The Complete Claude Guide

5 tools. One AI. Here's exactly
what each one does, and why it matters.

Anthropic's Claude isn't just a chatbot. In 2026 it's a full suite of five distinct AI tools, each one built for a different type of work. This guide breaks down every product, who it's for, and exactly how to use it.

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What Is Anthropic?

Anthropic is one of the world's leading AI safety companies, founded in 2021 by former OpenAI researchers, including siblings Dario and Daniela Amodei. Their mission is to build AI that is safe, reliable, and genuinely useful.

Claude is Anthropic's AI. Think of it the same way you'd think of Google and Gemini, or Microsoft and Copilot. Anthropic is the company. Claude is the product. And in 2026, Claude has grown from a single chatbot into a full suite of five distinct tools.

THE CLAUDE PRODUCT SUITE AT A GLANCE

■ Claude Chat: conversational AI, no setup required

■ Claude Code: agentic coding tool for developers

■ Claude Cowork: desktop AI worker for non-technical users

■ Claude in Chrome: AI that acts inside your browser

■ Computer Use: AI that controls your entire computer

Each tool uses the same underlying Claude AI. The difference is the interface, the permissions, and how deeply Claude gets access to your work. Think of it as a ladder, from a simple conversation all the way to full autonomous control of your machine.

Why does this matter for you?

Most people discover Claude Chat, use it like a fancy Google search, and never go further. But the real productivity gains, the ones that are replacing entire job functions, live in Cowork, Code, and Computer Use. This guide exists so you know exactly what each tool does, whether it's relevant to your life, and how to get started.

TOOL 01

Claude Chat

The one everyone knows, but most people underuse.

What it is

Claude Chat is the web-based and mobile chatbot available at claude.ai. You type a message, Claude responds. No installation required. It runs entirely in your browser or on the Claude mobile app. This is Claude at its most accessible, and most people who've heard of Claude have only ever used this version.

What makes it unique

Unlike ChatGPT, Claude Chat is known for longer, more nuanced responses and a much larger context window, meaning you can paste in entire documents, long transcripts, or multiple files and Claude will actually read and process all of it. It's also widely regarded as better at tone, writing quality, and following complex instructions.

Access	claude.ai: browser or mobile app
Setup	None, just sign up
Free tier	Yes, with usage limits
Paid plans	Pro ($20/mo), Max ($100–200/mo)
Best for	Writing, research, brainstorming, analysis

What it can do

• Write and edit content: emails, reports, social captions, scripts

• Research and summarise: paste in articles, PDFs, or documents

• Answer complex questions with nuanced, long-form reasoning

• Brainstorm ideas, strategies, and creative concepts

• Analyse data pasted into the chat

• Translate languages and rewrite in different tones or styles

• Help with coding questions (explain, debug, suggest)

What it cannot do

Claude Chat cannot access your local files, create documents on your computer, take actions on websites, or remember things between separate conversations (unless memory is enabled). Every new chat starts fresh. It talks about work, it doesn't do the work on your machine.

Who it's for

→ Anyone who wants a smart assistant for writing and thinking

→ Business owners who need help drafting communications

→ Students researching and summarising content

→ Marketers writing copy, captions, and campaign ideas

→ Anyone just getting started with AI, this is your entry point

EXAMPLE PROMPT

"I run a small business in New Zealand. Write me a punchy 30-second Instagram caption about why AI is going to change small business forever."

TOOL 02

Claude Code

Claude with its hands inside your codebase.

What it is

Claude Code is a command-line tool (CLI) that you install directly on your computer. Instead of responding in a chat window, Claude Code reads your actual files, writes real code, runs tests, fixes errors, and makes changes to your project, autonomously. It was released in early 2025 and quickly became the most talked-about AI coding tool among developers worldwide.

What makes it unique

The key difference from Chat is execution. Claude Chat tells you how to solve a problem. Claude Code solves the problem in your actual files. You give it a task: 'build me a contact form', 'fix this bug', 'refactor this module', and it reads your entire codebase, understands the architecture, and makes the changes itself. You review and approve. It drives.

Access	Terminal / command line (also VS Code + JetBrains plugins)
Setup	Install via terminal, takes ~10 minutes
Free tier	No, requires paid Claude plan
Paid plans	Included with Pro ($20/mo) and above
Best for	Developers, technical builders, vibe coders

What it can do

• Read and understand your entire codebase in context

• Write, refactor, and debug code across multiple files

• Run tests, identify failures, and fix them automatically

• Manage Git: commits, branches, pull requests

• Deploy projects and execute terminal commands

• Build full applications from a description

• Connect to your browser via Claude in Chrome for testing

The non-technical angle

Here's what surprises people: you don't need to be a software engineer to use Claude Code. You need to be comfortable in a terminal, but that's learnable in an afternoon. Marketers, agency owners, and operations managers have picked it up in a day. The concept of 'vibe coding', describing what you want and letting Claude build it, went viral in early 2026, and Claude Code is the engine behind it.

Who it's for

→ Software developers wanting to ship faster

→ Technical founders building their own products

→ Non-developers willing to learn the terminal basics

→ Anyone who wants to build apps, tools, or automations from scratch

→ Teams looking to automate code review and testing

EXAMPLE PROMPT

"Look at all the files in this folder and rename them so they're organised by date and topic. Then create a README that summarises what's in each file."

TOOL 03

Claude Cowork

Claude Code's power, for everyone else.

What it is

Claude Cowork is a desktop application, downloaded at claude.com/download, that lives inside the Claude desktop app as a separate tab alongside Chat and Code. It was launched in January 2026 and is Anthropic's answer to one question: how do we give non-technical people the same autonomous AI capabilities that developers get with Claude Code, without any terminal or coding required?

What makes it unique

The defining feature of Cowork is local folder access. You point Claude at a folder on your computer, give it a task, and it reads across all your files, does multi-step work, and produces real finished outputs (.docx, .xlsx, .pptx) that you can open immediately. It's not generating text in a chat window. It's doing work and leaving behind files.

Access	Claude Desktop app: claude.com/download
Setup	Download app, open Cowork tab, select a folder
Free tier	No, requires paid Claude plan
Paid plans	Pro ($20/mo) and above
Best for	Non-technical knowledge workers, business owners

What it can do

• Read and synthesise content across many files at once

• Create Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, and PowerPoint decks

• Organise, rename, and sort files in a folder

• Run multi-step tasks autonomously while you do other work

• Connect to Gmail, Google Drive, Slack, and other tools via connectors

• Build structured reports from raw notes or data files

• Schedule recurring tasks (weekly reports, summaries, etc.)

The mindset shift

ChatGPT trained you to write better prompts. Cowork is different: the game is folders and files. You give Claude a folder full of context about your business: your writing style, your SOPs, your past work. That folder becomes Claude's briefing. It works like an employee who's read everything you've ever written.

Who it's for

→ Business owners who want AI to actually complete tasks, not just advise

→ Operations managers drowning in repetitive document work

→ Consultants who produce reports, decks, and client deliverables

→ Non-technical teams who want Claude Code-level power without coding

→ Anyone who's ever spent hours manually organising or formatting files

EXAMPLE PROMPT

"Read everything in this folder and write me a one-page business summary I can send to a new client. Save it as a Word document with my branding colours and a professional layout."

TOOL 04

Claude in Chrome

AI that lives in your browser and acts on what it sees.

What it is

Claude in Chrome is a browser extension installed from the Chrome Web Store, that sits in a sidebar while you browse. Unlike the other Claude tools, this one operates inside your browser in real time. It can see the pages you're looking at and take actions on them: clicking buttons, filling in forms, extracting data, navigating between pages. It launched in beta and is available to all paid plan users.

What makes it unique

Every other tool in the Claude suite works with files or code on your machine. Claude in Chrome works on the live web. It sees what you see and can act on it. This is especially powerful paired with Cowork: Chrome becomes the research layer, gathering and extracting information from websites, while Cowork turns that research into polished finished files.

Access	Chrome Web Store, search 'Claude'
Setup	Install extension, sign in, grant permissions
Free tier	No, requires paid Claude plan
Paid plans	Pro (Haiku model), Max/Team/Enterprise (full model choice)
Best for	Research, data extraction, repetitive browser tasks

What it can do

- Read and summarise any webpage you're currently on

- Click buttons, fill forms, and navigate websites on your behalf

- Extract structured data from websites without copy-pasting

- Run multi-step workflows across multiple browser tabs

- Record a workflow once, Claude learns to repeat it automatically

- Schedule browser tasks to run on a recurring basis

- Pair with Cowork to turn web research into finished reports

A note on safety

Because this extension has access to your browser, Anthropic strongly recommends only granting permissions to familiar websites, always reviewing before Claude handles financial or sensitive tasks, and being aware that some websites contain hidden instructions designed to hijack AI assistants (called prompt injection). The extension has defences against this, but staying alert is good practice.

Who it's for

→ Researchers who regularly extract data from multiple websites

→ Sales teams doing manual prospect research and data entry

→ Content creators who spend hours reading and summarising sources

→ Anyone with repetitive browser tasks they do the same way every time

→ People who use Cowork and want to add a live web research layer

EXAMPLE PROMPT

"Read this competitor's website and pull out their pricing, their top three features, and who their target customer is. Format it as a comparison table."

TOOL 05

Computer Use

Claude controlling your entire machine. From your phone.

What it is

Computer Use is not a separate app, it's a capability built inside Claude Cowork and Claude Code that was launched on March 23, 2026. When enabled, Claude can control your entire Mac: clicking, typing, scrolling, opening apps, navigating your desktop. It's not limited to the browser or your files, it can use any application on your computer, just like a human would.

What makes it unique

The wow factor is Dispatch, Anthropic's phone-to-desktop feature. You send Claude a task from your iPhone. Claude works on your Mac while you're away. You come back to finished work. The sequence is: message from phone → Claude opens apps, clicks around your desktop, completes the task → you return to the result. No one sitting at the computer required.

Access	Inside Claude Cowork or Claude Code desktop app
Setup	Enable in desktop app settings, macOS only (March 2026)
Free tier	No, Pro ($20/mo) or Max ($100/mo)
Status	Research preview, still early, some tasks may need retries
Best for	Automating desktop workflows, apps without API connectors

How Claude decides what to use

Claude always tries the most precise tool first. It follows a three-level priority system:

LEVEL	METHOD	EXAMPLE
1st	Connectors	Uses Gmail API to read your email directly
2nd	Claude in Chrome	Opens browser, navigates to Gmail
3rd	Computer Use	Clicks around your desktop like a human would

What it can do

Open any application on your Mac and interact with it

• Navigate to websites, log in, and complete tasks inside them

• Fill spreadsheets with data from multiple sources

• Draft and send emails from your actual email client

• Move, organise, and rename files across your desktop

• Run apps that have no API or Claude connector available

• Work autonomously on your Mac while you're not there (via Dispatch)

Important caveats

Computer Use is in research preview, it's powerful but not perfect. Complex tasks sometimes need a second attempt. Screen-based navigation is slower than a direct API integration. Anthropic strongly recommends not using it with banking, healthcare, or other sensitive apps at this stage, and to always review Claude's planned actions before approving them.

Who it's for

→ Power users who want to automate desktop workflows end-to-end

→ Business owners who want to assign tasks from their phone

→ Teams working with legacy software that has no API or integration

→ Anyone who does the same multi-step computer tasks repeatedly

→ Early adopters who want to be ahead of where this is heading

EXAMPLE PROMPT

"Open Google Chrome, go to Gmail, and draft an email to my team saying our Monday meeting is pushed to 2pm. Use my usual sign-off."

07

Quick Comparison

TOOL	INTERFACE	TOUCHES YOUR FILES?	NEEDS SETUP?	BEST USE
Claude Chat	Browser / Mobile	No	No	Writing, Q&A, research
Claude Code	Terminal / IDE	Yes, code	Yes	Building & coding
Claude Cowork	Desktop App	Yes, any	Yes	Knowledge work & docs
Claude in Chrome	Browser Extension	No, web only	Yes	Research & web tasks
Computer Use	Inside Cowork/Code	Yes, all apps	Yes	Full desktop automation

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Where Should You Start?

The right tool depends entirely on who you are and what you're trying to do. Here's the honest guide:

Complete beginner to AI

Start with Claude Chat. Get a free account at claude.ai, ask it something you'd normally Google, and notice the difference. Once you're comfortable, upgrade to Pro and explore Cowork.

Business owner with repetitive admin work

Go straight to Claude Cowork. Download the desktop app, point it at a folder with your business documents, and ask it to produce something: a report, a summary, an email draft. The moment you open a real finished file that Claude created, you'll understand the shift.

Developer or technical builder

Claude Code is your tool. Install it, point it at a project, and give it a task. Start small: fix a bug, write a function, then scale up. The productivity gains compound quickly.

Content creator or researcher

Claude in Chrome paired with Claude Chat is your stack. Use Chrome to gather and extract information from websites, then use Chat or Cowork to turn that research into content.

Power user or early adopter

Enable Computer Use inside Cowork and try Dispatch. Send a task from your phone, step away, and come back to the result. This is the frontier, it's rough around the edges but it's a preview of how most computer work will happen in a few years.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Claude isn't one thing. It's a ladder. You don't have to climb all of it at once. Start where you are, get comfortable, then go deeper. Every step up gives you more of your time back.

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