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ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN or ANTHROPIC_API_KEY: which one to use in Claude Code

Claude Code

CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
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Interweb Mozambique
RLX Holdings, S.A. · Group RLX Holdings
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https://www.meu.interweb.co.mz/knowledgebase/3120

ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN or ANTHROPIC_API_KEY: which one to use in Claude Code

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Claude Code has two variables for the key. Our API accepts both, so the choice does not change what you pay. It changes the header the key travels in and how Claude Code treats it.

The difference

Variable	How the key is sent	What the Claude Code documentation says
`ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN`	In the `Authorization: Bearer ...` header	A custom value for the `Authorization` header. Claude Code adds `Bearer` in front.
`ANTHROPIC_API_KEY`	In the `x-api-key` header	When set, it is used instead of your Claude subscription, even if you are signed in. In interactive mode, Claude Code asks you once to approve the key.

Which one we recommend

`ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN`, as in the docs examples. Set only one of the two: that way you always know which key Claude Code sends.

```
export ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN="$INTERWEB_API_KEY"
```

`$INTERWEB_API_KEY` copies the key from the variable where you already keep it. In `settings.json` it works differently: there, the key is written exactly as it is. See **saving the setup in settings.json**.

If you use ANTHROPIC_API_KEY

1. Set it to your key: `export ANTHROPIC_API_KEY="$INTERWEB_API_KEY"`.

2. Open Claude Code. It asks you, once, whether to use this key. Accept: it is your Interweb key.

3. To go back to your Claude subscription, remove the variable and our address: `unset ANTHROPIC_API_KEY ANTHROPIC_BASE_URL`.

Neither one works for the MCP server

In the header of a remote MCP server, Claude Code reads `ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN` and `ANTHROPIC_API_KEY` as empty, so that a project file cannot send your credentials to another server. In `.mcp.json`, use `${INTERWEB_API_KEY}`, even if it holds the same key. See **sharing the MCP setup in .mcp.json**.

A 401 means the key did not arrive or is wrong.
Check that the variable exists in the terminal where you opened Claude Code, without showing it on screen:

```
test -n "$ANTHROPIC_AUTH_TOKEN" && echo OK || echo missing
```

If it says "missing", set the variable and open Claude Code again.

RECOMMENDED

Want to code with AI in Claude Code? Visit the Coding with AI page.

See Coding with AI →

SEE ALSO

- **Using Claude Code with All in One AI: the variables, the model and common errors**
- **Saving the Claude Code setup in settings.json so you do not set the variables every time**
- **Sharing the MCP setup with your team in .mcp.json without sharing the key**
- **Creating an API key: name, mode, permissions, validity, IP list and spending limit**
- **Coding with AI in All in One AI**

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