

Organize Your Notes, Projects and Tasks by Area of Responsibility

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[May 21st 2022](#)



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In this brief post I wanted to share a tip that has worked for me for years. It is connected to a method called "[PARA](#)" for organizing digital information. (A lot more to come on that in an upcoming book by Tiago Forte:

Building a Second Brain.)

The idea is that it doesn't matter what apps you use (Dropbox, Obsidian, Evernote, ...). If you categorize your work by areas of responsibility first, and the projects within them, you can manage your work more effectively.

I've been using this system for over five years now and it has been working wonderfully. I don't feel locked down in a particular app and the organization method seems to really stand the test of time.

For example, here are a few of my "areas of responsibility":

- Work
- Home
- Entertainment
- Errands
- Health
- Finances

Each of these areas can be associated with:

- A category of tasks in a To Do list manager
- A folder of projects in Dropbox under each area
- A set of notes in Evernote/Notion/Obsidian associated with the area in general or particular projects

- Physical notebooks for each area

Here is the “official” definition and examples from the page I linked above. An area of responsibility is:

“a sphere of activity with a standard to be maintained over time.”

Examples include: Health; Finances, Professional Development; Travel; Hobbies; Friends; Apartment; Car; Productivity; Direct reports; Product Development; Writing

The beauty of the method and why I think it works long-term is that areas of responsibility tend to have long half-lives. You will probably always want to keep an eye on your health, finances, home life, and work, for example. So why not use these categories as the foundational principle when you organize your notes, projects, and tasks?

I really think the only reason we tend not to do this is that it is easy to make up our own categories on-the-fly when working on tasks, notes, and projects. As a result, we end up coming up with ad-hoc ways of organizing our data and in the end it all seems like a bigger mess than it ideally should be.

I believe the core reason why the “areas of responsibility” method works is that it forces you to explicitly identify where a project, note, or task fits in a stable category and really be consistent with this approach across the applications and physical media you use. The fact that there are not too many areas makes it easy to sort your notes, projects, and tasks where they best fit, but you

don't have to think very hard about how to organize them.

It's a really simple tip, but I think no matter what other methods any of us use to organize our digital and analog info, the idea of "areas of responsibilities" is quite fundamental and it's a very useful exercise to identify your areas of responsibilities and organize your notes, tasks, and projects by them intentionally.

If this is interesting to you, check this article out on how I intersect the idea of areas of responsibility with a technique called "Interstitial Journaling":

[This Simple Journaling Method Could Change Your Life](#)

[I am using a journaling technique that I can honestly say has changed my life and I've also been sticking with it like...](#)

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