

Memory Vault vs. Scriptorium

Week 5: The Map // Structured vs. Unstructured Memory

THE QUESTION EVERYONE ASKS

How does Claude know where to find your information? How do you store a character's backstory, your business rules, your writing style, your world-building lore — so it's actually there when you need it?

The answer lives in two rooms of the Goblin Cave.

The Memory Vault holds structured information — things that live in rows and columns.

The Scriptorium holds unstructured information — things that read like writing.

Both are essential. Choosing the right one for each job saves you tokens, keeps your AI accurate, and makes your whole cave run faster.

THE MEMORY VAULT: SPREADSHEETS

What Goes Here

Structured information. Things with repeating parts — a title, a description, a few consistent fields that show up in the same arrangement every time.

Examples:

- Coffee recipes (title, description, prep time, ingredients, instructions)
- Character profiles (name, role, backstory, personality traits, visual description)
- Business products (name, price, description, category, status)
- Writing styles (name, tone, sentence length, formality level, example phrases)
- Episode notes (episode number, title, summary, guests, key topics)

Why It Saves Tokens

When Claude needs to find "what are the ingredients for the Midnight Mushroom Latte," it doesn't have to read your entire document about coffee. It goes to the third column of the coffee recipe table, finds the row with that name, and pulls the ingredients column. That's it.

Compare that to reading a five-page document to find one detail buried in paragraph three. The spreadsheet is faster, cheaper, and more reliable.

"It doesn't have to read the whole thing. It just knows exactly — third column, third box down — boom, we've got the information."

Tools

Airtable — \$20/month. More visual, easier to navigate, great for complex structures. RJ's choice for most organized data.

Google Sheets — Free. Less visual but fully functional. If you hear "Airtable" and want to save the money, just hear "Google Sheets" instead. Same idea, different interface.

How to Set It Up

Not sure how to structure your data? Let Claude help:

"Here are five of my character profiles. If you were going to put this in a spreadsheet, what would the column headers be?"

Claude will draft the structure. You review it, adjust it, and start filling it in. You don't have to design the schema yourself.

THE SCRIPTORIUM: DOCUMENTS

What Goes Here

Unstructured information. Things that read like writing. Context that needs nuance. Rules that require explanation.

Examples:

- Your Claude.md (how you work, your preferences, what Claude should always/never do)
- System.md (the architecture of a complex project — how all the pieces connect)
- Character backstories that are genuinely narrative
- World-building lore that reads like prose
- Style guides with examples and exceptions

Why Documents Work Here

A character backstory isn't a table. It's a story. It has emotional context, plot history, relationships, contradictions. Trying to force it into columns loses meaning.

Your Claude.md is the same. It's not a form — it's a set of instructions and preferences that need to be read as a whole to make sense.

"Scripts are so important in their own right. A massive amount of scripts run my systems."

The Size Rule

Keep documents to a manageable size. RJ's rule: 50 lines per document maximum. When a document gets too long, split it or summarize it. The shorter and tighter your documents, the more reliably Claude uses them.

At the end of every working session, RJ runs a wrap-up script that saves a summary document — what was done, what was decided, what comes next. This keeps the history without bloating any single file.

THE DECISION GUIDE

If your content has...	Use...
The same fields repeated across many records	Spreadsheet
A clear column structure	Spreadsheet
Things you'll filter or search by field	Spreadsheet
Prose, narrative, or context	Document
Rules and instructions for Claude	Document
System architecture or project specs	Document
A mix of both	Spreadsheet for the structured parts, document for the narrative

The Honest Answer

Personal preference plays a role. If you're more comfortable with documents, lean that way. If you love spreadsheets, use them more. The only costly mistake is putting something unstructured into a spreadsheet and losing all the meaning, or putting something highly structured into a document and making Claude read the whole thing every time it needs one field.

When you're not sure: ask Claude.

"Claude, give me the pros and cons of both and give me a recommendation."

Sometimes you'll agree with it. Sometimes you won't. Either way is fine.

WORLD ANVIL AND DATABASE CONNECTIONS

A note for world builders using World Anvil via MCP: connecting an external database to Claude doesn't automatically make it token-efficient. World Anvil is a powerful tool — but it's a large database, not necessarily a well-optimized one for Claude to search. Your mileage may vary.

If you find that World Anvil queries are eating more tokens than expected, one fix is to export specific articles as markdown and put them in your Scriptorium. Let Claude read the text version rather than traversing the live database for every query.

The rule applies everywhere: the more precisely you can point Claude at what it needs, the fewer tokens it uses to find it.

YOUR HOMEWORK

- 1. Audit what you have.** What information do you currently keep for your projects? Lists? Prose? Both?
 - 2. Pick one structured thing.** Take something that has repeating parts — recipes, characters, products, anything — and set up a Google Sheet or Airtable for it. Ask Claude to help you design the columns if you're not sure where to start.
 - 3. Check your Claude.md.** Does it still reflect how you actually work? Update it if anything has changed since you first built it.
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