	No. Every chat starts blank.	Yes, if you put info about yourself in text files inside your folder.	Yes, from the files and instructions you added to the project.
CONTEXT INPUT	You copy-paste into the chat. Every. Single. Time.	You write .md or .txt files once. Drop them in a folder. Point Claude to it.	You upload files and write instructions once. They stick.
CONTEXT BETWEEN CHATS	No. Gone when you start a new chat.	Yes, as long as you're in the same folder.	Yes. Every new chat inside the project has it.

- + Quick tasks: Chat
- + Deep sessions: Cowork
- + Recurring work: Projects or Cowork

Claude **Cowork** and **Projects** both need a Pro Plan (\$20/mo). **Cowork** is desktop only. **Extended thinking** works everywhere - always turn it on.

+

Opus 4.6 Extended

↑

to download more infographics, go to [how-to-ai.guide](#) from Ruben Hassid, on "How to AI"

Full comparison: Chat vs Cowork vs Projects – Source: Ruben Hassid / How to AI

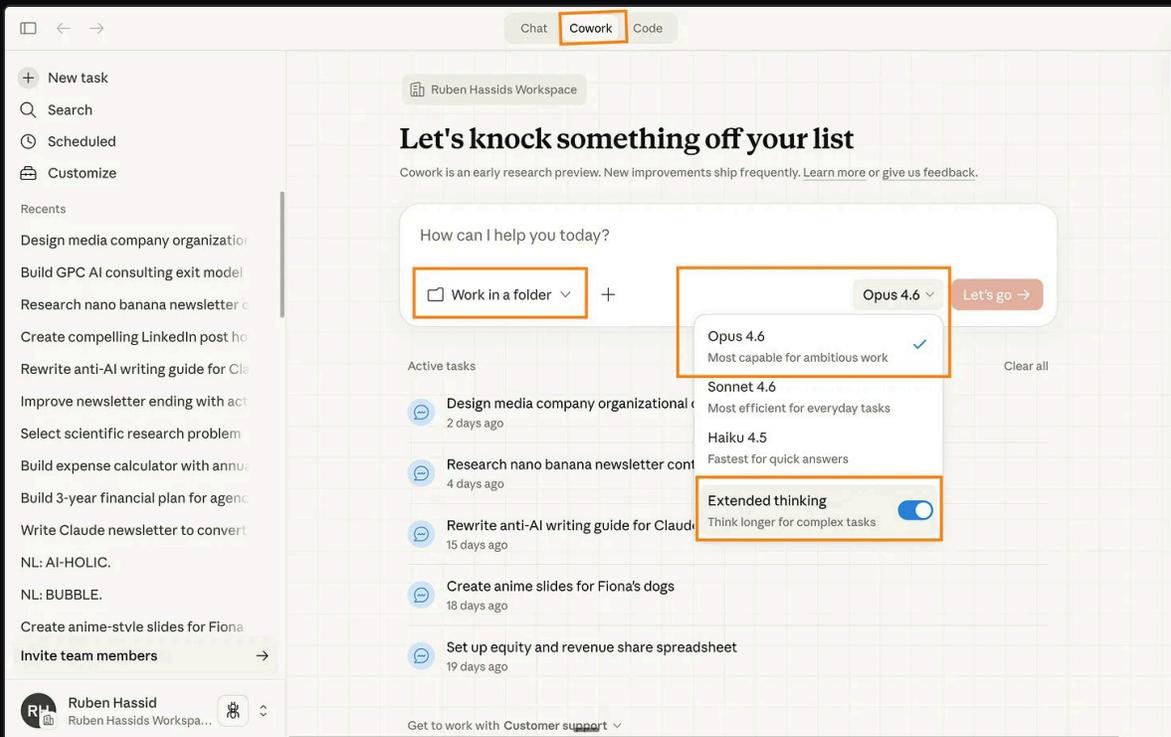
KEY **Cowork** is where you should spend 80% of your time. It reads your files, sounds like you, and creates actual deliverables. Chat is for quick questions. Projects are for recurring work.

STEP 01

Install Claude Desktop

Get the app running and configure it for the best output quality.

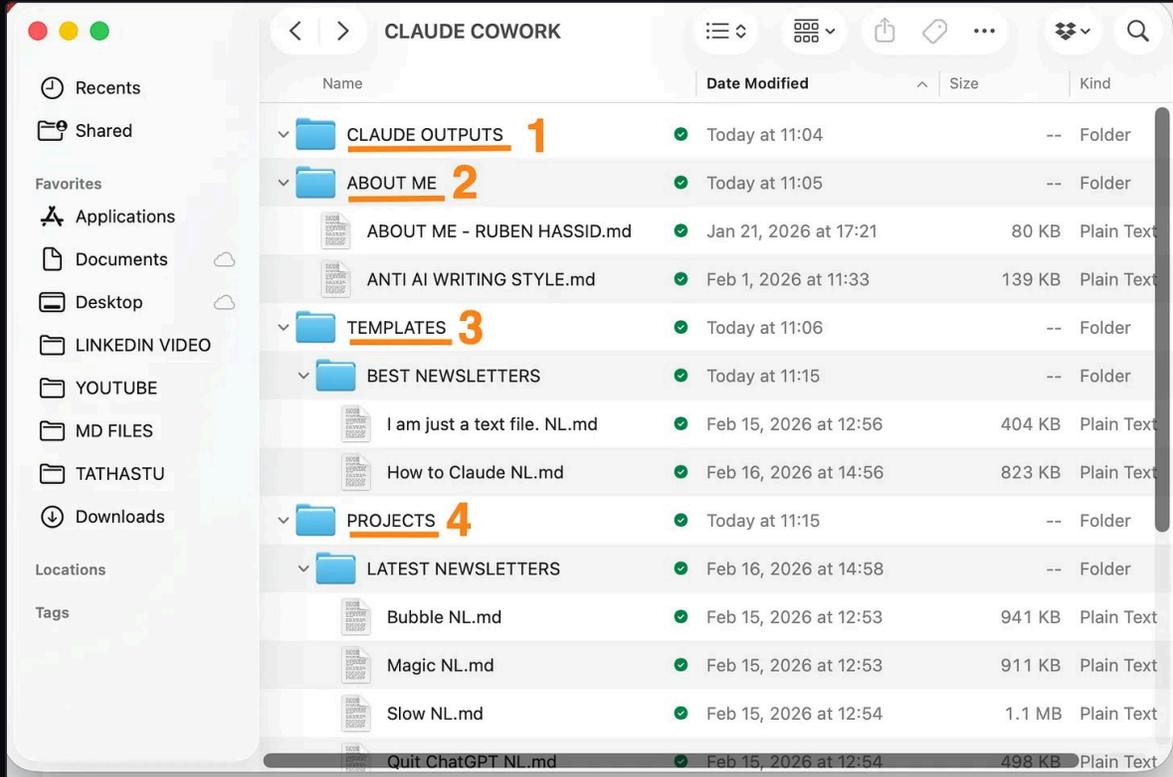
- 1 Go to claude.ai/download and download the desktop app
- 2 Install it on your machine (**macOS or Windows**)
- 3 You need a **Pro account** (\$20/month, or \$17/month annual)
- 4 Open the app
- 5 Click the **Cowork** tab at the top (between Chat and Code)
- 6 Always select **Opus 4.6** and **Extended thinking**



Go to Cowork tab > Select Opus 4.6 + Extended thinking > Work in a folder

Build Your Context Folder

ChatGPT trained you to write better prompts. Forget that. With Cowork, the game is text files. The more context you give, the less prompting you need.



The CLAUDE COWORK folder: 4 subfolders, clean and intentional

01

ABOUT ME

Two files: **about-me.md** (who you are, priorities, voice) and **anti-ai-writing-style.md** (no em dashes, no filler, no "certainly").

02

PROJECTS

One subfolder per active project. Drop in briefs, drafts, reference material.

03

TEMPLATES

Finished work so good you reuse the **structure**.
Newsletter format, report structure, outreach template.

04

CLAUDE OUTPUTS

The **only** folder where Claude writes. Damage is contained here if something goes wrong.

NOTE

A .md file is just a plain text file with an .md extension. Claude reads them better. One great markdown file is worth more than 50 random uploads.

Set Global Instructions

Go to Settings > Cowork > Edit Global Instructions. Paste this once. It runs every session automatically.

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 before proceeding.
3. If the task involves a content type that has a matching pattern in TEMPLATES/, study that template's structure first. Use the structure. Don't copy the content.

** FOLDER PROTOCOL

You have three read-only folders and one write folder.

*** Read-only (never create, edit, or delete):

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

*** Write folder:

- CLAUDE OUTPUTS/ -- *Everything you create goes here.*
One subfolder per project. Create if needed.

** NAMING CONVENTION

Format: project_content-type_v1.ext

Examples: How-To-AI_Newsletter_v1.md
EasyGen_Deck_v1.pptx
GPC_Report_v2.docx

** OPERATING RULES

- If the brief is unclear, use AskUserQuestion. No filler.
- Don't over-explain. Deliver the work.
- Never delete files anywhere.

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

The One Prompt That Runs Everything

80% of your sessions start with this. No prompt engineering. The context folder does the work. The prompt just points.

THE MASTER PROMPT

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.

What happens next:

- 1 Claude reads your context files (about-me, writing style, project files)
- 2 It generates a clickable form: buttons, options, multi-select
- 3 You click through in under a minute
- 4 Claude shows a plan. You approve.
- 5 It executes and creates real files in your output folder

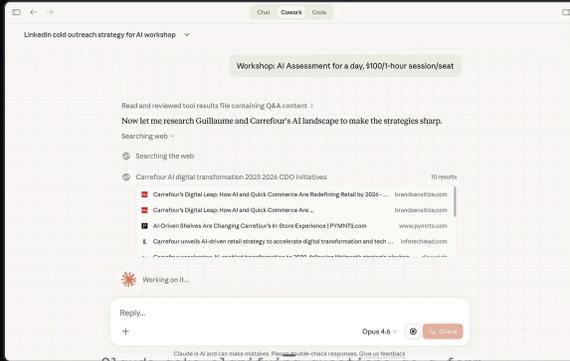
If something's off midway, you interrupt. Claude recalibrates with a new form. The process feels like **directing someone smart** instead of wrestling with a text box.

MAC TIP

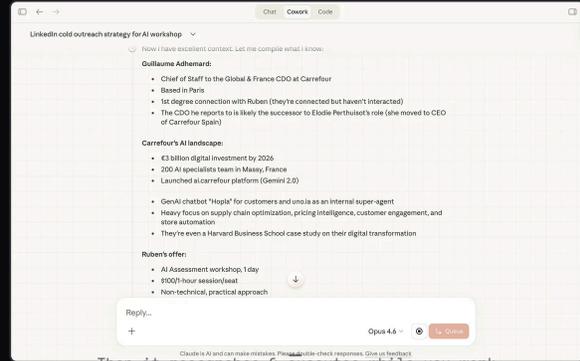
System Settings > Keyboard > Text Replacement. Add **/prompt** to auto-paste this template. You'll never type it again.

Don't Prompt Claude. Let It Prompt You.

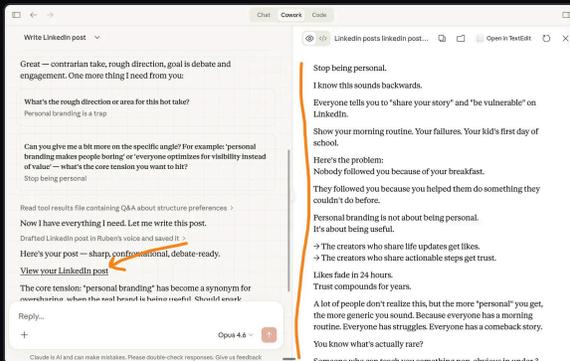
This is the feature that changes everything. Claude generates an interactive form. Actual buttons. Clickable options. AI finally prompts you.



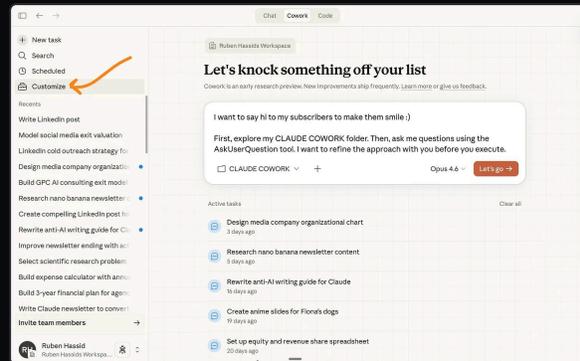
Claude asks clarifying questions as a form



Then it researches & executes while you work



Claude references your draft in AI personalization

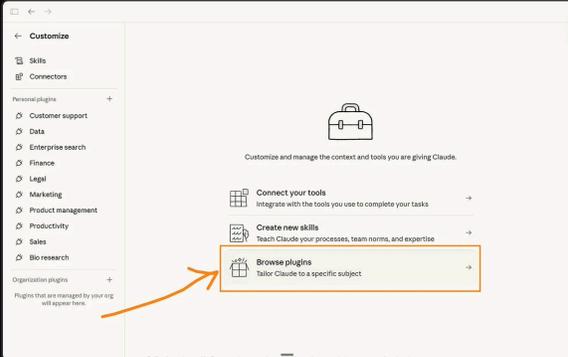


Mac Text Replacement: /prompt auto-pastes the template

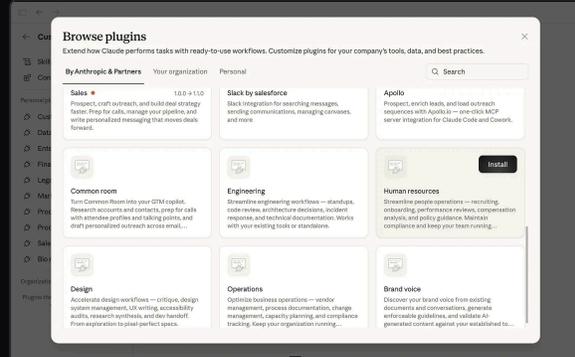
It takes 1–7 minutes, but you usually work somewhere else. This level of output is literally what a good employee would do. This is called **AskUserQuestion** — a tool built into Cowork. Claude *forces* you to be clear.

Install Plugins

11 official plugins. Legal software lost \$285B because Claude can *do the work*. You don't need to be technical to install them.

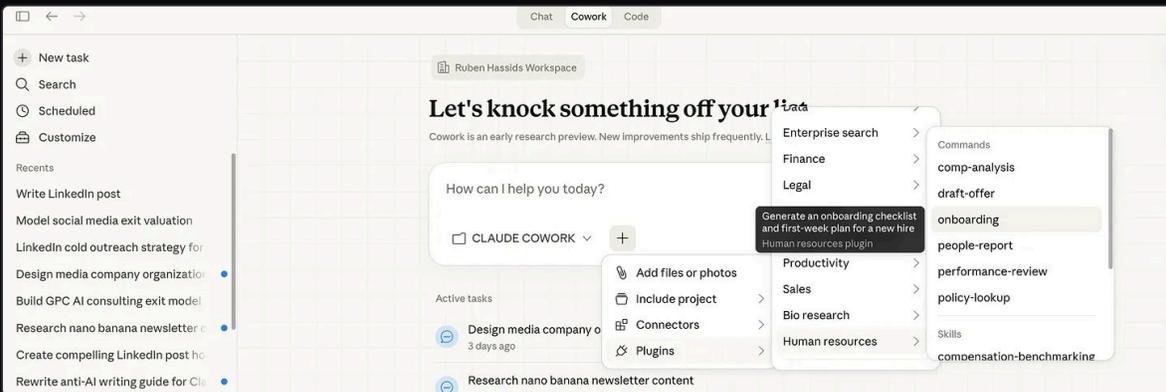


Click "Customize" in the sidebar.



Browse plugins > Install. Free.

<p>Marketing</p> <p>Drafts posts, emails, newsletters in your voice.</p>	<p>Legal</p> <p>Reviews contracts, flags risky clauses, suggests rewrites.</p>	<p>Data</p> <p>Drop a CSV. Summarizes, flags anomalies, builds dashboards.</p>
<p>Sales</p> <p>Prospect research, outreach, pipeline analysis.</p>	<p>Finance</p> <p>Modeling, projections, spreadsheet generation.</p>	<p>Product</p> <p>PRDs, feature specs, roadmap planning.</p>
<p>Productivity</p> <p>Tasks, workflows, checklists, onboarding.</p>	<p>Support</p> <p>Ticket analysis, response drafting, knowledge base.</p>	<p>Bio Research</p> <p>Scientific literature, research synthesis.</p>



Type / in the chat to see slash commands from installed plugins

STEP 06

Connect Your Tools

Go to Settings > Connectors. Browse the directory, click "Add." Free.



Once connected, Claude searches your Slack messages, pulls from Google Docs, or references Notion pages mid-conversation.

PLUGINS IN PRACTICE

What This Looks Like

MARKETING PLUGIN

Prompt: /marketing:draft-content → "Write a LinkedIn post about [topic]. Use my voice profile."

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

DATA PLUGIN

Prompt: /data:explore → Drop a CSV into the folder.

Result: Summarizes every column, flags anomalies, builds an interactive dashboard. No formulas.

LEGAL PLUGIN

Prompt: "Review the NDA in this folder. Flag anything unusual."

Result: Reads the contract, highlights risky clauses, explains each in plain English, suggests alternative language.

What People Are Shipping

1 Writing a Newsletter

SETUP

Your folder has your about-me.md, anti-AI writing guide, past newsletters that performed well, and reference material.

PROMPT

```
I want to write my next newsletter on [TOPIC]. 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.
```

WHAT HAPPENS

Claude reads every file. Generates a form asking about audience, tone, length, what angles others missed. You click answers. It produces an outline. You push back. It adjusts. Then it writes — and because it has your voice profile, the output sounds like you.

2 Client Deliverables

SETUP

Client sends a brief. Drop it in **PROJECTS/client-name/** next to your templates.

PROMPT

```
A client just sent a brief for a [DELIVERABLE TYPE]. The brief is in /PROJECTS/client-name/. Read the brief, my template, and past examples. Create a first draft as a .docx. Ask me questions first.
```

WHAT HAPPENS

Claude reads the brief, compares to your template. Asks: "Timeline or just recommendations?" You click. It creates a .docx in your output folder.

3 Competitive Analysis**SETUP**

Drop 3–5 competitor articles or reports into a subfolder.

PROMPT

I uploaded 4 newsletters from competitors covering [TOPIC]. Read all of them. Create a comparison table: what each covered, what they missed, and where I can say something new. Ask me questions first.

WHAT HAPPENS

Claude builds a comparison table, finds gaps where you have something original. That used to be a junior employee's job. Now it's a prompt.

4 Automated Weekly Briefing**SETUP**

Create `/weekly-briefings/` in your output folder. This one is different: Cowork works **without you even being there**.

PROMPT (USING /SCHEDULE)

Every Monday at 7am, research [COMPETITOR NAMES] for news, product updates, or pricing changes. Save a summary to `/CLAUDE OUTPUTS/weekly-briefings/` as a markdown file. Only include items from the past 7 days.

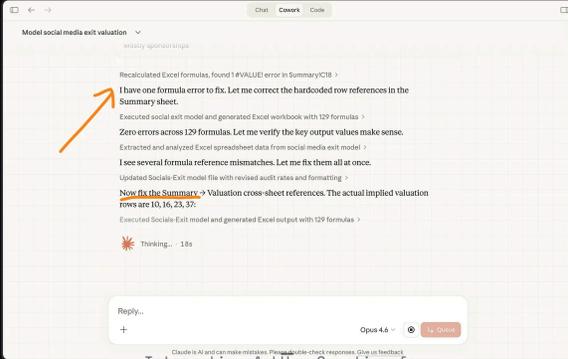
WHAT HAPPENS

Cowork runs automatically every Monday, as long as your computer is awake and the app is open. You wake up to a briefing doc. That's the endgame.

Across all four, the pattern is the same. Short task, point to folder, say "ask me questions." The workflow never changes. Only the context does.

See It In Action

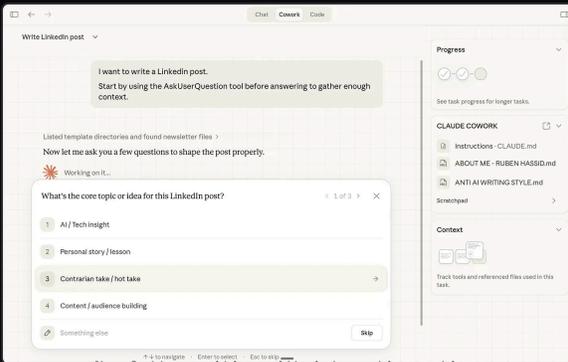
Actual screenshots from live Cowork sessions.



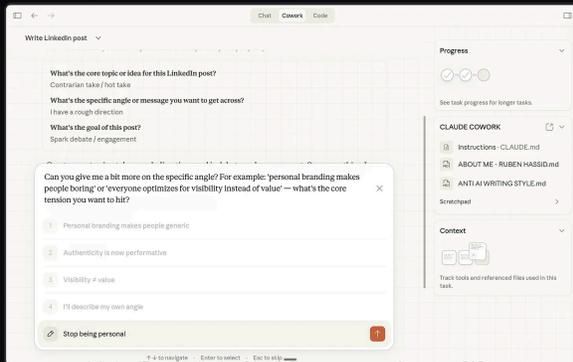
Interactive AskUser/Question Form



One-shot Excel - Full Street-style model



Newsletter writing with interactive options



LinkedIn post drafted from your voice profile

It plans itself. Finds errors itself. Fixes itself... while you work on something else. Few questions, 2 minutes, and you have a perfect start.

Ruben Hassids Workspace

Let's knock something off your list

Cowork is an early research preview. New improvements ship frequently. [Learn more](#) or [give us feedback](#).

/onboarding

CLAUDE COWORK + Opus 4.6 Let's go →

Connectors settings: plug Claude into your existing tools

BEFORE YOU START

Where Cowork Falls Short

USAGE It eats usage fast. A single session can burn dozens of regular chats. On Pro (\$20/mo), you'll feel it within a week. Consider Max (\$100/mo).

PREVIEW Still a research preview. It can make mistakes. Always review before sending to a client.

DESKTOP Needs the app open. Close the desktop app, session dies. No mobile, no web. macOS or Windows only.

SCOPE Not for quick questions. Want "capital of France?" Use Chat. Cowork is for multi-step tasks.

AGENTS Agents can be hit or miss. Parallel agents work 90% of the time. Sometimes one goes off track.

YOUR FIRST SESSION

30 Minutes to Setup

- 5'** **Minutes 0-5**
Install Claude Desktop, open Cowork, select Opus 4.6 + Extended thinking
- 10'** **Minutes 5-10**
Create CLAUDE COWORK folder with 4 subfolders. Write about-me.md
- 15'** **Minutes 10-15**
Point Cowork at your folder. Run your first prompt with AskUserQuestion
- 20'** **Minutes 15-20**
Install 1-2 plugins (start with Marketing or Productivity)
- 30'** **Minutes 20-30**
Give it a real task you need done this week. Watch it create files

That's everything.

Folder structure. Global instructions. Plugins. Prompts. Use cases. Real screenshots. Set aside 30 minutes this weekend.

If your company needs hands-on help with AI adoption, reach out directly:

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or

[DM me on LinkedIn](#)

Guide by **Ghiles Moussaoui**

Original article by Ruben Hassid. More guides coming.