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AI ESSENTIALS · GUIDE NO. 14

LET CLAUDE USE YOUR COMPUTER

Claude no longer has to stay in the chat window. With the right setup it can open your apps, sort your files, pull data across your browser tabs, and fill in forms, the way you would. Here's exactly how to turn it on, what it can do, and how to keep it safe.

~9 MIN READ · FOR EVERYONE WHO COMMENTED "COMPUTER" · FIRST SETUP: ~3 MINUTES

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THE SHORT VERSION

- A chat window can only **talk about** the work. Claude using your computer can **do** the work, on your real screen, apps, and files.
- There are three doors: **Claude in Chrome** (browser tasks), **Cowork** in the desktop app (your files + apps, on Mac **and** Windows), and **Claude Code** (for builders).
- It is **not** autonomous. Every action waits for your **Allow**, and sensitive apps like banking are blocked by default.
- The whole trick: give it **one clear job**, watch the first run, then let it go. Start with something low-stakes like sorting a folder.

THE REFRAME

Every AI tip you've ever read assumes the AI is trapped in a text box. The moment it can see and touch your actual computer, the whole game changes.

Picture the difference. You ask a normal chatbot "how should I organize these files?" and it hands you a tidy list of folder-naming tips. Useful, maybe, but you're still the one who has to open the folder, rename two hundred files, and drag each into place. Now picture asking the same thing of an assistant that can actually see your desktop: it reads the files, proposes a structure, and, once you approve, renames and sorts every one of them while you watch the cursor move on its own. One version gives you advice about the work. The other does the work.

A CHAT WINDOW

"How should I organize my files?"

"Here are 6 tips for folder structure you could try..."

It talks about the work.

You still do it.

YOUR ACTUAL COMPUTER

Clients

Invoices

IMG_2931 → Acme_Logo.png

untitled-1 → Q3_Invoice.pdf



It does the work.

You watch and approve.

Left: a chatbot describes what you should do. Right: Claude acts on your real screen, renaming and filing the actual documents. The difference is whether it can see your computer.

This is what Anthropic calls **computer use**, and in 2026 it's no longer a lab demo, it's a feature you can switch on. What it unlocks is the boring, click-heavy work that eats your afternoons: reorganizing a messy folder, copying figures out of five browser tabs into one sheet, filling in a repetitive web form, turning a pile of notes into a formatted document. None of that is hard. It's just tedious, and tedious is exactly what you want to hand off.

The payoff wears a different hat depending on who you are. A **consultant** can point it at a client's shared drive and have it sorted and renamed by convention in one sitting. A **solo founder** can have it pull numbers from Stripe, the bank, and a spreadsheet into a single weekly view without touching a keyboard. An **operations lead** can hand it the same twenty-step onboarding form and stop doing it by hand. Same feature, same three-minute setup, the tedium it deletes just looks different for each of you.

Advice about the work is a chatbot. Doing the work, on your screen, is an assistant. The only difference is whether you let it see the computer.

3

ways to turn it on, browser,
desktop app, or the CLI

~3 min

to install the Chrome extension
and run your first task

0

actions it takes without your
explicit approval

THE THREE DOORS

"Let Claude use my computer" isn't one button, it's three different tools that suit three different jobs. You do not need all of them. Pick the one that matches what you're actually trying to do, and ignore the rest until you need them.

THREE DOORS · PICK THE ONE THAT FITS THE JOB

CLAUDE IN CHROME

Browser tasks

Reads pages, clicks, fills forms, works across tabs

Paid plans · Chrome only

Best first door

COWORK

Your desktop + files

Controls apps, sorts files, fills spreadsheets, runs while you're away

Pro / Max · Mac + Windows

The file-reorg demo

CLAUDE CODE

For builders

Drives your machine from the terminal · compile, click, screenshot

Any plan · technical

If you live in a CLI

Three ways in. Most people should start with Claude in Chrome for browser work, add Cowork when they want it touching real files and apps, and only reach for Claude Code if they already live in a terminal.

DOOR	WHAT IT CONTROLS	WHERE IT RUNS	WHO IT'S FOR
Claude in Chrome	Websites, read, click, type, fill forms, work across tabs	Chrome browser (paid plans; Chrome only, not mobile)	Anyone whose tedious work happens in a browser
Cowork (desktop app)	Your files, desktop apps, and browser, can run while you're away	Claude Desktop on macOS and Windows (Pro / Max)	The "reorganize my files" and "run it on a schedule" crowd
Claude Code	Your whole machine, driven from the command line	Terminal, any plan	Developers and technical power users

WHICH ONE IS THE REEL?

The "Claude took over my computer and reorganized my files" moment is **Cowork** in the desktop app, it's the one that reaches your actual files and apps, and it works on Windows as well as Mac. If your tedious work is all websites, **Claude in Chrome** is the faster, lighter place to start.

DOOR 1, CLAUDE IN CHROME (ABOUT 3 MINUTES)

This is the easiest way in, and for a lot of people it's the only door they'll ever need, because so much real work is just clicking around websites. Claude in Chrome is a browser extension that lets Claude read the page you're on, click buttons, type into fields, fill out forms, and move between tabs, with you watching the whole time.

1. Open **Google Chrome** (it has to be Chrome, not a phone, not another browser).
2. Go to the **Chrome Web Store** and search for **Claude**, then click **Add to Chrome**.
3. **Sign in** with your Claude account. It works on the paid plans, Pro, Max, Team, or Enterprise.
4. **Pin** the extension (the puzzle-piece icon, then the pin) so it's one click away.
5. Open a page, click the extension, and give it a small job, "pull the three prices off this page into a list."

IT'S POWERFUL, SO IT'S STILL RISKY

Because the extension can act on any site on your behalf, treat it like a new assistant, not a trusted employee. Keep it to low-stakes sites while you learn its habits, never let it run on your banking or payroll pages, and stay at the keyboard for the first several runs. It's still in beta for a reason.

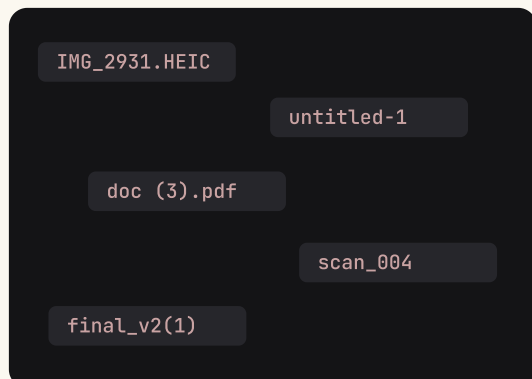
DOOR 2, COWORK, FOR YOUR FILES AND APPS

This is the one that reaches your real desktop, the files, the folders, the apps you already use. It's also the one that can keep working while you're away.

Cowork lives inside the **Claude Desktop** app and runs on both **macOS and Windows** (it's on the Pro and Max plans, in research preview). When you hand it a task, it works the way you would, but it's smart about how: it tries a direct **connector** first (Gmail, Google Drive, Slack), falls back to your **browser** if there's no connector, and only then reaches for **desktop control**, clicking and typing in your apps, for anything else. And because it runs on your machine, it can pick up where you left off even after you close the laptop lid, as long as the computer is on.

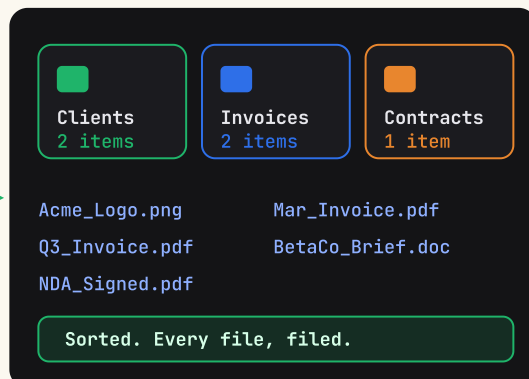
Turning it on lives in the desktop app's settings, and the setup is the same shape as any permission grant: you enable Cowork, then approve access app-by-app the first time Claude wants to touch something. Start it with the exact job from the reel, a folder that's a disaster.

BEFORE · A MESSY DESKTOP



one instruction

AFTER · SORTED + RENAMED



Give Cowork a folder of junk-named files and one instruction. It reads them, proposes folders like Clients / Invoices / Contracts, renames each file to a real name, and, after you approve, files them.

"Here's my Downloads folder. Reorganize it and make sense of it all:

- create folders by category (Clients, Invoices, Contracts, Personal)
- rename each file to something clear and consistent
- move each file into the right folder

Show me the plan first. Don't delete anything, if you're unsure, put it in a 'Review' folder."

Notice the two safety lines built into that prompt: "show me the plan first" and "don't delete anything." Those aren't optional. They're what keeps a helpful cleanup from turning into a file you can't get back. Once you've watched it do this a couple of times and trust the pattern, you can point it at bigger jobs: "pull the totals from these three bank exports into one spreadsheet," or "take the notes in this doc and turn them into a formatted client brief."

ONE CLEAR JOB BEATS TEN VAGUE ONES

The single thing that separates a great run from a frustrating one is a specific, bounded task. "Clean up my computer" is a recipe for confusion. "Sort everything in this one folder by client, rename it by convention, and show me before you move anything" is a job it can nail. Give it a clear job, then let it run.

DOOR 3, CLAUDE CODE (FOR BUILDERS)

If you already work in a terminal, Claude Code can drive your whole machine from the command line, writing code, running it, clicking through the app it just built, taking screenshots to check its own work, all in one flow. It's the most capable of the three and the most technical. Most business owners won't need it, but it's worth knowing it exists: it's the same "use my computer" idea, aimed at people who build. If that's not you, stay with the first two doors.

KEEP IT SAFE, THE PART THAT **ACTUALLY MATTERS**

Handing an AI the keys to your screen is only smart if you keep a few hard rules. None of these slow you down; they just make sure a helpful assistant never becomes a liability.

Start with the mental model: Claude can see anything that's visible on your screen, and there's no wall between it and your system. That's exactly why it's useful, and exactly why you scope it. The good news is the tools are built for this. You approve access one app at a time, you can review actions before they run, and the riskiest categories are blocked out of the box.

THE CONTROL PANEL · DECIDE WHAT IT CAN TOUCH

Your project + downloads folder

The files you actually want sorted

ALLOW



Your browser

So it can pull data and fill forms

ASK FIRST



Banking, payments, crypto

Blocked by default · leave it that way

BLOCKED



Health, legal, others' personal data

Never hand these over

OFF



A sane default. Allow the folders and apps you actually want it working in, make the browser ask first, and keep anything financial, medical, or legal firmly off. You hold the switches.

- **Review before it acts.** Ask for the plan in plain text first, "show me before you change anything." It proposes; you approve. This one habit prevents almost every bad outcome.
- **Grant access one app at a time.** Claude asks permission before touching each application. Say yes only to the ones the task actually needs, and use "Allow once" before "Always allow."
- **Leave the blocklist on.** Banking, payments, and crypto apps are blocked by default, keep them that way. Add anything else sensitive to your own blocklist.
- **Never hand over financial, health, legal, or other people's personal data.** If a screen contains it, don't let Claude see it. There's no undo on a leak.
- **Don't let it delete.** Tell it to move files, never remove them, "if you're unsure, put it in a Review folder." You keep the eraser.

THE ONE THING THAT GOES WRONG

The failure people fear is the AI quietly deleting or sending something it shouldn't. You prevent it two ways: keep it to "move, never delete," and always make it show the plan before it acts. Do both and the worst case is a file in a slightly wrong folder, a shrug, not a disaster.

START HERE TODAY

Install Claude in Chrome and give it one small browser task, or open Cowork and point it at a single messy folder with "show me the plan first, don't delete anything." That's the three-minute version. Watch it work once and you'll see exactly where it fits in your week.

SOURCES & WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- [Claude Help, Get started with Claude in Chrome](#)
- [Claude Help, Let Claude use your computer in Cowork](#)
- [Claude for Chrome, overview](#)
- [Claude Code Docs, Let Claude use your computer from the CLI](#)
- [Want the agent version that runs on a schedule? Comment "AGENT" for that guide](#)

Built by Hank Barker // AI Essentials // @hankhelpsai. Computer use is in active beta and changes fast, availability varies by plan and platform. Last reviewed July 2026.