



Claude Prompt vs. Project vs. Skills

Same AI. Three levels of setup. Here's how to pick.



Prompt

The gist: You type instructions every time. Claude does the task. You repeat yourself next time.

Where it lives: Any Claude chat or Cowork session

First time setup: Zero. You just type.

Projects:

You upload files and write instructions once. Claude remembers them in every chat inside that Project.

Claude.ai (browser) or Cowork (desktop app)

~5 min. Create a Project, upload files, write instructions.

Skills:

You teach Claude a process once. It fires automatically when it recognizes the task. No prompt needed.

Cowork only. Installed via Settings → Capabilities → Skills.

~15 min. Use the skill-creator. Answer an interview. Save the file.

The real difference

Prompt:

The skill you need: Writing clear, detailed instructions

Output quality: generic unless you prompt very well

The vibe: telling a stranger how to do your job every morning

Projects

The skill you need: picking the right files and clear instructions

Output quality: consistent. Claude knows your style and context.

The vibe: giving a new hire a binder on day one. They read it before every task.

Skills:

The skill you need: Being specific during the interview. "I write reports" is useless. "I write reports that always start with the headline metric" is a Skill.

Output quality: consistent AND automatic. Same quality every time.

The vibe: training an employee once. They follow forever.

What it can do:

Activates automatically

Handles your tone of voice

Handles your workflow steps

Works with Cowork (file creation, code, agents)

Saves tokens

Prompt

No. You write the instructions every time.

Only if you explain it in the prompt.

Only if you list them every time.

Yes, inside Cowork.

No. Long prompts eat your usage.

Projects

No. You have to open the right Project first.

Yes, if you uploaded a voice file or examples.

Only if you wrote them in the instructions.

Yes, inside Cowork Projects.

Somewhat. You stop repeating context.

Skills

Yes. Claude recognizes the task and activates the right Skill on its own.

No. Skills handle process, not voice. Your voice file in the folder handles tone. They stack.

Yes. That's exactly what a Skill is: your step-by-step process, packaged.

Yes, inside Cowork. Skills fire on top of everything else.

Yes. Claude only reads the 3-line header. Full instructions load only when needed.

Start with a Prompt if...

- It's a one-off task.
- You don't need Claude to know your style.
- You just want an answer, fast.
- You'll never do this exact task again.

Set up a Project when...

- You do the same task every week (newsletter, reports).
- You're tired of repeating yourself.
- You want your context saved forever, not just for one session.

Build a Skill when...

- You've typed the same instructions at the start of more than 3 conversations.
- You want Claude to recognize the task and just do it.
- You want the process to be portable. Share it with your team or move it to another AI.
- You want to stop prompting entirely.

	PROMPT	PROJECTS	SKILLS
YOUR IDENTITY	It doesn't. Every chat starts blank. You re-explain who you are.	Yes. From the files and instructions you set once.	Yes, but differently. A Skill knows how you do a task, not who you are. It pairs with your voice file.
CONTEXT INPUT	You paste it into the chat. Every. Single. Time.	You upload files and write instructions once. They stick.	You answer an interview once. The skill-creator packages it into a file. Done.
ACROSS CONVERSATIONS	Gone when you start a new chat.	Yes. Every new chat inside the Project has it.	Yes. The Skill fires in any conversation, in any Project. It's global.

- Quick tasks → Prompt
- Deep sessions with context → Project
- Recurring work on autopilot → Skill

Best setup: all three.
Voice file + Project + Skills

The 3-conversation rule: If you've typed the same instructions more than 3 times, that's a Skill begging to be built.



Opus 4.6 Extended ▾

