

# Hello, Claude

A plain-English field guide to your first AI assistant

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Clarqo Field Guides

AI-authorship note: this guide was written by June Calloway, an AI author working for Clarqo, and is maintained against Anthropic public documentation.

## Before we start

There is a particular kind of quiet disappointment that comes from trying something everyone calls life-changing and feeling nothing.

You open an AI assistant. You type "hello." It says hello back. And then you sit there, cursor blinking, with no idea what to say to a computer that can apparently do anything. So you ask it the capital of France, it gets it right, you think well, so does a search engine, and you close the tab.

If that's you, welcome. You're exactly who this book is for. Not the engineer, not the early adopter who already has opinions about which model is best. Just a curious person who suspects there's something useful here and would like someone to show them, plainly, without the breathless hype.

That's the whole job of this little book. By the end of it you'll be able to sit down with Claude and get real work done: write the awkward email, understand the dense document, plan the trip, learn the thing, and know when not to trust it, which matters just as much.

Let's begin.

## 1. What Claude actually is

Claude is an AI assistant made by a company called Anthropic. The simplest accurate description: it's a program you talk to in ordinary language, and it answers in ordinary language. You type, or speak, a request, and it writes back.

That's it. There's no special syntax to learn, no commands to memorise. If you can write a text message to a knowledgeable, patient colleague, you can use Claude.

It helps to know what's happening underneath, in one paragraph: Claude has learned patterns from a large amount of text: how questions get answered, how arguments get made, how a polite refund email is phrased. When you ask it something, it is not looking up a guaranteed stored answer. It is composing a response based on those patterns. This is why it is brilliant at language tasks and why it sometimes states wrong things with total confidence. Hold on to that idea; it explains almost everything Claude does well and badly.

Claude is genuinely useful for:

- Writing and rewriting: emails, summaries, posts, letters and rough first drafts.
- Explaining: turning something complicated into something you understand, at the

level you ask for.

- Summarising and extracting: key points, dates, obligations, names and next steps.
- Thinking with you: brainstorming, weighing options and talking through a decision.

Claude is not:

- A search engine with a guaranteed-correct database.
- A person, even though it writes like one.
- A calculator or source of live facts unless it is connected to the right tools or data.
- A replacement for professional advice in medical, legal, financial or similarly high-stakes situations.

Try this:

"Explain what you are and what you're good at, in three sentences, as if I'm new to all this."

Read the answer. You've just done the single most useful first move: asking the tool to describe itself.

## 2. Your first five minutes

You reach Claude through the website at [claude.ai](https://claude.ai) in a browser, or through the Claude app on your computer or phone where the app is available. You'll create an account; that's normal and expected.

What you'll see is a single text box. That box is the whole interface, and that's deliberate. Everything happens through conversation.

Here's the mental model that makes it click: it's a chat, not a search. In a search box you type a few keywords and get a list of links. Here, you write a request: a full sentence or two, like you'd say to a helpful person, and you get a response you can reply to.

The back-and-forth is the point. Your first message rarely gets the perfect answer. Your third one often does, because you've been steering.

Try a real task, not a test question. Tests make Claude look like a toy. Real tasks make it look like what it is. For example:

"I need to cancel a gym membership but I'm dreading writing the email. It's been a year, they were fine, I just can't afford it. Can you write something polite and short?"

Notice what happened: you gave it a job, a bit of context, and a constraint: polite and short. It will hand you a usable draft in seconds.

Don't like the tone? Just say so:

"A bit warmer."

Or:

"Make it firmer and shorter."

You are now having a conversation, and that's the whole skill.

Try this:

Think of one small thing you've been putting off that involves words: an email, a message, a note. Ask Claude to draft it. Then reply to its draft three times with small adjustments. Feel how the steering works.

### 3. How to talk to it

People imagine "prompting" is a dark art with secret magic words. It isn't. There are four habits, and once they're second nature you'll barely think about them.

#### Give it context

Claude knows nothing about your situation unless you tell it. The difference between a mediocre answer and a useful one is often the context you provided.

Compare:

"Write a birthday message."

With:

"Write a short, funny birthday message for my brother Tom, who turns 40, loves terrible puns, and is afraid of getting old."

Same effort, much better result.

#### Be specific about what you want

Say the format, length, tone and audience. Useful phrases include:

- "Three bullet points."
- "Two short paragraphs."
- "Explain it to a 12-year-old."
- "Professional but friendly."
- "Give me a checklist."

Vague in, vague out.

#### Show an example when you can

If you want something to match a style, paste an example of that style and say:

"Write it like this, but for my situation."

This often works better than long descriptions of a tone.

#### Iterate instead of restarting

When the answer is 80 percent right, do not open a new conversation and try again from scratch. Reply with what to change:

"Good, but cut the second paragraph and make the ending less formal."

Claude remembers the current conversation, so each reply builds on the last.

That's the whole craft: context, specificity, examples and iteration.

One more useful move:

"Before you write this, ask me any questions you need so the result is actually good."

That sentence turns Claude from a guessing machine into a collaborator.

## 4. Everyday wins

This is where Claude stops being a novelty and becomes part of your day. None of these uses are clever. They're just useful.

### The inbox

Paste an email you received and ask:

""Reply saying yes, I can make Tuesday, and ask them to send the address.""

Or paste a long thread and ask:

""What is actually being decided here, and what do they need from me?""

### The summary

Paste something too long to read: a report, article, policy note or terms document.

Ask for:

- the three things that matter;
- deadlines or decisions;
- anything you should be worried about.

### The blank page

The hardest part of writing is starting. Ask for a rough first draft of anything: a speech, a cover letter, a tricky message to a landlord. Then make it yours.

A bad draft you can fix beats a blank page you can't.

### The explainer

Read something baffling? Paste it and ask:

""Explain this like I've never heard of it.""

Then keep asking "why?" Claude is patient in exactly the way a tired human tutor is not.

### The planner

Try:

""Help me plan three days in Lisbon for two people who like food and walking and hate crowds. Ask me anything you need first.""

Claude can plan with you, adjust on the fly, and keep track of the constraints you already gave it.

### The thinking partner

If you're stuck on a decision, ask:

""I'm choosing between two jobs. Help me think it through. What questions should I be asking myself?""

It should not decide for you. It can help make your own thinking clearer.

Try this:

Pick one section above that matches something on your plate right now and do it for real. The fastest way to learn the tool is to use it on something you actually needed

done.

## 5. Bring your own documents

So far you've been typing or pasting. The next step up is handing Claude a file and talking to it about the contents.

Claude.ai supports document uploads on its current product surfaces, with exact file types and limits documented by Anthropic. Treat those docs as the source of truth, because upload limits and supported formats can change.

Once a file is uploaded, ask about the file directly. This is where Claude can become genuinely useful:

- A long PDF: "Summarise this, then tell me what it says about cancellation fees."
- A photo of a form: "What is this asking me to fill in?"
- A confusing letter: "What is this actually asking me to do, and by when?"
- A spreadsheet of expenses: "Which categories did I spend the most on, and is anything unusual?"

The same four habits apply. Upload the thing, then be specific about what you want from it.

For details that matter, add a grounding request:

""Answer only from the document. If the answer is not in the document, say so."

Or:

""Quote the sentence or section that supports your answer."

That keeps Claude closer to the source and makes it easier for you to check.

A word of care: be thoughtful about uploading anything genuinely sensitive. Do not paste passwords, full card numbers, government ID numbers, private medical details or other people's private information unless you have a strong reason and understand the account's privacy settings.

## 6. Keeping context: Projects

When you start using Claude for something bigger than a one-off question, you will want it to remember the background without you re-explaining everything. That is what a Project is for.

Think of a Project as a workspace for a particular job. It can have its own chats, documents, knowledge and instructions. You put the background in once, then conversations inside the Project can use that context.

For example, a "Job Search" Project might include your CV and an instruction like:

""I'm looking for marketing roles. I prefer a warm but professional tone. Keep cover letters under 250 words."

Now, when you ask for a cover letter inside that Project, Claude has a better starting point.

Projects are useful for:

- a job search;

- a course you are studying;
- planning a wedding or house move;
- a small business;
- a family trip;
- a writing project.

The exact features can vary by account type. Anthropic's current help pages say Projects are available to all users, while expanded project knowledge and team sharing are tied to paid or work plans. Treat the help pages as the source of truth because plan details can change.

You do not need Projects on day one. But the moment you notice yourself pasting the same background information for the third time, that is the signal: make a Project and stop repeating yourself.

## 7. When Claude is wrong

This is the most important chapter in the book, so here it is plainly: Claude can be confidently, completely wrong, and it may not warn you.

Claude composes answers. It does not always look up a guaranteed-correct source before replying. Usually the answer that sounds natural is also useful. Sometimes it is simply false.

People often call this a hallucination. In everyday terms: it can make things up.

Be especially careful with:

- exact dates;
- statistics;
- prices;
- quotes;
- names of laws, studies or reports;
- very recent events;
- anything medical, legal, financial or safety-critical.

How to protect yourself:

1. Match your trust to the stakes. For a birthday poem, imperfection barely matters. For a visa deadline, verify with the official source. 2. Ask for sources, then check them. If a source does not exist or does not say what Claude claims, do not use the claim. 3. Use Claude to get 90 percent of the way there, then do the last 10 percent yourself when it matters. 4. Ask Claude to doubt itself: "What might be wrong here? What should I verify?"

None of this makes Claude useless. It makes it a tool. A writing and thinking partner that is usually helpful, sometimes wrong and never a final authority on high-stakes facts can still be enormously useful.

The skill is not believing every answer. The skill is knowing which answers to check.

## 8. Privacy and good habits

A few simple habits will keep you comfortable and safer.

## Check your privacy settings

What Anthropic may use for model improvement depends on your account type, settings and whether a conversation is flagged or explicitly submitted as feedback. Consumer and work accounts are handled differently.

This is a moving policy area, so do not rely on memory or a blog post. Check Claude's privacy settings and Anthropic's Privacy Center for the current rule.

## Do not paste secrets

Keep passwords, full card numbers, government ID numbers, private medical details and other people's private information out of the chat unless you have a strong reason and understand the account settings.

Treat the text box a little like an email you are not 100 percent sure who will read.

## Be skeptical of instructions

If Claude tells you to click a link, run a command, download a file or change a setting, use normal internet caution. The same care you would apply to advice from a stranger online applies here.

## Use professionals for professional stakes

Claude can help you draft questions for your doctor. It can help you understand a legal letter. It can help you prepare for a financial conversation.

It should not replace the doctor, lawyer, accountant, adviser or official source. For anything affecting your health, money, immigration status, legal standing or safety, treat Claude as a starting point.

Sensible, not scary: that is the safety briefing.

# 9. Your first week

Habits beat intentions. Here is a gentle seven-day plan to make Claude part of how you work. Five minutes a day is enough.

### Day 1: introduce yourself

Ask Claude to explain what it is and what it is good at. Then ask it to write one small thing you have been avoiding.

### Day 2: the inbox

Use Claude on one real email: a reply, a summary of a long thread, or a cleaner version of something you already wrote.

### Day 3: the explainer

Take one thing you do not understand and ask Claude to teach you. Then ask "why?" three times.

### Day 4: a document

Upload a PDF, form or other suitable file and ask questions about the contents. For important details, ask Claude to point you back to the relevant part of the document.

## Day 5: steering

Do any task, then reply five times to refine the result. Make it shorter, warmer, clearer, firmer or more specific. Get used to the conversation.

## Day 6: a Project

Make one Project for something ongoing and add the background. Keep it simple. The point is to stop repeating the same context.

## Day 7: a wrong answer

Ask Claude something factual and hard, then verify the answer elsewhere. This is not a trick. It builds the instinct that keeps you safe.

After a week of this, you will not be reading a book about Claude anymore. You will just be someone who uses it.

# 10. Where to go next

You now have everything you need to be genuinely useful with an AI assistant. The four habits carry you a long way:

- context;
- specificity;
- examples;
- iteration.

A few directions, when you are ready:

## Go deeper on writing

Once you trust the basics, push on style. Feed Claude your own writing and ask it to match your voice. Then edit hard. The goal is not to sound like Claude. The goal is to get a better first draft of something that still sounds like you.

## Try voice

Talking instead of typing changes how Claude feels. It can become more like thinking out loud. This is especially useful for planning, learning and getting unstuck.

## Explore what it connects to

Assistants increasingly connect to the web, files and other tools. Each connection unlocks new tasks. Learn them one at a time, and check the official docs when a feature matters.

## Watch your own habit form

The real milestone is not a feature. It is the first day you reach for Claude before you reach for the search box, because conversation got you a better first pass faster.

That is the destination. Not magic. Just a useful tool you now know how to use, and how to doubt.

# Appendix. A pocket prompt cheat-sheet

Steal these. Replace the bracketed bits.

## Get unstuck on writing

""Write a [length] [email/message/post] that [does what], for [audience]. Tone: [tone]. Here's the context: [context]."

## Make it ask first

""Before you do this, ask me whatever you need so the result is actually good."

## Understand something hard

""Explain [thing] like I've never heard of it. Then give me one everyday analogy."

## Summarise

""Summarise this in [three bullets/two sentences]. Then tell me anything I should be worried about. [paste]"

## Improve a draft

""Here's my draft. Keep my voice, but make it [clearer/shorter/warmer/more confident]. [paste]"

## Check its confidence

""How confident are you in that? What might be wrong, and how would I verify it?"

## Match a style

""Write it in the same style as this example: [paste example]."

## Appendix. Sources and further reading

This edition was checked against Anthropic's public documentation and help pages on 1 June 2026. Product surfaces, limits and privacy wording can change, so check the current pages before relying on exact limits or policy details.

- Intro to Claude (<https://platform.claude.com/docs/en/intro>): Anthropic's high-level description of Claude capabilities.
- Upload files to Claude (<https://support.claude.com/en/articles/8241126-upload-files-to-claude>): current supported document and image uploads, with current file limits.
- What are Projects? (<https://support.claude.com/en/articles/9517075-what-are-projects>): current Projects behavior and plan-dependent features.
- Understanding Claude's personalization features (<https://support.claude.com/en/articles/10185728-understanding-claude-s-personalization-features>): profile preferences, styles, project instructions and past-chat search.
- Is my data used for model training? (<https://privacy.claude.com/en/articles/10023580-is-my-data-used-for-model-training>): Anthropic's current privacy explanation for model training.

Hello, Claude is the first of the Clarqo Field Guides: short, plain-English books that make new technology approachable. It is free to read and free to share.