

Subagents & Skills — The Cheatsheet

CHEATSHEET · VERSION: JULY 2026

The decision matrix

Criterion	Subagent	Skill	MCP server
What it is	Separate agent with its own system prompt and tool permissions	Reusable instructions (Markdown)	Tool connection to external systems (APIs, databases)
Own context?	Yes — own context window, doesn't flood the main context	No — loaded into the session on demand	No — provides tools, not context
Repeatable workflow?	No — bounded subtask	Yes: "this is how we audit", "this is how we write posts"	No — abilities, not procedures
External system?	No	No	Yes: read tickets, query databases, trigger deploys
Invocation	Main session delegates the subtask	Agent loads it itself — the <code>description</code> field is the trigger	Gives the agent abilities it doesn't have
Typical use	Research, review, search	Audit, release checklist, review ritual	Tickets, deploys, databases
Mnemonic	Division of labour	Knowledge	Connection to the world

Rules of thumb

- **Skills are knowledge, subagents are division of labour, MCP is a connection to the world.**
- **One role per subagent.** "Research and implement and test" is not a subagent — that's the main session.
- **Cut down tool permissions.** A reviewer that can only read cannot "quickly fix" its own criticism.
- **Write the `description` as a trigger** ("Use when ..."), not a summary — it decides whether the skill loads at the right moment.

File locations

Skills: `.claude/skills/<name>/SKILL.md` · Subagents: `.claude/agents/<name>.md` — both Markdown inside the project, each built in about 20 minutes.

The full guide: <https://halvic.ch/en/blog/claude-code-subagents-skills-guide>