

DO THIS FIRST

How to Set Up *Claude Cowork* the Right Way

So it actually does your studio's busywork while you step away.

WHAT YOU'LL SET UP IN 30 MINUTES:

- 1 **File System Access** — Claude reads and writes to your actual computer
- 2 **AskUserQuestion** — Forces clarity instead of guessing
- 3 **Plugins** — Specialist packs for your exact role
- 4 **Instructions** — Permanent memory that loads every session
- 5 **Connectors** — Live links to Gmail, Drive, Slack & 60+ tools

ChatGPT trained you to write better prompts.

Cowork trains you to build better context. One compounds.

Prepared for the AI for Designers class by Adam Zell

Founder & CEO, Boston Automations

adam@bostonautomations.com | design.bostonautomations.com/ai-for-designers

ORIGINAL AUTHOR

Based on the guide by **Nav Toor (@heynavtoor)** — 11M+ views on X. Adapted for interior designers by Adam Zell.

Cowork Is Not a Chatbot

It's something else entirely.

Most people think Claude is like ChatGPT — a text box. You type, it responds. That's [claude.ai](#), the browser version, and it's excellent. Cowork is different.

Claude Cowork lives on your desktop. It reads and writes to folders on your actual computer. It creates Word documents. It builds spreadsheets with working formulas. It installs specialist plugins for your exact job. And when it doesn't have enough information, it asks you — instead of guessing.

Cowork is what happened when Anthropic took the power of Claude Code — their agentic developer tool — and rebuilt it for the rest of us. No terminal. No code. Just: describe the outcome you want, point it at your files, and step away.

The Loop:

Describe what you need › Cowork asks questions › You answer › Come back to finished work

This loop now covers about 60% of the desk work for power users.

1. File System Access

Claude reads and writes files in a folder on your computer.

Every other AI tool runs on uploads. You export a file, drag it into the chat, wait, get an output, download it, put it back. Cowork eliminates that entire loop. You select a folder on your computer; Claude reads everything inside it; when it creates something, it saves right there.

How to set it up:

- 1 Go to **claude.com/download**. Download the desktop app (macOS or Windows).
- 2 You'll need a paid plan. Pro is \$20/month; Max starts at \$100/month for heavier use.
- 3 Open the app. At the top, switch to the **Cowork tab**.
- 4 Click the folder icon or "Select Folder" and choose a local folder.
- 5 Everything in that folder is now readable by Claude for your session.

Pro Tip: The Context Files Strategy

Stop thinking about better prompts. Start thinking about better files. Create a folder called "Claude Context" with three short files:

- **about-me.md** — who you are, your studio, your role, what a great outcome looks like
- **brand-voice.md** — how you write to clients. Your phrases. What sounds wrong to you.
- **working-style.md** — how you like Claude to behave. Questions first? Short or long?

The more quality context you put in these files, the less prompting you need. They compound over time — and your brand voice is exactly the kind of thing a designer wants baked in.

YOUR FIRST PROMPT

"Read all the files in this folder completely. Then give me a summary of what you know about me, how I work, and what context you have access to."

2. AskUserQuestion

Cowork asks YOU questions instead of guessing and getting it wrong.

Here's what every other AI does with an unclear task: it guesses, confidently. It picks an interpretation and hands you a polished answer to the wrong question. Cowork does something different — when it needs more information, it stops and generates a short form. Multiple choice. Specific options. It helps you think through what you actually want.

How to use it — add this line to any prompt:

APPEND TO ANY PROMPT

"DO NOT start working yet. First, ask me clarifying questions so we can define the approach together. Only begin once we've aligned."

YOUR DEFAULT OPENER FOR ANY TASK

"I want to [YOUR TASK] so that [WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE]. First, read all the files completely. DO NOT start executing yet. Ask me clarifying questions to refine the approach. Only begin once we've aligned."

The mindset shift:

ChatGPT trained you to write better prompts. **Cowork trains you to give better context. One is a skill that fades. The other compounds.**

3. Plugins

Pre-built specialist packs that make Claude an expert instantly.

Without a plugin, Cowork is a brilliant generalist. Plugins change that — bundles of skills, slash commands, and sub-agents built for a specific job function.

Design & Creative

Concepts, mood boards, visual direction

Marketing

Content, campaigns, brand voice

Sales

Inquiry follow-up, proposals, outreach

Productivity

Tasks, calendars, daily workflows

Operations

Process, checklists, vendor tracking

Finance

Budgets, invoices, reporting

Content Writing

Newsletters, blogs, captions

Customer Support

Client questions, response drafting

How to install:

- 1 Open Claude Cowork.
- 2 Click the "+" button in the chat bar, then "Plugins" to browse.
- 3 Or go to **claude.com/plugins** to see everything available.
- 4 Pick the plugin that fits your role and click Install.
- 5 Type "/" in any chat to see the slash commands it adds.

4. Instructions (Global & Folder)

Permanent memory that loads automatically at the start of every session.

Cowork has no memory between sessions. Every new conversation starts fresh — which frustrates people most, until they discover Instructions. These are standing orders you write once; they load automatically at the start of every session. Global instructions apply everywhere. Folder instructions apply when you select a specific folder.

How to set up Global Instructions:

- 1 Go to **Settings > Cowork** in the Claude desktop app.
- 2 Click "Edit" next to Global Instructions.
- 3 Write what you want Claude to always know. Save.

What to put in them:

- Your name, studio, and role ("I run a full-service interior design studio in the Boston area")
- Your communication preferences ("Concise, warm, no filler — the way I write to clients")
- Your output defaults ("Always save documents as .docx unless I say otherwise")
- Your working style ("Always ask clarifying questions before starting any task")
- Things to avoid ("Never use exclamation points in client-facing copy")

Folder instructions work the same way, but project-specific. Each client folder can carry its own brief that Claude loads automatically — so every session on that project starts with full context.

YOUR FIRST PROMPT

"Before we start any work, tell me what you know about me, how I like to work, and any standing preferences you're aware of."

5. Connectors, Scheduled Tasks & Artifacts

Live integrations, recurring jobs, and persistent live views.

The typical AI workflow is full of copy-pasting — screenshots, docs, threads pasted in. Connectors end that: link your tools once and Claude references their live data mid-conversation. Free on all plans, and the most underused feature in Cowork.

How to connect your tools:

- 1 Go to **Settings > Connectors** in Claude Desktop.
- 2 Browse the directory — 60+ integrations (Gmail, Google Drive & Calendar, Slack, Notion, Figma, QuickBooks, and more).
- 3 Click a connector and hit "Add." Authenticate. Done.

AFTER CONNECTING GMAIL

"Summarize my unread client emails from the last 3 days and tell me which ones need a reply today, in order of urgency."

Two newer features worth knowing:

- **Scheduled Tasks** — run the same prompt on a schedule. Try: "Every weekday at 7am, summarize my unread email and text me the top 3." It just runs.
- **Artifacts** — save a live one-page view that re-pulls fresh data every time you open it. Great for a daily project tracker or a client dashboard.

Where Cowork Falls Short

It's the best AI tool for desk work. It is not perfect.

No cross-session memory.

Every new session starts fresh. Workaround: keep context in markdown files and set solid global instructions. Document decisions in files Claude can read.

Tasks stop if you close the app.

Quitting the app stops a task mid-run. Put your computer to sleep instead — the session survives that.

Usage goes faster than regular chat.

Complex tasks eat more of your monthly allocation. On Pro with heavy daily use? Max (\$100–\$200/mo) may be worth it.

Cowork is desktop only.

Cowork runs on the macOS/Windows apps — no iPhone, no browser version. The regular Claude.ai mobile app is still excellent for chat, snapping a photo of a space, and voice on jobsites. Keep your context files in a cloud-synced folder (iCloud, Dropbox, Drive).

It doesn't generate images.

Use Gemini or Midjourney for imagery. Keep Cowork for documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and research.

It's a research preview.

Agent safety is still developing. Enable deletion protection in settings and review plans before running anything sensitive.

Your First 30 Minutes With Cowork

Block 30 minutes on your calendar. Here's exactly what to do.

MIN 0–5 **Install**

Go to claude.com/download. Download the desktop app. Sign in or create an account. Get Pro (\$20/mo). Open it, find the Cowork tab. You're in.

MIN 5–10 **Create Context Files**

Open a text editor. Create **about-me.md**, **brand-voice.md**, **working-style.md**. Save in a folder called "Claude Context." Tip: dictate them with voice-to-text.

MIN 10–15 **Set Global Instructions**

Settings > Cowork > Edit Global Instructions. Paste the highlights from your three files: who you are, how you write, how you want Claude to work. Save.

MIN 15–20 **Run Your First Task**

Select your "Claude Context" folder. Type: "Read all files. Then help me [your task]. Ask me clarifying questions first." Watch what happens. Iterate.

MIN 20–25 **Install a Plugin**

Click "+" > Plugins. Pick one for your role: Design & Creative, Marketing, or Sales. Type "/" to see its commands. Try one, compare to a generic prompt.

MIN 25–30 **Connect One Tool**

Settings > Connectors. Connect Gmail, Google Drive, or Notion. Authenticate. Ask Claude something about it. Watch it pull live data. **That's the moment it clicks.**

The Real Reason to Switch

The designers getting the most from AI aren't the ones with the cleverest prompts. They're the ones who built systems.

Files that store their context. Instructions that persist across sessions. Plugins that specialize the tool. A setup that gets a little better every week.

Cowork is what makes that system possible — and it's worth the 30 minutes to set up.

ChatGPT trained you to write better prompts.

Cowork trains you to build better context.

Quick Reference Links

Download Claude Desktop claude.com/download

Browse Plugins claude.com/plugins

AI for Designers — Class Materials design.bostonautomations.com/ai-for-designers

Original Guide by Nav Toor (@heynavtoor) x.com/heynavtoor

Prompt Cheat Sheet

Copy these word-for-word to get started.

FIRST SESSION

"Read all the files in this folder completely. Then give me a summary of what you know about me, how I work, and what context you have access to."

ANY TASK OPENER

"I want to [YOUR TASK] so that [WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE]. First, read all the files completely. DO NOT start executing yet. Ask me clarifying questions to refine the approach."

EMAIL TRIAGE

"Summarize my unread client emails from the last 3 days and tell me which ones need a reply today, in order of urgency."

ORIGINAL AUTHOR & CREDIT

This guide was written by **Nav Toor (@heynavtoor)** and adapted for the AI for Designers class by Adam Zell. Follow Nav on X for more AI workflow guides.

Adam Zell

Founder & CEO, Boston Automations

adam@bostonautomations.com | bostonautomations.com | (781) 333-8003

Adam Zell | Boston Automations | design.bostonautomations.com/ai-for-designers