THE CLAUDE DO-NOT GUIDE.

Sixteen things to tell Claude to stop doing before it designs anything for your brand.



55KNOTS

By Ben Williams

WHY YOUR CREATIVE LOOKS LIKE CLAUDE.

Claude is good at design. It also has habits. Give it a blank brief and it reaches for the same handful of tricks every time, and once you have seen them you can't stop seeing them.

I'm a designer and I run a creative agency. We use Claude every day. The difference is that we write the design guides, and the do-not guides, before it starts.

This is our do-not list. Sixteen habits, what each one looks like, why it gives you away, what to do instead, and the exact line to give Claude so it stops.



LEARN THE LIST

Read through them once. You will start spotting them in your own posts and everyone else's.



PASTE THE LIST

The full list is at the back, ready to copy. Put it in your Project instructions, or at the top of a new chat.

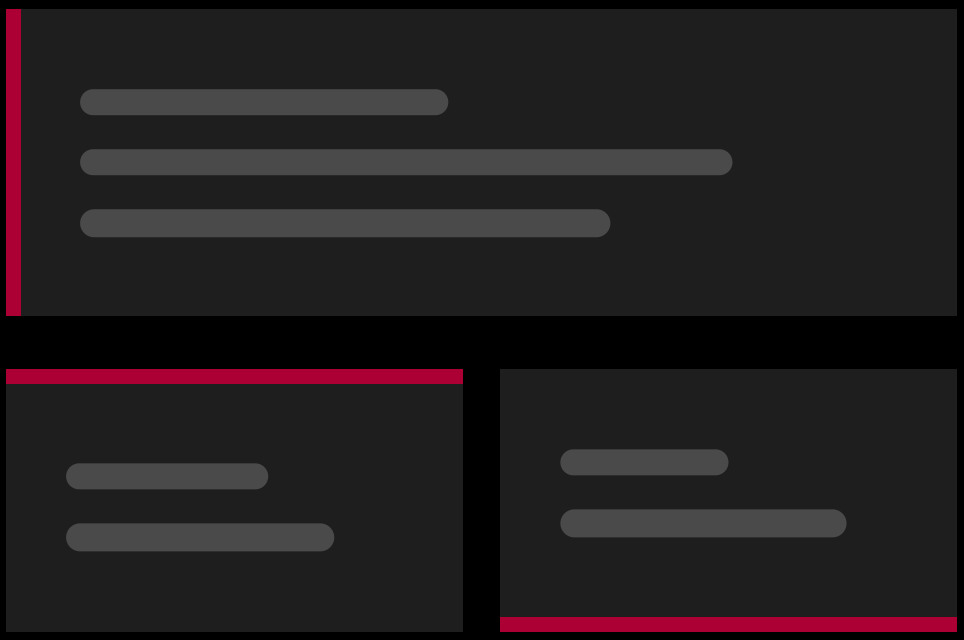


ADD YOUR BRAND

A do-not list is half the job. The last pages cover what a full guide needs.

01

THE ONE-SIDED BORDER.



What it looks like. A coloured line down one edge of a card, quote or callout box. Left, right, top or bottom, it is the same tell.

Why it gives you away. It is Claude's go-to move for making a plain box look designed. It turns up in almost every AI-built deck, website and carousel, so people spot it in a second.

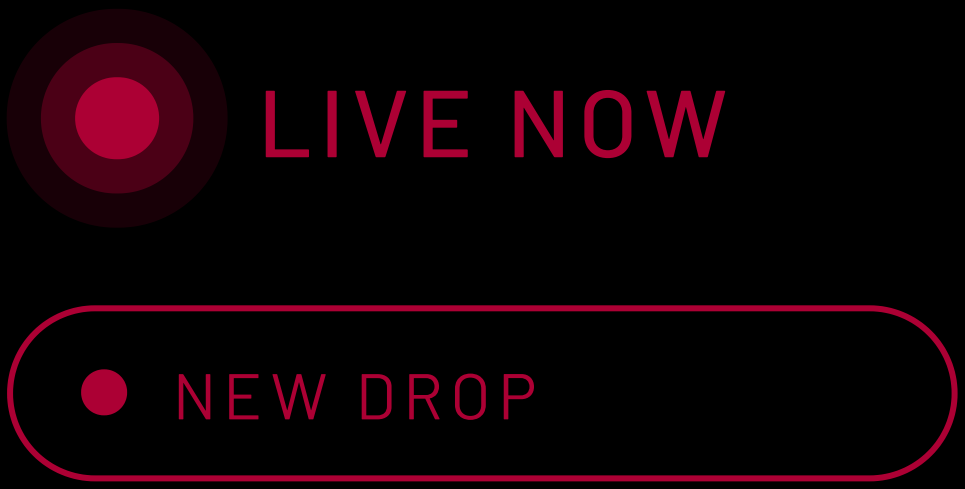
Do this instead. Give the box a full border, a solid fill, or no box at all. Spacing and type can separate content without decoration.

TELL CLAUDE

No accent border on one side of any card, quote or callout. Use a full border, a solid fill, or no box.

02

THE PULSING DOT.



What it looks like. A small glowing dot in front of a label like “Live now” or “New”. Often the whole thing sits inside a pill, which is worse.

Why it gives you away. It is borrowed from software dashboards, where a dot means something is running right now. Nothing in your post is live. It is decoration pretending to be information.

Do this instead. Write the label in your normal type, or drop the label. If something really is new, say so in the headline.

TELL CLAUDE

No status dots, glowing dots or “live” indicators next to labels or inside buttons.

03

THE DASH EYEBROW.

ABOUT THE STUDIO

I am a header.

What it looks like. A short line, then tiny spaced-out capitals sitting above the headline.

Why it gives you away. It is the default opening of every template website. On a phone the text is too small to read, so it adds clutter and no meaning.

Do this instead. If the headline needs context, put it in the headline or in a subline at a size people can read.

TELL CLAUDE

No eyebrow labels. No small letter-spaced capitals above headlines, with or without a line.

04

PILLS FOR BULLET POINTS.

Strategy

Content creation

Paid ads

Websites

Photo & video

Print

What it looks like. Every item in a list wrapped in its own rounded pill and scattered across the slide.

Why it gives you away. Pills are for things you can tap, like tags and filters. Used for a list they look clickable when they are not, and the eye has to hunt around instead of reading down.

Do this instead. Set a list as a list. Left aligned, one item per line. Use numbers when the order matters.

TELL CLAUDE

Never wrap list items in pills, chips or tags. Lists are plain, left-aligned lines.

05

EMOJI DOING AN ICON'S JOB.

LOG YOUR RUN ⚡

What it looks like. A lightning bolt on a button. A rocket in a heading. Green ticks instead of bullet points.

Why it gives you away. Emoji look different on every phone and none of them match your brand. They are what Claude reaches for when it has no icon set to use.

Do this instead. Pick one real icon set in one weight and use only that. If there is no icon that fits, use nothing.

TELL CLAUDE

No emoji anywhere in a design. Use icons from [your icon set] only, or no icon at all.

06

THE ONE FANCY WORD.

Make your brand *truly iconic.*

What it looks like. A clean sans-serif headline, then one or two words flip to an italic serif in the accent colour.

Why it gives you away. It was a fresh look a couple of years ago. Now it is the house style of AI landing pages, and it makes your headline look like everyone else's.

Do this instead. One typeface and one style per headline. If a word matters, the sentence should make that clear.

TELL CLAUDE

Headlines use one typeface and one style. Never switch a word to a serif or italic for emphasis.

07

THE HIGHLIGHTED WORD.

Content that actually works.

What it looks like. One or two words picked out in the accent colour, or sitting on a coloured box, in every single headline.

Why it gives you away. A highlight says “this is the important bit”. When it is on every slide it stops meaning anything, and Claude often picks the wrong word.

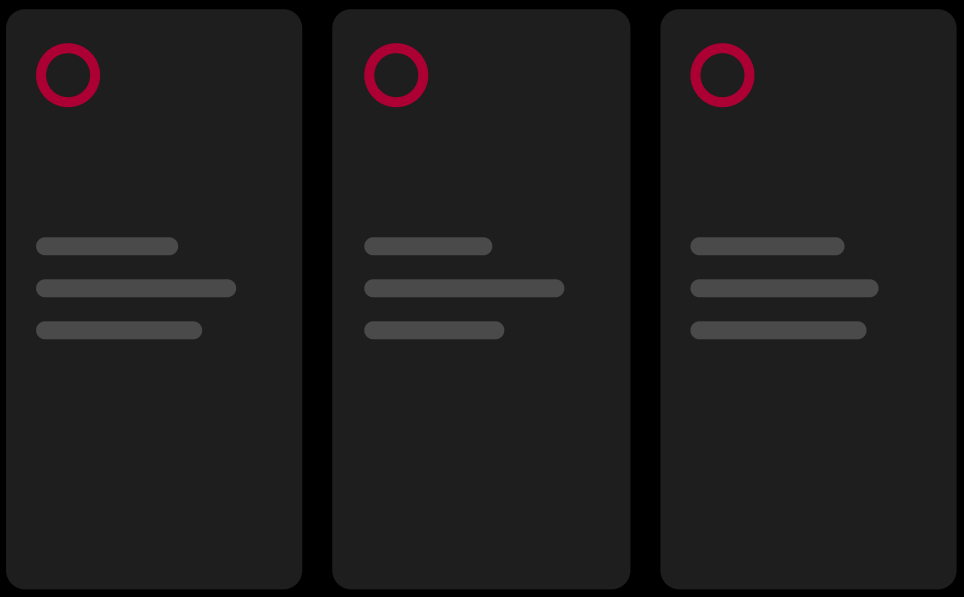
Do this instead. Most headlines need no highlight. Keep it for the rare word that is the whole point, like a number or a measurement.

TELL CLAUDE

Do not colour or highlight individual words in headlines unless I ask for it on that slide.

08

A LOGO ON EVERY SLIDE.



What it looks like. Your logo stamped in the corner of all ten slides.

Why it gives you away. Your name and photo already sit above the post, so people know whose it is. A logo on every slide takes up room and makes the post read like an ad.

Do this instead. Put the logo on the end card. On the cover as well if you really want it. Nowhere else.

TELL CLAUDE

The logo appears on the final slide only.

09

“01 / 02” IN THE FOOTER OR HEADER.



What it looks like. Brand name bottom left, slide count bottom right. Sometimes a thin line above them.

Why it gives you away. It is slide-deck furniture. Instagram and LinkedIn already show the count, so it only tells people something they can see.

Do this instead. Leave the edges of the slide empty. Clean padding looks more finished than a footer.

TELL CLAUDE

No slide numbers, page counters, brand name footers or headers on any slide.

10

THE DEFAULT FONTS.

BEBAS NEUE

Instrument Serif

Inter

What it looks like. Bebas Neue Bold for the headline, Instrument Serif for the fancy bits, Inter for everything else.

Why it gives you away. They are good fonts. They are also in every AI deck, because Claude picks them when nobody tells it what to use.

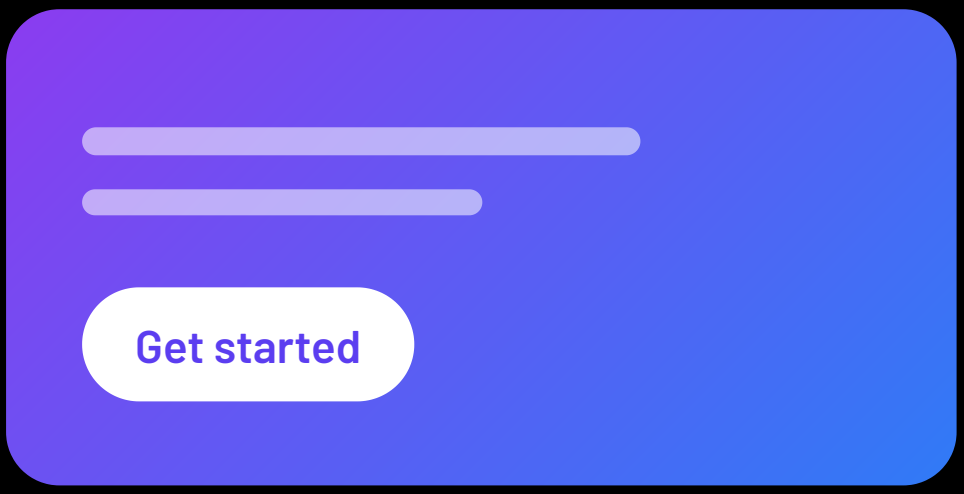
Do this instead. Use your brand fonts and name them, with the weights. If you don't have brand fonts yet, choosing them is a design decision to make once and write down.

TELL CLAUDE

Use only these fonts: [your fonts and weights]. Never use Bebas Neue, Instrument Serif, Inter, or any font not on this list.

11

THE PURPLE-TO-BLUE GRADIENT.



What it looks like. A purple that fades into blue, across a background, a button or a whole hero section.

Why it gives you away. It is the most recognised AI look there is. Nobody chose it. It is what you get when no colours were given.

Do this instead. Use your brand colours as flat fills. If you want a gradient, build it from your own palette and say where it is allowed.

TELL CLAUDE

No purple, violet or blue-to-purple gradients. Use only these colours: [your hex codes]. Flat fills unless I ask for a gradient.

12

THE GRADIENT HEADLINE.

Transform your workflow.

Simple, transparent pricing.

What it looks like. Headline text filled with a gradient, usually saying “Transform your workflow” or “Simple, transparent pricing”.

Why it gives you away. Both the effect and the words are stock. The line could sit on any company’s website, so it tells people nothing about yours.

Do this instead. Set headlines in one solid colour, and say something only your business could say.

TELL CLAUDE

No gradient text. No stock headlines like “Transform your X” or “Simple, transparent pricing”. Headlines are one solid colour.

13

THE BENTO GRID.



What it looks like. Content packed into a grid of boxes in different sizes, with rounded corners on absolutely everything.

Why it gives you away. It came from tech product launches and Claude now uses it for everything, whether or not the content suits boxes. Round every corner and it all blurs into the same soft look.

Do this instead. Pick a layout that suits the content. Decide your corner style once and write the radius down.

TELL CLAUDE

No bento grids. Only put content in a box when it needs one. Corner radius is [your radius] on everything.

14

THE ICON IN A TINTED TILE.



What it looks like. A small icon sitting in a rounded square, filled with a pale tint of the icon's own colour. Usually three or four in a row, all identical.

Why it gives you away. It is the default feature row of every AI-built website and app. The tile is there to make a small icon feel designed.

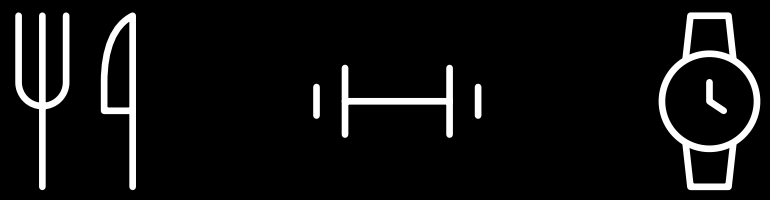
Do this instead. Let the icon sit on the page on its own, at a size people can see. Or drop the icons. A strong heading often doesn't need one.

TELL CLAUDE

Never place icons inside tinted or rounded tiles or circles. Icons sit directly on the background.

15

THIN ICONS.



What it looks like. Hairline outline icons, all in the same wispy weight.

Why it gives you away. It is the weight of the icon set Claude grabs by default. Next to bold type they look weak, and on a phone they nearly disappear.

Do this instead. Choose an icon weight that matches your type. If your headlines are bold, your icons need to hold their own beside them.

TELL CLAUDE

No thin or hairline icons. Use [your icon set and weight], heavy enough to match the headline type.

16

TOO MUCH WHITE SPACE.



What it looks like. A few small words floating in the middle of a big empty slide or section.

Why it gives you away. Space is good when it is a choice. Claude adds it by default because empty reads as clean. On a phone it means tiny text and a wasted screen.

Do this instead. Set your padding, then fill what is left. Make the type big enough to read without zooming.

TELL CLAUDE

Do not leave large empty areas. Use [your padding] padding and size the type to fill the space.

COPY THIS INTO CLAUDE.

All sixteen in one block. Fill in the square brackets with your own colours, fonts, icons and spacing, then paste it into your Project instructions or the start of a chat.

Design do-nots. Follow these on everything you design for me.

1. No accent border on one side of any card, quote or callout. Use a full border, a solid fill, or no box.
2. No status dots, glowing dots or "live" indicators next to labels or inside buttons.
3. No eyebrow labels. No small letter-spaced capitals above headlines, with or without a line.
4. Never wrap list items in pills, chips or tags. Lists are plain, left-aligned lines.
5. No emoji anywhere in a design. Use icons from [your icon set] only, or no icon at all.
6. Headlines use one typeface and one style. Never switch a word to a serif or italic for emphasis.
7. Do not colour or highlight individual words in headlines unless I ask for it on that slide.
8. The logo appears on the final slide only.
9. No slide numbers, page counters, brand name footers or headers on any slide.
10. Use only these fonts: [your fonts and weights]. Never use Bebas Neue, Instrument Serif, Inter, or any font not on this list.
11. No purple, violet or blue-to-purple gradients. Use only these colours: [your hex codes]. Flat fills unless I ask for a gradient.
12. No gradient text. No stock headlines like "Transform your X" or "Simple, transparent pricing". Headlines are one solid colour.
13. No bento grids. Only put content in a box when it needs one. Corner radius is [your radius] on everything.
14. Never place icons inside tinted or rounded tiles or circles. Icons sit directly on the background.
15. No thin or hairline icons. Use [your icon set and weight], heavy enough to match the headline type.
16. Do not leave large empty areas. Use [your padding] padding and size the type to fill the space.

If Claude slips on one, name it. "You used a one-sided border, check the do-not list" works better than asking it to try again.

HOW I ACTUALLY USE CLAUDE.

The do-not list cleans up what Claude makes. These are the habits that get the most out of it day to day.

01 **USE THE ADOBE CREATIVITY CONNECTOR.**

It is my preferred way to design with Claude. It is free, and it works a bit like Canva, except it sits inside Claude and follows your guide.

02 **LET CLAUDE LAY THE FOUNDATIONS.**

Because I'm a designer, I use the connector to set up the bones of a design in Photoshop or Illustrator. Layout, type and structure, built to the guide.

03 **MAKE THE FINAL PASS YOURSELF.**

Then I open the file and tidy up. Spacing, crops, and the small calls that make it look finished. Claude gets it started. A designer's eye finishes it.

04 **FEED YOUR WORK BACK IN.**

I constantly feed my finished work back into Claude. Every finished piece shows it what right looks like, so the next first draft starts closer.

05 **NOT A DESIGNER? BRING REFERENCES.**

Show Claude work you like, with a line on what you like about each piece. It works far better from something it can see than from a description.

06 **FIX IT TWICE, WRITE IT DOWN.**

If you correct the same thing a second time, it belongs in your guide or your do-not list. That is how both of mine were built.

WANT THIS BUILT FOR YOUR BRAND?

We design Claude guides, so what it makes looks like you from the first draft.

55knots.com.au →

A DO-NOT LIST ONLY GETS YOU HALFWAY.

It stops you looking like everyone else using Claude. It doesn't tell Claude what your brand should look like.

Take away the defaults without giving it something better and it will find new defaults. The other half is a proper design guide, and that part takes a designer. Claude follows a guide well. It can't decide what your brand should be. Someone has to make those calls first, then write them down clearly enough that Claude can't get them wrong.

What a good Claude guide covers.

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01 **WHAT YOUR BRAND LOOKS LIKE.**

The logo and where it goes. Your colours as hex codes. The overall feel described in plain words, so Claude knows what it is aiming for.

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02 **WHAT YOUR CAROUSELS LOOK LIKE.**

A layout for the cover, the internal slides and the end card, each with a real example attached. Claude copies what it can see far better than what it is told.

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03 **FONT SIZES AND FIXTURES.**

Headline, body and caption sizes in pixels. Padding and margins. The things that sit in the same place on every slide and never move.

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04 **HOW TO TREAT IMAGES.**

The colour grade, the crop, where people sit in the frame, and how text sits over a photo so it stays readable.

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05 **WHAT ICONS LOOK LIKE.**

One set, one weight, one size. When an icon is allowed and when it is not.



Part of the guide we use for our own carousels.

CLAUDE ISN'T BAD.

It just needs a proper guide.

If you want one designed for your brand, that's what we do.

Get your guide designed →

55knots.com.au

55KNOTS

