Claude Code Skill Cheat Sheet

One file. Two parts. No code anywhere in it.

WHAT THE WHOLE FILE LOOKS LIKE

```
---
name: meta-description
description: Use when I want to write a
  meta description, or when I say "write
  the meta" or "SEO description".
---

# Meta description

I'll give you a post. Write three options.

Every option must:

- Be 140 to 160 characters
- Put the keyword in the first half

If you can't tell what the keyword is, ask
me before writing anything.
```

1. **The three dashes.** They open and close the frontmatter. Claude reads what sits between them differently from everything else. Keep both lines.
2. **The frontmatter.** A couple of lines telling Claude when this file is relevant. Claude keeps this part on hand so it knows the skill exists.
3. **The instructions.** Written to Claude in your own words. Only read once the skill is running. After that it stays in your conversation, so keep it short and specific.
4. **A stop-and-ask line.** A skill is allowed to tell Claude to pause and ask you. This one line prevents more bad output than all the others.

THE FRONTMATTER FIELDS

FIELD	NEEDED	WHAT IT DOES
`name`	Optional	The command you type and the name in the / menu. Leave it out and Claude Code uses the folder name. If the two differ, the folder name still works too.
`description`	Do it	The line that decides whether any of this works. Claude keeps your skill descriptions on hand, and opens the rest of the file only when the description matches what you asked. Write the literal phrases you'd type.
`when_to_use`	Optional	Extra trigger phrases and example requests. Gets read right along with the description, so it's the same budget, just tidier to look at. Combined cap is 1,536 characters in the skill listing, so put the important part first.

WHERE THE FILE GOES

KIND	PATH	WORKS IN
Personal	`~/.claude/skills/name/SKILL.md`	Every project on this computer. Pick this for writing skills.
Project	`.claude/skills/name/SKILL.md`	Only inside that one project folder.

You don't have to make the folder yourself. Paste the file into Claude Code and say "save this as a skill called name". If that skills folder didn't exist when you started the session, type /reload-skills once, or your new skill won't show up.

THREE WAYS IT GOES WRONG

WHAT HAPPENS	WHY	THE FIX
It never fires	The description was vague, so Claude never saw a match. This is the common one, and a skill that never loads looks exactly like a skill that's broken.	Write the literal phrases you'd type, not a summary of them.
It does too much	One giant skill tried to handle five jobs and picked the wrong one.	One skill, one job. Split it.
It fires when you don't want it	The description was broad enough to grab unrelated work.	Name what it's not for, right in the description.

BEFORE YOU SAVE IT, CHECK THE DESCRIPTION

- [ ] It names one job, not five
- [ ] It says what the skill is not for
- [ ] The rules use numbers, not adjectives
- [ ] It lists three or more phrases you'd really type
- [ ] No vague filler like help, handle, or various
- [ ] The important part comes first