GitHub Actions CI/CD workflows

CONCEPTS

Workflows live in .github/workflows/*.yml; each file holds jobs, each job runs steps on one fresh runner.

Workflow one YAML file, triggered by events

Job own runner, parallel unless needs

Step run: command or uses: action

TRIGGERS

on: push
Run on pushes

on: pull_request
Run on pull requests

on.push.branches: [main, 'release/']**
Only these branches

on.push.tags: ['v*']
Run on version tags

on.*<event>*.paths: ['src/']**
Only when these files change

on.workflow_dispatch
Allow manual runs

on.schedule: - cron: '0 3 * * 1'
Run on a cron schedule (UTC)

JOBS

jobs.*<id>*.runs-on: ubuntu-latest
Choose the runner

needs: [*<job>*, *<job>*]
Wait for other jobs

if: github.event_name == 'push'
Condition on a job or step

if: always()
Run even after failure

STEPS

- uses: *<owner>*/*<repo>*@*<ref>*
Run an action

with: { *<input>*: *<value>* }
Pass inputs to an action

- run: *<command>*
Run a shell command

run: |
Multi-line script

STEPS (cont.)

id: *<step_id>*
Name a step to read its outputs

env: { *<VAR>*: *<value>* }
Environment for a step

MATRIX & CONTAINERS

strategy.matrix.*<key>*: [a, b]
One job per value

${{ matrix.*<key>* }}
Read the current value

strategy.fail-fast: false
Let other legs finish

services.*<id>*.image: *<image>*
Sidecar such as a database

EXPRESSIONS & CONTEXTS

${{ *<expression>* }}
Evaluate an expression

github.ref / github.ref_name
Full ref / short branch or tag

needs.*<job>*.outputs.*<name>*
Output of a needed job

steps.*<id>*.outputs.*<name>*
Output of an earlier step

DATA & SECRETS

secrets.*<NAME>*
Read a repository secret

secrets.GITHUB_TOKEN
Automatic per-run token

echo "k=v" >> "$GITHUB_OUTPUT"
Set a step output

PERMISSIONS & CONCURRENCY

permissions: contents: read
Least-privilege GITHUB_TOKEN

REUSE, CACHE & ARTIFACTS

uses: actions/cache@v4
Cache dependencies

uses: actions/upload-artifact@v4
Keep files from a run