

ACCELERATING CLAUDE CODE WORKFLOWS

WITH MCP

A BEGINNER-TO-ADVANCED
GUIDE TO THE
MODEL CONTEXT PROTOCOL



CONNECT
TOOLS



BUILD
INTEGRATIONS



AUTOMATE
WORKFLOWS



DEPLOY SECURELY
AT SCALE



ACCELERATE
RESULTS

Master the Model Context Protocol to extend Claude Code, automate complex tasks, and build production-grade integrations that are **reliable**, **secure**, and **built to scale**.

CHARLES FOSTER

Accelerating Claude Code Workflows with MCP

A Beginner-to-Advanced Guide to the Model Context Protocol

Steve Publications

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A Beginner-to-Advanced Guide to the Model Context Protocol

This book teaches you how to use the Model Context Protocol to extend, automate, and accelerate Claude Code workflows from first principles through production-grade deployments. You will learn the architecture behind MCP, how to connect existing servers, how to build your own integrations, how to design reliable multi-step workflows, and how to secure and scale everything for real-world engineering teams. No prior AI or MCP experience is required; only basic familiarity with programming and command-line tools. By the end, you will have a complete mental model of MCP and a working toolkit of configurations, patterns, and practices you can apply immediately.

Introduction: From Chat to Infrastructure

There is a moment every developer hits when using AI coding assistants. You are deep into a complex task, refactoring across multiple services, debugging a production incident, or implementing a feature that touches your database, your deployment pipeline, and your monitoring system all at once. The assistant is helpful in theory but limited in practice. It can suggest code it has never seen, reason about patterns it memorized during training, and generate plausible commands you might run. But it cannot read the latest logs from your cluster, query your staging database to verify a schema change, or check whether that pull request you are working on is blocking someone else.

The gap between what AI coding assistants can do in isolation and what they need to do to be truly useful in real engineering workflows is called the context problem. Before MCP existed, developers solved this problem with custom integrations, fragile prompt patterns, and manual copy-pasting of data into chat windows. Each solution was bespoke, each broke when something changed, and none composed well with other tools.

The Model Context Protocol changes that equation. MCP gives Claude Code a standardized way to discover, authenticate with, and use external tools and data sources without custom glue code for every integration. It turns Claude Code from a smart chat interface into an automation platform that can reach into your actual development environment and act on real data.

This book is about making that transformation happen in your workflow, methodically and reliably. We will start with the fundamentals so you understand exactly what MCP is and how it works under the hood. Then we will move through installation, configuration, connecting existing servers, building custom integrations, designing workflows, hardening security, optimizing performance, and deploying everything in production environments with teams.

You do not need to be an AI expert to get value from this book. You do need to be comfortable working in a terminal, reading configuration files, and understanding basic concepts like APIs and authentication. If you can set up

a development environment and run commands, you can use MCP effectively with Claude Code.

Here is what you will be able to do after finishing this book:

- Explain the architecture of MCP and how it connects Claude Code to external systems
- Install and configure Claude Code with full MCP support on any major platform
- Discover, evaluate, and connect prebuilt MCP servers for common services like databases, version control, cloud platforms, and more
- Build custom MCP servers in Python or TypeScript that expose tools, resources, and prompts tailored to your stack
- Design multi-step workflows that orchestrate Claude Code with MCP tools reliably and idempotently
- Secure your MCP integrations with proper authentication, secrets management, and access controls
- Debug connection failures, performance issues, and tool problems systematically
- Deploy MCP configurations across teams using shared project files and CI/CD integration
- Apply production-grade patterns for monitoring, scaling, and maintaining MCP infrastructure

The book is organized so you can read it cover to cover or jump to specific sections based on your current needs. Chapters build on each other, but each one is self-contained enough to use as a reference when you are solving a particular problem. Code examples are complete and runnable; configuration samples show real file paths and commands you can execute today.

Let us begin by understanding why MCP exists and what problem it solves for Claude Code specifically.

Chapter 1: Why MCP Matters for Claude Code

The Promise and Limits of AI Coding Assistants

AI coding assistants have changed how developers work in ways that are already obvious but still underappreciated. Tools like GitHub Copilot, Cursor, and Claude Code can generate boilerplate, suggest refactors, explain unfamiliar code, write tests, and even implement features from natural language descriptions. The speed gains are real. Teams report shipping faster, spending less time on repetitive tasks, and onboarding new developers more smoothly.

But there is a fundamental limitation baked into every AI coding assistant that runs in isolation: it only knows what you tell it and what was in its training data. Its knowledge of your codebase comes from files you explicitly share or that it is given access to read. Its knowledge of your infrastructure, your databases, your deployment pipelines, your monitoring systems, and your team processes comes from nothing unless you manually provide it.

This creates a friction pattern that every serious user of AI coding tools encounters:

- You ask Claude Code to investigate a bug. It can read the relevant source files but cannot query production logs or check error tracking dashboards for recent failures.
- You ask it to refactor a database schema change. It can generate migration code but cannot inspect the current schema or validate that the change will not break existing queries.
- You ask it to help with a deployment. It can write Kubernetes manifests or Dockerfiles but cannot check whether your cluster has capacity or whether dependent services are ready.
- You ask it to review a pull request. It can analyze the diff but cannot see what tests failed in CI or whether other team members have left conflicting feedback.

Each of these scenarios requires Claude Code to reach outside its own context window and interact with external systems. Before MCP, there was no standardized way to do this.

What Is Claude Code

Claude Code is Anthropic's agentic coding tool that runs primarily in the terminal but also integrates with IDEs and desktop applications. It launched as a research preview on February 24, 2025 alongside Claude 3.7 Sonnet and reached general availability by mid-2025. Unlike browser-based AI assistants or inline autocomplete tools, Claude Code is designed to operate as an autonomous coding agent within your development environment.

When you run Claude Code in a project directory, it gains access to your codebase files, can execute shell commands, edit files directly, manage git operations, and maintain conversation context across a development session. It understands the structure of your project and can navigate between files to perform multi-step tasks that span an entire codebase rather than working on isolated snippets.

Claude Code has several key modes and features:

- Manual mode starts with read-only access and prompts you for approval before making changes or running potentially destructive commands
- Auto mode uses a classifier model to review actions for safety, allowing more autonomous operation while still catching dangerous operations
- Hooks let you define deterministic rules that run at specific lifecycle points, such as automatically linting code after every write or blocking certain commands
- Skills are reusable packages of instructions and procedures stored as SKILL.md files that extend Claude Code's capabilities for specific tasks
- Subagents allow parallel execution by spawning specialized Claude instances to work on different aspects of a task simultaneously

Claude Code also has built-in support for the Model Context Protocol from day one. This is not an afterthought or a compatibility layer; MCP is woven into how Claude Code discovers and uses external tools. When you configure an MCP server in Claude Code, its tools become available alongside Claude's native capabilities like file reading and bash execution. The model decides when to use which capability based on the task at hand.

The Context Problem: Why AI Needs External Access

The context problem is not unique to Claude Code or even to coding assistants. It applies to any language model application that needs to work with data or systems it was not trained on. Language models have a fixed context window – a limit on how much information they can hold in memory at once. Even the largest current windows of 200,000 tokens or more are finite, and filling them with everything an AI might need to know about your development environment is impractical.

More fundamentally, static context is always stale. Code changes, deployments happen, configurations drift, bugs appear and get fixed. An AI assistant that relies on a snapshot of your environment taken hours or days ago is working with outdated information. For many tasks this matters little. For debugging production issues, managing infrastructure, or coordinating across services, it matters enormously.

The solution is not to stuff more context into the model's window upfront. The solution is to give the model controlled access to external systems so it can fetch exactly what it needs when it needs it. This is the essence of tool use in AI: instead of preloading all possible information, you define a set of actions the model can take and let it decide which ones are relevant to the current task.

Before MCP, adding tool capabilities meant building custom integrations for each combination of AI application and external system. If you wanted Claude to query your database, you might write a wrapper script, embed API keys in prompts, or use a platform-specific plugin format. Each integration was fragile, hard to maintain, and locked into a particular ecosystem. If you switched from one AI tool to another, you had to rebuild everything.

This $N \times M$ integration problem – N AI applications each needing M custom connectors for external systems – is exactly what MCP was designed to solve.

Enter the Model Context Protocol

The Model Context Protocol is an open standard that defines how AI applications connect to external tools and data sources. It was created by David Soria Parra and Justin Spahr-Summers, open-sourced by Anthropic on November 25, 2024, and donated to the Linux Foundation's Agentic AI Foundation in December 2025 with joint governance from multiple major technology companies.

At its core, MCP is a client-server protocol built on JSON-RPC 2.0. An MCP server exposes capabilities – tools that perform actions, resources that provide data, and prompts that structure interactions. An MCP client manages the connection to that server on behalf of an AI application, which acts as the host. The protocol handles capability discovery, message passing, error handling, and authentication in a standardized way.

The key insight is separation of concerns:

- The AI application (Claude Code, for example) focuses on understanding user intent, reasoning about tasks, and deciding which tools to use
- MCP servers focus on connecting to specific external systems – databases, APIs, file systems, cloud platforms – and exposing them through a consistent interface
- The protocol itself defines how they communicate without either side needing to know implementation details about the other

This means you can build an MCP server once and use it with any MCP-compatible client. A database query server you write for Claude Code will also work with Cursor, VS Code AI features, or any other tool that supports MCP. Similarly, Claude Code can use hundreds of prebuilt MCP servers created by the community without requiring custom integration code from Anthropic for each one.

For Claude Code specifically, MCP transforms it from a smart terminal assistant into an automation platform. With MCP servers connected, Claude Code can:

- Query databases directly to inspect schemas, run diagnostic queries, or validate data before making changes
- Interact with version control systems beyond basic git commands – searching issues, reviewing pull requests, checking CI status
- Access cloud provider APIs to provision resources, check deployment status, or read configuration
- Read from monitoring and logging systems to diagnose issues using real-time data
- Integrate with team tools like issue trackers, documentation platforms, and communication systems
- Execute custom business logic through servers you build for your specific domain

All of this happens through the same conversational interface. You do not need to learn new commands or switch between tools. You ask Claude Code to do something, and it uses whatever MCP tools are available to accomplish the task.

What This Book Will Teach You

This book takes you from zero knowledge of MCP to advanced proficiency in using it with Claude Code for real-world development workflows. We will cover:

The fundamentals first: how MCP architecture works, what tools and resources and prompts actually are, how clients and servers communicate, and the configuration options available in Claude Code. This foundation is essential because understanding how MCP works under the hood makes you better at debugging problems and designing effective integrations.

Then practical implementation: step-by-step guides for installing and configuring everything, connecting existing MCP servers from the ecosystem, and building custom servers tailored to your needs. Examples will be complete, runnable, and based on real use cases rather than abstract demonstrations.

Advanced patterns next: workflow design for multi-step operations that are reliable and idempotent, orchestration across multiple MCP servers, performance optimization techniques, security hardening strategies, and production deployment considerations for teams.

Throughout the book, we will emphasize practical usefulness over theoretical completeness. Every concept is introduced because it solves a real problem or enables a real capability. Code examples show complete implementations you can adapt. Configuration samples use actual file paths and commands. Troubleshooting guidance addresses issues people actually encounter.

If you are new to MCP, start at the beginning and read sequentially. If you already know the basics and want specific information, you can jump to relevant chapters – but be aware that later chapters assume familiarity with concepts introduced earlier.

Let us move on to understanding MCP's architecture and core concepts in detail. Once we have that foundation, everything else becomes much clearer.

Chapter 2: MCP Architecture and Core Concepts

The Client-Server Model

MCP uses a three-part architecture that separates responsibilities cleanly between the AI application, the connection manager, and the tool provider. Understanding these roles is essential because confusion about who does what is one of the most common sources of misunderstanding when people first encounter MCP.

The three participants are:

- **Host:** The AI application itself – Claude Code, Cursor, Claude Desktop, or any other tool that uses an LLM to interact with users. The host manages the conversation, maintains context, and presents capabilities to the user.
- **Client:** A component within the host that manages a connection to exactly one MCP server. Each server gets its own client instance. The client handles protocol messaging, capability negotiation, and transport communication.
- **Server:** An external process that exposes tools, resources, and prompts through the MCP protocol. Servers can be local processes on your machine or remote services accessible over the network.

When Claude Code starts up with MCP configured, it creates a client for each server defined in your configuration. Each client connects to its corresponding server using whatever transport is specified – typically stdio for local servers or Streamable HTTP for remote ones. The client discovers what capabilities that server offers through a handshake process, then makes those capabilities available to Claude Code's model.

This architecture has several important implications:

First, MCP servers are completely independent of the AI model they serve. A server does not need to know anything about Claude, Anthropic, or language

models in general. It simply implements the protocol and responds to requests. This means servers can be written in any programming language and deployed anywhere.

Second, each server runs as a separate process with its own lifecycle. If one server crashes or hangs, it does not affect other servers or the host application itself. Claude Code will attempt to reconnect to failed servers automatically.

Third, the client-server boundary is also a security boundary. Servers control what operations are available and can enforce their own access controls. The host cannot bypass server-side validation because all operations go through the protocol.

Tools: Giving Claude Code Actions It Can Take

Tools are the most commonly used MCP primitive. A tool is an executable function that Claude Code can invoke to perform actions such as querying a database, calling an API, running a computation, or modifying external state. Tools are model-controlled, meaning the language model discovers them automatically and decides when to use them based on context and user intent.

Every tool definition has three required components:

- **Name:** A unique identifier using lowercase letters, numbers, and underscores. Names should be descriptive enough that the model can distinguish between similar tools – for example, `database_run_query` versus `database_list_tables` rather than `query` and `list`.
- **Description:** A human-readable explanation of what the tool does, when to use it, and importantly when not to use it. Good descriptions are detailed because they directly affect how reliably the model selects the right tool.
- **Input schema:** A JSON Schema object that defines the parameters the tool accepts, their types, which are required versus optional, and any validation rules.

When Claude Code starts a session with MCP servers connected, each server's client calls `tools/list` to discover available tools. The model receives these definitions as part of its context and can then invoke tools by calling `tools/call` with the appropriate parameters. Servers can also notify clients

when their tool list changes using notifications/`tools/list_changed`, allowing dynamic addition or removal of tools without restarting the session.

Tool results can include text output, images, audio, resource links, embedded resources, or structured JSON content depending on what makes sense for the operation. Errors are communicated through standard JSON-RPC error codes for protocol-level failures and an `isError` flag in the result for execution-level failures.

Consider a practical example: a database MCP server might expose tools like:

- `database_list_tables`: Returns all tables in the current database with their schemas
- `database_run_query`: Executes a read-only SQL query and returns results as formatted text or JSON
- `database_describe_table`: Shows column names, types, constraints, and indexes for a specific table

When you ask Claude Code to “check what data would be affected by this schema change,” it can use `database_list_tables` to understand the structure, `database_run_query` to inspect sample data, and then reason about the impact using its understanding of SQL – all without you manually running queries and pasting results into the conversation.

Resources: Giving Claude Code Data It Can Read

Resources are MCP’s mechanism for providing contextual data to AI applications. Unlike tools, which perform actions that may have side effects, resources are read-only data sources identified by URIs. They represent anything an MCP server wants to make available as reference material – file contents, database records, API responses, documentation pages, or any other information the model might need.

Resources follow a URI-based addressing scheme similar to web URLs. Standard schemes include `https://` for web resources, `file://` for local files, and `git://` for version control references. Servers can also define custom schemes like `postgres://` for database content or `config://` for application configuration files. The important requirement is that URIs follow RFC 3986 conventions.

Servers declare the resources capability during initialization and support three key operations:

- `resources/list`: Returns all available resources with their URIs, names, descriptions, and MIME types
- `resources/read`: Retrieves the content of a specific resource given its URI
- `resources/templates/list`: Lists parameterized resource templates that can generate multiple concrete resources

Resource templates are particularly powerful. A server might define a template like `logs://app/{service}/recent` that accepts a service name parameter. When Claude Code needs recent logs for a particular service, the client instantiates the template with the specific service name to create a concrete resource URI.

Resources also support subscriptions through `resources/subscribe`. When a client subscribes to a resource, the server sends `notifications/resources/updated` whenever the content changes. This enables real-time awareness of changing data without constant polling – useful for monitoring logs, tracking deployment status, or watching configuration updates.

The distinction between tools and resources matters because it signals intent to both the model and the system designer. Resources are application-driven: the host or user explicitly requests specific resource content when they need it. Tools are model-controlled: the AI decides autonomously when invocation is appropriate. Use resources for data you want Claude Code to reference consciously and tools for actions you want it to take automatically.

Prompts: Prebuilt Interaction Templates

Prompts are MCP's third primitive, designed for structured, repeatable interactions between users and language models. Unlike tools and resources, prompts are user-controlled rather than model-controlled. They typically appear as commands in the host application's UI – such as slash commands in Claude Code or menu items in Claude Desktop – that users invoke explicitly.

A prompt template defines a reusable interaction pattern with parameterized inputs. When a user invokes the prompt, they provide values for those parameters and the server generates a formatted message sequence that

structures how the model should respond. Prompts can include messages from both user and assistant roles, supporting few-shot examples and conversation patterns.

For example, a development team might create a prompt template called `code_review` that accepts parameters for the code to review and the review focus area. When invoked, it generates a structured prompt that guides Claude through a systematic review process: checking for bugs, assessing performance implications, verifying security considerations, and suggesting improvements – always in the same consistent format.

Servers declare the prompts capability and support two operations:

- `prompts/list`: Returns all available prompts with their names, descriptions, and required parameters
- `prompts/get`: Retrieves a specific prompt's content given its name and parameter values

Prompts can include text content, base64-encoded images or audio with MIME type annotations, and embedded resource references. This makes them flexible enough for complex interaction patterns beyond simple text templates.

While tools and resources tend to be the focus of most MCP integrations because they directly extend Claude Code's operational capabilities, prompts are valuable for standardizing how teams interact with AI across projects. They encode best practices into reusable templates that ensure consistency whether a senior engineer or a new team member is doing the work.

Transports: How Clients and Servers Communicate

MCP separates message format from transmission mechanism through its transport layer. All MCP messages use JSON-RPC 2.0 as their wire format – UTF-8 encoded JSON objects with `id`, `method`, `params`, `result`, or `error` fields following the JSON-RPC specification. The transport defines how these messages move between client and server.

The protocol currently defines two standard transports:

Stdio is process-to-process communication over standard input and output streams. The client launches the server as a subprocess and sends JSON-RPC messages to its `stdin`, one per line, newline-delimited. The server reads

from stdin and writes responses to stdout. Stdio is the recommended transport for local servers because it is simple, reliable, and requires no network configuration. It is also the most common transport in MCP configurations because many useful servers – filesystem access, git operations, local database connections – naturally run on the same machine as Claude Code.

Streamable HTTP is the standard transport for remote servers. Each JSON-RPC message is sent as an HTTP POST request to a single endpoint. Responses arrive either as immediate JSON objects or as Server-Sent Events streams for longer-running operations. Streamable HTTP replaced the older two-endpoint SSE model that was deprecated in the 2025-06-18 specification because it simplifies connection management and supports standard HTTP features like authentication, load balancing, and TLS termination.

Both transports support bidirectional communication: clients send requests and notifications to servers, and servers send responses and notifications back to clients. Notifications are one-way messages that do not expect a response – used for things like `list_changed` events or resource update alerts.

Custom transports are permitted by the specification as long as they preserve JSON-RPC formatting and message patterns. Some implementations support WebSocket connections or other protocols for specific use cases, but stdio and Streamable HTTP cover the vast majority of scenarios.

When choosing a transport for your MCP server, the decision is straightforward: use stdio if the server runs locally on the same machine as Claude Code, and use Streamable HTTP if it needs to be accessible remotely or shared across multiple clients.

The Request-Response Lifecycle

Understanding what happens when Claude Code uses an MCP tool requires walking through the full request-response lifecycle from user input to result display. This sequence reveals where things can go wrong and helps with debugging.

The lifecycle begins when you type a request in Claude Code's terminal. The model processes your input along with its context – conversation history, loaded files, available tools, resources, and prompts. If the task requires external information or action, the model generates a tool call specifying which tool to use and what parameters to provide.

Claude Code's MCP client receives this tool call and routes it to the appropriate server based on the tool name. The client packages the request as a JSON-RPC tools/call message with the tool name and parameters, then sends it over the configured transport.

For a stdio transport, this means writing a newline-delimited JSON object to the server process's stdin. For Streamable HTTP, it means making an HTTP POST request to the server's endpoint with the JSON-RPC payload in the request body.

The server receives the message, validates that the tool exists and the parameters match the expected schema, then executes the tool's logic. This might involve querying a database, making an API call, reading a file, or running some computation. The server packages the result into a JSON-RPC response – either with a result field containing the output or an error field describing what went wrong.

The response travels back through the transport to the client, which forwards it to Claude Code's host process. The model receives the tool output as part of its context and continues processing the task, potentially making additional tool calls or generating a final response for you.

Several things can fail at each step:

- The model might select the wrong tool or provide incorrect parameters if tool descriptions are unclear
- The client might fail to connect to the server due to configuration errors, network issues, or the server process not running
- The server might reject the request due to invalid parameters, authentication failures, or internal errors
- The transport itself might break due to timeouts, process crashes, or network interruptions

Claude Code handles some of these failures automatically with retry logic and reconnection attempts. Others require manual intervention – fixing configuration files, restarting servers, updating credentials. Knowing where each failure occurs makes troubleshooting much faster, which is why understanding this lifecycle matters beyond academic interest.

The next step is getting MCP actually running on your machine. In the following chapter we will walk through installing Claude Code, configuring it

for MCP support, and verifying that everything works before connecting any servers.

Chapter 3: Installing and Configuring Claude Code with MCP

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Understanding the Configuration File

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Enabling and Configuring MCP Support

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Project Structure and Dependencies

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Running and Connecting Your Server

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Handling Authentication and Credentials

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Database Access Patterns

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Cloud Platform Integrations (AWS, GCP, Azure)

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Version Control and CI/CD System Integration

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Error Handling for External Dependencies

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Controlling Context Window Usage

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Grouping and Organizing Related Tools

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Lazy Loading and Dynamic Tools

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Avoiding Tool Conflicts and Ambiguity

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Thinking in Workflows, Not Single Prompts

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Chapter 9: Advanced Orchestration and Multi-Server Patterns

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When Single Servers Are Not Enough

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Coordinating Multiple MCP Servers

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Composing Complex Systems from Simple Parts

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Chapter 10: Security, Authentication, and Access Control

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The Attack Surface of MCP Integrations

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Secrets Management Strategies

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Authentication Patterns (API Keys, OAuth, mTLS)

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Tool-Level Permissions and Scoping

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Input Validation and Prompt Injection Defense

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Security Hardening Checklist

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Chapter 11: Debugging, Logging, and Reliability

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Understanding MCP Logs and Diagnostics

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Debugging Tool Failures

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Adding Structured Logging to Custom Servers

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Health Checks and Monitoring

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Retry Logic and Circuit Breakers

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Measuring and Profiling MCP Performance

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Reducing Latency in Tool Calls

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Versioning Servers and Configurations

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Documentation Standards for MCP Workflows

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Migrating from Ad Hoc to Production

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Chapter 14: Troubleshooting, Pitfalls, and Best Practices

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