

A QUICK REFERENCE

Claude Sonnet 5.5 & Opus 5.5 Cheat Sheet

*How to work best with the two models:
in both Claude Chat and Claude Cowork.*

QUICK PICKER

Which model should you pick?

Sonnet 5.5 and Opus 5.5 belong to the same family, but they are built for different kinds of work. A simple rule: start with Sonnet 5.5 for anything well defined, and move to Opus 5.5 when the job is complex, ambiguous or high stakes.

Pick Sonnet 5.5 when the task is clear and contained: fixing a bug, building a slide deck from a template, drafting a spreadsheet, or running many quick iterations on the same piece of work.

Pick Opus 5.5 when the task is open ended or heavy on judgment: a deep research project, a long review across many files, a decision with several moving parts, or anything where a mistake would be expensive.

Not sure? Start with Sonnet 5.5. It is faster and cheaper, so a first pass costs you little. If the result feels shallow, run the same request again on Opus 5.5.

Chat or Cowork? Chat is where you talk with Claude: ask, draft, explain, or work on text you paste in. Cowork is where Claude works for you: you describe an outcome, it plans the steps, reads your files, builds the documents and saves the finished result on your computer. Cowork needs the Claude desktop app and a paid plan, and it uses more of your allowance than Chat.

SECTION 1 • CLAUDE SONNET 5.5

The everyday workhorse

Released on 28 September 2026, Sonnet 5.5 is a clear upgrade over Sonnet 5. It writes its answers more than 30% faster and, for most tasks, costs up to 30% less to run, because it needs fewer steps to get the job done.

Where it shines. Well-scoped everyday work: fixing bugs, producing polished documents, slides and spreadsheets, and refining layouts. Testers also praise its eye for design and its habit of following a template closely enough that a first draft needs very little editing.

How close is it to Opus 5.5? On several knowledge-work and computer-use tests it lands within a few points of Opus 5.5. The gap opens on complex, open-ended problems that need sustained judgment, where Opus 5.5 is still clearly stronger.

Writing. It writes more clearly and naturally than the previous generation, which makes it a better partner for back-and-forth work.

Good to know. The Claude apps run it at Medium effort by default. Some higher-risk cybersecurity requests are handed automatically to the older Sonnet 5, while routine coding and bug fixing work as usual.

SONNET 5.5 IN PRACTICE

Using it in Chat and in Cowork

In Chat, go for speed. Use it for the first pass of a text, an outline or an analysis, then refine in follow-up messages. Fast replies let you iterate five or six times in the time a slower model needs for one.

In Chat, show it a model. Paste an example of the format, tone or structure you want. Sonnet 5.5 follows templates well, so the result usually lands close to the final version.

In Chat, raise the effort only when needed. For a delicate task, ask it to think more carefully. For a quick draft, the default is plenty.

In Cowork, hand it clear jobs. Sorting a folder, turning raw data into a spreadsheet, or formatting a batch of documents in one style are ideal. Describe the outcome, review the plan Claude proposes, then approve it.

In Cowork, use it for routine work. Tasks you repeat every week suit the lighter, faster model and are gentler on your usage allowance.

In Cowork, switch up when it gets murky. If a task turns out longer or more ambiguous than expected, rerun it on Opus 5.5.

The flagship for complex work

Released on 22 September 2026 as the first model of the Claude 5.5 family, Opus 5.5 is the most capable Opus so far. Anthropic says it performs at the level of Fable 5.1 on most work, generates output more than 30% faster than Opus 5, and costs about 40% less to run.

Where it shines. Long, sprawling and judgment-heavy work: deep research across many sources, reviews spanning a whole codebase, financial analysis and multi-stage projects. In one early test it stayed on task for more than 18 hours on a single engineering job.

Sharper thinking. Testers report that it keeps digging past the first plausible answer, and that it can spot mistakes in the instructions it receives instead of following them blindly.

Clearer writing. Its messages put the most important information first, use less jargon and follow the writing rules you give it, which answers a common complaint about Opus 5.

Careful by design. It is much less likely than earlier models to take hard-to-reverse actions or step outside the boundaries it was given, and it resists prompt injection better than Opus 5. That matters when Claude works on your files.

Good to know. Anthropic also raised the five-hour usage limits on Pro, Max, Team and seat-based Enterprise plans.

OPUS 5.5 IN PRACTICE

Using it in Chat and in Cowork

In Chat, ask for more than a first answer. Use it when you want Claude to verify, cross-check sources and flag its own uncertainty before it concludes.

In Chat, use it for long sessions. Its clear, front-loaded replies stay easy to follow across a long exchange, so you can think through a problem together over many messages.

In Chat, skip maximum effort. Even at lower settings it is already very solid. Save the highest setting for genuinely critical work.

In Cowork, give it open-ended jobs. It is the right pick when you cannot tell in advance what Claude will find along the way: a research brief, a review of many files, a multi-step project.

In Cowork, spend it where it counts. It draws more on your allowance than Sonnet 5.5, so keep it for complex tasks rather than routine ones.

In Cowork, share only what the job needs. Its caution helps when a task touches many files, but a smaller shared folder is still the safest setup.

CLOSING CHECKLIST

Five habits for both models

- ☐ Say what you want, not what to avoid. "Write it as one flowing paragraph" works better than "no bullet points".
- ☐ Explain the reason behind a rule. Claude applies it better, even in cases you did not foresee, when it knows why it matters.
- ☐ Define what done looks like: format, length and audience, rather than every single step.
- ☐ Skip the "double-check it" request. These models already verify their own work, and an explicit second pass often slows things down without improving the result.
- ☐ Add one to three examples of the result you have in mind. An example beats a long description.

Start small, look at the result, and adjust. The best prompts often come from the second attempt.