

The Attorney's Guide to Claude

20 Skills to Push Claude to Its Limits in Legal Practice

Twenty practical skills covering every stage of a matter — research, drafting, review, client management, and firm operations. Each skill includes a ready-to-use prompt template built for legal work. Five of them connect directly to CourtListener's free database of real court opinions, so Claude searches actual case law instead of recalling from training memory.

RESEARCH

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- 02. Statute Analysis Skills
- 03. Opposition Research Skills
- 04. Jurisdiction & Procedure Skills

DRAFTING

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RESEARCH

SKILL 01

Case Law Research Skills

Turns a legal question into a structured research brief — relevant doctrine, split authority, strongest cases on each side, and gaps Claude can't fill that still need Westlaw.

WHEN TO USE

Before drafting a brief, evaluating a new matter, or advising a client where the law is unsettled.

PROMPT

```
You are a legal research assistant. I need a research brief on the following issue:  
Issue: [describe the legal question]  
Jurisdiction: [state / federal circuit]  
My client's position: [plaintiff / defendant / which side of the issue]  
Give me:  
1. The controlling doctrine and leading cases (with case names, courts, and years)  
2. Any circuit split or state-to-state variation on this issue  
3. The strongest 2-3 cases supporting my client's position, and why they help  
4. The strongest 2-3 cases against my position, and how courts have distinguished them  
5. Any recent trend in how courts are deciding this issue (last 5 years)  
6. What you cannot tell me – where I need to verify with a primary source database  
Flag any case you are not certain exists. Do not invent citations.
```

SKILL 02

Statute Analysis Skills

Breaks a statute into its operative elements, identifies definitional gaps, highlights enforcement provisions, and maps the exceptions.

WHEN TO USE

Regulatory compliance questions, new practice area work, statutory interpretation disputes.

PROMPT

```
Analyze the following statute [or regulation] for a client matter.
Statute text: [paste the full text]
Client situation: [brief description of what the client did or is trying to do]
Jurisdiction: [state / federal]
Give me:
1. The key operative elements – what must be true for the statute to apply
2. All defined terms, and where the definitions are ambiguous or undefined
3. The exceptions and safe harbors
4. The enforcement mechanism and penalties
5. How my client's situation maps to each element (does it apply? where is it close?)
6. The interpretation questions a court would need to resolve if this were litigated
Write this as analysis, not a summary. Tell me what the hard questions are.
```

SKILL 03

Opposition Research Skills

Builds a profile of opposing counsel or an adverse party — litigation history, preferred arguments, motion practice patterns, and known tendencies — from public record.

WHEN TO USE

Before a contentious matter, high-stakes negotiation, or when you've never faced this firm before.

PROMPT

```
I'm preparing for a matter where opposing counsel is [name / firm] in [jurisdiction].
Based on publicly available information, build a litigation profile:
1. Known practice areas and the types of cases they typically handle
2. Common arguments or motions they favor
3. Reputation for settlement vs. trial
4. Any notable verdicts, published opinions, or disciplinary history
5. What I should expect in their discovery approach and litigation style
Be clear about what you know vs. what you're inferring. Flag anything to verify independently.
Do not fabricate cases or bar history.
```

SKILL 04

Jurisdiction & Procedure Skills

Pulls the procedural rules, local requirements, filing deadlines, and format requirements for a specific court.

WHEN TO USE

New court, unfamiliar judge, or filing in a jurisdiction you don't practice in regularly.

PROMPT

```
I need a procedural checklist for filing [type of motion / pleading] in [court name].  
Give me:  
1. The applicable federal or state rule governing this filing  
2. Local rules that modify the general rule (page limits, formatting, font, margins)  
3. The deadline to file and how it's calculated  
4. Any required meet-and-confer or pre-filing certification  
5. Service requirements  
6. Any judge-specific standing orders I should check (tell me where to find them)  
7. Common reasons courts in this jurisdiction deny or strike these filings  
Tell me what I must verify on the court's current website before filing.
```

DRAFTING

SKILL 05

Contract Drafting Skills

Produces a first-draft contract section built around the specific deal terms, risk allocation, and governing law you provide — not a generic template.

WHEN TO USE

Any transactional drafting where you're starting from a blank page or need a specific clause fast.

PROMPT

```
Draft [section name] for a [type of agreement] with the following parameters:  
Parties: [brief description – who is doing what]  
Deal context: [what the agreement covers, key risk being allocated]  
Client's position: [which party is your client and what they want]  
Governing law: [state]  
Any specific requirements: [cap on liability, carve-outs, insurance tie-in, etc.]  
Draft the clause, then give me:  
1. A plain-English explanation of what it does and what risk it shifts  
2. The 2-3 provisions opposing counsel is most likely to push back on, and why  
3. Suggested fallback language for each
```

Brief & Motion Skills

Structures a legal argument — thesis, authority, application, and response to the strongest counterargument — before you write a single word of the actual brief.

WHEN TO USE

Any dispositive or contested motion where you need to stress-test the argument before drafting.

PROMPT

```
I am drafting a [motion type] in [court] on the following issue:  
Issue: [state the legal question the motion turns on]  
My client's position: [what you're arguing]  
Key facts: [3-5 facts the motion relies on]  
Governing standard: [the legal standard the court will apply]  
Give me:  
1. The argument structure – the logical order to make the points  
2. The controlling authority I should lead with  
3. The strongest counterargument the other side will make  
4. How I should address that counterargument in the brief  
5. Any factual gaps or legal weaknesses I need to address before filing  
Do not write the brief. Give me the architecture and the stress points.
```

SKILL 07

Demand Letter Skills

Drafts a demand letter calibrated to the specific purpose — prelitigation settlement, cease and desist, collections, or insurance demand — with tone matched to the strategic goal.

WHEN TO USE

Any client matter where the first written communication to the other side sets the negotiating frame.

PROMPT

```
Draft a demand letter for the following matter:  
Client: [my client – plaintiff / claimant]  
Recipient: [opposing party or counsel]  
Type of demand: [prelitigation settlement / cease and desist / insurance demand]  
Key facts: [what happened, dates, amounts]  
Legal basis: [the claims or rights at issue]  
Amount demanded or action required: [specific ask]  
Tone: [firm but open / aggressive / formal notice only]  
Deadline for response: [if applicable]  
Draft the letter, then flag:  
1. Any factual claim I should verify before sending  
2. Any legal theory that is weaker than it looks  
3. Whether the tone matches the stated strategic goal
```

SKILL 08

Client Communication Skills

Drafts attorney-client communications — status updates, advice letters, bad news — in plain English without sacrificing legal precision or creating unintended admissions.

WHEN TO USE

Any substantive written communication to a client that will sit in the file.

PROMPT

```
Draft a [type: status update / advice letter / bad news communication] to a client:  
Client profile: [layperson / sophisticated / business owner]  
Matter: [brief description]  
What I need to communicate: [the key message]  
Tone: [empathetic / direct / formal]  
What I cannot say: [any privilege or litigation-strategy concern to avoid in writing]  
Write the communication, then flag:  
1. Any statement that could create an implied warranty or unrealistic expectation  
2. Any language that is clearer verbally and should not be in writing  
3. Whether the plain-English level matches the client profile
```

Engagement Letter Skills

Drafts an engagement letter or retainer with scope, fee structure, billing terms, and termination provisions — specific to the matter, not recycled from a form.

WHEN TO USE

New client, new matter type, or any engagement where the scope is non-standard.

PROMPT

```
Draft an engagement letter for the following representation:  
Client: [individual / entity]  
Matter: [describe what you're being retained to do]  
Fee structure: [hourly at $X / flat fee / contingency / hybrid]  
Billing terms: [monthly / milestones / retainer amount]  
Scope limitations: [what is explicitly out of scope]  
Termination: [notice required, unpaid fees on termination]  
Jurisdiction: [state – for governing law clause]  
Any special terms: [client responsible for costs, conflict waiver, etc.]  
Flag any provision that is unenforceable or atypical for [state].
```

REVIEW & ANALYSIS

SKILL 10

Contract Review Skills

Reviews a contract for missing provisions, unfavorable terms, hidden risk, and standard-of-care gaps — organized by risk level, not section order.

WHEN TO USE

Transactional review, incoming vendor agreements, or any contract where you're on the receiving end.

PROMPT

```
Review the following contract from the perspective of [my client's role: buyer / seller / service provider].
```

```
[Paste contract text]
```

```
Give me a risk-tiered review:
```

```
HIGH RISK – significant exposure or missing provisions that should be there
```

```
MODERATE RISK – unfavorable but negotiable terms
```

```
LOW RISK / NOTE – items to flag but unlikely to create a problem
```

```
For each issue:
```

1. What the contract says (or doesn't say)
2. Why it matters to my client
3. Suggested redline or addition

```
Do not summarize what the contract does. Identify what's wrong with it.
```

SKILL 11

Discovery Triage Skills

Processes a batch of discovery documents — summarizing key documents, flagging relevant evidence, identifying gaps, and organizing by issue.

WHEN TO USE

Initial document review, deposition prep, or building a trial exhibit list.

PROMPT

```
I am reviewing discovery documents in a [type of case] matter. The key disputed issues are:  
Issue 1: [describe]  
Issue 2: [describe]  
Issue 3: [describe]  
[Paste or attach document text]  
For each document:  
1. Summarize in 2-3 sentences what it is and what it shows  
2. Tag it to the relevant issue(s)  
3. Flag if it helps my client, hurts my client, or is neutral  
4. Note any inconsistency with other documents or the client's account  
At the end, give me a gap list: what documents should exist but are not in this production?
```

SKILL 12

Deposition Prep Skills

Generates a deposition outline — question sequences, follow-up branches, and impeachment setups — built from the facts and documents you provide.

WHEN TO USE

Adverse deposition, witness prep, or any deposition where you're going in with documents to work through.

PROMPT

```
I am taking the deposition of [witness name / role] in a [case type] matter.  
My theory of the case: [one paragraph – what you're trying to prove]  
Key documents involving this witness: [paste or summarize]  
What this witness is likely to say: [their expected testimony]  
What I need to establish or undermine: [specific goals]  
Build me a deposition outline with:  
1. Opening sequence to establish background and credibility boundaries  
2. Question sequences for each key topic with follow-up branches  
3. Impeachment setups using the documents provided  
4. Closing sequence to lock in admissions I need  
Flag where the witness has an easy escape and I need a tighter question.
```

Settlement Evaluation Skills

Frames a structured settlement analysis — probability-weighted outcomes, cost of litigation, client risk tolerance, and a recommended range.

WHEN TO USE

Any time a settlement offer comes in or you're preparing a client for the settlement discussion.

PROMPT

```
Build a settlement analysis for the following matter:
Case type: [describe]
Stage of litigation: [where the case is now]
Current offer: [amount or terms, if an offer exists]
My liability assessment: [strong / moderate / weak, and why]
Damages range: [best case / likely / low-end estimate]
Anticipated litigation costs to trial: [your estimate]
Client's risk tolerance: [conservative / willing to take risk / driven by principle]
Give me:
1. A probability-weighted expected value of going to trial
2. A comparison against the current offer (or the range I should demand)
3. The factors that most affect the calculation
4. How I should frame the recommendation to the client
5. Questions to ask the client before finalizing
```

CLIENT MANAGEMENT

SKILL 14

Intake-to-Matter Skills

Converts a raw client intake — messy notes, a phone call summary, or a form — into a structured matter brief with key facts, open questions, potential claims, and next steps.

WHEN TO USE

New client screening, post-intake processing, or getting a matter off the ground.

PROMPT

```
Convert the following client intake information into a structured matter brief.  
[Paste intake notes, form responses, or call summary]  
Produce a matter brief with:  
1. Client name and contact (as provided)  
2. Factual summary – what happened, key dates, parties involved  
3. Preliminary legal issues identified  
4. Potential claims or defenses (flag strength: strong / arguable / weak)  
5. Statute of limitations concerns (flag if any deadlines are near)  
6. Open questions – what I need to ask before assessing the matter  
7. Recommended immediate next steps (in order of urgency)  
  
Do not add facts. Only work from what's provided and flag where information is missing.
```

SKILL 15

Client Counseling Prep Skills

Prepares you for a difficult client conversation — structures the key points, anticipates the client's questions and emotional reactions, and gives you language for the hard parts.

WHEN TO USE

Delivering a bad outcome, advising against what the client wants, or managing unrealistic expectations.

PROMPT

```
Help me prepare for a client meeting with the following situation:
Client profile: [individual / business owner / sophisticated / emotional]
What I need to communicate: [bad news / unfavorable recommendation / reality check]
What the client wants to hear: [their expectation]
The gap: [describe the difference between expectation and reality]
My relationship with this client: [new / long-standing / contentious]
Give me:
1. How to open the conversation (the first 2-3 sentences)
2. The key points I need to land, in order
3. The 3 questions the client is most likely to push back with, and how to answer each
4. Language for the hardest moment in the conversation
5. How to close – what the client should leave knowing and what happens next
```

SKILL 16

Case Status Communication Skills

Drafts recurring client status updates that are informative without creating false expectations, document obligations, or billing narrative problems.

WHEN TO USE

Monthly status letters, post-hearing updates, or any required client communication under your retainer.

PROMPT

```
Draft a case status update for the following matter:
Client: [name or description]
Matter: [brief description]
What happened since the last update: [filings, hearings, rulings, negotiations]
What's coming next: [upcoming deadlines, hearings, decisions]
What the client needs to do (if anything): [action required]
Tone: [routine update / significant development / manage expectations]
Write the update in plain English. Avoid language that overpromises an outcome.
Keep it under 300 words unless the developments require more.
```

PRACTICE OPERATIONS

SKILL 17

Time Entry Skills

Turns your shorthand notes into billable time entries that are specific, defensible, and formatted to survive a client audit or fee petition.

WHEN TO USE

End-of-day time entry, billing write-ups, or any time you're converting rough notes to entries clients will scrutinize.

PROMPT

```
Convert the following work notes into billable time entries.
Notes: [paste your raw notes]
Matter: [case or client name]
Billing format: [block billing / task billing / UTBMS codes required: yes/no]
Standard: [client is a sophisticated business / individual / government]
For each time entry:
1. Write a clear, specific description of the work performed
2. Identify the time in tenths of an hour
3. Flag any entry a client might question and suggest how to clarify it
Do not inflate time. Do not combine unrelated tasks without flagging it.
```

Matter Summary Skills

Produces a current matter summary — facts, procedural posture, open issues, risks, and next steps — from any combination of pleadings, notes, and prior orders you paste in.

WHEN TO USE

Handing off a matter, returning to a file after a gap, or bringing in co-counsel.

PROMPT

```
Build a current matter summary from the following file materials.  
[Paste pleadings, prior orders, key correspondence, or case notes]  
Produce a summary with:  
1. Parties and their roles  
2. Claims and defenses (brief statement of each, current status)  
3. Procedural posture – where the case is in the litigation timeline  
4. Key facts established vs. facts still in dispute  
5. Open legal issues that haven't been decided  
6. Risks to my client (in order of seriousness)  
7. Upcoming deadlines and next steps  
  
Write for a reader who knows nothing about the file but is a practicing attorney.
```

Case Theory Development Skills

Forces the argument — builds a case theory from the facts you have, identifies what the theory requires that you don't yet have, and exposes where the theory breaks.

WHEN TO USE

Early in a new matter, before committing to a litigation strategy, or when the facts don't fit neatly into an obvious theory.

PROMPT

```
Help me develop a case theory for the following matter.  
Known facts: [what you know as of today]  
Client's goal: [what outcome the client wants]  
Available claims or defenses: [what legal theories could apply]  
Evidence you have: [what's in hand]  
Evidence you don't have yet: [what you need but haven't obtained]  
Give me:  
1. The strongest case theory available given the current facts  
2. The factual and legal elements that theory requires  
3. Which elements are provable now vs. still need to be developed  
4. Where the theory breaks – the most damaging fact or legal obstacle  
5. An alternative theory if the primary one fails  
6. What I should do in the next 30 days to build or abandon it
```

Legal Risk Assessment Skills

Evaluates a proposed client action for legal exposure before the client does it — what laws apply, what the realistic exposure is, and how to reduce risk while still achieving the goal.

WHEN TO USE

Transactional advice, compliance questions, or any time a client says 'can we do this?'

PROMPT

```
My client wants to [describe the proposed action or decision].
Client: [individual / entity type]
Industry: [if relevant]
Jurisdiction: [state / federal / multi-state]
Relevant facts: [what the client has done so far, if anything]
Assess the legal risk:
1. What laws, regulations, or contractual obligations are implicated?
2. What is the realistic exposure – civil, regulatory, criminal?
3. How likely is that exposure to materialize? (High / Moderate / Low – explain why)
4. What can the client do to reduce the risk while still achieving the goal?
5. Are there alternative approaches with less legal exposure?
6. What should I confirm with primary sources before advising the client to proceed?
Give me a clear recommendation. Tell me what the answer is and where the real uncertainty
lives.
```

Five of These Skills Run on Real Case Law

Install the CourtListener MCP (free, no subscription) in Claude Cowork, then save the five .skill files included with this guide. Skills 01, 03, 06, 10, and 20 will automatically query CourtListener before running their analysis — real citations, real opinions, no hallucination risk.

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