

Claude Cowork or Claude Code?

How I decide which one to use



THE RULE OF THUMB

If you're unsure, just ask Claude. Give it a brain dump of what you're trying to accomplish and ask whether Cowork or Code is the better fit. In general, default to Claude Cowork, and only use Claude Code if you get stuck.

When I use Claude Cowork

Scenario / Task	Description	Examples
General requests	Everyday questions and asks, the same way you'd use a regular Claude chat.	Thinking through a decision, summarizing an article, prepping for a meeting
Documents & writing	Anything you write, or anything you produce over and over.	Emails, drafts, blogs, long-form documents, and repeatable outputs like Word docs, PDFs, presentations, one-pagers and invoices
Recurring project work	An ongoing project or client you keep coming back to.	A chat session you return to for a specific project or client
Everyday app work	Working with the apps you already use: Email, Calendar, Drive, Slack.	Drafting replies to unanswered emails, finding a time for a meeting, pulling last quarter's proposal from Drive
Scheduled tasks	Work you want done on a schedule (as often as hourly), without having to ask each time.	A check that runs every hour, a morning brief that runs every weekday, a weekly report that runs every Monday

When I use Claude Code

Scenario / Task	Description	Examples
Data-intensive tasks	When you know there's a lot of data involved, or a task means hundreds of lookups or updates in another tool.	Spreadsheet analysis, pulling public data from websites, analyzing YouTube transcripts
Event-triggered tasks	When you want a task to start because something happened (not on a schedule), or if you need a task to run more often than hourly.	Starting a task when another app sends a signal, like a new form submission passed along by Make.com or Zapier
Apps and websites	Anything that involves building, especially something you'll look at and click around in.	Ongoing website updates, custom apps, clickable interfaces for tracking projects/data
Unknown complexity	When you're not sure it's even possible, or it's beyond your technical know-how. It may be worth asking Claude Code.	"Is there a way to automate this?" or "Can these two tools talk to each other?"

Good to know about Claude Code

- I think of Claude Code as the engineer who knows a lot more than I do. It can often do things I didn't know were possible, but it will quickly produce work I may not fully understand or be able to check quickly, so it carries more risk.
- Cowork and Code can use the **same project folders**, so you can have a Cowork session and a Code session working off the same folder. This is fairly common. For example, write the content for a new web page in Cowork, then have Code put it on your site.
- Claude Code is more powerful, and it will try to find a way to get your task done that you may not have thought of. That's good, but it's also part of the risk.
- Start small and test what it builds before you rely on it. Don't point it at anything you can't undo, like your live website or customer records, until you trust the result.
- Claude Code will generally use more of your usage (tokens), since it tries different ways to accomplish your task.
- Set up Claude Code the same way you use Cowork: give it a project folder to keep it organized and to control what it can access.
- You don't need to be a developer to use Claude Code. It's a tab in the same Claude desktop app.