

# NO BS AI

CLASS MATERIALS

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## Spreadsheets vs Documents

*(The Basement Jar Decision Guide)*

Pilot Class // May 2026

Instructor: RJ // Platform: Rippily

*The Goblin Mining Cave // Print Edition*

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## Spreadsheets vs Documents

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*The Basement Jar Decision Guide*

***"If all the jars are clearly marked, they're in rows.  
You can — from the stairs — see where you're going."***

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### SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

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You have information your AI needs. Where does it go?

Some people put everything in documents (.md files, system.md, Claude.md). Others lean into spreadsheets (Airtable, Google Sheets). Both work. **One is faster for certain things.** Picking the wrong format costs you tokens, time, and accuracy.

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### SECTION 2: THE BASEMENT JAR ANALOGY

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***"Mom in her basement has these jar collections from many years of travels in many places. If you go down and you're just looking in boxes, pack a sandwich — it's gonna be a while."***

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***"But if all the jars are clearly marked, they're in rows, you can — from the stairs — see 'oh, this was from her travels to Nashville, this was from Texas.' Then from the stairs you can start to see where you're going."***

Documents are unlabeled boxes. You have to read everything to find anything.

Spreadsheets are labeled jars in rows. The goblin can scan from the door and grab exactly what's needed.

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## SECTION 3: THE DECISION RULE

Use a Spreadsheet When...	Use a Document When...
Information has REPEATING FIELDS	Information is PROSE
Each entry has the same shape	Each entry is unique narrative
You want fast lookup by attribute	You want context-rich reading
You'll add many of the same kind	You're describing one whole thing
The goblin needs to filter or count	The goblin needs to understand and reason

### Examples

#### Spreadsheet:

- Recipes (title, ingredients, prep time, instructions)
- Character profiles (name, role, traits, voice notes)
- Client info (name, contact, preferences, project status)
- Visual style notes (color, lighting, anatomy locks, technique)
- Workflow logs (date, action, status, notes)
- Bug reports (severity, status, system, description)

#### Document:

- A character's backstory and worldview
- Your Claude.md (how you work, what you like)
- A novel chapter
- Your business philosophy
- System rules and architecture explanations
- Your Goblin Glossary

## SECTION 4: WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK CLAUDE

***"Hey Claude, would this be better in a spreadsheet or a document?"***

Show Claude the information. Let it tell you. Sometimes the answer is *"spreadsheet for the data, document for the rules around it."* That's a totally legitimate hybrid.

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## SECTION 5: YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN THE SPREADSHEET

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The big anti-spreadsheet objection: *"I hate spreadsheets. I'm a creative person, not a data person."*

**Good news: you don't have to live in them.**

If you connect Airtable or Google Sheets via MCP, your job is just:

***"Computer goblins, please store this information in a way you can get it real handily."***

Claude organizes the spreadsheet. Claude updates it. Claude pulls from it. You never have to format a cell or fight a column width. Your only job is to tell Claude what you want and what's important.

***"I don't work in spreadsheets either. Half my life is on Airtable. I don't have to work IN Airtable. I just hook the MCP up."***

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## SECTION 6: WHY SPREADSHEETS ARE FASTER FOR THE GOBLIN

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When you ask Claude *"what are the ingredients for the coffee recipe?"* the goblin:

**With a spreadsheet:**

1. Goes to the recipe row
2. Pulls the "ingredients" column
3. Done. Fewer tokens. Faster. More accurate.

**With a document containing many recipes:**

1. Reads through everything searching for "coffee recipe"
2. Then parses the surrounding text to find ingredients
3. Risk of pulling adjacent content by accident
4. More tokens. More chances to misread.

For ANYTHING with structure that repeats, the spreadsheet wins. Period.

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## SECTION 7: PRACTICAL CHARACTER LIMITS

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You can stuff a LOT into a single spreadsheet cell:

Platform	Limit per cell
Google Sheets	50,000 characters
Airtable (Long Text field)	~100,000 characters (per RJ's recall — verify before relying on it)

That means your character profile, your full lore entry, your client backstory — all of it can live in one cell, while the SURROUNDING cells let the goblin filter and find it instantly.

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## SECTION 8: THE HYBRID PATTERN (RJ'S APPROACH)

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The most powerful pattern is **both at once**:

- A *project.md* document that explains:
  - What this project IS
  - What boundaries the goblin should respect
  - What documents matter
  - How you work
- A spreadsheet that holds:
  - Repeating data the goblin will reference
  - Character profiles, style guides, reference info
  - Anything you'll add to over time

The .md tells Claude "*this is the world.*"

The spreadsheet is "*here's where the things live.*"

Together: bulletproof.

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## SECTION 9: GETTING STARTED — THE FIRST QUESTION

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Don't try to perfect your structure on day one. RJ's Goblin Grotto V2.0 spreadsheet — the one she demoed live in class — has been built up over **a year**. You start small:

***"I would be a skeleton in a chair if I had to arrange all of this. I don't care what the columns are called. I want it to have the information it needs."***

So your first day looks like:

1. Pick ONE project
2. Identify ONE kind of information that repeats (characters, recipes, clients, anything)
3. Open Claude
4. Say: *"Here's what I have. How would you like it organized in a spreadsheet so you can grab what you need fast?"*
5. Let Claude design it. Let Claude name the columns. Don't fight it.
6. Add three entries. Test.
7. Add three more. Test again.

That's it. Year-over-year, you're building yourself a referenced library. The goblin will love you for it.

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## **SECTION 10: ANNE'S OBJECTION (AND THE WAY AROUND IT)**

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**Anne (in class):** *"I don't use spreadsheets. They're a nightmare, especially for creative people."*

**RJ:** *"They ARE a nightmare. I can't write on lined paper, what are you going to give me a spreadsheet for?"*

The way around it:

- Don't open the spreadsheet
- Don't format anything yourself
- Use the connector (MCP) to tell Claude what to save and where
- Trust the goblins to keep the columns straight
- You stay in the conversation; the data stays in the storage

If you already pay for Google One? Use Google Sheets. Connect it. Done.

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## **SECTION 11: ONE LAST PRO TIP**

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When Claude says *"that's a great question, let me look that up,"* and there's nothing structured to look up — that's when fabrication happens. Goblins fill the void with invention.

**The fix isn't to scold the goblin. The fix is to fill the void with structured truth.**

A populated, organized spreadsheet is the cure for fabrication. The goblin can't make stuff up if the real answer is sitting right there, labeled, in a row, exactly where they expect to find it.

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***"Endless amounts is the answer to that. Half my life is on Airtable. I don't have to have my nose in them. I just hook the MCP up."***

***— RJ, Week 7***

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**End — Spreadsheets vs Documents**