

CLAUDE CODE

A Beginner's Guide

Step-by-step setup and first use — explained simply. No coding experience needed. If you want screenshots of the setup, look at my article [here](#).

INTRODUCTION

What Is Claude Code?

Claude Code is Anthropic's AI agent — the version of Claude that can actually do things on your computer, not just chat. You don't need to know how to write code. You just describe what you want in plain English, and Claude builds it.

Think of it as the difference between asking someone for directions and having them drive you there. Claude.ai is the directions. Claude Code is the driver.

Give it a task — "make me a website about cats" or "build a homework tracker" — and it writes the files, runs the code, and saves everything into your project folder. You watch it work in real time and steer it with plain conversation.

PHASE 1 — GETTING YOUR SUPPLIES

Three Things to Set Up Before You Start

1. Get a Paid Account

You need a Claude Pro subscription. Sign up at claude.ai — it starts at around \$20/month. The basic plan is fine to begin with. You can always upgrade later if you find yourself using it heavily.

2. Download VS Code

VS Code (Visual Studio Code) is the program Claude lives and works inside. Think of it as Google Docs, but for building software. Download it free from the VS Code website and install it like any other app.

3. Install the Claude Code Extension

Open VS Code. On the left sidebar there's an icon that looks like four squares — that's the Extensions panel. Click it, search for Claude, and install the one called Claude Code. Once it's installed, a small Claude icon will appear in the corner of your screen. That's your entry point.

PHASE 2 — TURNING IT ON

Log In and Create Your Project Space

4. Log In

Click the Claude icon in VS Code. Type `/login` or click the login button it shows you. A browser window will open — click Authorize to confirm it's you. Your computer is now connected.

5. Create Your Project Folder

Create a new empty folder anywhere on your computer and give it a name — "My-First-App" works fine. In VS Code, go to File → Open Folder and select it.

This folder is Claude's room. Everything it builds goes here, and it only ever touches files inside this folder — it can't wander into the rest of your computer.

PHASE 3 — TEACHING CLAUDE THE RULES

Two One-Time Settings That Make Everything Smoother

6. Handle Permissions

By default Claude asks permission before doing almost anything — "Can I read this file?", "Can I search the web?" — for every single action. This gets exhausting fast.

The fix is simple. Paste this into the chat box once and Claude will stop asking for every small, safe thing:

```
add permissions to this claude code project to allow non-destructive bash
commands,
reading files, and searching the internet without asking for confirmation each
time.
```

This doesn't let Claude delete files or touch anything outside your project folder. It just removes the constant hand-holding for safe actions.

7. Understand Claude's Two Modes

Claude has two main modes and you switch between them depending on what you want.

Plan Mode is for thinking and talking. Claude discusses what you want to build, works through the approach with you, but doesn't touch your files. Use this when you're still figuring things out.

Edit Mode is for building. Claude actually creates and modifies files on your computer. Switch to this when you're ready to go.

Good habit: start in Plan Mode to agree on the direction, then switch to Edit Mode to build. It saves a lot of back-and-forth.

PHASE 4 — START BUILDING

Three Features That Will Make Claude More Useful

8. Just Ask

Type what you want in the chat box. Claude thinks, looks at your folder, and starts writing. You don't need technical language — plain English is fine.

```
"Create a game where a snake eats apples."  
"Make a schedule for my homework."  
"Build a simple webpage that shows today's weather."  
"Write a script that renames all my photos by date."
```

If Claude misunderstands, correct it the same way you'd correct a person: "No, I meant the background should be blue, not the text." It will adjust and try again.

9. The Memory File — CLAUDE.md

Claude has no memory between conversations by default. Every time you open a new chat, it starts fresh. You can fix this by asking it to create a file called CLAUDE.md in your project folder.

Say something like: *"Create a CLAUDE.md file. Remember that I always want my apps to use blue as the main color, and keep all explanations short."*

Every time you start a new conversation, Claude reads this file first. It's how you give it a persistent set of preferences and rules without repeating yourself every session.

10. Skills — Shortcuts You Teach Once

Skills are custom shortcuts you define once and reuse forever. You describe a task in detail, give it a name, and from then on you trigger the whole thing with one word.

For example, you can teach Claude a skill called `/post` that automatically drafts a social media post from any text you paste. Set it up once, use it every day without re-explaining anything.

SUMMARY

Setup Checklist

Run through this once. After step 4 you're building.

1. Sign up for Claude Pro at claude.ai
2. Download and install VS Code
3. Install the Claude Code extension inside VS Code
4. Click the Claude icon → log in → open your project folder
5. Type what you want to build
6. Optional: paste the permissions command to stop the constant prompts
7. Optional: ask Claude to create `CLAUDE.md` with your preferences

QUICK REFERENCE

Things You Can Ask Claude to Build

CATEGORY	EXAMPLE PROMPT
Game	"Create a game where a snake eats apples."
Website	"Make a simple webpage about my dog."
Tool	"Write a script that renames all my photos by date."
Organizer	"Build a homework schedule tracker."
Content	"Draft a LinkedIn post from this article I pasted."
Automation	"Every morning, email me a summary of my to-do list."