

From basic chat to full workflow automation — each layer builds on the last.

## 1 Chat

- **The starting point** — open [claude.ai](https://claude.ai) and start typing. No setup needed.
- **Enable Extended Thinking** — toggle it on for complex questions. Claude reasons step-by-step before responding.
- **Use Search before every prompt** — Claude can search the web for current information. Always enable it for factual queries.
- **Best for:** brainstorming, drafting, quick analysis, and learning.

## 2 Cowork

- **Reads your actual files** — drop a folder and Claude can see everything inside it.
- **Creates real documents** — Excel spreadsheets, Word docs, PDFs, and code files saved directly to your folder.
- **Runs autonomously** — give it a task, and it works through it step by step without hand-holding.
- **Best for:** document production, file analysis, and multi-step tasks.

## 3 Projects

- **The memory layer** — one project per client, topic, or initiative. Context persists across conversations.
- **Drop docs and context files** — upload your brand guide, strategy doc, or data set. Claude references them automatically.
- **Custom instructions per project** — set tone, format, and rules that apply to every conversation in that project.
- **Best for:** ongoing workstreams, client engagements, and complex initiatives.

## 4 Skills

- **Permanent personal standards** — write your rules, tone, and format preferences once. Claude applies them automatically.
- **Reusable across all projects** — a skill works everywhere, not just in one project.
- **Community libraries available** — install pre-built skills from [skills.sh](https://skills.sh), [skillsmp.com](https://skillsmp.com), and [skillhub.club](https://skillhub.club).
- **Best for:** consistent output quality, brand voice, and repeatable workflows.

## 5 Connectors

- **Link your tools** — connect Google Drive, Slack, Notion, and more. Claude searches them on demand.
- **No copy-pasting data** — Claude pulls information directly from your connected services.
- **Account-level** — set up once and connectors follow you across projects and conversations.
- **Best for:** referencing live data, searching documents, and cross-tool workflows.

## 6 Artifacts

- **The output layer** — build documents, trackers, dashboards, and calculators directly in chat.
- **Edit live** — modify artifacts in real time. Claude updates them as you refine your request.
- **Shareable** — export or share artifacts with colleagues without leaving Claude.
- **Best for:** interactive documents, visual outputs, and rapid prototyping.

## 7 Excel Add-in

- **Reads actual formulas, tabs, and cell references** — not just the visible text, but the structure of your spreadsheet.
- **Works inside Excel** — no need to export or copy data. Claude analyses your workbook in place.
- **Best for:** financial models, data cleanup, formula debugging, and spreadsheet automation.

## 8 Plugins

- **One-click skill packs** — pre-built bundles for Sales, Marketing, Legal, Data, and more.
- **Instant capability boost** — install a plugin and Claude gains domain-specific knowledge and workflows.
- **Best for:** rapid adoption across teams and standardised output by function.

Source: Gabriel Millien — Layer by layer, Claude becomes your operating system for knowledge work.