OpenAI Codex CLI Quick Reference

CLI usage, modes, configuration, key commands

Getting Started

Install

```
npm install -g @openai/codex
```

Authentication

```
export OPENAI_API_KEY="sk-..."
```

Set in shell profile or .env file

First Run

```
codex "explain this project"
codex "add input validation to app.py"
```

Commands

Interactive (Default)

```
codex                       # start interactive
session
codex "fix the login bug"   # with initial prompt
```

codex exec

```
codex exec "write unit tests for utils.py"
codex exec "refactor db.py to use async"
```

Non-interactive — runs task to completion

codex review

```
codex review                # review staged
changes
codex review --diff HEAD~3  # review last 3
commits
```

Modes

Approval Modes

`suggest`	Show proposed changes, require approval for every file edit and command
`auto-edit`	Apply file edits automatically, require approval for shell commands
`full-auto`	Apply edits and run commands without approval

Setting the Mode

```
codex --approval-mode suggest "add tests"
codex --approval-mode auto-edit "refactor"
codex --approval-mode full-auto "fix lint"
```

Configuration

Config File

```
# ~/.codex/config.yaml
model: o4-mini
approval_mode: suggest
providers:
  - name: openai
    api_key_env: OPENAI_API_KEY
```

Per-project overrides: .codex/config.yaml in project root

Project Instructions

```
# AGENTS.md (in project root)
- Run tests with: uv run pytest
- Use ruff for linting
- Never modify migration files
```

Useful Config Options

`model`	Model to use (e.g., **`o4-mini`**, **`o3`**)
`approval_mode`	Default approval mode
`providers`	API provider config (key, base URL)
`history`	Save conversation history: **`true`** / **`false`**

Sandboxing

How It Works

Codex runs commands in a sandboxed environment to prevent unintended side effects. Network access is disabled by default. File writes are restricted to the project directory.

Sandbox Options

`macOS`	Apple Seatbelt (default, built-in)
`Linux`	Docker-based sandbox
`--full-auto`	Requires sandbox to be enabled
`--dangerously-auto-approve`	Skip sandbox (not recommended)

Tips

Effective Prompts

`Be specific`	"add retry logic to fetch_data()" > "improve code"
`Reference files`	"fix the bug in src/auth.py" narrows scope
`State constraints`	"don't change the public API" sets boundaries
`Iterate`	Follow up with refinements in the same session

Workflow Patterns

```
# Explore → plan → execute
codex "explain the auth module"
codex "plan how to add OAuth support"
codex --approval-mode auto-edit "add OAuth"

# Review before commit
git add -A
codex review
```

Common Flags

`--model, -m`	Override model for this session
`--approval-mode`	Set approval mode
`--quiet, -q`	Minimal output
`--no-project-doc`	Ignore AGENTS.md