

The skills starter kit

A skill is instructions Claude follows every single time, for one job. Think of it as your SOPs, finally used. The test: if you explain the same thing to Claude two times a week or more, make it a skill.

TIME About 15 minutes per skill

YOU NEED A paid Claude plan (Pro or higher)

What you end up with

A short set of instructions Claude reads before it does a job you do all the time, so you stop re-explaining yourself. You say four words and it runs the way you would run it, in the order you would run it, avoiding the mistakes you have already corrected once.

Honest version: a skill is not magic and it is not code. It is the written version of how you train a new hire. If you cannot explain the job out loud, the skill will not save you, and that is worth finding out.

What you need

- A paid Claude plan.
- One job you do at least weekly and always do the same way.
- One example of that job done well, that you can paste in.

Where skills live

Open Settings in Claude and find Skills (on some plans it sits under Capabilities). You can create one there, or simply ask Claude in any chat to build one with you.

1. Pick the right first skill

Not the most impressive one. The one you do most often and hate most. Three tests: you do it at least once a week, you do it roughly the same way every time, and you can tell in ten seconds whether the result is good. If a job fails the third test, it is not ready to be a skill.

2. The fastest way to write one: let Claude interview you

Open a new chat, turn on voice-to-text, and paste this. Answer out loud, like you are training a new hire, because you are. Talking gets you the real version; typing gets you the tidy one.

THE INTERVIEW PROMPT

I want to build a Claude skill for [the job, e.g. writing proposals]. Interview me one question at a time until you understand exactly how I do it: what triggers it, the steps in order, what good looks like, what I never want, and an example of one I was happy with. Then write the skill for me.

3. The template every good skill follows

THE SKILL TEMPLATE

Name: [short name]
When to use: [the words or situations that should trigger it]
Steps:
1. [first thing]
2. [next thing]
3. [...]
What good looks like: [paste an example you were happy with]
Never: [the mistakes you keep correcting]

Four parts, and the last two are the ones people leave out. A skill with no example guesses at your standard. A skill with no never list makes the same mistake every week.

4. Three to start with

EMAILS IN MY VOICE

Name: my-emails
When to use: whenever I ask you to write or reply to an email.
Steps:
1. Ask who it is to and what I want to happen, if I did not say.
2. Lead with the point in the first line.
3. Keep it to 3 to 5 short sentences unless I ask for more.
4. End with one clear next step.
What good looks like: [paste 2 or 3 emails you sent and liked]
Never: "I hope this email finds you well," "circling back," "just checking in," more than one question.

WEEKLY CONTENT PLAN

Name: content-plan
When to use: when I say "plan my content" or "what should I post this week."
Steps:
1. Ask what happened in the business this week: wins, client stories, questions people asked.
2. Turn the best three into post ideas, each with one clear point.
3. Write a hook for each that works in the first second.
4. Give me a simple posting schedule for the week.
What good looks like: [paste a post that did well]
Never: generic tips with no real example, anything I did not actually do.

FIRST DRAFT OF A PROPOSAL

Name: proposal-draft

When to use: when I share call notes and say "draft the proposal."

Steps:

1. Pull out their problem in their own words, and what it costs them.
2. Write the outcome they want before anything about us.
3. Lay out what we will do, in phases, with what they get at the end of each.
4. Leave the price as [PRICE] for me to fill in.

What good looks like: [paste a proposal that closed]

Never: invented numbers or timelines, jargon, more than two pages.

5. Test it on a job you have already done

Run the skill on last week's work, where you already know the answer, and compare. You are not checking whether it is impressive. You are checking whether it is you.

THE TEST PROMPT

Run [skill name] on this: [paste the real input from a job you already did].

Then tell me which step you were on when you made each choice, and anything in the skill that was unclear or that you had to guess at.

I have the real version. I am going to compare them.

The second half of that prompt is the useful half. Every place it had to guess is a line the skill is missing.

6. Correct it into the skill, not the chat

Fixing it in the chat fixes today. Fixing it in the skill fixes every week after. When you correct something, say why, then put the why in the Never list.

The never list is the most valuable part of the skill, and it is the only part you cannot write on day one. It gets written one mistake at a time.

What goes wrong, and the fix

- It never triggers. The "when to use" does not match the words you actually type. Put your real phrases in, including the lazy ones.
- It does two jobs badly. One job per skill. "Write emails and plan content" is two skills.
- It ignores a step. The steps are vague. "Research them" is not a step. "Look up their company site and their last three posts, and tell me what changed recently" is.
- The output is close but not yours. There is no example in it. One real example beats a page of instructions.
- It works once and then drifts. You have been correcting it in chat. Move the corrections into the skill.

Before you rely on it

- Run it on three real jobs, not one.
- Check it never invents a number, a name or a date. If it did once, it will again: put it in the Never list.
- Read the skill back as if you were the new hire. If a step needs you to already know something, write that down.

Skills are how a business stops living in one person's head. Every one you write is a job someone else could now do the way you do it, which is the same thing as being able to hire.

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