# Accidental Intelligence

A pocket-sized guide to the Accidental Guides, as of October 2026.




*My friend has a lot of questions.*

# What are the Accidental Guides?

The Accidental Guides are short guides to AI coding agents and the ways teams use them to build software. Each one answers one question by explaining a few parts, one at a time.

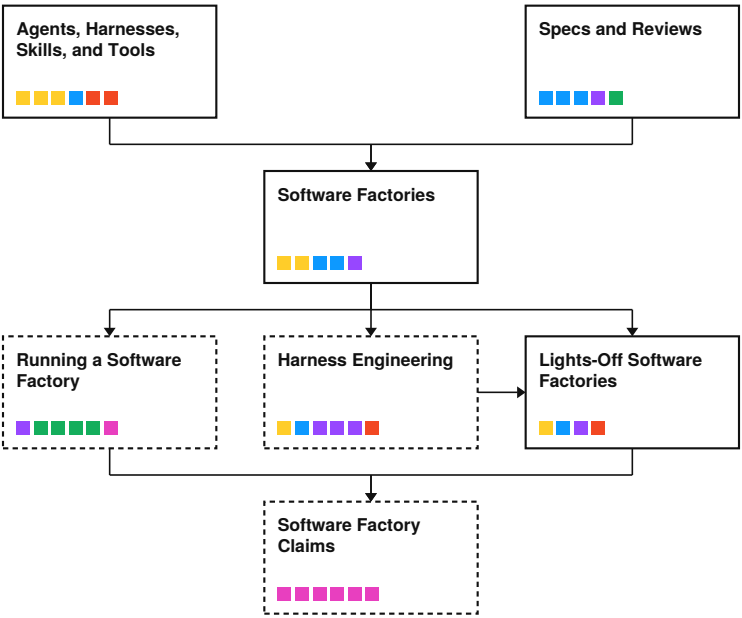
There's a lot written about AI coding agents, and the same word often means different things to different writers. These guides are short and use one name for each thing in every guide, so what you learn in one carries over to the next.

The guides started by accident, when one was written to settle which words to use for the parts of a coding agent. The title Accidental Intelligence plays on artificial intelligence.

People often build a machine for one job and find it does another. The models that coding agents use were trained to predict the next word, and it turned out they could write software. Guides that started by accident are in good company.

| Guide | Answers | Version |
|---|---|---|
| **Agents, Harnesses, Skills, and Tools** | What are the parts of an AI coding agent, and what does each one do? | 1.0.0 |
| **Specs and Reviews** | How does work get from an idea to done? | 0.2.0 |
| **Software Factories** | What is a software factory, and what's in one? | 0.1.0 |
| **Lights-Off Software Factories** | What decides if a change is right when nobody reads the code? | 0.2.0 |
| **Harness Engineering** | What do teams build to catch a coding agent's mistakes? | 0.1.0 draft |
| **Running a Software Factory** | What does a team decide before a factory runs, and how does it know the factory works? | 0.1.0 draft |
| **Software Factory Claims** | How do you check a claim about AI-built software? | 0.1.0 draft |

# Where do I start?




Arrows show the order to read the guides in. A dashed box is a draft. The small squares are each guide's parts, colored by family.

| Guide | Read it if you |
|---|---|
| **Agents, Harnesses, Skills, and Tools** | use a coding agent and want to know how it works |
| **Specs and Reviews** | are new to specs, trackers and reviews |
| **Software Factories** | hear "software factory" and want to know what it means |
| **Running a Software Factory** | lead a team that runs a factory |
| **Harness Engineering** | build checks and limits for coding agents |
| **Lights-Off Software Factories** | wonder if anyone still needs to read the code |
| **Software Factory Claims** | read announcements about AI writing code |

# What do the colors mean?

Each part belongs to one of six families, and each family has one color.

A part goes in the family of the job it does. A review agent runs, but its job is to judge a change, so it sits with the checks.

**Ru** — **Things that run**
Programs and loops that do the work.
Model, Harness, Agent, Orchestrator, Agent session, Closed loop, Outer loop

**Wr** — **Things you write down**
Text that people or agents read and keep.
Skill, Spec, Work item, Tracker, Scenario, Progress file

**Ck** — **Things that check**
Whatever decides if a change is right.
Review, Gate, Satisfaction, Check, Review agent, Eval, Evidence

**Us** — **Things an agent uses**
Tools an agent calls and places it works in.
Tool, MCP server, Digital twin, Sandbox

**Dm** — **Decisions people make**
Rules a team sets before the work runs.
Acceptance criteria, Accepted output, Boundary, Identity, Back pressure

**Nu** — **Numbers and claims**
Counts and scores, and the claims built on them.
Metric, Share of code, Multiplier, Benchmark, Demo, Headcount, Dark factory

Inside each guide, tiles are colored by their order in that guide, so a part may have a different color there.

# Where does each part live?

Each row is one guide and the parts it defines, sorted by color.

**Agents, Harnesses, Skills, and Tools**

Mo Model · Ha Harness · Ag Agent · Sk Skill · To Tool · Mc MCP server

**Specs and Reviews**

Sp Spec · Wi Work item · Tr Tracker · Rv Review · Ac Acceptance criteria

**Software Factories**

Or Orchestrator · As Agent session · Sp Spec · Wi Work item · Ga Gate

**Lights-Off Software Factories**

Cl Closed loop · Sn Scenario · Sa Satisfaction · Dt Digital twin

**Harness Engineering** draft

Ol Outer loop · Pf Progress file · Ch Check · Ra Review agent · Ev Eval · Sb Sandbox

**Running a Software Factory** draft

Ed Evidence · Ao Accepted output · Bd Boundary · Id Identity · Bp Back pressure · Me Metric

**Software Factory Claims** draft

Sc Share of code · Mu Multiplier · Bm Benchmark · De Demo · Hc Headcount · Df Dark factory

Spec and work item are parts in two guides, once for any project and once inside a factory.

# Guides to start with

## Agents, Harnesses, Skills, and Tools

version 1.0.0

| | |
|---|---|
| **Parts** | Model, Harness, Agent, Skill, Tool, MCP server |
| **Read next** | Software Factories, where a program starts the agent sessions instead of you. |

## Specs and Reviews

version 0.2.0

| | |
|---|---|
| **Parts** | Spec, Work item, Tracker, Acceptance criteria, Review |
| **Read next** | Software Factories. |

## Software Factories

version 0.1.0

| | |
|---|---|
| **Parts** | Spec, Work item, Orchestrator, Agent session, Gate |
| **Read next** | Running a Software Factory if you lead one, Harness Engineering if you build one, and Lights-Off Software Factories if you wonder whether anyone needs to read the code. |

# Guides to read next

## Lights-Off Software Factories

version 0.2.0

| | |
|---|---|
| **Parts** | Scenario, Digital twin, Satisfaction, Closed loop |
| **Read next** | Software Factory Claims. |

## Harness Engineering

version 0.1.0 draft

| | |
|---|---|
| **Parts** | Check, Review agent, Eval, Outer loop, Progress file, Sandbox |
| **Read next** | Lights-Off Software Factories, for the checks you need before you stop reading the code. |

## Running a Software Factory

version 0.1.0 draft

| | |
|---|---|
| **Parts** | Accepted output, Boundary, Identity, Evidence, Back pressure, Metric |
| **Read next** | Software Factory Claims, for checking the numbers other people publish. |

## Software Factory Claims

version 0.1.0 draft

| | |
|---|---|
| **Parts** | Share of code, Multiplier, Benchmark, Demo, Headcount, Dark factory |
| **Read next** | Lights-Off Software Factories, since the boldest claims are about factories where nobody reads the code. |

# Versions

The version number on each guide's cover goes up whenever the text changes. Before 1.0.0, a guide's parts may still change.

Ru Wr Ck Us Dm Nu

An Accidental Guide to…

**Accidental Intelligence**

A pocket-sized guide to the Accidental Guides, as of October 2026.

Written and reviewed by a person. AI does the grunt work. Set in TeX Gyre Heros and Newsreader.

Leave a star: `accidental.info/star`

*My friend has a lot of questions.*