

Getting Started with Claude Projects

A Reference Guide for Faculty

Mills College at Northeastern University · CATLR AI Fellowship 2025–2026 · Tomás Galguera

What Is a Claude Project?

A Claude Project is a persistent workspace that holds your documents, remembers context across conversations, and applies a set of custom instructions to every exchange within it. Unlike a regular Claude conversation, which starts fresh each time you open a new tab, a project accumulates knowledge about your course over the course of a semester.

The practical consequence: once you load your syllabus, rubrics, assignment sheets, and relevant theoretical frameworks into a project, Claude can respond to your questions by reasoning against your actual course materials, not generic defaults. It can also flag tensions between a new request and decisions you documented earlier.

Regular Conversation	A Project
Starts fresh each time	Remembers context across sessions
No shared documents	Holds your syllabus, rubrics, and frameworks
Generic responses	Responds against your specific course materials
No persistent instructions	Custom instructions shape every response
Useful for one-off questions	Grows more useful over a semester

Setting Up Your First Project

Creating a project takes about fifteen minutes the first time. The quality of every subsequent conversation depends largely on what you put in at setup.

1 Create the project

Log into claude.ai. Select 'Projects' from the left sidebar, then 'New Project.' Give it a name that identifies the course and semester. Write brief descriptions of the project that can help you distinguish it from others.

2 Write your custom instructions

In the Project Settings panel, write a brief description of the course, your role, and the values that should shape every response. See the Markdown section below for how to format these effectively.

3 Upload your project files

Add your syllabus, rubrics, key assignment sheets, and any theoretical frameworks central to the course. If you have notes from a previous iteration of the course documenting what worked and what did not, upload those too.

4 Start a conversation

Open a new conversation within the project. Claude will have access to everything you uploaded and will apply your custom instructions automatically.

5 Refine as you go

You can add files, update your instructions, and upload new materials at any point during the semester. The project improves as it accumulates context.

What to upload as project files

High-value documents to include at setup

- Course syllabus (current and, if available, prior versions for comparison)
- Rubrics and assignment sheets for major assessments
- Key theoretical frameworks or readings that anchor the course
- CAPE or accreditation standards relevant to your program
- Post-course reflection notes from previous semesters
- Any institutional documents Claude should reason against (program handbooks, policy statements)

What not to upload

- Identifiable student work without anonymizing it first
- Documents with sensitive personnel or HR information
- Files larger than the project storage limit (Claude will flag this)

Writing Good Custom Instructions

Custom instructions are the single most important setup decision you make. They tell Claude who you are, what the course is, and what values should govern every response. A well-written set of instructions means you do not have to re-explain context every time you start a conversation within the project.

What to include

- Your role and institutional context
- The course name, level, and student profile
- Key pedagogical values and constraints (for example: a preference for less-is-more session design, or an ethical limit on using AI to make assessments of individual students)
- How you want Claude to communicate (level of formality, preferred length of responses, whether to ask clarifying questions or proceed with stated assumptions)
- Anything Claude should never do within this project

Using Markdown formatting

Formatting your custom instructions with Markdown, using bold headers for sections, bullet points for lists, and bold text for non-negotiables, helps Claude parse what matters most and produces more consistent responses. You do not need to know Markdown to use it: ask Claude to take your plain-prose instructions and reformat them in Markdown, and it will do so immediately; you can paste what Claude gives you in the project you create. Do this in a conversation outside of any project in which you describe what you have in mind. Provide as much context as possible and remember to close with “What else do you need to know to complete this task?”

BEFORE (plain prose):

I teach a graduate seminar called EDUT 6305. There are five students.
I want you to favor simple session designs. Don't make assessments
about individual students. I prefer concise responses.

AFTER (Markdown formatted):

Course Context

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- Course: EDUT 6305, Human Resource Management in Education
- Level: Graduate seminar, MA in Educational Leadership
- Cohort: 5 students, California Administrative Services Credential

## Pedagogical Values
- **Less is more**: favor focused session designs over comprehensive ones
- **Faculty judgment**: do not substitute AI judgment for faculty judgment
  on student assessment

## Communication Preferences
- Concise responses unless I ask for detail
- Flag tensions with prior decisions rather than overwriting them
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The Markdown version takes the same information and makes it structurally legible. Claude responds to the headers and bold text as signals about what matters most.

What a Project Can Do for Your Course

The most useful applications tend to emerge from real teaching situations rather than planned workflows. The following examples are drawn from EDUT 6305 (Human Resource Management in Education), a graduate seminar taught using Claude Projects.

Syllabus revision

Upload an existing syllabus alongside your current constraints and pedagogical goals. Ask Claude to compare the two and help you rebuild sections that no longer fit. Claude will preserve what you explicitly want to keep and flag tensions between your stated values and the proposed changes.

Canvas page creation

Ask Claude to generate structured HTML for a course introduction page, reading guide, or discussion framing. The output pastes directly into Canvas's HTML editor. Because the project holds your syllabus and course goals, the pages Claude generates are drawn from your actual course materials, not generic templates.

Session planning

Describe what you want to accomplish in a session and any constraints (time, student stress levels, competing assignments). Claude will produce a structured plan with time markers and facilitation notes. If you have uploaded post-course reflections from previous semesters, Claude will draw on those to flag potential problems before you encounter them.

Discussion prompt generation

Describe the learning outcome you are targeting and the relevant readings. Claude will generate discussion prompts calibrated to your students' level, with scaffolding built in. Prompts can be revised iteratively within the same conversation.

Rubric drafting

Describe what you are assessing and the criteria that matter most. Claude will draft a rubric aligned to your course objectives. Because your syllabus and assignment sheets are in the project, the rubric will reflect your specific standards rather than generic ones. You revise; it refines.

Chatbot personas as practice partners

For courses that involve practiced skills (difficult conversations, post-observation feedback, family conferences), Claude can be configured as a practice partner with a specific persona. Students can repeat the same scenario multiple times, or compare the AI response to a peer's response of the same scenario. Voice mode is available for spoken practice.

Claude Projects vs. Other AI Tools

Different tools suit different tasks. This comparison focuses on the specific affordances relevant to sustained course work.

	Best suited for
Claude Projects	Semester-long course collaboration with persistent context, custom instructions, and document-grounded responses
Claude (no project)	One-off questions, quick drafts, tasks that do not require course-specific context
ChatGPT	General-purpose tasks; similar capabilities to Claude for one-off work; no equivalent to Projects' persistent custom instructions
NotebookLM	Deep analysis of a fixed document set; strong at surfacing connections across uploaded sources; less suited to generative tasks like drafting or session planning
Priyank's Assignment Redesign Tool (Claude shared project)	Structured assignment redesign using Backward Design, UDL, and TILT; produces a redesign brief across three pathways (AI-resistant, AI-integrated, process-focused)

A Note on Data Privacy

Northeastern University has an enterprise agreement with Anthropic. Conversations conducted through your institutional account are not used to train Claude models and are not accessible to Anthropic for commercial purposes.

- Use your Northeastern institutional account, not a personal free account, for course-related work
- Anonymize any student work before uploading it to a project
- Do not upload documents containing sensitive HR or personnel information
- If you have questions about specific use cases, please refer to the [Standards and Recommendations for the Use of Generative AI in Teaching and Learning at Northeastern](#)

Next Steps

Schedule a 1-on-1 consultation

- Individual consultations are available for any faculty member who wants to set up a project for their own course
- Not restricted to Claude use
- Contact: t.galguera@northeastern.edu

AI in the Academy Salon

- Reconvenes March 31st for ongoing dialogue about AI in teaching and scholarship (send suggestions for what to work on)
- Open to faculty across the spectrum, from early adopters to principled skeptics
- The Salon is a space for examination, not advocacy

Priyank's Assignment Redesign Tool

- Available for any faculty member who wants to think through how a specific assignment sits relative to AI
- Produces a redesign brief, not a prescription; you own the outcome
- Email t.galguera@northeastern.edu for access