THE CHARACTER LOCK

Set Up Claude Like an Operator — The Complete System

The Character module. This is the method for building one AI character who looks like the same person in every image and every video — the discipline that separates a recognizable character your audience can follow from a folder of random generations that sort of resemble each other.

Why characters fall apart

Left to itself, an image generator invents your character fresh every time. The face drifts. The body changes shape between outfits. The room behind them is different in every shot. Each generation is a first guess, and no two guesses match.

The fix isn't a better prompt. It's a production discipline, and it has six parts:

1. **One identity anchor** — a single reference every generation is judged against
2. **A style-anchor set** — the approved outputs that define the locked look
3. **The wardrobe rule** — outfits change, the body never does
4. **Backgrounds first** — recurring places built and locked *before* the character goes in them
5. **Pose by sheet** — poses chosen from a reference sheet, not described in prose
6. **QC gates** — written pass/fail checks, with you as the only final judge

Work through the six lessons in order. Each one ends with the worksheet or checklist that makes it real. Nothing here depends on a specific tool — the method works with whatever image or video generator you use, because the discipline lives in your files and your checks, not in the tool.

Lesson 1 — One identity anchor

Every consistent character starts with **one** reference image: the anchor. Not a folder of maybes — one approved image that *is* the character's face and identity. Every future generation gets compared to this single image, and anything that doesn't read as the same person gets rejected, no matter how good it looks on its own.

How to get your anchor:

1. Generate or source a batch of candidate portraits of your character (front-facing, plain background, neutral expression is easiest to judge).
2. Lay them side by side. You're not picking the prettiest one — you're picking the one you want to see a hundred times, because you will.

3. Pick exactly one. Save it as `identity-anchor` in your character folder and never overwrite it. If you ever replace it, you are recasting your character — treat it with that much weight.
4. From now on, every generation workflow starts by feeding in or referencing the anchor. A generation made without it is a sketch, not a shot.

The rule, stated plainly: if a new image doesn't match the anchor, the image is wrong — the anchor is never wrong.

Worksheet 1 — Your anchor

- [ ] Candidate batch generated/sourced (aim for 8–12 to choose from)
- [ ] One anchor picked and saved as `identity-anchor`
- [ ] Anchor test: could I pick this face out of a lineup of my own rejects? (If not, keep generating — a vague anchor is how a character drifts.)

Lesson 2 — The style-anchor set

The identity anchor locks *who* the character is. The style anchors lock *how your character looks on screen* — the rendering style, proportions, lighting feel, and finish that make one of your images recognizable as yours at a glance.

How to build the set:

1. Once your anchor exists, produce your first real shots: your character in your most typical setting, doing typical things.
2. Judge them hard (Lesson 6 gives you the checklist). Most won't pass. That's normal.
3. The first 3–6 shots that genuinely pass — right face, right style, right feel — become your **style-anchor set**. Save them together in one folder.
4. From then on, the style anchors ride along with the identity anchor in every generation: they are the examples of "this is what correct looks like."

Why this works: generators drift toward whatever examples they're given. Give them no examples and they drift toward generic. Give them your approved set and they drift toward *your* character. When your style starts sliding weeks from now, the set is how you prove it — compare new work against the anchors, not against your memory.

Worksheet 2 — Your style anchors

- [ ] First real shots produced from the identity anchor
- [ ] 3–6 passing shots saved as the style-anchor set
- [ ] Set review date picked (re-check the set monthly; styles creep slowly)

Lesson 3 — The wardrobe rule: outfits change, the body never does

Audiences recognize a character by silhouette as much as by face. The fastest way to break a character is to let the generator redesign the body every time the clothes change — taller in this outfit, softer in that one, different proportions in every post. It reads as a different person wearing a similar face.

The rule: your character has **one body**. It does not change between outfits, scenes, or seasons. Ever.

How to work it:

1. **Give your character a staple outfit** — the default look that defines them, the one they wear in most content. Choose it deliberately: it's how your audience learns to spot them mid-scroll.
2. **Define outfit categories, not infinite outfits.** A short list — for example: the staple, at-home wear, going-out wear, seasonal wear. New outfits get designed inside a category, and every one of them goes on the *same* body.
3. **Judge outfits against the anchor body first, the clothes second.** A great outfit on the wrong body is a reject. A plain outfit on the right body is usable.
4. When you brief a generation, state the body as fixed and the outfit as the variable — never the reverse.

Worksheet 3 — Your wardrobe doctrine

- [ ] Staple outfit chosen and saved (image + short written description)
- [ ] Outfit categories listed (3–5)
- [ ] Body description written in one or two sentences — the fixed reference you paste into every brief

---

Lesson 4 — Backgrounds first: lock the places before the person

A character who lives nowhere looks fake even when the face is perfect — a new kitchen every episode, furniture that moves, a "home" that changes architecture weekly. Real productions solve this the way this lesson does: **build the recurring places first, as empty backgrounds, lock them, and only then put the character in.**

How to work it:

1. List your character's recurring places — usually 2–3 to start: where they spend their days, where the "talking to the audience" moments happen.

2. Generate each place **empty** — no character in the frame. An empty background is called a *plate*.
3. Judge each plate on **geography and structure**: where the doors, windows, and main furniture sit; how the spaces connect. This is what gets locked.
4. **Decor is not locked.** Wall art, small objects, seasonal dressing — those can change freely between scenes. What never changes is the room itself: its layout, its furniture, how it's shaped.
5. Save the approved plates. Every scene in that place from now on is generated *into* the locked plate (or composited into it), so the room is identical every time your audience sees it.
6. **Only your yes locks a plate.** Not "close enough," not "the tool said it's fine." If the geography is wrong, reject it and regenerate — a wrong room locked in becomes a wrong room in every future scene.

The payoff: locked places are also faster. You stop redesigning rooms and start making scenes.

Worksheet 4 — Your locked plates

- [ ] Recurring places listed (2–3)
- [ ] Each place generated empty and judged on geography/furniture
- [ ] Approved plates saved in one folder, clearly named
- [ ] For each plate, one line noting what's changeable (decor) vs locked (layout/furniture)

Lesson 5 — Pose by sheet, not by prose

Describing a pose in words — "sitting naturally, relaxed but expressive" — gives you a different pose every time, because prose is vague and generators improvise around vagueness. Productions that need repeatable character performances don't describe poses. They *show* them.

How to work it:

1. Build a **pose sheet**: a small set of reference images showing your character in the poses and expressions your content actually uses — the core set most characters need is small (standing neutral, seated talking, a laugh, a deadpan, a thinking pose, one or two signature gestures).
2. Build a **pose plate** for each key pose: the approved version of your character in that pose, judged like any other shot.
3. When you need a new scene, start from the pose plate for the pose you want and change the scene around it — don't describe the pose fresh and hope.
4. New pose needed? Generate it, gate it (Lesson 6), and if it passes, it joins the sheet. Your sheet grows; your character's range grows with it — under control.

Worksheet 5 — Your pose sheet

- [ ] Core poses listed (start with 5–8 your content actually uses)
- [ ] Pose plate generated and approved for each core pose
- [ ] Sheet saved with your anchors (identity + style + poses live together)

Lesson 6 — QC gates: nothing moves forward unapproved

This is the lesson that holds the other five together. Consistent characters aren't made by good generations; they're made by **rejecting the bad ones at the right gate.**

The gates, in order:

- **Gate 1 — Stills before motion.** No image gets animated, composited, or built into a scene until the still passes. Motion hides nothing — a wrong face in a still becomes a wrong face that moves.
- **Gate 2 — The anchor check.** Hold the new still next to the identity anchor and the style-anchor set. Same person? Same body? Same style? All three, or it stops here.
- **Gate 3 — The situation check.** Does the character sit *on* the chair like a person sits? Do objects stay the objects they were (no furniture invented, moved, or melted)? Does anything in the frame contradict your locked plates?
- **Gate 4 — Your verdict.** One human is the final judge of whether a render *reads as* the character — and that human is you, the character's owner. Not a tool's confidence score, not someone else's "looks fine to me." If you have to squint and talk yourself into it, it's a fail. Your audience won't squint; they'll just feel that something's off.

Working rule: an almost-right generation is a reject, not a rough draft. Regenerating is cheap. Publishing a drifting character is expensive — it spends the recognition you were building.

The pass/fail checklist (run on every still)

- [ ] Matches the identity anchor — same face, no squinting required
- [ ] Same body as the anchor body — outfit may differ, proportions may not
- [ ] Style matches the style-anchor set
- [ ] Background is the locked plate (or correctly derived from it) — geography and furniture unchanged
- [ ] Pose matches a pose plate or honestly earns a new one
- [ ] No invented, moved, or malformed objects
- [ ] **Your verdict: this reads as my character** — yes, or it does not ship

---

The Character Lock, on one page

1. **Anchor** — one identity reference; everything is judged against it.
2. **Style set** — 3–6 approved shots that define the look; they ride along on every generation.
3. **Wardrobe** — one body, always; a staple outfit plus defined categories.
4. **Plates** — recurring places built empty, geography locked, decor free; only your yes locks them.
5. **Poses** — chosen from a sheet of approved plates, never described from scratch.
6. **Gates** — stills before motion, anchor check, situation check, and your verdict as the only final say.

Follow the six and your character compounds: every approved shot makes the next one easier to judge. Skip them and every post is a new stranger wearing a familiar face.