GitLab CI/CD Pipelines in YAML

CONCEPTS

Everything lives in .gitlab-ci.yml at the repo root; a push or merge request creates a pipeline of stages, each holding parallel jobs.

Pipeline one per push, MR or schedule

Stage runs in order; next waits for all jobs

Job script run by a runner in a clean checkout

Jobs start clean: pass files with artifacts, speed up installs with cache (best effort only).

Validate edits with the pipeline editor's Lint tab before pushing.

JOBS

```
<job>:
  script:
    - <cmd>
```
Minimal job

`stage: <name>`
Put the job in a stage

`image: <name>:<tag>`
Container image for the job

`before_script: [<cmd>]`
Run before script

`after_script: [<cmd>]`
Run after, even on failure

`services: [postgres:16]`
Sidecar containers (databases)

`tags: [<runner-tag>]`
Choose runners by tag

`timeout: 30m`
Fail the job after this long

`retry: 2`
Retry failed jobs

`allow_failure: true`
Let the job fail without failing the pipeline

`when: manual`
Wait for a click to run

`interruptible: true`
Cancel when a newer pipeline starts

STAGES AND ORDER

`stages: [build, test, deploy]`
Set stage order

`needs: [<job>]`
Start once these jobs finish

`dependencies: [<job>]`
Fetch artifacts only from these jobs

RULES

`rules: - if: $CI_COMMIT_BRANCH == "main"`
Run when the expression is true

`rules: - if: $CI_PIPELINE_SOURCE == "merge_request_event"`
Run in merge request pipelines

`rules: - changes: ["src/**"]`
Run when these files changed

`rules: - when: never`
Fallback: skip the job

```
rules: - if: <expr>
    when: manual
```
Manual only on a condition

```
workflow:
  rules: [...]
```
Decide whether a pipeline exists

ARTIFACTS AND CACHE

```
artifacts:
  paths: [<path>]
```
Keep files after the job

`artifacts: expire_in: 1 week`
Expire artifacts

`artifacts: when: always`
Upload even on failure

`artifacts: reports: junit: <file>`
Show test results in the MR

```
cache:
  paths: [<dir>]
```
Reuse files between runs

`cache: key: $CI_COMMIT_REF_SLUG`
One cache per branch

`cache: key: {files: [<lockfile>]}`
Key on lockfile contents

REUSE AND INCLUDE

`include: - local: <path>`
Include a file from this repo

```
include: - project: <group/proj>
    file: <path>
```
Include from another project

`include: - template: <name>.gitlab-ci.yml`
Use a GitLab template

`include: - remote: <url>`
Include by URL

```
<job>:
  extends: .<template>
```
Inherit from a hidden job

`.<name>:`
Hidden job: a template, never runs

`default: {image: <img>}`
Defaults for all jobs

```
parallel:
  matrix:
    - <VAR>: [a, b]
```
One job per combination

VARIABLES AND ENVIRONMENTS

```
variables:
  <NAME>: <value>
```
Pipeline or job variable

`$CI_COMMIT_BRANCH`
Branch name

`$CI_COMMIT_SHA`
Commit hash

`$CI_COMMIT_REF_SLUG`
URL-safe ref name

`$CI_PIPELINE_SOURCE`
Why the pipeline ran (push, merge_request_event, ...)

`$CI_DEFAULT_BRANCH`
The project's default branch

`$CI_PROJECT_DIR`
Checkout directory

`environment: {name: <env>, url: <url>}`
Track a deployment

Secrets go in Settings > CI/CD > Variables (masked, protected), not in the YAML.