

 FREE DOWNLOADABLE
RESOURCE

Architect Second Brain Workbook

Build a Knowledge System That Works as Hard as You Do

22

Pages

4

PARA Folders

30

Day Plan

Architect's Name:

Practice / Studio:

Date Started:

01

Welcome & How to Use This Workbook

Welcome, Architect.

Architecture is one of the most information-dense professions in the world. Every project combines building codes, material specifications, client briefs, site observations, consultant reports, and hundreds of design decisions — all happening simultaneously across multiple commissions.

Most of this knowledge disappears. A great idea noted on a site visit. A material spec researched for a previous project. A climate detail that solved a difficult problem three years ago. Without a system, all of it is lost — and rediscovered at cost, every time.

This workbook gives you that system. It is a hands-on companion to the ARCNET article: *Second Brain for Architects: Organize Your Entire Design Workflow*. Use it alongside the article or as a standalone tool.

How to Use This Workbook

 Print + Fill	Print all 12 pages on A4 or US Letter. Use a pen. Keep it on your desk. Review it every Friday.
 Digital Fill	Open on iPad with Apple Pencil or annotate in PDF reader. Works on Notability, GoodNotes, or Adobe Acrobat.
 Reference Copy	Keep it open alongside Notion or Obsidian as a planning reference while you build your digital system.

The PARA Framework — Your Foundation

Everything in this workbook is built on the PARA Method by Tiago Forte. PARA is a universal four-folder structure that organises all professional knowledge — adapted here specifically for architectural practice.

P — Projects	A — Areas	R — Resources	A — Archive
Active commissions with a clear deadline	Ongoing responsibilities you maintain	Reference material by topic	Completed or inactive work

02

My Second Brain Setup Checklist

Complete this checklist in order. Check each box when done. Your entire Second Brain foundation should be set up within three hours.

STEP 1 — Choose Your Tool (Day 1)

☐

I have chosen my primary note-taking app:

Notion / Obsidian / Apple Notes / Other: _____

☐

I have downloaded / opened the app on my desktop AND mobile device

☐

I have created a free account (if required)

☐

I will not switch tools for at least 30 days

STEP 2 — Create Your PARA Folder Structure (Day 2)

☐

PROJECTS folder created (top level)

☐

AREAS folder created (top level)

☐

RESOURCES folder created (top level)

☐

ARCHIVE folder created (top level)

☐

No other top-level folders created (keep it clean)

STEP 3 — Set Up Your Capture Inbox (Day 3)

- ☐ Quick Note Inbox created inside my app (zero-friction capture zone)
- ☐ Mobile capture app configured — quick note widget on home screen
- ☐ Voice memo shortcut set up on phone for site visits
- ☐ Email-to-note forwarding configured (if applicable)
- ☐ Web clipper browser extension installed

STEP 4 — Move Existing Work (Day 3)

- ☐ All live project files identified and moved into PROJECTS folder
- ☐ Ongoing responsibilities identified and named as Areas
- ☐ Existing reference material moved into RESOURCES
- ☐ Completed projects moved to ARCHIVE

STEP 5 — Schedule Your Weekly Review (Day 4)

- ☐ 30-minute Friday Review blocked in calendar — recurring, every week
- ☐ Phone notifications for Friday Review turned ON
- ☐ This workbook kept open or printed and on desk for the first 4 reviews

☒ **Setup Complete Date:**

My chosen tool:

03

PARA Folder Planner

Use this page to plan what goes inside each of your four PARA folders before you start building your system. Write in the sub-folder names, naming conventions, and review cadence for each category.

P PROJECTS — Active Commissions with Deadlines

Sub-folder 1 name (e.g. 2026-RES-001-Mehta-Residence):

Sub-folder 2 name:

Sub-folder 3 name:

Sub-folder 4 name:

Project folder structure (stages inside each project):

Naming convention for drawings and files:

A AREAS — Ongoing Responsibilities (No Deadline)

Area 1 name (e.g. Building Codes & Regulations):

Area 2 name (e.g. CPD Learning & Certificates):

Area 3 name (e.g. Business Development):

Area 4 name:

Review frequency for Areas:

R RESOURCES — Reference Material by Topic

Resource topic 1 (e.g. Climate & Passive Design):

Resource topic 2 (e.g. Material Studies):

Resource topic 3 (e.g. Typology Research):

Resource topic 4 (e.g. Codes & Standards):

Resource topic 5:

Primary tagging system (Content Type / Climate / Scale):

A ARCHIVE — Completed or Inactive Work

Archiving trigger: when does a project move here?

Archive folder structure (e.g. by year):

Oldest project currently in archive:

04

My Active Projects Dashboard

Update this table every **Friday during your Weekly Review**. RAG Status:  **Red** = at risk  **Amber** = needs attention  **Green** = on track

Project Name / Code	Client	Stage	Key Deadline	RAG	Notes / Next Action

Stage Reference Guide

Briefing	Schematic	Design Dev.	Const. Docs	Site Super.	Handover
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Priority Matrix — This Week

 URGENT — Action This Week	 IMPORTANT — Plan This Month

05

Weekly Capture Log

Week of: _____	Active Projects: _____	Capture Score: _____/5
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Category	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Quick Ideas					
Site Observations					
Client Actions					

Category	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Research Finds					
Inspiration					

Inbox Processing Notes

After your Friday Review, note anything that needed special attention or revealed a gap in your system:

This Week's Top 3 Insights

06

Friday Review Template — 30 Minutes

Run this review every Friday. Set a timer. **The goal: zero inbox, full clarity.** Use a new copy of this page each week — print a batch of 4 at the start of each month.

Date: _____	Review #: _____ of 52	Energy Level: ☐ Low ☐ Mid ☐ High
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PHASE 1 — INBOX ZERO — Process every captured item this week

10

mins

Items in inbox at start: _____ | Items remaining after review: _____

Items filed to Projects: _____ | Items filed to Resources: _____

Items deleted / discarded: _____ | Items flagged for follow-up: _____

PHASE 2 — PROJECT UPDATES — One pass through every active project

10

mins

Projects reviewed this week:

PHASE 3 — RESOURCE FILING — Save and tag reference material captured this week**5**
mins*New resources added:***PHASE 4 — AREA SCAN** — Quick check on all ongoing responsibilities**5**
mins*Areas that need attention:***Three priorities for next week:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

07

Information Organisation Matrix

Use this matrix to build your personal tagging and filing taxonomy. **Pre-filled rows are examples.** Add your own in the blank rows at the bottom. Review and update quarterly.

Three-Tag Rule: Every item gets a maximum of three tags: **Content Type** (what it is) + **Climate Tag** (where it applies) + **Scale** (Room / Building / Urban).

Information Type	PARA Location	Primary Tag	Climate Tag	Review Cycle
Client Brief / Scope	Projects	#Document	#Any	Per Meeting
Site Photographs	Projects	#Image	#Regional	Per Site Visit
Building Code / NBC	Areas	#Code	#Any	Annually
Climate Research	Resources	#Article	#Hot-Humid	Quarterly
Passive Design Notes	Resources	#Research	#Hot-Dry	Quarterly
Structural Detail	Resources	#Drawing	#Any	As Needed
Design Inspiration	Resources	#Inspiration	#Any	Weekly Capture
CPD Certificates	Areas	#Certificate	#Any	Annually
Consultant Reports	Projects	#Report	#Any	Per Project
Completed Drawings	Archive	#Drawing	#Any	Post-Handover
Supplier Specifications	Resources	#Specification	#Any	Quarterly
Award Submissions	Archive	#Portfolio	#Any	Post-Award

My Custom Tagging Taxonomy

Content Type Tags	Climate Tags	Scale Tags
#Document	#Hot-Humid	#Room
#Drawing	#Hot-Dry	#Floor
#Article	#Temperate	#Building
#Specification	#Cold	#Campus
#Image	#Mixed	#Urban
#Code	#Coastal	#Landscape
#Report	#High-Altitude	#Regional
#Certificate	#Any	#Any
#Inspiration		

08

My Resource Library Map

Map out your personal Resource library below. Each box is one top-level Resource sub-folder. **Write the folder name as the heading, then list the sub-folders or topics inside it.** Limit yourself to 8–10 top-level Resource folders maximum.

 MY RESOURCES FOLDER

Climate & Passive Design Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name:	Material Studies Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name:
Structural Systems Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name:	Typology Research Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name:
Regional Architecture Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name:	Codes & Standards Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name:
Urban & Landscape Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name:	Sustainability Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name: Sub-folder name:

Resource Review Schedule

Weekly Capture	Quarterly Review	Annual Purge
Inspiration, articles, web clips saved during the week. Filed every Friday.	Review each Resource folder. Update outdated specs. Tag new material. Remove duplicates.	Delete anything irrelevant, superseded by new codes, or no longer aligned with your practice.

09

Knowledge Dashboard Template

This is your daily control panel. **Open it first every morning.** Spend three minutes scanning all five panels before you open email. Update the Active Projects panel every Friday.

PANEL 1 — ACTIVE PROJECTS (Update Every Friday)					
Project	Client	Stage	Deadline	RAG	Next Action

PANEL 2 — THIS WEEK'S TOP 3 FOCUS (Reset Every Monday)	
01	
02	
03	

PANEL 3 — UPCOMING DEADLINES (Rolling 2 Weeks)

Date	What Is Due	Project / Client

PANEL 4 — LEARNING QUEUE

- 01 _____
- 02 _____
- 03 _____

PANEL 5 — RECENTLY CAPTURED

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

10

30-Day Action Plan Tracker

Week 1 — Foundation

Week 2 — Dashboard

Week 3 — Capture
HabitWeek 4 — Organise &
Index
☐ **Day 1:** Choose your tool (Notion / Obsidian / Apple Notes)

Notes:

☐ **Day 3:** Move all live project files into Projects folder

Notes:

☐ **Day 5:** Set up your Quick Note Inbox on mobile and desktop

Notes:

☐ **Day 7:** First Friday Review — process everything captured this week

Notes:

☐ **Day 9:** Build Active Projects panel — one row per live commission

Notes:

☐ **Day 11:** Add Upcoming Deadlines panel — populate next two weeks

Notes:

☐ **Day 13:** Add Recently Captured panel — last five items

Notes:

☐ **Day 15:** Set up Site Visit Log template on mobile

Notes:

☐ **Day 17:** Configure a reading highlights tool (Readwise / Matter)

Notes:

☐ **Day 2:** Create four PARA folders — Projects, Areas, Resources, Archive

Notes:

☐ **Day 4:** Create your Inspiration Queue inside Resources

Notes:

☐ **Day 6:** Add at least three existing inspirations to Resources

Notes:

☐ **Day 8:** Create your Knowledge Dashboard page

Notes:

☐ **Day 10:** Add This Week's Focus panel — identify three priorities

Notes:

☐ **Day 12:** Add Learning Queue panel — list three things you are learning

Notes:

☐ **Day 14:** Second Friday Review — refine Dashboard based on Week 1

Notes:

☐ **Day 16:** Set up Client Meeting Note template

Notes:

☐ **Day 18:** Capture day — minimum three items across all five channels

Notes:

☐ Day 19: Capture day — voice memos and site photographs filed <i>Notes:</i>	☐ Day 20: Capture day — one article saved and highlighted <i>Notes:</i>
☐ Day 21: Third Friday Review — which capture channels are you actually using? <i>Notes:</i>	☐ Day 22: Tag all Resources — apply three-tag system to existing files <i>Notes:</i>
☐ Day 23: Tag new Resources added this week <i>Notes:</i>	☐ Day 24: Review Areas folder — are all ongoing responsibilities listed? <i>Notes:</i>
☐ Day 25: Build your Personal Index — list every folder with a one-sentence description <i>Notes:</i>	☐ Day 26: Move any completed project files to Archive <i>Notes:</i>
☐ Day 27: Archive old references that are superseded <i>Notes:</i>	☐ Day 28: Set up monthly Area review reminder in calendar <i>Notes:</i>
☐ Day 29: Fourth Friday Review — full system check <i>Notes:</i>	☐ Day 30: Full reflection — what is working? What needs adjustment? Celebrate. <i>Notes:</i>

Progress: ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Days completed: _____ / 30

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My Personal Index

Your Personal Index is the map of your entire Second Brain. **Every folder gets one row.** When you cannot remember where something lives, this Index tells you in seconds. Review and update it every quarter.

Last Updated:

[illegible]

Folder / Area Name	What It Contains	Last Updated

Index Usage Tips



When you cannot find something, scan the 'What It Contains' column first — not the folder name.



Add the 'Last Updated' date every time you make significant changes to a folder.



If a row has not been updated in over a year, consider archiving or deleting that folder.



Print and pin this page above your desk for the first three months of using your Second Brain.

12

Reflection & Next Steps — After 30 Days

You have built your Second Brain. Now reflect honestly on the first 30 days. **This review will define your next 30 days.** There is no right or wrong — only honest observation and forward motion.

What is working well in my Second Brain?

What is NOT working yet?

Which capture channel did I use the most?

What surprised me about this process?

What will I change or improve in Month 2?

MY SECOND BRAIN SCORE — AFTER 30 DAYS

Habit / System	Rating (circle one)	Notes
Daily Dashboard Check	☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	
Weekly Capture Habit	☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	
Friday Review Completed	☐ 0–1x ☐ 2–3x ☐ 3–4x ☐ Every Week	
PARA Folders Maintained	☐ Never ☐ Partially ☐ Mostly ☐ Fully	
Tags Applied Consistently	☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always	

*"Your career's entire knowledge should be instantly accessible.
Your Second Brain makes that possible."*

— ARCNET.STUDIO, *Second Brain for Architects*

Continue at: arcnet.studio/second-brain-for-architects