

Using the Claude Code CLI agent entirely free of charge on a Windows PC requires bypassing the Anthropic API (which is paid) by running local open-source AI models using a tool called [Ollama](#).

Here is the complete step-by-step guide to setting up a 100% free, local Claude Code environment on Windows.

## Prerequisites (Hardware Requirements)

- **RAM:** 16GB RAM is strongly recommended (8GB will be very slow).
- **Storage:** 20GB+ free space for local models.
- **Windows 10/11** with Git installed.

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## Step 1: Install Ollama (Your Local AI Engine)

Ollama runs the AI models locally on your machine, eliminating API costs.

1. Go to [ollama.com](https://ollama.com) and download the Windows installer.
2. Install and run Ollama. It will reside in your system tray.

## Step 2: Download a Free Coding Model

Open your terminal (PowerShell or Command Prompt) and download a capable, free coding model, such as **Qwen2.5-Coder** (recommended for coding) or **Qwen3**.

```
powershell
```

```
ollama run qwen2.5-coder:7b
```

*Wait for the download to finish. Once it says "success", type `/bye` to exit the chat, but keep Ollama running in the background.*

### Step 3: Install Node.js

Claude Code requires Node.js (version 18 or higher).

1. Download and install the **LTS version** from [nodejs.org](https://nodejs.org).

### Step 4: Install Claude Code CLI

1. Open PowerShell as Administrator.
2. Run the following command to install Claude Code globally:

```
powershell
```

```
npm install -g @anthropic-ai/claude-code
```

### Step 5: Configure Claude Code to Use Local Models

This is the most critical step to ensure it is free. You must tell Claude to talk to your computer instead of Anthropic's servers.

In your terminal, run these commands:

```
powershell
```

```
# Point Claude to your local Ollama server
```

```
$env:ANTHROPIC_BASE_URL="http://localhost:11434"
```

```
# Set a dummy auth key (Ollama does not require a real one)
```

```
$env:ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN="fakekey"
```

*Note: These set the environment variables only for the current session. If you close the terminal, you must run them again. To make them permanent, add them to your Windows System Environment Variables.*

### Step 6: Launch Claude Code

1. Navigate to your project folder in the terminal:

```
powershell
```

```
cd C:\Users\YourName\Documents\YourProject
```

2. Launch Claude using the local model:

```
powershell
```

```
claude --model qwen2.5-coder:7b
```

3. You will see "Claude Code" start up. Type `/help` to see available commands.
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## Key Tips for Free Usage

- **If you see "Anthropic" or "Pro":** You are not using the free local setup. Ensure `ANTHROPIC_BASE_URL` is set to `http://localhost:11434`.
- **Performance:** If 7B models are too slow, try smaller models like `gemma:2b` or `qwen2.5-coder:1.5b`.
- **Git Bash:** Claude Code works best within a Unix-like environment on Windows. Using Git Bash or WSL (Windows Subsystem for Linux) is recommended if PowerShell gives you issues.
- **Persistence:** To make your `export` commands permanent on Windows, search for "Edit the system environment variables" in the Start menu, click "Environment Variables," and add `ANTHROPIC_BASE_URL` and `ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN` to your user variables.