EFFORT

My subagent effort setup

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Checked 2026-10-31 against code.claude.com/docs/en/changelog (2.1.316), code.claude.com/docs/en/sub-agents and code.claude.com/docs/en/model-config.

From @learningwithcole

Claude Code's helpers run at your session's effort level unless something names another one. One environment variable changes that, so search and lookup work stops running at the level you picked for hard thinking.

The launch line

```javascript
CLAUDE_CODE_SUBAGENT_EFFORT=low claude
```

- You need Claude Code 2.1.316 or later (October 31, 2026).
- It sets the level subagents run at when nothing else names one.
- Your main session keeps its own level. Only the delegated work changes.

The changelog doesn't list accepted values for this variable, and the environment variables docs page didn't have a row for it when I checked on October 31. I use the official effort levels: `low`, `medium`, `high`, `xhigh`, `max`. Which ones are available depends on the model.

Which level I give which helper

These are my picks, not official advice.

Helper	Level	Why
Search and lookup	`low`	It finds things. You judge what comes back

Helper	Level	Why
The agent doing the real review	`high`	This is where a miss costs you
Debugging a hard problem	`xhigh` or `max`	Only for the hard ones. The docs warn `max` may show diminishing returns and is prone to overthinking

So `low` goes on the launch line, and anything that needs more names its own level in its agent file.

Give one agent its own level

Add `effort` to the frontmatter of the agent file:

```javascript
---
name: reviewer
description: Reviews code changes before I merge them
effort: high
---
```

That agent runs at `high`, whatever the launch line says.

What still overrides it

The variable only covers subagents nothing else names. In order, strongest first:

1. `CLAUDE_CODE_EFFORT_LEVEL`, if you set it, beats everything below. If it is set, your helpers run at that level instead.
2. The `effort` parameter, when you ask Claude to run a subagent at a specific level for one run.
3. The `effort` field in the agent file.
4. `CLAUDE_CODE_SUBAGENT_EFFORT`, for everything left.

A `maxEffortLevel` setting or an organization effort cap still limits the level a subagent runs at.

Why it matters

From the official subagents docs: a subagent "sends its own requests, which count toward the same usage limits as your main conversation."

Opus 5.5, Sonnet 5.5 and Haiku 5.5 default to `medium`, so the gap is biggest when you have raised your session above that.

Check it worked

Run `/tasks`. Claude Code names the model on the subagent's row and adds the effort level set for that subagent, if any.