

Enabling Learning — Companion Guide

Claude Cowork for Educators: A Practical Guide

A downloadable companion resource for the course module *The Age of AI Agents*
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1. What Is Claude Cowork?

Claude Cowork is a feature built into the **Claude Desktop application** (available for macOS and Windows) that transforms Claude from a traditional chatbot into an autonomous AI agent that works directly with files on your computer. Launched by Anthropic in January 2026, Cowork is essentially “Claude Code for the rest of your work,” bringing powerful agentic capabilities to knowledge workers who are not software developers (Anthropic, 2026a).

How Cowork Differs from Regular Claude Chat

Feature	Claude Chat	Claude Cowork
Interaction style	Back-and-forth conversation	Describe a task, Claude executes it
File handling	You upload files manually	Claude reads, edits, and creates files directly in your folders
Task execution	One response at a time	Autonomous multi-step task completion
Workflow	Synchronous (you wait for each response)	Asynchronous (you can queue tasks and step away)
Extensibility	Limited to conversation	Plugins, skills, connectors, and sub-agents

Think of it this way: **regular Claude Chat is like texting a colleague**. You send a question, wait for an answer, and go back and forth. **Cowork is like leaving detailed instructions for a trusted teaching assistant** who then goes away, completes the work in a shared folder, and lets you review the results when you are ready.

What Can Cowork Do?

- **Read** files in your designated folders (documents, spreadsheets, notes, lesson plans)
- **Edit** existing files based on your instructions
- **Create** new files (lesson plans, rubrics, reports, summaries)
- **Organize** materials across multiple files and folders
- **Synthesize** information from multiple sources into coherent documents

2. Why Cowork Matters for Educators

A 2024 Gallup survey cited in Anthropic’s education report found that teachers using AI tools saved an average of **5.9 hours per week** on routine tasks (Anthropic, 2024). Cowork takes this further by allowing educators to work with AI the way they actually work: through files and folders, not just chat windows.

The Folder-Based Workflow

Most teachers already organize their work in folders: one for each class, unit, or semester. Cowork builds on this natural workflow. Instead of copying and pasting content into a chat window, you simply point Claude to your existing folder and describe what you need. Claude works within that folder, reading your existing materials and producing new ones right where you need them.

Beyond One-Off Prompts

Traditional AI chat is useful for quick tasks: “Write me a warm-up activity about photosynthesis.” But real teaching work is more complex. You need rubrics that align with specific lesson plans, differentiated materials that reference the same source text, or parent communication that reflects a student’s specific progress across multiple assignments. Cowork handles this complexity because it can see and work across multiple files at once.

3. How It Works: A Step-by-Step Walkthrough

Requirements

Before you begin, make sure you have the following:

- **Claude Desktop app** installed (macOS or Windows x64)
- **A paid Claude subscription** (Pro at \$20/month, Max at \$100 or \$200/month, or a Team/Enterprise plan)
- **An active internet connection** throughout your session
- **The Desktop app must remain open** while Claude is working

Note: Cowork is not available on the free Claude plan, on mobile devices, or through the web browser version of Claude.

Step-by-Step Setup

Step 1: Open Claude Desktop and switch to Cowork mode. In the Claude Desktop app, look for the mode selector at the top. You will see options for “Chat” and “Cowork.” Click on **Cowork**.

Step 2: Describe your task. Type a natural-language description of what you need. For example:

"I have a folder with my 8th-grade science unit on ecosystems. I need you to create a vocabulary list, a study guide, and a formative assessment quiz based on the materials in this folder."

Step 3: Grant folder access. Claude will ask you to select the folder you want it to work with. Navigate to the folder on your computer and grant access. **Claude can only access folders you explicitly approve** — it cannot see anything else on your computer.

Step 4: Review Claude's proposed approach. Before doing any work, Claude will outline its plan. For example:

"I'll start by reading all the documents in your ecosystems folder. Then I'll create three new files: a vocabulary list, a study guide, and a quiz. I'll base all content on the concepts and terminology found in your existing materials."

Review this plan. If it looks right, approve it. If not, adjust your instructions.

Step 5: Let Claude work. Claude will begin reading your files and creating the requested materials. You will see progress updates as it works. You can step away and come back, but keep the Claude Desktop app open.

Step 6: Review the results. When Claude finishes, open the folder and review the new files. Edit anything that needs adjustment, just as you would with work from a teaching assistant.

Global and Folder-Specific Instructions

Cowork supports two types of standing instructions:

- **Global Instructions** (Settings > Cowork): Directives that apply to every Cowork session, such as your preferred writing tone, grade level, or formatting standards.
- **Folder-Specific Instructions:** Context that is tied to a particular folder. For example, in your "AP Spanish" folder, you might include instructions like: "All materials should be written in Spanish. Use formal register. Align activities with College Board AP Spanish Language and Culture standards."

Educator tip: Set up global instructions that reflect your teaching philosophy, language preferences, and formatting standards. This saves you from repeating the same information in every session.

Example global instructions for a bilingual educator:

"I am a bilingual educator working with English Learners in grades 6-8. When creating materials, use clear, accessible language at a Lexile level appropriate for

middle school. When I ask for bilingual materials, provide content in both English and Spanish. Follow my school district's formatting standards: 12pt font, 1-inch margins, header with subject and date."

4. Setting Up Your First Educator Workspace

The most effective way to use Cowork is to set up a **dedicated working folder** that contains only the materials you want Claude to access. This keeps your work organized and protects sensitive files from being included accidentally.

Recommended Folder Structure

```
My Teaching AI Workspace/  
├── Unit-Ecosystems/  
│   ├── lesson-plans/  
│   ├── student-materials/  
│   ├── assessments/  
│   └── INSTRUCTIONS.md  
├── Unit-Fractions/  
│   ├── lesson-plans/  
│   ├── student-materials/  
│   ├── assessments/  
│   └── INSTRUCTIONS.md  
├── Communication-Templates/  
│   ├── parent-letters/  
│   ├── progress-reports/  
│   └── INSTRUCTIONS.md  
└── Professional-Development/  
    ├── meeting-notes/  
    ├── reflections/  
    └── INSTRUCTIONS.md
```

Key Principles

1. **Use a dedicated workspace folder.** Do not point Claude at your entire Documents folder or your school's shared drive. Create a specific folder for AI-assisted work.
2. **Separate student data from curriculum materials.** Your lesson plans, rubrics, and activity templates do not contain student data and are safe to work with. Gradebooks,

IEPs, and student records should be kept in a completely separate location.

3. **Use folder-specific instructions.** Drop an `INSTRUCTIONS.md` file into each subfolder to give Claude context about that specific project. Claude will read and follow these instructions automatically.
4. **Copy, don't link.** If you want Claude to reference a specific document, copy it into your working folder. Do not give Claude access to folders that also contain sensitive information.

What Are Markdown Files and Why Does the AI Create Them?

When you start using Cowork, you will notice that many of the files Claude creates — and the instruction files you write — have the extension `.md`. This stands for **Markdown**, a simple, lightweight format for writing structured text. Markdown is not a programming language. It is plain text with a few simple symbols that indicate formatting:

```
# This is a heading
## This is a subheading
**This is bold text**
- This is a bullet point
1. This is a numbered list
```

Almost all AI-powered tools — Claude Cowork, Claude Code, ChatGPT, Gemini, and others — use Markdown as their default format for creating documents. Why? Because Markdown files are small, fast, universally readable, and easy for both humans and AI to read and edit. When Claude creates a lesson plan, a rubric, or a set of instructions in your folder, it will most likely save it as a `.md` file.

The challenge is that if you double-click a `.md` file on your computer, it may open in Notepad (Windows) or TextEdit (Mac) and look like raw text with `#` symbols and `**` marks everywhere. It is still perfectly readable, but it does not look polished.

Obsidian: A Free Tool for Reading and Navigating Your AI Workspace

If you want a more visual experience, consider downloading **Obsidian** (free at obsidian.md), a knowledge management application that is designed to work with Markdown files and folders.

Here is what makes Obsidian useful for educators working with Cowork:

1. **It renders Markdown beautifully.** Headings, bold text, tables, and lists display in a clean, formatted view — no raw symbols.
2. **It works directly with your folders.** You point Obsidian at a folder on your computer (called a “vault”), and it shows you all the files and subfolders in a navigable sidebar. No importing, no uploading — it reads the same files that Claude reads and creates.
3. **It supports PDFs, images, and other files.** If your workspace contains PDFs (like your ELPS or TEKS documents), Obsidian can display them alongside your Markdown files.
4. **You can edit files directly.** Any changes you make in Obsidian are saved to the actual files in your folder, which means Claude will see your edits the next time you start a Cowork session.
5. **It works offline.** Obsidian runs entirely on your computer with no internet required.

How to set it up:

1. Download Obsidian from obsidian.md (free for personal use, available on macOS, Windows, and Linux)
2. Open Obsidian and select “Open folder as vault”
3. Navigate to your Cowork workspace folder (e.g., `My Teaching AI Workspace`)
4. Your entire folder structure appears in the sidebar, ready to browse and edit

This step is optional. You do not need Obsidian to use Cowork. You can always open `.md` files in any text editor. But if you plan to work frequently with AI-generated documents, Obsidian makes the experience significantly more comfortable, especially for browsing folders with many files.

Pro Tip: Use Voice Input to Talk to Your AI Agent

When working with AI agents, you often need to give longer, more detailed instructions than a quick chat question. Typing a multi-paragraph prompt explaining exactly what you want can feel slow — especially when you know exactly what to say.

Voice-to-text tools let you **speak your instructions** instead of typing them. This is not about replacing writing — writing is thinking, and there is real value in composing your own ideas at the keyboard. But when you are giving instructions to an AI agent, the goal is efficiency. Speaking naturally lets you give richer, more detailed prompts in a fraction of the time.

Recommended tools:

Tool	Platform	Cost	Notes
SuperWhisper	macOS	Free tier available	Runs locally using Whisper AI. Very accurate, works offline, privacy-friendly. This is what the author of this guide uses daily.
Built-in Dictation	macOS / Windows	Free	macOS: System Settings > Keyboard > Dictation. Windows: press Win+H. Already on your computer, no install needed.
Google Docs Voice Typing	Chrome browser	Free	Open a Google Doc, go to Tools > Voice typing. Works well for drafting prompts before pasting them into Claude.

How to use it with Cowork: Open SuperWhisper (or your built-in dictation), speak your instructions, and the text appears wherever your cursor is — in the Claude desktop app, in a text file, or anywhere else. For example, instead of typing a long prompt about creating differentiated lesson plans, you can simply describe what you need out loud and let the voice tool transcribe it.

This is optional. You can absolutely use Cowork by typing your instructions. Voice input is simply a productivity tip for those who want to save time when giving detailed prompts.

5. Practical Use Cases for Teachers

5.1 Lesson Planning and Curriculum Development

Task: “Read the three articles in my `source-materials` folder and create a week-long lesson plan for my 10th-grade ESL class on the topic of immigration narratives. Include daily

objectives, warm-up activities, guided practice, and exit tickets."

What Cowork does: Claude reads all three articles, identifies key themes and vocabulary, and generates a complete 5-day lesson plan saved as a new file in your folder. Because it has access to all the source materials at once, the lesson plan is coherent and directly references specific passages from your articles.

5.2 Differentiated Materials

Task: "Take the reading passage in `reading-passage.docx` and create three versions: one at grade level, one simplified for newcomer ELs, and one extended for advanced students. Save each as a separate file."

What Cowork does: Claude reads the original passage and creates three differentiated versions, each saved as its own file. The simplified version uses shorter sentences, cognates, and visual supports. The extended version adds analytical questions and academic vocabulary.

5.3 Assessment Creation and Alignment

Task: "Review the lesson plans in this folder and create a formative assessment that aligns with each daily objective. Include a mix of selected-response and constructed-response items. Then create an answer key and a scoring rubric."

What Cowork does: Claude reads all lesson plans, identifies the objectives, and creates an assessment with items that directly address each objective. It produces three separate files: the assessment, the answer key, and the rubric.

5.4 Meeting Notes and Action Items

Task: "I have rough notes from three PLC meetings in this folder. Synthesize them into a single summary document with: (a) key decisions made, (b) action items with responsible parties, and (c) questions that still need resolution."

What Cowork does: Claude reads all three note files, identifies patterns and decisions, and produces a clean summary document.

5.5 Parent and Family Communication

Task: "Using the progress report template in this folder, create individualized progress update letters for my students. I've included a spreadsheet with each student's name and their areas of strength and growth. Make each letter personal but professional."

Important: If your spreadsheet contains grades, test scores, or other student data protected under FERPA, see [Section 6](#) before proceeding with this task.

5.6 Professional Development Reflections

Task: "I attended a workshop on translanguaging pedagogy and took notes in `workshop-notes.md`. Help me write a professional reflection that connects what I learned to my current practice, identifies three specific changes I want to implement, and includes a timeline."

5.7 Using Standards Documents as Your AI Knowledge Base

This is one of the most powerful applications of Cowork for bilingual and ESL educators. Instead of hoping Claude "knows" your state standards, you can **place the actual standards documents in your working folder** so Claude references them directly when creating materials.

For example, Texas educators can download the **English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS)** from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website and save them into their Cowork workspace. Educators in WIDA-member states can do the same with WIDA's English Language Development Standards Framework. Once those documents live in your folder, Claude can read them and use them as the basis for everything it creates.

Example folder setup:

```
My Teaching AI Workspace/  
├── standards-reference/  
│   ├── texas-elps-2024.pdf  
│   ├── telpas-proficiency-level-descriptors.pdf  
│   ├── teks-science-grade-5.pdf  
│   └── INSTRUCTIONS.md  
├── Unit-Ecosystems/  
│   ├── lesson-plans/  
│   ├── student-materials/  
│   └── INSTRUCTIONS.md
```

Example folder instructions (`standards-reference/INSTRUCTIONS.md`):

"This folder contains the official Texas English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and TELPAS Proficiency Level Descriptors. When I ask you to create lesson plans, assessments, or differentiated materials, always cross-reference these documents. Align language objectives with the appropriate ELPS cross-curricular student expectations. When differentiating materials, use the TELPAS proficiency

levels (Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, Advanced High) rather than generic labels."

Example tasks using standards as a reference:

"Read the ELPS document in my standards-reference folder. Then look at my lesson plan in Unit-Ecosystems/lesson-plans/week-3.md . Add explicit ELPS-aligned language objectives for each day. For each activity, suggest linguistic accommodations for students at the Beginning and Intermediate proficiency levels based on the TELPAS descriptors."

"Using the ELPS in my reference folder, create a set of sentence stems for academic discussions about ecosystems. Organize them by TELPAS proficiency level: Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Advanced High."

This approach works with any standards framework: Texas ELPS and TELPAS, WIDA ELD Standards, TEKS, CCSS, NGSS, or your own district's curriculum guides. The key insight is that **your standards documents become Claude's knowledge base**, so the materials it produces are grounded in the actual frameworks you are accountable to, not generic approximations.

Free resource for Texas educators: If you work with the Texas ELPS, check out the **ELPS Online Helper** at apps.enablinglearning.com/elps. This free tool from Enabling Learning LLC provides a digital reference for the 2024 ELPS, including proficiency level descriptors, linguistic support statements, instructional scaffolds, and an AI-powered teaching assistant that can generate ELPS-aligned lesson plans, strategy cards, and tutoring session plans. You can use the ELPS Online Helper alongside Cowork: use the Helper for quick reference and targeted strategies, and use Cowork for larger, multi-file curriculum projects.

6. Privacy, Security, and Student Data Protection

This is the most important section of this guide. As educators, we are bound by ethical obligations and legal requirements to protect student information. Using AI tools introduces new risks that must be managed carefully.

How Cowork Handles Your Data

Cowork runs inside a **sandboxed virtual machine** on your computer. This means:

- **Files are processed locally** within a secure container on your machine.
- **File contents are not uploaded to external servers for storage.**
- **File contents are not used to train AI models** (Anthropic, 2026b).
- Only the conversation context (your instructions and Claude’s responses) is sent to Claude’s API for processing.

However, Cowork does require an active internet connection, and your instructions and Claude’s responses do pass through Anthropic’s servers. This means that **any text you type into the Cowork prompt, and any file content that Claude reads and processes, does transit through Anthropic’s infrastructure during the session.**

FERPA and Student Data: The Golden Rule

The **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** protects personally identifiable information (PII) from students’ education records. Under FERPA, you generally cannot share student PII with third parties without parent/guardian consent unless a specific exception applies (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Golden Rule: Never include student names, IDs, grades, test scores, behavioral records, IEP/504 information, or any other personally identifiable student data in folders that Claude can access.

What Is Safe to Use with Cowork

Safe to Use	NOT Safe to Use
Blank lesson plan templates	Completed gradebooks
Curriculum standards documents (ELPS, TEKS, WIDA, CCSS)	Student IEPs or 504 plans
TELPAS or WIDA proficiency level descriptors	Student work samples with names
Textbook excerpts and articles	Behavioral incident reports
Your own teaching reflections	TELPAS or WIDA individual student scores
Assessment rubrics (without student data)	Attendance records
Professional development notes	Student health information
Communication templates (without names)	Email correspondence about specific students

Safe to Use	NOT Safe to Use
Vocabulary lists and study guides	Disciplinary records

If You Need to Reference Student Data

Sometimes, you may want to create individualized materials. In these cases:

1. **Use pseudonyms or codes.** Replace student names with "Student A," "Student B," etc.
2. **Remove identifying details.** Strip out student IDs, dates of birth, and other PII.
3. **Work with aggregated data.** Instead of individual scores, provide class averages or general performance trends.
4. **Create the template, fill in details manually.** Ask Claude to generate a parent letter template, then manually add the student's name and specific details yourself.
5. **Check your district's AI policy.** Many school districts now have policies governing AI use. Follow your district's guidelines, which may be more restrictive than FERPA alone.

Anthropic's Own Safety Recommendations

Anthropic explicitly recommends the following practices when using Cowork (Anthropic, 2026b):

- Restrict access to sensitive documents, credentials, and personal records
- Use dedicated working folders instead of granting broad access
- Maintain backups of important files before letting Claude edit them
- Watch for unexpected patterns such as suspicious file access or scope creep
- Report anomalies to usersafety@anthropic.com

District and Institutional Considerations

If you work in a school or university:

- **Check whether your institution has approved Claude for use.** Some districts maintain approved vendor lists for AI tools.
- **Verify whether your institution has a data processing agreement (DPA) with Anthropic.** Team and Enterprise plans offer organizational controls, but during the current research preview, Cowork activity is not captured in audit logs or compliance exports (Anthropic, 2026c).
- **Follow your institution's acceptable use policy for AI tools.**

- **When in doubt, use Claude only for tasks that involve no student data at all.**
Curriculum development, professional learning, and administrative templates are all productive uses that carry no student data risk.

A Note on the Enterprise Compliance Gap

As of February 2026, Anthropic acknowledges that Cowork activity is **not yet captured** in enterprise audit logs, compliance APIs, or data exports. Conversation history from Cowork sessions is stored locally on users' machines, outside standard organizational data retention policies (Anthropic, 2026c). If your institution requires full audit trails for AI tool usage, be aware of this limitation during the current research preview phase.

7. Tips for Bilingual, Multilingual, and ESL Educators

Claude is a multilingual model that can work effectively in English, Spanish, and many other languages. For educators working in bilingual, dual-language, or ESL settings, Cowork offers unique advantages.

Working in Multiple Languages

You can communicate with Claude in any language, and you can ask it to produce materials in any language. You can even mix languages in a single session. For example:

"Crea una guía de estudio en español para la unidad de ecosistemas. Incluye el vocabulario clave con definiciones en español e inglés. Al final, agrega una sección de cognados."

"Create a bilingual vocabulary wall template with terms in English and Spanish. Include an image description column for visual supports."

Setting Language Preferences in Instructions

Use your global or folder-specific instructions to establish language expectations:

Example for a dual-language classroom:

"I teach in a 50/50 dual-language program (English/Spanish) in 4th grade. When I ask for materials in Spanish, use grade-appropriate academic Spanish, not translations of English materials. Use culturally relevant examples. When creating

bilingual materials, place Spanish and English side by side rather than one after the other."

Example for an ESL/ELD classroom (WIDA states):

"I teach English Language Development to newcomer students (WIDA levels 1-2) in grades 9-10. All student-facing materials should use simplified English with short sentences, high-frequency vocabulary, and visual supports. Include sentence frames and word banks. Teacher-facing materials can use standard professional English."

Example for a Texas bilingual/ESL classroom (ELPS and TELPAS):

"I teach ESL in Texas, grades 6-8. Align all language objectives with the Texas English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). When differentiating materials, use the TELPAS proficiency levels: Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Advanced High. I have the ELPS and TELPAS Proficiency Level Descriptors saved in my standards-reference folder — always reference those documents when creating materials. Include cross-curricular student expectations (e.g., ELPS 1.A, 3.E) in lesson plan headers."

Note for Texas educators: Texas uses its own English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) and the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) rather than the WIDA framework used by most other states. When setting up your Cowork instructions, be specific about which framework you use. If you place the actual ELPS document in your working folder (see Section 5.7), Claude will reference the official standards directly rather than relying on general knowledge. For a quick-reference digital version of the ELPS, visit the free [ELPS Online Helper](#) from Enabling Learning.

Leveraging Translanguaging

Cowork is particularly well suited for creating materials that support translanguaging practices, where students use their full linguistic repertoire as a resource for learning:

- **Bilingual glossaries** with academic terms in both languages, including cognates
- **Anchor charts** with key concepts in the home language alongside English
- **Bridge activities** that explicitly connect concepts across languages
- **Multilingual sentence frames** that scaffold academic language production

Creating Culturally Responsive Materials

When setting up folder instructions, include context about your students’ cultural backgrounds:

“My students are predominantly Mexican-American and Central American. When choosing examples, themes, or contexts for activities, draw from culturally familiar experiences: family, community, food traditions, immigration narratives, and bilingual identity. Avoid stereotypes and deficit-based framing.”

8. Extending Cowork with Plugins

Cowork is not limited to reading and writing files. Anthropic offers a growing collection of **plugins** that add specialized capabilities to Claude, letting it handle tasks that go beyond document work.

What Are Plugins?

Plugins are add-ons that give Cowork access to additional tools and workflows. Think of them the way you think of browser extensions: the base tool works well on its own, but plugins let you customize it for your specific needs.

How to Add Plugins

1. Open Cowork in the Claude Desktop app
2. Click **Plugins** in the left sidebar
3. Browse the available plugins or upload a custom plugin file
4. Select the ones you want to activate. They will be available for the current session

Plugins Most Useful for Educators

Plugin	What It Does	Educator Use Cases
Productivity	Task management, calendars, workflows	Organize lesson planning tasks across multiple units, manage your weekly schedule, track professional development goals
Data	Query, visualize, and transform datasets	Analyze anonymized assessment results, create charts showing class performance trends, summarize survey or feedback data

Plugin	What It Does	Educator Use Cases
Biology Research	Search scientific literature and experimental databases	Science teachers can find current research to support NGSS-aligned or TEKS-aligned lessons; any educator conducting academic research can use this to search the literature
Marketing	Content creation and campaign planning	Useful for instructional coaches or department heads who promote professional development events or school programs

Example: Using the Data Plugin for Assessment Analysis

Imagine you have a spreadsheet of anonymized student assessment scores (no names, just "Student A," "Student B," etc.). With the Data plugin active, you can ask Claude:

"Read the assessment data in `assessments/unit3-scores.csv` . Create a bar chart showing the distribution of scores. Identify which standards had the lowest average performance and suggest targeted review activities for those areas."

Claude will read the data file, generate visualizations, and produce recommendations, all within your working folder.

Example: Using the Biology Research Plugin

A high school biology teacher preparing a lesson on gene editing could ask:

"Search for recent peer-reviewed articles on CRISPR applications in agriculture. Summarize the three most relevant findings at a level appropriate for AP Biology students."

The plugin searches scientific databases and returns summaries grounded in actual research, giving you a stronger foundation than general AI knowledge alone.

Custom Plugins

For advanced users, Anthropic provides an open-source plugin framework on GitHub (github.com/anthropics/knowledge-work-plugins). This means school districts or instructional technology teams could potentially build custom plugins tailored to their specific needs, for example, a plugin that connects to their district’s curriculum management system.

Connecting to Online Services with Connectors

Beyond plugins, Cowork also supports **connectors**, integrations that let Claude connect directly to online services you already use. These connectors are powered by the **Model Context Protocol (MCP)**, a standardized way for AI to communicate with external tools and services securely.

Through connectors, Claude can work with services across categories like:

- **Productivity:** task managers, calendars, project management tools
- **Communication:** messaging and email platforms
- **Data:** databases, analytics, and visualization tools
- **Code:** development tools and repositories

You can browse available connectors at claude.com/connectors. Each connector clearly shows whether it offers read-only access or full read-and-write capabilities, and **you always control which services Claude can access** through your settings at claude.ai/settings/connectors.

This is part of a bigger picture: **Anthropic is building a system where AI agents can work with your projects, your folders, and your online services, all with your explicit permission.** Instead of copying information between apps manually, you describe what you need and the AI agent coordinates across your tools. The key principle is that you remain in control: Claude cannot access anything you haven't approved.

Cowork as Your Starting Point

We recommend Cowork as the best starting point for experiencing AI agents. It provides a visual, approachable way to see what AI agents can do, from working with your files and following your instructions to connecting to your tools and completing multi-step tasks autonomously. For most educators, Cowork will cover everything you need.

However, if you feel more adventurous and want even greater control over what AI agents can do on your computer, like running commands, processing files in bulk, and building custom automated workflows, the next step is **terminal-based AI agents** like Claude Code. You can learn about those in the companion guide **"Terminal AI Agents for Educators"** and in the course topic **"AI Agents in the CLI (Advanced)."**

9. Limitations to Keep in Mind

Note: The limitations below apply to Cowork's core functionality. Some limitations (such as the inability to connect to external data sources) can be partially addressed through plugins (see [Section 8](#)).

Cowork is a powerful tool, but it has important limitations:

1. **No memory between sessions.** When you start a new Cowork session, Claude does not remember previous sessions. You will need to re-establish context or rely on your folder-specific instructions to provide continuity.
2. **Desktop only.** Cowork works only in the Claude Desktop app, not in the web browser or on mobile devices. Your files are not synchronized across devices through Cowork.
3. **Token consumption.** Cowork uses significantly more tokens than regular chat because Claude is reading and processing entire files. On the Pro plan (\$20/month), you may reach usage limits faster during heavy sessions.
4. **No real-time collaboration.** You cannot share a Cowork session with a colleague. Each user works in their own session on their own machine.
5. **AI limitations still apply.** Claude can still produce inaccurate information, misinterpret instructions, or make errors in content. Always review AI-generated materials before using them with students, especially for factual accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and age-appropriateness.
6. **File format support.** Cowork works best with plain text, Markdown, and common document formats. Complex formatting in Word documents or Google Docs exports may not be perfectly preserved.

10. Getting Started Checklist

Use this checklist to set up Cowork for your teaching work:

- ☐ **Download Claude Desktop** from claude.ai/download (macOS or Windows)
- ☐ **Subscribe to a paid plan** (Pro at \$20/month is sufficient for most teachers)
- ☐ **Create a dedicated working folder** on your computer (e.g., `My Teaching AI Workspace`)
- ☐ **Set up subfolders** for each class, unit, or project
- ☐ **Write global instructions** in Settings > Cowork (your teaching context, language preferences, formatting standards)

- ☐ **Add folder-specific instructions** (`INSTRUCTIONS.md`) to each subfolder
- ☐ **Verify no student PII** is present in any folder you plan to share with Claude
- ☐ **Back up important files** before your first session
- ☐ **Check your school’s AI policy** to confirm Claude is permitted
- ☐ **Try a low-stakes task first** (e.g., creating a vocabulary list for a unit you have already planned)

11. Additional Resources

Official Anthropic Resources

Resource	Link
Claude Cowork Announcement	https://claude.com/blog/cowork-research-preview
Getting Started with Cowork	https://support.claude.com/en/articles/13345190-getting-started-with-cowork
Using Cowork Safely	https://support.claude.com/en/articles/13364135-using-cowork-safely
Cowork for Teams and Enterprise	https://support.claude.com/en/articles/13455879-cowork-for-team-and-enterprise-plans
Cowork Plugins	https://claude.com/blog/cowork-plugins
Knowledge Work Plugins (GitHub)	https://github.com/anthropics/knowledge-work-plugins
Webinar: The Future of AI at Work	https://www.anthropic.com/webinars/future-of-ai-at-work-introducing-cowork
Anthropic Education Report	https://www.anthropic.com/news/anthropic-education-report-how-educators-use-claude

Related Enabling Learning Resources

Resource	Description
Boosting Productivity with AI (Free Course)	enablinglearning.com/courses/boosting-productivity-with-ai-for-teachers/

Resource	Description
The Age of AI Agents (Course Module)	Part of the Boosting Productivity course — covers AI Projects, AI Agents, and terminal-based tools
ELPS Online Helper (Free Tool)	apps.enabblinglearning.com/elps/ — Digital reference for the 2024 Texas ELPS with AI-powered lesson planning, strategy cards, and tutoring session generator

Recommended Further Reading

Topic	Resource
FERPA and Educational Technology	studentprivacy.ed.gov
AI Guidance for K-12 Schools	U.S. Department of Education — <i>Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning</i> (2023)
TeachAI Framework	teachai.org — Toolkit for school and district AI policy development
WIDA Standards	wida.wisc.edu — For aligning EL materials with language proficiency standards (WIDA-member states)
Texas ELPS (2024)	tea.texas.gov — English Language Proficiency Standards for Texas educators
TELPAS Resources	tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/telpas/ — Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System, including proficiency level descriptors

12. References

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Texas Education Agency. (2024). *English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS)*.
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Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). *Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS)*. <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/telpas/>

U.S. Department of Education. (2021). *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*.
<https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/faq/what-ferpa>

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology. (2023). *Artificial intelligence and the future of teaching and learning: Insights and recommendations*.
<https://tech.ed.gov/ai-future-of-teaching-and-learning/>

This guide was created by Enabling Learning LLC as a companion resource for the course "Boosting Productivity with AI for Teachers." For questions, feedback, or professional development inquiries, visit enablinglearning.com.

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