

Skills: teaching Claude a trade

What they are, how they work and how to use them in chat, in Cowork and
in Claude Code

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How to use this handout

This handout gathers, in written and ordered form, everything covered in the lesson. You do not need to memorise it: it is there so you can find things again calmly, later, when the lesson is over and a question is left hanging.

GOAL

Understand what a skill is, how Claude loads it when needed, where to find it and how to install and use it safely.

What you will be able to do

- Explain what a skill is and how it differs from a prompt.
- Describe the three loading levels (metadata, instructions, resources).
- Find, turn on and turn off skills in `claude.ai`.
- Call a skill with the slash and with the menu.
- Assess the safety of a skill before installing it.

1. What a skill is

A skill is an operating manual: a set of instructions, and sometimes tools, that teaches Claude how to do a job your way.

In the Italian interface you find it under the name **Competenze**; in English pages, **Skills**. Technically it is a folder with a `SKILL.md` file that describes the job and, if needed, supporting files: templates, examples, scripts.

What is it for? To stop **repeating the same instructions**. If every time you paste the same procedure («this is how we do a quote, here is the tone, here are the fields»), that procedure is a skill you have not written yet. A skill loads **only when needed**, so you can have many without weighing down conversations.

Prompt or skill

Prompt	Skill
- You write it every time - Lasts one chat - Gets lost	- You write it once - Works in every chat - Loads when needed

A prompt lasts one conversation, a skill works every time it is needed.

IN PLAIN WORDS

A prompt is an instruction given aloud. A skill is the procedure written in the company manual: you read it when you need it.

1.1 An everyday example

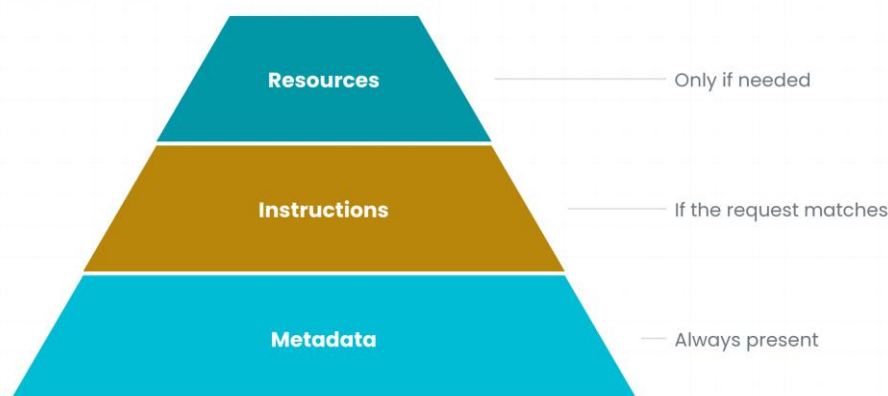
Imagine the skill «customer-quote»: it holds your price list, your delivery times, the letter template and a rule («never discounts above 10%»). When you write «prepare the quote for the Bianchi company», Claude recognizes the request, loads the skill and produces the document in your style.

2. How it works: loading in levels

Claude does not read all skills every time: it loads one piece at a time, only if needed.

The official documentation calls it **progressive disclosure**. A skill has three levels:

The three levels



The three loading levels of a skill.

Level	When it loads	Approximate cost
1. Metadata (name and description)	Always, at startup	About 100 tokens per skill
2. Instructions (body of SKILL.md)	When the request matches the description	Under 5,000 tokens
3. Resources (files, templates, scripts)	Only if the instructions call them	None until needed

Source: official Agent Skills documentation, October 2026.

Two practical rules follow. First: the **description** is the most important part, because it is what Claude uses to decide whether to use the skill. Second: long details go in separate files, not in the body.

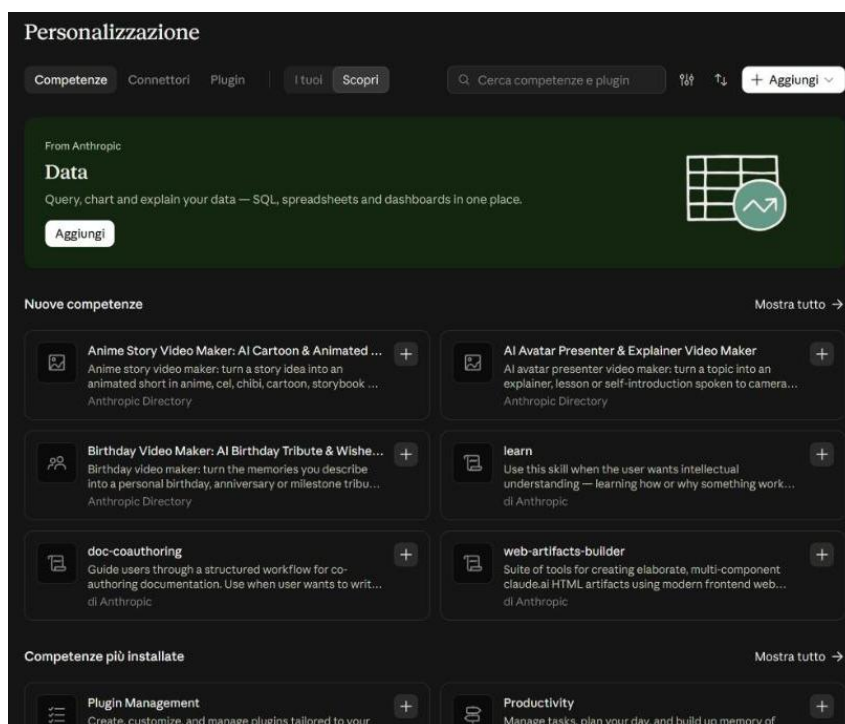
CAREFUL

If the description is vague («helps with documents») the skill does not fire, or fires when it should not. It must say what it does **and** when to use it.

3. Finding and installing skills

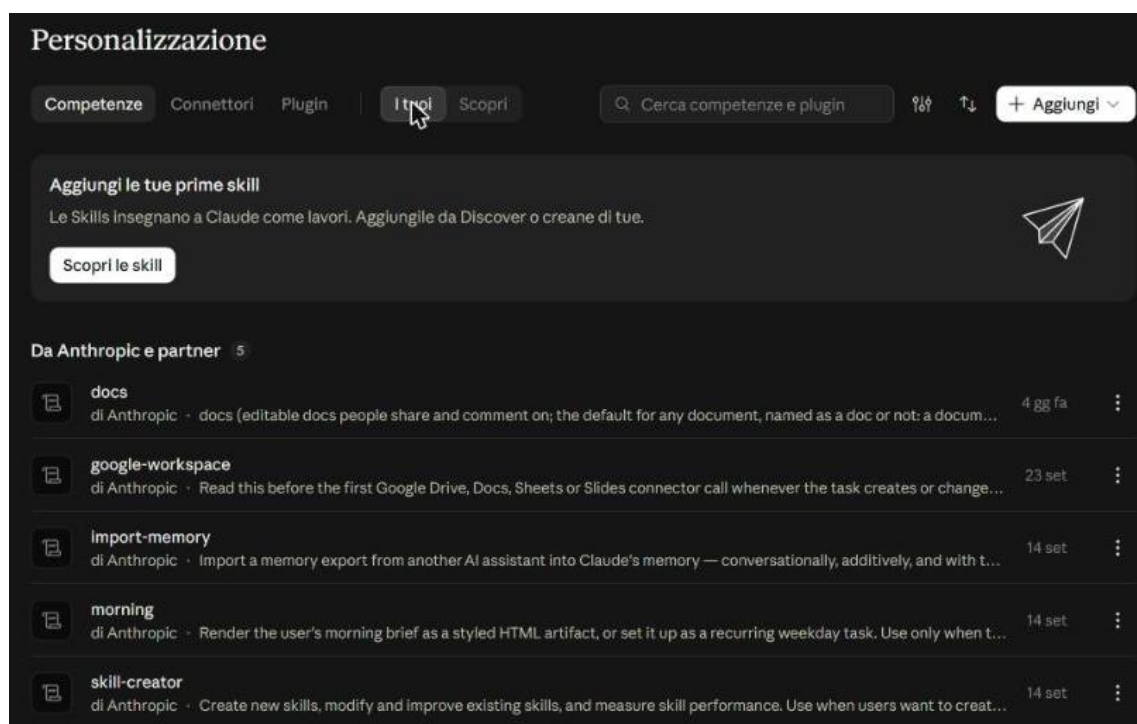
Skills are managed from a single panel: Customize.

In the sidebar open **Customize** and choose the **Skills** tab. There are two views: **Discover**, with skills from Anthropic and partners, and **Yours**, with the ones you installed.



The Discover view (Italian interface): skills suggested by Anthropic and the directory.

Press the **+** next to a skill to add it. From the **Yours** view you can see the list and open the three-dot menu of each entry to edit or turn it off.



The «Yours» view (Italian interface): installed skills, with description and date.

3.1 Ready-made skills for documents

Anthropic offers skills to create and edit **PowerPoint presentations, Excel sheets, Word documents and PDFs**. In claude.ai they turn on by themselves when you ask to create a

document. Custom skills are available on the Pro, Max, Team and Enterprise plans with code execution enabled.

3.2 Where skills live

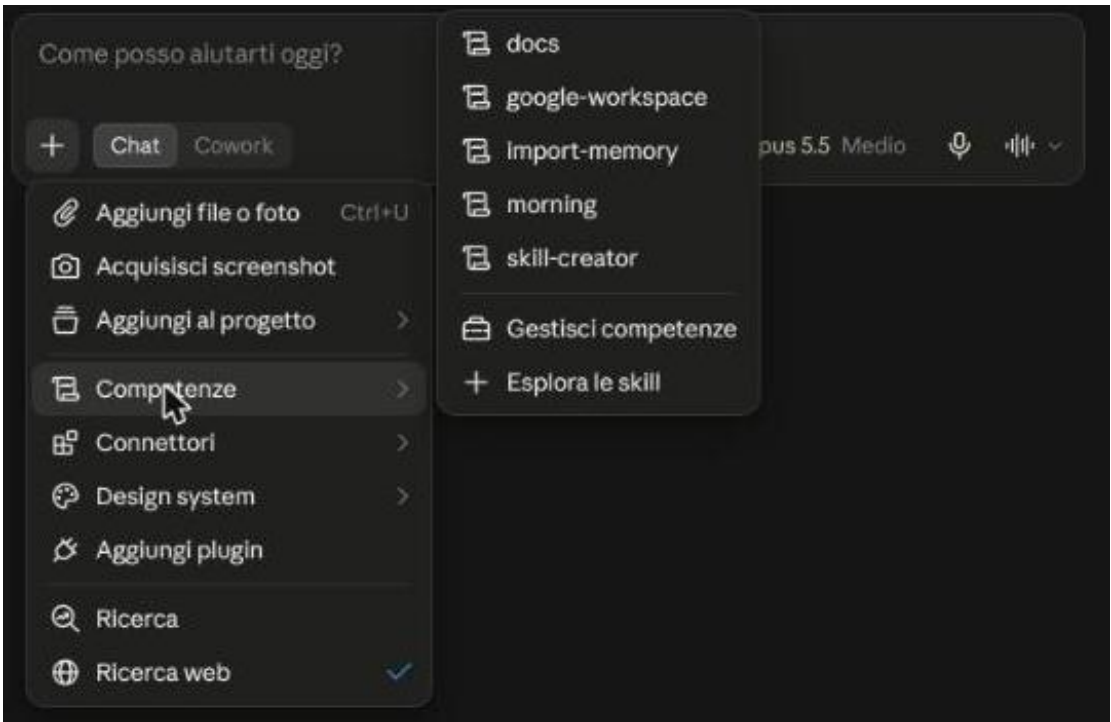
Environment	Where they are
claude.ai and apps	Customize, Skills (individual to each user)
Claude Code	Folders on the computer: ~/.claude/skills (personal) or .claude/skills (project)
API	Uploaded to the workspace through the skills API

Skills do not sync automatically across environments.

4. Using a skill

There are two ways: let Claude choose it, or call it yourself.

- 1. **Automatic:** describe the job and, if the description matches, Claude loads the skill.
- 2. **From the bar:** in the box type / and pick the skill from the list (the hint «Type / for skills» appears in the box).
- 3. **From the + menu:** open Skills and choose one.
- 4. **In Claude Code:** type /skill-name.



+ menu, Skills (Italian interface): the list of active skills, «Manage skills» and «Explore skills».

4.1 How to tell it worked

When Claude uses a skill you see it in the reasoning and in the steps of the answer. If it does not fire, it is usually enough to name it in the request («use the docs skill») or fix the description.

4.2 Skill, project or memory?

Tool	When to use it
Prompt	A one-off request
Project	Files and instructions for recurring work on a topic
Skill	A procedure reusable in any chat
Memory	Personal preferences and facts about you

Four tools, four purposes.

5. Skill safety

Installing a skill is like installing a program: you trust whoever wrote it.

A skill contains instructions and, sometimes, code. A malicious skill could make Claude do things other than those declared. The official documentation is clear: use skills you wrote yourself or that come from trusted sources, such as Anthropic.

- Read **all** the files of the skill, not just the description.
- Be wary of skills that download content from external addresses.
- Do not give a skill more access than it needs.
- Turn off or remove skills you do not use.

GOLDEN RULE

If you do not know who wrote it and do not understand what it does, do not install it.

Hands-on exercise

Fifteen minutes to explore, install and try a safe skill.

1. Open claude.ai and go to Customize, Skills tab, Discover view.
2. Choose an Anthropic skill related to a job of yours and read its description.
3. Press + to add it and check it is present in the Yours view.
4. Open a new chat, type / and select the skill from the list.
5. Give it a real task and observe in the steps whether the skill is loaded.
6. Turn it off and repeat the task: what difference do you notice?

WATCH OUT

Does the skill come from Anthropic or a source you know?

Did you read the description before turning it on?

Can you say what changed with and without the skill?

Questions that come up in class

Is a skill different from a plugin?

Yes. A skill is a single manual; a plugin is a package that can contain several skills, connectors, commands and agents (chapter 7).

Do skills work on the free plan?

The built-in document skills do when you create files; for custom skills you need a paid plan with code execution on.

Can my colleagues see my skills?

In claude.ai skills are individual: each person must upload their own. In a Claude Code project they can be shared in the repository.

Does a skill replace the prompt?

No: it reduces it. The specific request remains; the fixed procedure sits in the skill.

How many skills can I have?

Many: only name and description occupy context until they are needed.

Glossary

Term	What it means
Description	The text Claude uses to decide whether a capability applies to your request.
Directory	The list of capabilities, links and packages you can browse from Customize.
Progressive disclosure	Loading in levels: first metadata, then instructions, then resources.
Skill	A folder with reusable instructions that Claude loads when needed.

Further reading

Anthropic, Agent Skills overview (platform.claude.com/docs) - accessed 3 October 2026

Anthropic, Extend Claude with skills (code.claude.com/docs/en/skills) - accessed 3 October 2026

claude.ai interface, Customize, Skills - screenshots of 3 October 2026

WATCH OUT

Features, limits and interface verified on 3 October 2026: skills are evolving quickly.