

ANATOMY OF A WORKING CONTEXT

W02

KEEP THIS

IT BECOMES `brief.md`

The model has no memory of your project, no access to it, and no stake in it. Everything it knows, you put there. Everything you leave out, it invents — smoothly, in the same confident register as the parts it got right.

SIX PARTS. MOST PEOPLE SUPPLY ONE.

GOAL

What are we actually doing, for whom, and why does it matter? A specific deficiency, not a general aspiration.

CONSTRAINTS

What is fixed, what is off-limits, what cannot move. Money, time, bodies, law, physics, access. Constraints are generative.

REFERENCES

Examples of good — and examples of bad. The bad ones do more work and everyone skips them. “Not like this” is far more legible than any adjective.

NON-GOALS

What you are deliberately not doing. The most underused section in design.

HOUSE RULES

The mistakes not to repeat. Starts empty and fills up as you get things wrong.

STATE

Where the work actually is right now. The section a collaborator joining on Monday reads first.

PERSISTENT, OR PER-TASK?

Persistent context lives in a file that loads every time: who the project is for, the constraints, the house rules, the standing non-goals. Written once, corrected as you learn. Per-task context belongs in the message: what you are doing right now, the specific material in front of you, the one-off constraint.

Most people put everything in the message and rebuild the whole situation from scratch every session. It is the most expensive habit in the room and it is invisible, because each individual instance only costs two minutes.

THE LINE THE WHOLE SESSION HANGS ON

If you correct the same thing twice, that is a context bug, not an output bug. Fix it upstream and it stops happening. This is the difference between someone who prompts and someone who builds a system.

FOUR MORE THINGS

- Examples beat description. Two examples of the output you want do more than a paragraph describing it. Hand a paragraph of adjectives to a junior designer and you get the same result: something that satisfies every word and none of what you meant.
- Know when to start fresh. Long threads accumulate contradictions, abandoned directions and reversed decisions. The model averages them and the output gets quietly worse. A clean thread with good context beats a long thread with drift.
- Context is curated, not dumped. Stale decisions, contradictions and everything-you-happen-to-have all make output worse. What you leave out is a design decision.
- Access is not description. There is a difference between telling a model about your data and letting it read your data. Different work, different risks. Properly at W08.

WHAT YOU DO WITH THIS

In W02 studio you write one of these for your own project. It is not an exercise — what you write becomes `brief.md` and `patterns.md`, two of the four files in your graded Project Notebook. If a section is honestly empty, write “not known yet.” That is real information; inventing a constraint to fill a heading is worse than leaving it blank.