

Second Brain System **with AI Tools**

Build a practical personal knowledge system: capture ideas, organize them simply, summarize with care and reuse what you know.

25

AI prompts

13

fill-in templates

32

A4 pages

What is inside

Capture and Processing Workflows

Get ideas out of your head and into a form you can use

Note Organization Methods

A structure that is simple enough to keep using

AI-Assisted Summarization Approaches

Condense long material while staying accurate and engaged

Retrieval and Application Techniques

Find what you saved and turn it into work

Weekly Knowledge Review Habits

A short weekly routine that keeps the system alive

Two-week start plan

A simple sequence for putting the system into practice

Contents

1

Capture and Processing Workflows

Get ideas out of your head and into a form you can use

Pages 3–8

2

Note Organization Methods

A structure that is simple enough to keep using

Pages 9–14

3

AI-Assisted Summarization Approaches

Condense long material while staying accurate and engaged

Pages 15–20

4

Retrieval and Application Techniques

Find what you saved and turn it into work

Pages 21–26

5

Weekly Knowledge Review Habits

A short weekly routine that keeps the system alive

Pages 27–31

✓

Two-week start plan

A simple sequence for putting the system into practice

Page 32

Who this is for

Knowledge workers, students, researchers, writers and anyone who takes a lot of notes, particularly people whose current note system feels messy or underused.

How to use it

Start with capture

Pick one reliable capture method before you build anything else.

Process regularly

Turn raw notes into structured ones on a schedule, even a short one.

Keep it maintainable

The best system is the one you will really keep using. Simplify when in doubt.

Please note: results vary by tool version and settings, so review AI output before relying on it.

The Capture Habit

A second brain starts with capture. If ideas, quotes and tasks are not saved somewhere reliable, they are gone before you can use them.

1 Decide what deserves capture

Save ideas that surprise you, facts you will need, quotes you admire and tasks you commit to. Not everything is worth keeping.

2 Make capture effortless

Choose tools you always have with you, such as a phone note, a voice memo or a small notebook. Friction kills the habit.

3 Capture in your own words when possible

A short sentence of your own thinking is worth more than a long pasted excerpt.

4 Note the source

Record where an idea came from. You will want to find the original or give credit later.

5 Do not organize while capturing

Save first and sort later. Capture and organization are separate steps that work better apart.

PROMPT 1 · VOICE NOTE CLEANUP

Here is a messy voice note transcript: [PASTE]. Turn it into a short note with a title, three key points and any tasks. Keep my wording where possible and mark anything unclear with a question mark.

Tip: If capturing feels like a chore, reduce the steps until it takes under ten seconds.

NOTES

Capture Sources Map

List the places where ideas and information reach you, and decide how each gets captured.

READING (BOOKS, ARTICLES) how I will capture highlights and thoughts

MEETINGS AND CALLS

CONVERSATIONS AND IDEAS ON THE GO

PODCASTS AND VIDEOS

EMAIL AND MESSAGES

DAILY OBSERVATIONS AND SPARKS

MY SINGLE INBOX where everything lands

Capture Tools Checklist

Check that your capture tools are quick, reliable and always available.

Always with me

- ☐ Phone note or app is ready
- ☐ Voice memo works in one tap
- ☐ Small notebook for quiet moments
- ☐ Widget or shortcut on my home screen

At my desk

- ☐ Web clipper is installed
- ☐ Email forwarding to my inbox works
- ☐ Shortcut to create a note
- ☐ Screenshot folder is monitored

Reliability

- ☐ Notes sync across devices
- ☐ I back up regularly
- ☐ I can capture offline
- ☐ I can find saved items easily

Simplicity

- ☐ One main inbox
- ☐ Few categories at capture
- ☐ No heavy formatting required
- ☐ I use it daily

Three Prompts for Capture

Use these to turn raw captures into usable notes. Remove confidential details before pasting.

2 Meeting capture

Use it when: You took rough notes in a meeting.

PROMPT

Turn these rough meeting notes into a clean summary with decisions, action items with owners and open questions. Keep it under 150 words.

[PASTE NOTES]

MY VERSION

3 Web clipping

Use it when: You saved a long page.

PROMPT

From the web page text below, extract the three ideas most relevant to [MY PROJECT], with a one-sentence explanation of why each matters.

[PASTE TEXT]

MY VERSION

4 Idea expander

Use it when: You wrote a one-line idea.

PROMPT

Here is a one-line idea: [IDEA]. Ask me five questions that would help me develop it, then suggest three directions it could take.

MY VERSION

Processing Notes in Three Passes

Processing turns raw captures into notes you can use. Three quick passes keep the work light and focused.

1 First pass: decide

Look at each captured item and decide whether to keep, act on or delete it. Aim for a quick yes or no.

2 Second pass: clarify

For items you keep, add a title, a summary line and the source. Clear titles make notes searchable.

3 Third pass: place and connect

Move the note to the right project, area or resource folder, and link it to at least one related note.

4 Process in small batches

Ten minutes daily beats two hours monthly. Short sessions are easier to sustain.

5 Stop when time is up

Unprocessed items can wait. Consistency matters more than clearing everything at once.

PROMPT 5 · PROCESSING ASSISTANT

Here are five raw notes: [PASTE]. For each, suggest a clear title, a one-line summary, a keep or delete recommendation and the folder it might belong in. I will make the final decision.

Tip: Process the newest items first. They are the freshest and easiest to understand.

NOTES

Processing Log

Track your processing sessions. A short log shows whether the habit is working.

Day	Items processed	Time spent	Kept or deleted	Notes
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				
Day 8				
Day 9				
Day 10				

Organize by Actionability

Instead of filing by topic, many people find it easier to organize by how soon they will use something. Notes for active work stay close; the rest moves further away.

1

Active projects first

Notes tied to current projects live in the most visible place. They are the ones you will use this month.

2

Ongoing areas next

Responsibilities such as finances, health or career have their own space for notes you maintain over time.

3

Reference material

Interesting topics and background research live in a searchable library that you visit when needed.

4

Archive the rest

Completed or inactive material moves to an archive, keeping your working space uncluttered.

5

Review placement occasionally

Move notes up or down as their relevance changes. The structure should reflect your life now.

PROMPT 6 · ORGANIZATION DESIGN

My current projects are [LIST], my responsibilities are [LIST] and my interests are [LIST]. Propose a simple note structure organized by how actively I use each item, with no more than three levels.

Tip: When you cannot decide where a note belongs, ask which project it would help first.

NOTES

Second Brain Map

Draft the main spaces in your system on paper before building them in a tool.

ACTIVE PROJECTS

ONGOING AREAS

REFERENCE TOPICS

ARCHIVE RULES what moves there and when

MAIN TOOLS AND WHAT EACH IS FOR

NAMING CONVENTIONS

WHAT I WILL NOT KEEP

Three Prompts for Organizing

Use these to sort and name notes without a long manual process.

7 Suggest a home

Use it when: A note has no obvious folder.

PROMPT

My folders are [LIST]. Based on the note below, tell me which folder it belongs in and why, and suggest a short descriptive title.

[PASTE NOTE]

MY VERSION

8 Merge duplicates

Use it when: You have overlapping notes.

PROMPT

Compare the notes below and tell me if they cover the same idea. If so, draft one merged note that keeps the unique points of each and list what you removed.

NOTE 1: [PASTE]

NOTE 2: [PASTE]

MY VERSION

9 Rename for searchability

Use it when: Your titles are unclear.

PROMPT

Suggest clear, searchable titles for the notes below, each under eight words and starting with the main topic.

[PASTE CURRENT TITLES]

MY VERSION

Tag Vocabulary

Keep tags few and consistent. List each tag, what it means and where you use it.

Tag	Meaning	Used for	Example note
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

Example: An Organized Workspace

This fictional example shows a small, tidy system for a freelance designer.

PROJECTS

Three folders: Brand refresh for a bakery, Website for a studio, Portfolio update.

AREAS

Business admin, Learning, Health, Finances. Each contains a single running note plus supporting documents.

RESOURCES

Typography, Color, Client communication, Pricing ideas. Each has a hub note linking to the best items.

ARCHIVE

Finished projects from past years, stored by year with a short summary note.

TAGS

Only six: idea, quote, template, reference, to-do and waiting.

RESULT

The designer finds most materials within a minute and does not spend time deciding where things go.

WHAT WAS LEFT OUT ON PURPOSE

No deep folder trees and no elaborate tag system. The designer decided that every extra category had to earn its place.

WHAT TO TRY YOURSELF

Sketch your own version with three project folders and four areas, and see how much of your current material fits.

YOUR EXAMPLE

Organization Audit Checklist

Run this audit every few months to keep the structure healthy.

Structure

- ☐ Folders are shallow
- ☐ Names are consistent
- ☐ Hub notes exist for key topics
- ☐ Archive is used

Content

- ☐ Duplicates are merged
- ☐ Outdated notes are removed
- ☐ Key notes are linked
- ☐ Sources are recorded

Habits

- ☐ Inbox is processed regularly
- ☐ I search before I create
- ☐ I use tags sparingly
- ☐ I review weekly

Improvement

- ☐ One friction point identified
- ☐ One change tested
- ☐ Unused features turned off
- ☐ Backup verified

Layered Summaries

A layered summary keeps several levels of detail so you can revisit a source quickly or dive deep when needed.

1

Layer one: the source

Keep the original text or link, so you can always return to the full material.

2

Layer two: key passages

Mark the sentences or sections that matter most, so you can skim them in a minute.

3

Layer three: your summary

Write a short summary in your own words, a few sentences at most.

4

Layer four: your takeaway

Add one sentence about how this changes what you think or do.

5

Use AI for drafts, not conclusions

Ask AI to propose key passages or a draft summary, then edit it until it says what you actually believe.

PROMPT 10 · LAYERED SUMMARY DRAFT

From the text below, propose the five most important passages, a three-sentence summary and a possible takeaway for someone working on [MY PROJECT]. Quote passages exactly and keep them short.

[PASTE TEXT]

Tip: The takeaway layer is where learning happens. Do not outsource it.

NOTES

Three Prompts for Articles and Reports

Use these on material you are allowed to copy into an AI tool. Check results against the source.

11 Quick brief

Use it when: You have little time.

PROMPT

Give me a brief of the text below: its purpose, three main points, any numbers mentioned and one limitation or caveat.

[PASTE TEXT]

MY VERSION

12 Critical read

Use it when: You want to challenge the text.

PROMPT

List the main claims in the text below, the evidence for each, and what you would need to see to be more confident in each claim.

[PASTE TEXT]

MY VERSION

13 Relevance filter

Use it when: You wonder if it is worth your time.

PROMPT

Based on my goal of [GOAL], tell me which parts of the text below are most relevant, which can be skipped and what questions it does not answer.

[PASTE TEXT]

MY VERSION

Layered Summary Template

Fill in one for each source you want to keep.

SOURCE AND LINK

KEY PASSAGES two to five short quotes or sections

SUMMARY IN MY WORDS three sentences at most

MY TAKEAWAY what it changes for me

QUESTIONS I STILL HAVE

CONNECTED NOTES

WHEN I WILL REVIEW THIS

Three Prompts for Books and Long Material

For longer material, work chapter by chapter and keep the original open.

14 Chapter summary

Use it when: You are reading a book.

PROMPT

Summarize this chapter in six bullets, list the main example it uses and write two questions I should think about. Do not invent details.

[PASTE CHAPTER EXCERPT]

MY VERSION

15 Book synthesis

Use it when: You finished the book.

PROMPT

Here are my chapter notes: [PASTE]. Draft a one-page synthesis with the central argument, the three most useful ideas and how they connect. I will rewrite it afterward.

MY VERSION

16 Compare with my views

Use it when: You want to test your thinking.

PROMPT

Here is my current view on [TOPIC]: [VIEW]. Here are notes from the book: [NOTES]. Where do they agree, disagree and where does the book challenge my assumptions?

MY VERSION

Example: A Layered Summary

This fictional example shows a short, honest layered summary of an article about remote team habits.

SOURCE

A published article on written communication in remote teams, saved with its link and date.

KEY PASSAGES

Two short quotes about writing decisions down and one paragraph about response times.

SUMMARY

Remote teams work better when decisions are written, response expectations are explicit and meetings are reserved for discussion.

TAKEAWAY

Our team should add a short decision log and agree on expected response times.

CHECK

The writer verified the main claims against the original and noticed the AI draft had overstated one point.

CONNECTIONS

Linked to notes on meeting agendas and asynchronous updates.

TIME SPENT

About fifteen minutes in total, including checking the source and writing the takeaway.

WHAT TO TRY YOURSELF

Take one article you read recently and write the four layers: source, key passages, summary and takeaway.

YOUR EXAMPLE

Summary Verification Checklist

Use this list each time you rely on an AI-assisted summary.

Accuracy

- ☐ I compared it to the source
- ☐ Numbers are correct
- ☐ Names and dates are correct
- ☐ Nothing was added that I cannot find

Balance

- ☐ Main arguments are represented
- ☐ Limits and caveats are noted
- ☐ Counterpoints are mentioned
- ☐ Tone is neutral

Ownership

- ☐ I wrote my own takeaway
- ☐ I rewrote key phrases myself
- ☐ I noted my doubts
- ☐ I linked it to my goals

Storage

- ☐ Source link is saved
- ☐ Date is recorded
- ☐ Tags are applied
- ☐ Review date is set

Retrieval Comes First

Notes are only valuable if you can find them. Design your system around retrieval, not just storage.

1 Use clear titles

Start titles with the main topic and keep them specific, so search results make sense at a glance.

2 Add a summary line

A one-sentence summary at the top of each note makes it easier to judge relevance without opening it.

3 Use hub notes and links

Hub notes list the best items on a topic. They give you a shortcut that search alone cannot.

4 Search before creating

Before writing a new note, search for existing ones. Updating beats duplicating.

5 Learn your tool's search features

Filters, tags and quotes can make search far more precise. A few minutes of learning pay off for years.

PROMPT 17 · SEARCH STRATEGY

I am looking for notes about [TOPIC] but my search returns too many results. Suggest ten alternative search terms, three ways to narrow the search and a way to structure a hub note for the topic.

Tip: If you often cannot find things, improve titles and links before adding more tools.

NOTES

Three Prompts for Retrieval

Use these when you need to pull together what you already know.

18 Gather what I know

Use it when: You start a new project.

PROMPT

I am starting a project on [TOPIC]. Here are titles and summaries of my relevant notes: [PASTE]. Group them by theme and tell me what I already know, what is missing and what to read next.

MY VERSION

19 Question my notes

Use it when: You want to test coverage.

PROMPT

Based on these notes on [TOPIC] [PASTE], write ten questions someone might ask me. Mark which ones my notes can answer and which they cannot.

MY VERSION

20 Build a brief

Use it when: You need a quick overview.

PROMPT

Using only the notes below, draft a one-page brief on [TOPIC] and mark any statement that is not supported by the notes.

[PASTE NOTES]

MY VERSION

Retrieval Practice Page

Use this to test how well your system helps you find and use knowledge.

TOPIC I NEED TO RECALL

WHAT I REMEMBER WITHOUT LOOKING

WHAT I FOUND IN MY NOTES

HOW LONG IT TOOK TO FIND

WHAT WAS MISSING OR HARD TO FIND

WHAT I WILL CHANGE IN MY SYSTEM

From Notes to Output

A second brain exists to produce things: decisions, writing, designs and plans. Plan how you will move from stored ideas to finished work.

1 Start with the deliverable

Decide what you want to produce, such as an article, a proposal or a presentation.

2 Gather relevant notes

Collect only the notes that serve this deliverable. Ten good notes beat a hundred loosely related ones.

3 Arrange them into an outline

Group notes into sections and put them in order. The outline emerges from the material.

4 Draft quickly, then refine

Write a rough version using your notes, then improve it. AI can help with structure, but the thinking should be yours.

5 Save what you learned

Add new insights back to your notes so the next project starts further ahead.

PROMPT 21 · NOTES TO OUTLINE

Here are my notes for a [DELIVERABLE]: [PASTE]. Propose an outline with sections, put the notes in a sensible order and tell me what is missing. Do not write the content.

Tip: Shipping small outputs often builds more value than collecting forever.

NOTES

Output Planning Template

Plan how you will turn notes into a finished piece of work.

WHAT I AM PRODUCING AND FOR WHOM

DEADLINE

RELEVANT NOTES TO GATHER

OUTLINE

GAPS I NEED TO FILL

DRAFT DATE AND REVIEW DATE

WHAT I WILL SAVE BACK TO MY NOTES

Idea-to-Output Tracker

Follow ideas from first note to finished work. Record the stage and the next step.

Idea	Output	Stage	Next step
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

The Weekly Knowledge Review

A weekly review keeps notes fresh, connected and useful. Without it, even a good system slowly fills with clutter.

1

Empty your inbox

Process everything you captured this week. Decide, clarify and file.

2

Review active projects

Open each project note, update its status and write the next action.

3

Revisit important notes

Reread two or three notes you want to keep alive and add links or comments.

4

Capture lessons

Write one thing you learned this week and where you might use it.

5

Plan next week

Decide which projects and learning topics deserve attention and place them on your calendar.

PROMPT 22 · WEEKLY REVIEW HELPER

Here are my notes from this week: [PASTE]. Summarize the key themes, list unfinished items and suggest three notes I should revisit next week. Keep it under 150 words.

Tip: Do the review at the same time every week, such as Friday afternoon.

NOTES

Weekly Knowledge Review Template

Complete this at the end of each week. It should take about twenty minutes.

WEEK OF

NOTES CAPTURED AND PROCESSED

NOTES I IMPROVED OR LINKED

KEY IDEA I LEARNED

WHERE I APPLIED KNOWLEDGE

WHAT I WILL ARCHIVE OR DELETE

FOCUS FOR NEXT WEEK

Weekly Review Checklist

Work through this list in order each week.

Clear

- ☐ Inbox is empty
- ☐ Loose notes are collected
- ☐ Screenshots are sorted
- ☐ Tasks are on my list

Review

- ☐ Active projects are updated
- ☐ Waiting items are checked
- ☐ Two key notes are revisited
- ☐ Links are added where useful

Learn

- ☐ I wrote one lesson
- ☐ I noted open questions
- ☐ I recorded something I applied
- ☐ I celebrated progress

Plan

- ☐ Next week's priorities are set
- ☐ Learning time is scheduled
- ☐ Backup is done
- ☐ One improvement is chosen

Three Prompts for the Weekly Review

Remove private details before pasting notes into AI tools.

23 Theme finder

Use it when: You want to spot patterns in your notes.

PROMPT

Here are titles and summaries of the notes I created this week: [PASTE]. Identify three themes, suggest connections between notes and suggest one note I might write next.

MY VERSION

24 Prune candidates

Use it when: The system feels crowded.

PROMPT

From this list of notes [PASTE LIST], identify which look outdated, duplicated or unlikely to be useful. Explain briefly. I will decide what to archive.

MY VERSION

25 Learning plan

Use it when: You want a focus for next week.

PROMPT

Given my active projects [LIST] and topics I want to learn [LIST], suggest a simple learning plan for next week using no more than three short sessions.

MY VERSION

Example: A Twenty-Minute Weekly Review

This fictional review shows how little time a useful routine can take.

MINUTES 0 TO 5: CLEAR

Processed eleven captured items. Deleted four, filed five and turned two into tasks.

MINUTES 5 TO 10: PROJECTS

Updated three project notes. Wrote the next action for each. Marked one project as stalled.

MINUTES 10 TO 15: REVISIT

Reread a note on client onboarding, added a link to a new template and fixed an unclear title.

MINUTES 15 TO 18: LEARN

Wrote: "Short, regular reviews beat long, rare ones." Linked it to the habits hub note.

MINUTES 18 TO 20: PLAN

Scheduled two project blocks and one hour of reading next week. Backed up the notes folder.

RESULT

The system stayed small and current, and the writer started Monday knowing exactly what to do.

WHAT WAS SKIPPED

No new tools were added and no large reorganization was attempted. The writer only did the routine tasks and stopped on time.

WHAT TO TRY YOURSELF

Block twenty minutes on your calendar at the same time every week, and use the checklist as your script for the first month.

WHEN IT GOES WRONG

If a week is too busy, do only the first step and empty the inbox. A short review is better than none.

YOUR REVIEW

Your two-week start plan

Start with the smallest version of the system and build only when each step feels easy. Simplicity is what keeps a second brain alive.

Days 1–2

Choose capture tools

Pick one main inbox and one quick capture method, then fill in the capture sources map.

Days 3–5

Practice processing

Process your inbox in three passes each day for ten minutes.

Days 6–8

Organize simply

Sketch your second brain map and move active project notes into place.

Days 9–11

Try layered summaries

Summarize one long article, check it against the source and write your own takeaway.

Days 12–13

Test retrieval

Use the retrieval practice page to find a note and plan one small output.

Day 14

Do your first weekly review

Complete the weekly review template and schedule it for next week.

Review regularly so important ideas stay active, and keep the system simple enough that you will maintain it. Results vary by tool version and settings.