CLAUDE SKILLS · GUIDE 1 OF 3

Claude Skills
The hands-on guide

How to find, make, run and share skills in the Claude desktop app.

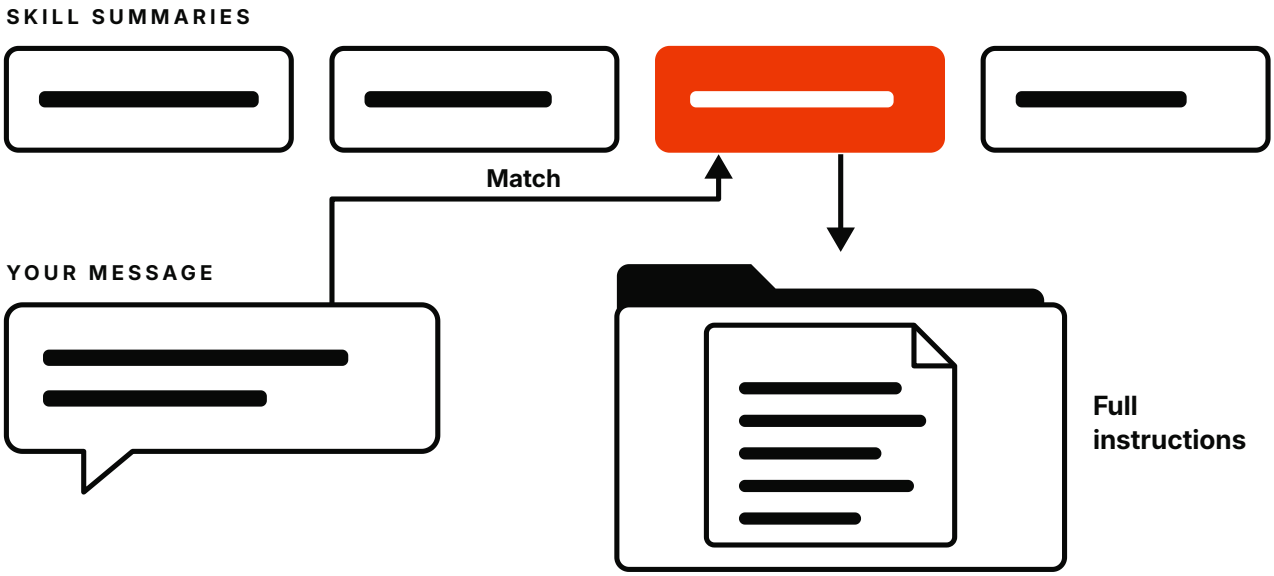
Checked against Anthropic's docs on 10 November 2026.

Alex Kerss

SECTION 1

What a skill is

A skill is a set of instructions you save once, so Claude can follow the same method every time without you explaining it again. Behind the scenes, a skill is a folder with those instructions inside, and sometimes a few extra files Claude can open when it needs them. Claude keeps a short summary of every skill you've switched on. When something you ask for matches one of those summaries, Claude loads the full skill and follows it.



A skill is different from a Project. A Project holds background knowledge that's always there while you work inside it. A skill holds the steps for one kind of work, and Claude only reaches for it when that work comes up. The two work well together. You can run a skill inside a Project, so Claude has both the method and the background.

When a skill is worth making

A skill earns its place when you keep asking for the same thing and keep giving the same corrections. Say you write a weekly sales report and every week you tell Claude the same things. Put the totals at the top. Compare with last week. Keep it to one page. That's a skill. Write it down once and you stop repeating yourself.

Some good signs a skill would help:

- You paste the same instructions into Claude more than once a month.
- The output has a fixed format, like a report layout or a house style for customer replies.
- Someone else on your team needs the work done the same way you do it.

If something only happens once, or the steps change every time, a skill won't save you much. Just ask Claude in the conversation.

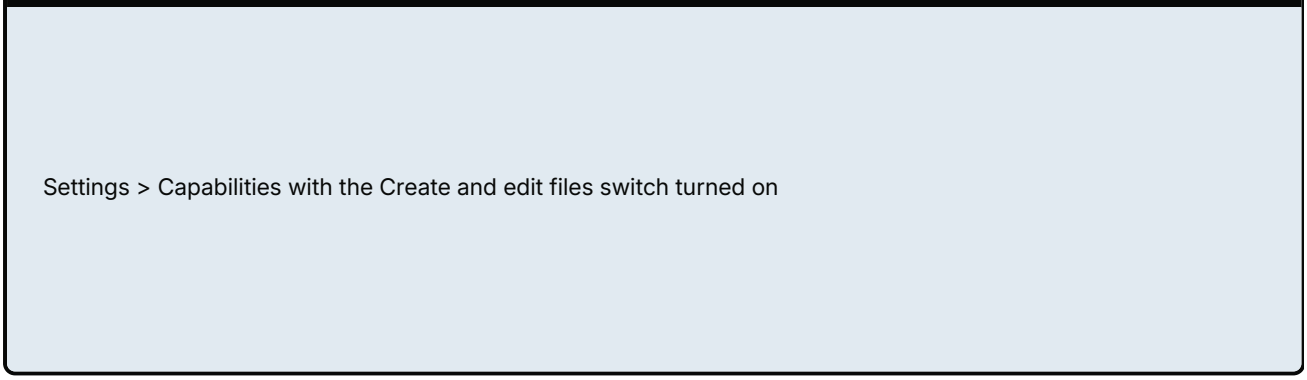
SECTION 2

Before you start

Skills need one setting switched on. Claude runs skills in a small workspace where it can create and edit files, so if that's off, skills don't run at all.

1. Open **Settings**.
2. Go to **Capabilities**.
3. Turn on **Code execution and file creation**. In the updated layout this is called **Create and edit files**.

••• SCREENSHOT 1



Settings > Capabilities with the Create and edit files switch turned on

Which plans have skills? Anthropic's Help Center lists skills on Free, Pro, Max, Ultra, Team and Enterprise. Anthropic's developer docs leave Free out when it comes to uploading your own skills, so if you're on Free and the upload option is missing, that's the reason.

On Team, skills are on for the whole organisation by default. On Enterprise, an owner has to turn on two settings first, under **Organization settings**: **Cloud code execution and file creation** and **Skills**. If you're on Enterprise and see no skills at all, ask whoever looks after your Claude account.

SECTION 3

Where to find your skills

Your skills live on the **Customize** page. It has three tabs, **Skills**, **Connectors** and **Plugins**, and two views, **Yours** and **Discover**.

To see your skills:

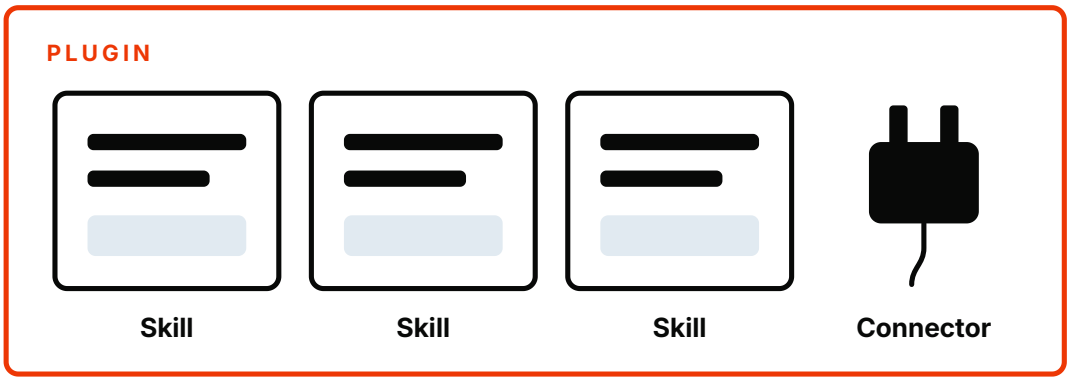
1. Click **Customize** in the sidebar.
2. Open the **Skills** tab.
3. Choose **Yours** to see the skills on your account, or **Discover** to browse new ones.

••• SCREENSHOT 2

the Customize page with the Skills tab and Yours selected, showing a list of skills

Anthropic is renaming this page **Plugins**, and putting skills, connectors and plugins into one list with a filter for each. That change is rolling out gradually, so your app may still show Customize. If it shows Plugins, your skills are in the same place, under the skills filter. Nothing moves out of your account.

What's a plugin, then? A plugin is a bundle. It can hold several skills along with the connectors they need. When you install a plugin, its skills come with it. Public plugins in the directory carry a **Verified** or **Community** label.



SECTION 4

The skills already there

You don't have to make anything to start getting value from skills. Anthropic includes four built-in skills, for Excel, Word, PowerPoint and PDF files. These are how Claude makes proper Office files and PDFs when you ask for one. You don't need to call them. Once code execution is on, Claude picks them up whenever you ask for one of those files.

There's also a skill for making skills, called skill-creator. More on that below.

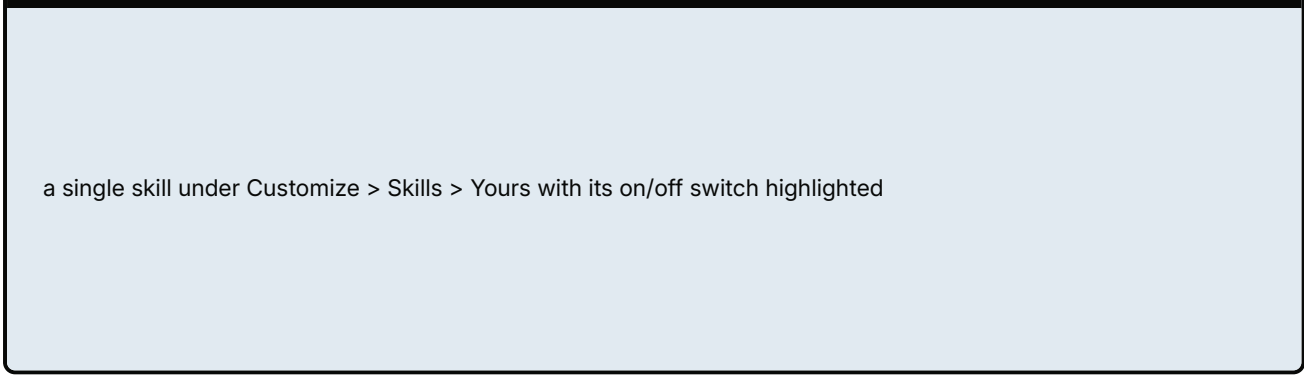
Beyond those, the **Discover** view has skills and plugins from Anthropic and from partners such as Notion and Figma. Partner skills usually expect you to have that partner's connector too. A Notion skill, for example, needs Notion connected before it can do anything useful.

SECTION 5

Turning skills on and off

Every skill under **Customize > Skills > Yours** has a switch. When the switch is off, Claude can't see that skill at all, so it won't run, even if you ask for it.

••• SCREENSHOT 3



Switching off a skill is worth doing for two reasons.

The first is clarity. If two skills cover similar ground, Claude has to choose between them, and it may choose the one you didn't want. Turning off the one you're not using takes that choice away.

The second is usage. Claude reads the short summary of every switched-on skill with every message you send. Each summary is small, but together they count towards your usage limits. So if you installed a skill to try it and never went back to it, switch it off.

Switching a skill off doesn't delete it. You can turn it back on at any time.

Deleting a skill is permanent. If you delete a skill and want it back, the only way is to upload it again from a copy. So before you delete a skill you made, download a copy first.

SECTION 6

Making a skill by asking Claude

The easiest way to make a skill is to ask Claude for one. Claude has a built-in skill called skill-creator for exactly this. It asks you questions about what you want, then writes the skill for you.

There are two ways in.

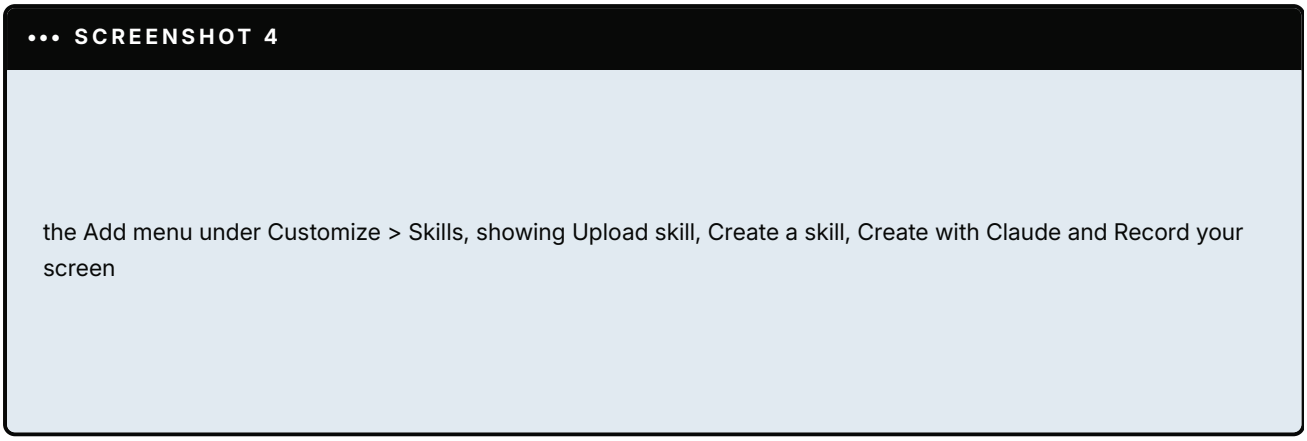
Start from a conversation. Describe what you want, in plain words. For example: "Make me a skill for replying to customer complaints. Always apologise once, offer a fix, and keep it under 150 words." Claude asks a few questions first. Then it writes the skill and shows you a card to save it.

Start from the Customize page.

1 Go to **Customize > Skills** and click **Add**.

2. Pick **Create with Claude**.
3. Claude opens a conversation and asks what the skill should do.

••• SCREENSHOT 4



The best skills come out of work you've already done with Claude. Here's the way I'd go about it. First, do the work with Claude in a normal conversation, without any skill. Correct Claude as you go. Once the result is right, ask Claude to turn that conversation into a skill. That way the skill holds the corrections you actually needed, not the ones you guessed at in advance.

When Claude gives you the skill, read it before you save it. Check that the steps are the ones you meant, and that it says clearly when Claude should use it.

The same menu has a **Create a skill** option, where you type the skill yourself. That route needs you to know how a skill file is laid out, which is covered in the Under the Hood guide.

SECTION 7

Record a skill

Record a skill lets you show Claude the steps instead of writing them down. You do the work on your screen and talk through it. Claude then writes a skill from what it saw and heard.

It suits work that's mostly clicking: things like filing receipts into the right folders, or pulling numbers from one app into a spreadsheet.

Who can use it. Record a skill is on Pro, Max, Ultra and Team. It only works in **Cowork** in **Claude for Mac**. It isn't available on Windows, on Free, or on Enterprise.

To make a recording:

1. Open **Cowork** in the Mac app.
2. Click **+** in the message box and choose **Record a skill**. You can also start from **Customize > Skills**: click **Add** and choose **Record your screen**.
3. The first time, macOS asks for **Accessibility** and **Screen recording** permission. Allow both. macOS may ask you to restart Claude.

4. Click **Start recording**. Leave the microphone on and say what you're doing and why as you go.
5. Click **Done** when you've finished, or **Discard** to throw the recording away.

••• SCREENSHOT 5

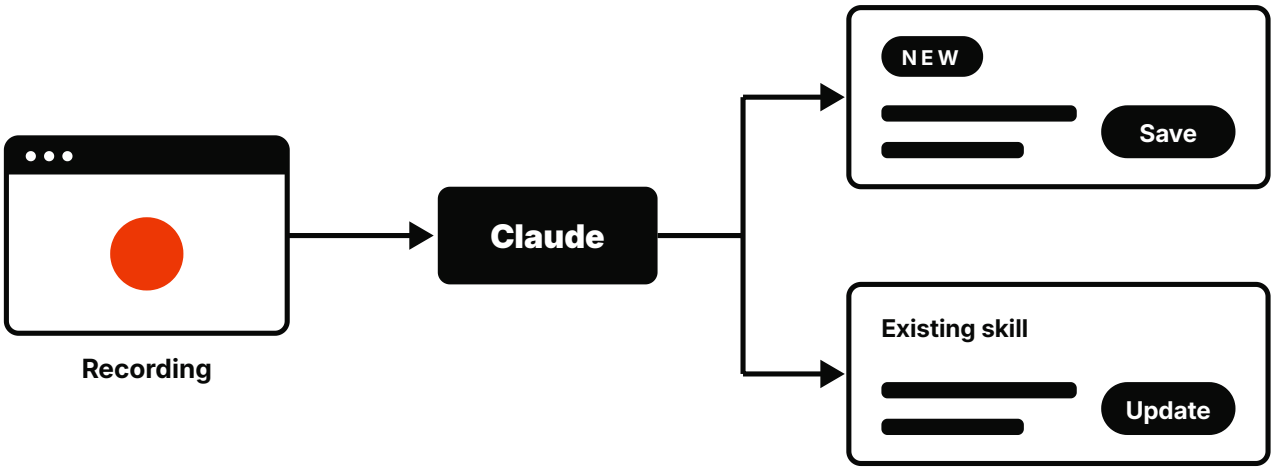
Cowork composer with the + menu open and Record a skill highlighted

••• SCREENSHOT 6

the capture bar during a recording, showing Done and Discard

A recording can run for about ten minutes. When roughly a minute is left, a countdown appears in the capture bar. When it reaches zero, Claude stops and works with what it has. If your process takes longer, split it into parts and record each one.

When Claude has finished, it shows you a skill. If it's new, it's marked **NEW**, with **Save** and **Dismiss** buttons. If the recording overlaps a skill you already have, Claude offers to **Update** that skill instead. Expand **Content** and read it before you click anything. An update changes the skill you already have.



A few things to know before you record:

- **Everything on your screen is captured**, along with anything you say, for the whole recording. Close anything you don't want Claude to see, and don't type passwords while recording.
- **The video and audio aren't kept.** Screenshots from the recording stay inside that Cowork session. If you delete the session, those screenshots go too.
- **Talking helps.** Claude learns far more from "I'm only copying the rows marked paid" than from watching you click.

SECTION 8

Adding a skill someone gave you

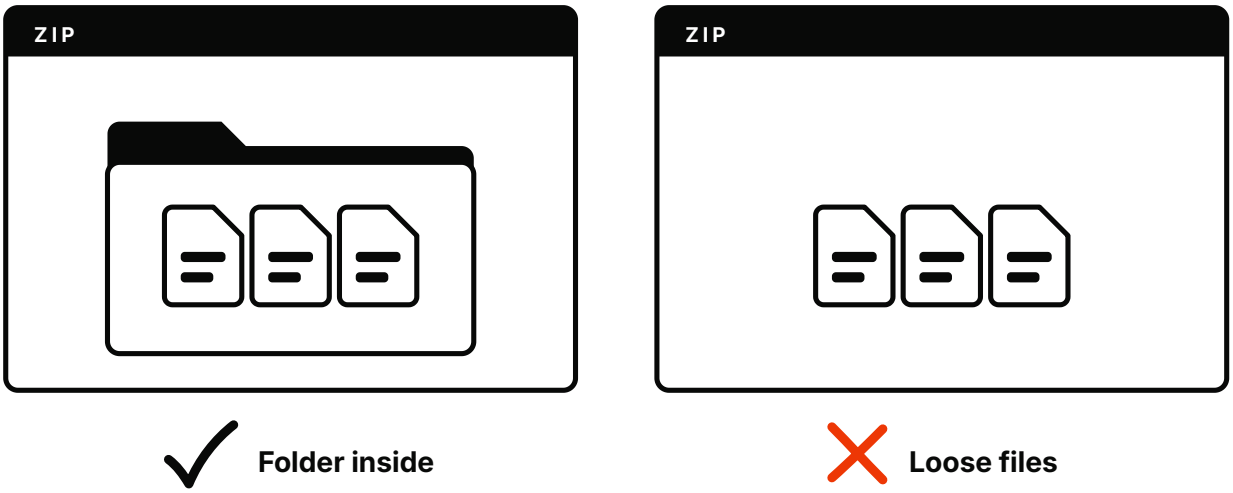
If a colleague or a friend sends you a skill, it usually arrives as a ZIP file, or as a file ending in **.skill**. You add it by uploading it.

1. Go to **Customize > Skills** and click **Add**.
2. Choose **Upload skill**.
3. Pick the file.
4. Find the new skill in your list and make sure its switch is on.

••• SCREENSHOT 7

the Upload skill window with a ZIP file selected

If the upload fails, the most likely cause is how the ZIP was made. The ZIP needs to hold the skill's folder, not the loose files from inside that folder. So if someone zipped the files themselves, ask them to zip the whole folder instead.



Before you switch on a skill from someone else, read it. The section on safety at the end of this guide explains why.

SECTION 9

How a skill runs

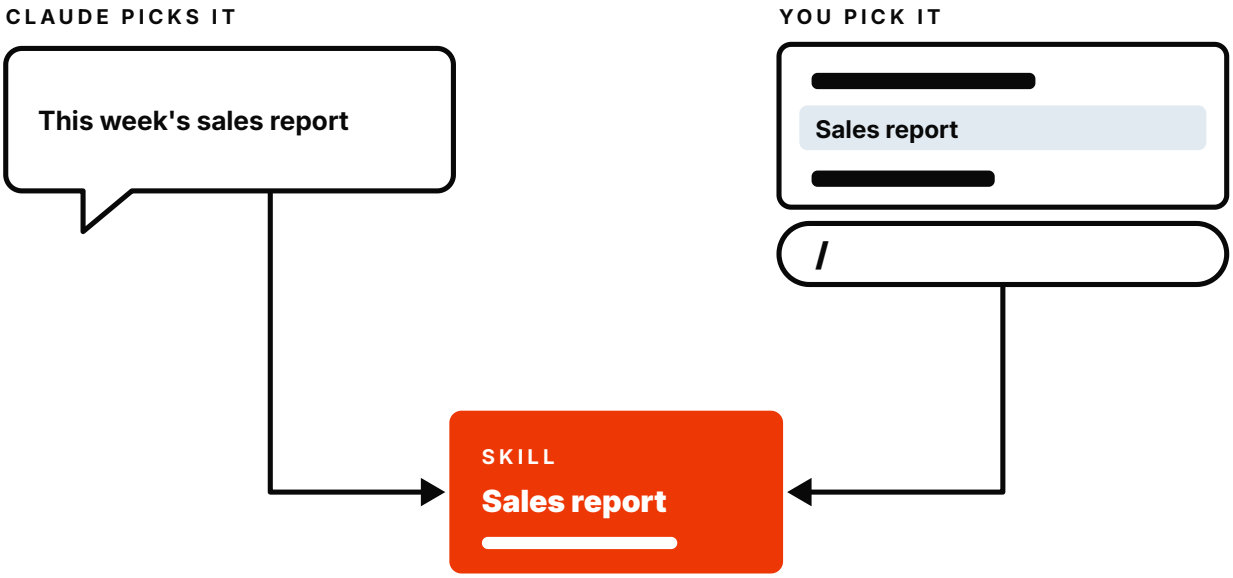
There are two ways a skill gets used.

Claude picks it for you. Each skill has a short description that says what it's for and when to use it. Claude reads those descriptions, and when your message matches one, it loads that skill. So if you have a weekly sales report skill and you ask for this week's sales report, Claude uses the skill without being told.

You ask for it by name. You can type **/** in the message box, or click **+**, and pick the skill from the list. You can also just say it in words: "Use my sales report skill on this spreadsheet." Asking by name is handy when you want to be sure the skill runs, or when two skills could both fit.

••• SCREENSHOT 8

the message box with / typed and the skill list showing



Claude can also use more than one skill at once. If you ask for the sales report as a Word document, Claude can follow your report skill and use the built-in Word skill to make the file.

How to tell whether a skill ran. Open Claude's thinking for that reply. When Claude loads a skill, you can see it there.

Skills you've switched on also work in Claude on the web and on your phone. They work in Claude for Excel, Word, PowerPoint and Outlook too: type **/** in the Claude sidebar to pick one.

SECTION 10

Improving a skill after you try it

The first version of a skill is rarely the final one. The most useful thing you can do is run it a few times on ordinary work and watch what happens.

If the skill doesn't run when you expect it to, the problem is almost always its description, not its instructions. Claude decides whether to use a skill from the description alone. If the description is vague, Claude won't connect it to what you're asking for. Rewrite it to say plainly what the skill does and the kinds of things you'd say when you want it.

If the skill runs when you don't want it to, the description is too broad, or it overlaps another skill. Narrow the description, or switch off the other skill.

If the skill runs but the result is wrong, fix the instructions. Be specific about what went wrong. "The totals should be at the top, not the bottom" helps Claude far more than "make it better".

To make the change, ask Claude in a conversation. Something like: "Update my sales report skill. Put the totals at the top and add a comparison with last week." Claude edits the skill and shows you the new version to save. If Claude shows you the skill file in the conversation, you can also highlight the part you want changed and click **Edit with Claude**. When you have several changes for one skill, send them all in one message, so Claude makes them together.

A recording can update a skill too. If you record yourself doing the work again and it overlaps a skill you already have, Claude offers to update that skill instead of making a new one.

After each change, try the skill again on a couple of examples before you make the next change. That way, if something breaks, you know which change caused it.

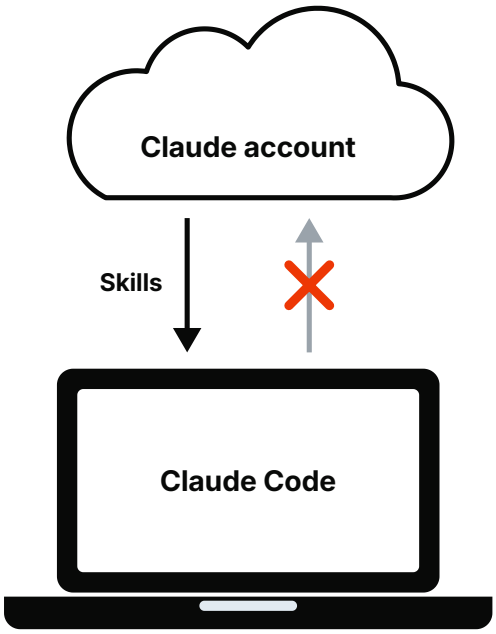


SECTION 11

Your skills in Claude Code

If you also have Claude Code, the skills on your Claude account show up there automatically. You don't need to copy them across. A skill you made in the desktop app works in Claude Code too.

This only works one way. Skills travel from your Claude account into Claude Code. A skill you make or edit in Claude Code stays on that computer and doesn't appear in the desktop app. If you want it in the app as well, you need to upload it yourself.



For the sync to work:

- Claude Code needs to be version 2.1.273 or later.
- You need to sign in to Claude Code with the same Claude account.
- It doesn't work if you sign in to Claude Code with an API key, or through a cloud provider such as Amazon Bedrock.

Claude Code checks for your account skills when a session starts, then about every ten minutes after that. In Claude Code, type **/skills** and look under **claude.ai sync** to see them.

One thing won't come across. The built-in Excel, Word, PowerPoint and PDF skills aren't available in Claude Code.

SECTION 12

Sharing skills

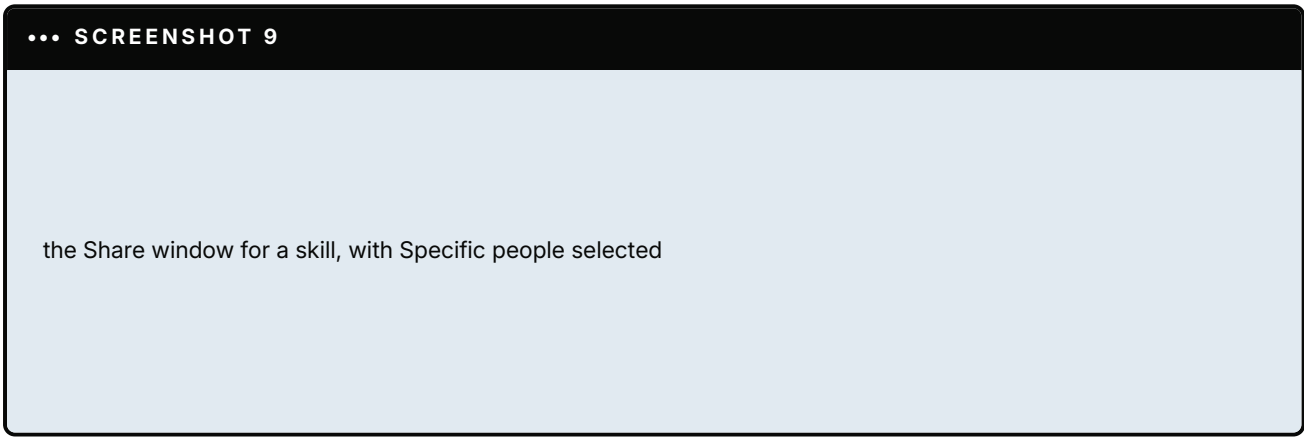
How you share a skill depends on your plan.

On Free, Pro, Max and Ultra, there's no share button. Each person keeps skills in their own account. To give a skill to someone, download it and send them the file. They then upload it to their account, as described above. If you change the skill later, you'll need to send it again.

On Team and Enterprise, you can share from inside the app.

1. Go to **Customize > Skills > Yours** and find your skill.
2. Click the **...** menu and choose **Share**.
3. Pick **Specific people**, or **A group** on Enterprise.
4. Click **Share**.

••• SCREENSHOT 9



A few things work differently from sending a file:

- **The skill arrives switched off.** The other person finds it under **Shared with you** and has to turn it on.
- **They can view it but not change it.**
- **It stays up to date.** When you change the skill, their copy changes too.

To make a skill available to everyone in your organisation, choose **Publish to org** instead of Share. Owners decide whether a published skill is just available to install, installed for everyone by default, or required. They can also ask to review skills before anyone can publish them. Bear in mind that a published skill belongs to the organisation, and later changes may need review again.

If you don't see a Share button at all, sharing hasn't been switched on for your organisation. An owner turns it on in **Organization settings**.

Admins can see the names of your skills and whether you've shared them. They can't see what's inside them.

SECTION 13

Only install skills you trust

A skill isn't just text. It can tell Claude to run code, and it can bring in extra software packages. A badly made or harmful skill could misuse your connected tools or send your files somewhere you didn't intend. So treat installing a skill the way you'd treat installing an app.

Anthropic's advice is to use skills only from trusted sources. That means skills you made yourself, or ones from Anthropic. For anything else:

- Read the skill before you switch it on. If anything in it asks Claude to send data somewhere or download something you don't recognise, don't install it.
- Under **Customize > Plugins**, check whether a plugin is **Verified** or **Community**.
- Never put passwords or API keys into a skill, even your own.

On Enterprise, admins can turn on security scanning. With scanning on, a skill from outside can't run until it passes a check, which usually takes a minute or two.

One more point for anyone handling sensitive data at work: skills aren't covered by zero data retention, and they aren't covered by Anthropic's HIPAA agreement. If your organisation relies on either, check with your admin before you add skills.

AT A GLANCE

Quick reference

••• QUICK REFERENCE

WHAT YOU WANT	WHERE TO GO
Switch skills on for your account	**Settings > Capabilities > Code execution and file creation** (or **Create and edit files**)
See your skills	**Customize > Skills > Yours**
Turn a skill on or off	The switch on the skill's card
Make a skill	Ask Claude in a conversation, or **Customize > Skills > Add > Create with Claude**
Record a skill	Cowork on Mac: **+ > Record a skill**. Pro, Max, Ultra and Team only. About ten minutes per recording
Add a skill someone sent you	**Customize > Skills > Add > Upload skill** (a ZIP of the skill folder, or a .skill file)
Run a skill	Ask for the work and let Claude pick it, or type **/** and choose it
Fix a skill that doesn't run	Rewrite its description
Fix a skill that gets things wrong	Ask Claude to update the skill with the exact correction
Use your skills in Claude Code	Same account, Claude Code 2.1.273 or later. Account to Claude Code only
Share a skill	Team and Enterprise: **... > Share** or **Publish to org**. Other plans: send the file
Stay safe	Install only skills you made or got from Anthropic, and read anything else first