

Claude Cowork

Beginner's Guide

The practical guide for Dutch professionals who truly want to use AI in their daily work. From first steps to advanced workflows - everything you need to start today.

By Erik van der Veen

AI trainer | 180+ training sessions given | 22,898 LinkedIn followers

claudecoworkexpert.com

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1. What is Claude Cowork?

Claude Cowork is an AI assistant from Anthropic that works directly on your desktop. While ChatGPT and other AI tools are chat windows where you type text and get text back, Cowork is fundamentally different: it works with your files, your apps, and your screen.

Imagine a digital colleague sitting next to you. You give an instruction, for example "summarize these 5 reports" or "build a dashboard from this Excel file", and Cowork executes it. It opens files, creates new documents, analyzes data, and delivers concrete output. No text to copy, but actual files you can use immediately.

Cowork is available as part of the Claude Desktop app for macOS (Apple Silicon, M1 or newer) and Windows. It is currently a research preview for paid subscriptions.

Key features

Skills

Skills are reusable instruction sets that you can add to Cowork. Think of a skill for creating presentations, writing emails in your style, or analyzing data according to a fixed format. You can also create your own skills or install skills from others.

Connectors

Connectors link Cowork to external services like Google Drive, Slack, Gmail, Notion and more. This allows Claude to retrieve information directly from or write to the tools you already use. There are now over 38 connectors available.

Dispatch

With Dispatch, you give Claude a task via your phone and let it work independently on your desktop. You can walk away, grab a coffee or sit in a meeting, and when you come back the work is done. Dispatch turns Claude into a real colleague who keeps working when you're not around.

Projects

With Projects, you organize your Cowork sessions by topic, client, or project. Each project has its own working folder, context, and history. This way you don't have to keep re-explaining what you're working on.

Scheduled Tasks

You can schedule tasks that Cowork executes automatically, one-time or recurring. Think of a weekly report, a daily summary of your inbox, or automatically processing incoming files.

The difference with regular AI chatbots

	Regular AI Chat	Claude Cowork
Works with your files	No	Yes
Creates actual documents	No	Yes (PDF, Excel, PPT...)
Multiple steps automatically	No	Yes
Access to your desktop	No	Yes (Computer Use)
Run tasks while you're away	No	Yes (Dispatch)

2. Who is it for?

Cowork is specifically designed for knowledge workers who are not developers. You don't need to be able to code. If you can explain what you want, Cowork can do it for you.

- Marketers - content creation, data analysis, campaign planning
- Entrepreneurs - administration, reporting, presentations
- Consultants - research, reports, client materials
- Managers - meeting preparation, KPI dashboards, overviews
- Finance professionals - processing bank statements, organizing bookkeeping, dashboards
- HR professionals - job descriptions, onboarding materials, analyses
- Anyone who works extensively with documents, data and email

3. What do you need?

- A Mac with Apple Silicon (M1 or newer) or a Windows computer
- The Claude Desktop app (free to download at claude.ai/download)
- A paid Claude subscription (Pro, Max, Team, or Enterprise)
- An internet connection

4. Get started in 5 minutes

Step 1: Download Claude Desktop

Go to claude.ai/download and install the app for your operating system.

Step 2: Log in with your account

Open the app and log in. You need a Pro or Max subscription for Cowork.

Step 3: Open Cowork

At the top of the app you see three tabs: Chat, Cowork and Code. Click on Cowork.

Step 4: Select a folder

Cowork will ask you to choose a folder. This is the working folder where Claude can read, edit and create files. Choose a folder with files you want to work with, or create a new folder.

Step 5: Give your first task

Type for example: "Create a summary of all PDF files in this folder" or "Make an Excel overview of the data in these files". Claude plans the task, executes it, and delivers the result.

*"Start with something small. Give Cowork a document and ask for a summary.
Once you see how fast and good it works, you'll never want to go back."*

- Erik van der Veen

5. 10 practical use cases

These are applications I use daily in my own work and show in trainings. No theory, this actually works.

1. Create dashboards from data

The problem: You have CSV, Excel or JSON files with raw data, but have no overview.

What Claude Cowork does: Upload your data file and ask Cowork to create a visual dashboard. It analyzes the data, creates charts and tables, and delivers an interactive HTML dashboard that you open in your browser.

Result: From raw data file to professional dashboard in 3-5 minutes.

2. Complete Excel files with charts

The problem: You need to create a report or overview in Excel, including formulas and charts.

What Claude Cowork does: Describe what you need. Cowork creates a fully formatted Excel file with data, formulas, pivot tables and charts. Ready to send.

Result: Professional spreadsheets in minutes, not hours.

3. Build prompt generators in HTML

The problem: Your team uses AI but everyone has a different way of prompting, with varying quality.

What Claude Cowork does: Cowork builds a custom HTML tool: a prompt generator with dropdowns, input fields and pre-set templates. Everyone on the team can use it directly.

Result: Consistent AI results for the entire company.

4. Create presentations

The problem: Going from loose notes to a neat PowerPoint takes too much time.

What Claude Cowork does: Give Cowork your notes, briefing or meeting notes. It creates a complete slide deck with structure, text and formatting. You only need to fine-tune.

Result: 20 slides in less than 10 minutes.

5. Analyze Google Search Console data

The problem: You want to know how your website is performing but interpreting the data takes time.

What Claude Cowork does: Export your Search Console data and give it to Cowork. It analyzes your search terms, positions, CTR and impressions. You get concrete SEO advice back.

Result: From raw data to actionable SEO insights.

6. Analyze brand identity and create brand book

The problem: You have a website but no documented brand book with colors, fonts and style guidelines.

What Claude Cowork does: Let Cowork visit your website and analyze the stylesheet. It extracts all colors, fonts, spacing and design patterns and creates a complete brand book.

Result: A professional brand book without a designer.

7. Merge and deduplicate Excel files

The problem: You receive multiple Excel files from suppliers that you need to combine and clean up.

What Claude Cowork does: Give all files to Cowork with the task: merge, remove duplicates, check data. It delivers one clean, merged file.

Result: Hours of manual work becomes 5 minutes.

8. Process bank statements to dashboard

The problem: You have bank statements but no overview of your expenses and income.

What Claude Cowork does: Upload your bank statements (CSV or PDF). Cowork categorizes transactions, calculates totals by category and creates a visual dashboard of your finances.

Result: Complete bookkeeping insights from raw bank data.

9. Summarize and process documents

The problem: You receive a 40-page report and have 5 minutes.

What Claude Cowork does: Upload the document. Cowork reads everything, summarizes, extracts key points and if needed creates an email for your team with the important conclusions.

Result: 40 pages in 5 bullets. With a ready-made email underneath.

10. Research and competitor analysis

The problem: You need to research a market, competitor or topic but are drowning in information.

What Claude Cowork does: Give Cowork a research question. It searches sources, compares information, and delivers a structured report with findings and recommendations.

Result: Thorough research in a fraction of the time.

6. Costs and subscriptions

Claude Cowork is part of the Claude Desktop app. You need a paid subscription. These are the options (prices as of April 2026):

Subscription	Price/month	Cowork	Note
Free	Free	No	Chat mode only
Pro	From \$20	Yes	For individual use
Max (5x)	\$100	Yes	More capacity
Max (20x)	\$200	Yes	Maximum capacity
Team	\$30/user	Yes	For teams (min. 5)
Enterprise	On request	Yes	SSO, compliance, audit

My advice: start with Pro (from \$20/month). That's enough to discover Cowork and build your first workflows. If you notice you're hitting limits, you can upgrade to Max.

Download: go to claude.ai/download to download the Claude Desktop app. The app is free; you only pay for the subscription.

7. Tips from a trainer

After 180+ AI training sessions, I see the same mistakes and the same breakthroughs over and over. These are my most important tips:

Start small, build up

Don't start with your most complex task. Begin with something simple: a summary, a translation, a simple overview. Get comfortable with how Cowork works, then build from there.

Give context, not just a task

"Write something about marketing" doesn't work. "Write a LinkedIn post of 200 words about email marketing for SMB entrepreneurs, in an informal but professional tone" does. The more specific you are, the better the result.

Use your own files

The power of Cowork lies in working with your documents and data. Upload your own Excel, PDFs and emails. That makes the difference from a regular chatbot.

Set up Global Instructions

In Settings you can set fixed instructions that apply to every session. Put your preferred language, writing style and standard formats here.

Let Claude ask questions

Give the instruction: "Before you start, ask me 3 clarifying questions." That delivers much better results.

8. Frequently asked questions

Is Claude Cowork safe for business data?

Claude Cowork runs locally on your computer. Your files are not permanently stored by Anthropic. For team and enterprise use, there are additional security options. Always check the privacy policy for your specific situation.

Do I need to be able to program?

No. Cowork is specifically designed for people who don't write code. You give instructions in plain language.

What if I'm not satisfied with the result?

Give feedback. Say exactly what you want to change. Cowork learns from your corrections within the same session and adjusts the result.

9. Next steps

You now have the basics. Here's how you move forward:

Today: Download Claude Desktop, get a Pro subscription, and run your first Cowork task.

This week: Try 3 of the 10 use cases from this guide. Start with #9 (summarizing documents), that's the easiest.

This month: Build your first own workflow. Discover which tasks in your work take the most time and automate those with Cowork.

Want to learn more?

Free webinar

"Work smarter with Claude Cowork: 7 practical applications for your daily work"
Sign up at claudecoworkexpert.com

Workshop / Training

Live online or on-site workshop - hands-on, practical, tailored to your needs.
Check out the offerings at claudecoworkexpert.com/en/workshop/

Weekly tips

Subscribe to the newsletter and receive new workflows, prompts and tips every week.
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Follow Erik van der Veen on LinkedIn for daily AI tips. **Tips in Dutch.**
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