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LAUNCHPAD

Your AI Second Brain

Capture everything you learn, organise it simply and ask AI questions across it: PARA and CODE methods, Notion, Obsidian and NotebookLM, context engineering and AI memory, meeting and reading pipelines, and building your own with MCP and automation.

Edition 2026 · skillnavora.in

How to use this guide

Each class has goals, concepts with Indian examples, key takeaways and a practice exercise, from basic to advanced. Finish with the final project to build something you can show in interviews.

	Class	Level
Class 1	What a second brain is, and why AI changes it	Basic
Class 2	Capture: getting things into the system	Basic
Class 3	Organise and distil	Basic
Class 4	Ask AI across your notes	Intermediate
Class 5	Context engineering and AI memory	Intermediate
Class 6	Pipelines: meetings, email, reading and learning	Intermediate
Class 7	Second brains for PMs, students and teams	Advanced
Class 8	Build your own: MCP, automation and evaluation	Advanced
Toolkit: templates, tools cheat sheet, glossary, 12 interview questions, further reading		

What a second brain is, and why AI changes it

Understand the idea, the PARA and CODE methods, and what AI adds.

The problem

We read, watch and hear more than we can remember: lectures, articles, meetings, WhatsApp forwards, PDFs. Most of it is lost, so we redo work and forget good ideas. A **second brain** is a trusted system outside your head where useful information is captured and can be found again.

Two simple methods (Tiago Forte, *Building a Second Brain*)

CODE: the workflow	PARA: the folders
Capture what resonates Organise by where you'll use it Distil the key points Express: use it to create something	Projects: active, with a deadline (e.g. "Capstone PRD") Areas: ongoing responsibilities ("Career", "Health") Resources: topics of interest ("SQL", "AI evals") Archive: finished or inactive

What AI adds

- **Ask, don't search:** "What did the client say about pricing in last month's calls?"
- **Auto-summaries** of long PDFs, videos and meetings.
- **Connections** between notes you forgot were related.
- **Drafting:** turn your notes into a PRD, blog post or interview answer in your own voice.

Rule: the second brain is for **using** knowledge, not hoarding it. If a note will never help a project, don't save it.

Key takeaways

- Capture → Organise → Distil → Express.
- Organise by where you'll use information (PARA), not by topic perfection.
- AI turns notes into something you can question and reuse.

Practice exercise: List your current 'information mess': where your notes, files and bookmarks live today. Sketch PARA folders for your own life (2 projects, 3 areas, 5 resources).

Capture: getting things into the system

Set up fast, low-friction capture from phone, browser, reading and voice.

Capture tools

Source	Tool examples
Quick notes on phone	Notion, Obsidian mobile, Google Keep, Apple Notes
Web pages and articles	Notion Web Clipper, Obsidian Web Clipper, Readwise Reader, Pocket-style read-later apps
Highlights from books and PDFs	Readwise, Kindle highlights export
Voice thoughts	Voice notes → AI transcription (WhatsApp to self + AI, Otter, phone dictation)
Meetings and classes	Otter, Fireflies, Granola, built-in meeting summaries in Zoom, Teams and Meet
Screenshots	Save with a one-line note on why it matters

Capture rules

- One **inbox**: everything lands in one place first.
- Add one line: *why* you saved it and where you might use it.
- Capture in 10 seconds or less, or you'll stop doing it.
- Don't capture what you can easily find again (most of Google).

Choosing your main app

App	Best for
Notion	Databases, templates, sharing with teams; Notion AI built in
Obsidian	Private, local Markdown files, linked notes, many AI plugins
Google Drive + NotebookLM	PDFs and docs you already have; ask questions with citations
Claude / ChatGPT Projects	Topic workspaces with files and instructions for an AI assistant

Key takeaways

- One inbox, captured in under 10 seconds.
- Always note why you saved something.
- Pick one main app; don't spread across five.

Practice exercise: Install a web clipper and a voice-capture method. Capture 10 useful things this week with a one-line 'why' each.

Organise and distil

Turn a pile of captures into findable, useful notes.

Weekly organising (20 minutes)

1. Empty the inbox: move each item into a PARA folder or delete it.
2. Rename notes with clear titles ("SQL window functions – examples").
3. Link related notes (Obsidian [[links]] or Notion relations).
4. Archive finished projects.

Progressive summarisation

Layer 1: the saved text. Layer 2: **bold** the key passages. Layer 3: **highlight** the best of the bold. Layer 4: a 3-line summary in your own words at the top. AI can do a first draft of layers 2–4: "Summarise this in 3 bullets for a PM preparing for interviews."

Note templates

```
Title:
Source / link:      Date:
Why I saved it:
Key points (3):
How I'll use it (project/area):
Related notes:
```

Tags vs folders vs links

- **Folders (PARA)** answer "where do I use this?"
- **Links** connect ideas across folders.
- **Tags:** keep to a few (e.g. #idea, #quote, #interview).

Key takeaways

- Weekly 20-minute review keeps the system alive.
- Summarise in your own words at the top of each note.
- Folders for use, links for ideas, few tags.

Practice exercise: Take 5 saved articles and apply progressive summarisation (ask AI for a draft, then edit it into your own words).

Ask AI across your notes

Use NotebookLM, Claude and ChatGPT Projects, Notion AI and Obsidian plugins to question your knowledge.

Tools that answer from your own files

Tool	How it works	Great for
NotebookLM	Upload PDFs, docs, links, videos; answers with citations; audio overviews	Exam prep, research, course notes
Claude Projects	Project knowledge files + custom instructions	PRDs, writing in your style, ongoing work
ChatGPT Projects	Files, instructions and chats grouped by project	Study plans, job search
Notion AI	Q&A across your Notion workspace	Team wikis, meeting notes
Obsidian + AI plugins	Plugins (e.g. Smart Connections, Copilot for Obsidian) chat with your vault	Private personal notes

How it works: RAG in plain words

Your notes are split into chunks, turned into "meaning fingerprints" (embeddings) and stored. When you ask a question, the most relevant chunks are found and given to the AI with your question, so it answers from **your** material and can cite it.

Good questions to ask your second brain

- "What are the 5 recurring complaints in my user-interview notes? Quote each."
- "Make a revision quiz from my SQL notes, hardest first."
- "What did I learn about pricing across all projects this year?"
- "Draft a STAR answer about stakeholder conflict using my project notes."

Quality checks

- Ask for citations and open them.
- If the answer isn't in your notes, the AI should say so.
- Keep sources clean and current; old notes give old answers.

Key takeaways

- NotebookLM and Projects answer from your files with citations.
- RAG = find relevant chunks + answer from them.
- Ask for quotes and sources; verify.

Practice exercise: Create a NotebookLM notebook (or Claude Project) with 5 of your study documents and ask 5 questions, including one whose answer isn't in the files.

Context engineering and AI memory

Give AI the right context about you and your work, and manage what it remembers.

Why context matters

An AI only knows what's in its **context window** (the text it can see right now) plus any **memory** features. Better context beats better prompts: the same question gives much better answers when the AI knows your role, goals, style and project.

Layers of context

Layer	Where it lives	Example
Personal profile	Custom instructions / memory / a "about me" file	"I'm a 2nd-year PM aspirant in Pune; explain with Indian app examples; be concise"
Project brief	Project instructions + key files	Capstone PRD brief, user research summary, metrics
Task context	The prompt itself	"Rewrite section 3 for a VP audience in 150 words"
Retrieved knowledge	Second brain search (RAG)	Relevant interview quotes

Personal context file (template)

```
About me: role, experience, location, goals this quarter
How I like answers: length, format, tone, language
Current projects: name - goal - deadline - key files
Things to avoid: jargon, US-only examples, ...
Glossary: company or course terms
```

Memory hygiene

- Review and delete stored memories regularly (ChatGPT and Claude let you view and manage them).
- Don't store passwords, bank details, Aadhaar or health data in AI memory.
- Use separate projects for separate contexts (job search vs college vs work).
- Long chats drift: start a fresh chat with a short summary when quality drops.

Key takeaways

- Context beats clever prompts.
- Keep a reusable personal context file and project briefs.
- Manage memory: review, delete, separate, never store secrets.

Practice exercise: Write your personal context file (1 page) and a project brief for one current project. Compare answers with and without them on the same question.

Pipelines: meetings, email, reading and learning

Automatically feed your second brain from meetings, email and courses.

Pipelines that run themselves

Pipeline	How
Meetings → notes	Otter / Fireflies / Granola summary → automation saves to Notion "Meetings" with date, people, decisions, action items
Starred emails → tasks	Zapier / Make / n8n: Gmail star → Notion task with link
Highlights → notes	Readwise syncs book and article highlights to Notion or Obsidian
YouTube / courses → notes	Transcript → AI summary + 5 key takeaways + 3 quiz questions
Weekly digest	Every Friday: AI summarises the week's notes and open action items

A meeting-notes prompt

From this transcript, write:

1. Summary (5 bullets)
 2. Decisions
 3. Action items (owner, due date)
 4. Open questions
 5. Quotes worth keeping (with speaker)
- Keep names exact; don't invent facts.

Weekly review checklist

- Inbox to zero · update project statuses · review action items · archive finished work · pick 1 note to turn into something (post, PRD section, answer).

Ask permission before recording meetings, and follow your company's policies on meeting data.

Key takeaways

- Automate capture from meetings, email and reading.
- Structure summaries: decisions, actions, questions.
- Weekly review keeps it useful.

Practice exercise: Build one automation: starred Gmail → Notion task, or meeting summary → Notion page, using Zapier, Make or n8n.

Second brains for PMs, students and teams

Apply the system to product work, exam prep and team knowledge.

For product managers

- **Insight repository:** every user-interview quote tagged by theme and segment; AI finds patterns across 50 interviews.
- **Decision log:** date, decision, options, why, owner; ask "why did we choose X?" months later.
- **Metrics notebook:** definitions, dashboards, past experiments and results.
- **Interview bank:** STAR stories from your projects; AI drafts answers in your words.

For students and job seekers

- One notebook per subject; AI makes quizzes, flashcards and summaries before exams.
- Project portfolio notes ready for resumes and interviews.
- Job-search tracker with company research and tailored resume points.

For teams

- Shared wiki (Notion / Confluence) with AI search; owners for each page; review dates.
- Onboarding: a new joiner can ask "how do we deploy?" and get the official answer with a link.
- Permissions: AI should only see what each person is allowed to see.

Privacy and data protection

Keep personal data of others (customers, classmates) out of personal tools unless allowed; follow the DPDP Act and company policy; prefer enterprise AI plans for work data; know where your files are stored.

Key takeaways

- PMs: insight repository + decision log + interview bank.
- Students: notebooks per subject with AI quizzes.
- Teams: owned pages, permissions, privacy.

Practice exercise: Set up an insight repository with 10 real or sample interview quotes, tag them, and ask AI for the top 3 themes with supporting quotes.

Build your own: MCP, automation and evaluation

Connect AI assistants to your notes with MCP and automation, and make sure answers stay accurate.

MCP: connecting AI to your second brain

The **Model Context Protocol (MCP)** lets assistants like Claude read and write in your tools: Notion, Google Drive, GitHub, Slack, or a folder of Obsidian notes. Example requests: "Find my notes on pricing and draft a 1-page summary in my Projects folder", or "Add today's meeting actions to my Notion task list".

DIY architecture (for builders)

Notes (Markdown / Notion / Drive) → chunk + embed → vector store → retrieve top matches → AI answers with citations → optional: write back new notes

No-code route: n8n or Make with an AI step and a vector-store node. Code route: Python with an embeddings model and a vector database (e.g. pgvector, Chroma).

Evaluate your second brain

- Write 20 questions you know the answers to; check if the AI finds the right note (retrieval) and answers faithfully (no invented facts).
- Track: answer correct, source correct, "I don't know" when it should.
- Fix by improving titles, summaries and chunking; remove outdated notes.

Final project

Build your AI second brain for one area of your life (study, job search or a product): PARA structure, capture from 3 sources, one automation, a personal context file, an AI Q&A setup (NotebookLM, Projects or MCP), and a 20-question accuracy check. Show it in a 5-minute demo.

Key takeaways

- MCP connects assistants to your tools safely.
- DIY: chunk, embed, retrieve, answer with citations.
- Test with known questions; fix sources, not just prompts.

Practice exercise: Complete the final project and demo it to a friend or mentor.

Templates

A. PARA starter

```
1 Projects/    Capstone PRD · Job search Q4 · SQL certification
2 Areas/      Career · Health · Finances · Learning
3 Resources/   AI evals · SQL · Product case studies · Interview stories
4 Archive/     Finished projects and old material
```

B. Personal context file

```
About me:
Goals this quarter:
How I like answers (length, format, tone, language):
Current projects (goal, deadline, key files):
Avoid:
Glossary:
```

C. Weekly review (20 minutes)

Step	Done
Inbox to zero	
Update project statuses	
Review action items	
Archive finished work	
Turn one note into output	
Review AI memory and delete what's stale	

D. Decision log

```
date | decision | options considered | why | owner | revisit date
```

Tools cheat sheet

Term / tool	Meaning / use
Notion + Notion AI	Databases, templates, team wiki; AI Q&A across the workspace
Obsidian	Local Markdown notes with links; AI plugins such as Smart Connections and Copilot for Obsidian
NotebookLM	Ask questions across uploaded sources with citations; audio overviews
Claude Projects / ChatGPT Projects	Workspaces with files, instructions and chats
Readwise / Reader	Highlights and read-later, synced to notes
Otter / Fireflies / Granola	Meeting transcription and AI notes
Zapier / Make / n8n	Automate capture pipelines
MCP	Standard way to connect AI assistants to your tools and data
Embeddings + vector DB	How AI finds relevant notes by meaning
PARA	Projects, Areas, Resources, Archive
CODE	Capture, Organise, Distil, Express
Progressive summarisation	Bold → highlight → summary layers on each note

Glossary

Second brain	External system for knowledge you want to reuse
Context window	The text an AI model can see at once
Memory	AI features that remember facts about you across chats
Embedding	Numeric 'meaning fingerprint' of text used for search
Vector database	Store for embeddings that finds similar meaning
RAG	Retrieval-augmented generation: answer from retrieved sources
Inbox	Single landing place for new captures
Decision log	Record of decisions with reasons
MCP	Model Context Protocol

12 interview questions with answers

Q1. What is a second brain?

A trusted external system for capturing, organising and reusing knowledge, so you don't rely on memory. With AI, you can ask questions across it and get cited answers.

Q2. Explain PARA and CODE.

PARA organises by actionability: Projects, Areas, Resources, Archive. CODE is the workflow: Capture, Organise, Distil, Express.

Q3. How does AI answer from your notes?

Retrieval-augmented generation: notes are chunked and embedded; the most relevant chunks are retrieved for a question and given to the model, which answers with citations.

Q4. What is context engineering?

Designing what information the AI sees: personal profile, project brief, task instructions and retrieved knowledge. Good context usually improves answers more than prompt tricks.

Q5. How do you manage AI memory safely?

Review and delete memories, keep projects separate, never store secrets or sensitive personal data, and prefer enterprise plans for work data.

Q6. How would a PM use a second brain?

An insight repository of user quotes, a decision log, metrics and experiment notes, and an interview story bank, with AI finding patterns and drafting documents.

Q7. NotebookLM vs Claude Projects?

NotebookLM is source-grounded Q&A over uploaded material with citations and audio overviews; Projects combine files with custom instructions for ongoing work and drafting.

Q8. What is MCP?

The Model Context Protocol: a standard way for AI assistants to connect to tools and data (Notion, Drive, GitHub) to read and act with permission.

Q9. How do you know your AI second brain is accurate?

Test with questions whose answers you know; check retrieval (right note), faithfulness (no invented facts) and correct 'I don't know' responses.

Q10. Biggest mistake people make?

Hoarding without using: saving everything, never distilling or expressing. Fix it with a one-line 'why' on capture and a weekly review.

Q11. How do you automate capture?

Meeting tools + automations into Notion, starred email to tasks, highlight syncing, and transcript summaries with structured prompts.

Q12. What data should never go into it?

Passwords, bank and card details, Aadhaar, health records, and others' personal data without permission, per the DPDP Act and company policy.

Further reading and tools

- Building a Second Brain (Tiago Forte): <https://www.buildingasecondbrain.com/>
- The PARA method: <https://fortelabs.com/blog/para/>
- NotebookLM help: <https://support.google.com/notebooklm>
- Claude Projects: <https://support.anthropic.com/>
- Notion AI help: <https://www.notion.com/help/guides>
- Obsidian help: <https://help.obsidian.md/>
- Model Context Protocol: <https://modelcontextprotocol.io/>
- Readwise: <https://readwise.io/>
- n8n docs: <https://docs.n8n.io/>

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