

ARCHITECTING AGENCY

Start Here

What you downloaded, what every file does, and your first fifteen minutes - assuming nothing.

READ THIS FIRST · VERSION 1.3.1

Ten minutes, then build.

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Start Here

IN PLAIN TERMS

This guide assumes you know nothing, on purpose. Maybe you have never built software or used an AI coding tool. Maybe you are not entirely sure what you just downloaded. Either way, start here. Ten minutes from now, you will know what every file is, which one to open first, and what your first fifteen minutes look like. More experienced readers: skim the tables and go; nothing here gates you.

1. You just downloaded this. Here is everything you are looking at.

Your download arrives as one zip file. Unzip it anywhere and the files below appear together, each with a tag to tell you what kind of attention it needs: **READ** (for humans), **USE** (you act with it), **REFERENCE** (open when needed), or **LATER** (safe to ignore today).

File	Tag	What it is, in one line
`Start_Here_v1.3.1.pdf`	READ	This guide. The front door.
`Architecting_Agency_v1.3.1.pdf`	READ	The field guide: the reasoning behind everything else here.
`Architecting_Agency_Start_Kit_v1.3.1.zip`	USE	A ready-to-open project folder with the rules pre-installed. The workshop.
`prompt_1_fresh_install_v1.3.1.md`	USE	Full-length prompt: build something new. Works in any chat window.
`prompt_2_enterprise_v1.3.1.md`	USE	Full-length prompt: build on a company machine / under data rules.
`prompt_3_audit_upgrade_v1.3.1.md`	USE	Full-length prompt: audit and improve something that already exists.
`Architecting_Agency_Day_1_Worksheet_v1.3.1.md`	USE	A one-page fill-in sheet for your project's first five decisions.
`Architecting_Agency_v1.3.1.md`	REFERENCE	The field guide's content as plain text - searchable, and feedable to an AI.
`LICENSE_v1.3.1.md`	LATER	Your license and terms. Plain language, short.

(Every file in this download carries the same release version number.)

2. What do I open first?

There are two honest paths through the suite, and it is normal to move between them:

- **"I want to understand what this is."** Open the Architecting Agency PDF and read its Reader Guide and "Zero to your first success" - about ten pages. Then come back here when you want to run something.
- **"I want to build something right now."** Stay here and let Section 3 walk you through your first fifteen minutes. You can read the book afterward to understand why the process worked.

3. Your first fifteen minutes

There are two ways to run this system. Pick by what you have open in front of you.

Lane A - a browser chat window (nothing to install)

Any capable AI chat assistant works. This lane cannot touch your files, which makes it a place to design rather than implement. It is still the fastest possible start, and there is enough room here to get a real architecture designed.

1. Open a fresh chat session.
2. Open ``prompt_1_fresh_install_v1.3.1.md`` in any text editor (double-clicking usually works).
3. Select the entire prompt - from its first line to its last - and copy it.
4. Paste it into the chat box and send. **It will look absurdly long in the box. That is correct; send it anyway.** The AI will not act on it as a wall of text - it simply replies with its first interview question.
5. Answer the questions in plain language. "I don't know - help me check" is always a valid answer. Keep the ``DAY_1_WORKSHEET`` beside you and fill it in as the interview settles each answer.

An hour in, look for three signs that the first run worked: a tier written down, an architecture proposed or in progress, and one action kept human because it cannot be undone.

Lane B - the workshop (the Starter Kit)

Choose this lane when you want the AI to create files, run code, and build the real thing. That work needs an AI-enabled editor or coding agent, the category of tools that includes VS Code with an AI extension, Claude Code, Codex, or Cursor. (Names change fast; the category is what matters. Architecting Agency's "From the chat window to a real workshop" section explains this graduation.)

1. Unzip ``Architecting_Agency_Starter_Kit_v1.3.1.zip`` wherever your projects live. Rename the folder after your project.
2. Open that folder in your AI tool.
3. Inside the folder, open ``prompts/START_BUILD.md``, copy the short block, paste it into the session, and send.
4. That is it. The prompt is short because the rulebook is already in the folder: the AI reads ``GOVERNANCE.md`` and operates under it, interviews you, fills in the worksheet with you, and asks your approval before it builds anything.

Which lane?

You	Lane
Never done anything like this; want the gentlest start	A, then B when curious
Comfortable installing an app; want a real project on disk	B
On a company machine, or company/client data is involved	Either - but use the enterprise prompt (`prompt_2` in lane A, `START_ENTERPRISE` in lane B)
Something already exists that you want improved	`prompt_3` (A) or `START_AUDIT` (B)

4. What every file in the Starter Kit does

Here is the plain-language tour of the zip. The goal is to make each file familiar before the AI begins using it:

File	What it really is
`GOVERNANCE.md`	The rulebook the AI reads so you never have to paste rules. It is the book's doctrine, compressed into direct instructions, tagged by tier so small projects are not burdened with big-project ceremony. You can read it yourself - it is short and human-readable.
`AGENTS.md` and `CLAUDE.md`	The note on the door. Most AI coding tools automatically read one of these on opening a folder; both say the same thing: "read the rulebook first."
`DAY_1_WORKSHEET.md`	Your project's birth certificate: what it does, its tier, what actions it may take, which stay human. The AI fills it in with you during the first interview.
`DECISIONS.md`	The project's diary of choices. Every load-bearing decision gets a dated entry: what, why, what was rejected. Append-only - history never gets rewritten.
`LESSONS_LEARNED.md`	The project's scar tissue. When something breaks, the incident and its rule are recorded so the same mistake cannot repeat silently.
`prompts/`	The three short starter prompts for this lane.
`README.md`	The kit's own three-step instructions - a condensed version of this section.

The design follows from what happens between sessions. Rules stored in files are read fresh by every AI session, in every tool, on every machine; rules stored only in a pasted prompt vanish when the chat ends. The kit gives that discipline somewhere permanent to live. It also means your project begins in the structure the book says durable AI work should use.

5. Which full-length prompt do I use? (Lane A)

Your situation	Use
An idea, but no real system yet - personal or general-purpose	Prompt One
Building on a company-managed machine, or company/client/privacy/security rules apply	Prompt Two
A system already exists (a repo, a pipeline, a knowledge base) and you want it assessed or improved	Prompt Three
You want to rebuild an existing system from scratch	Start with Prompt Three - so the rebuild decision is evidence-based

Use one prompt per session and paste it whole. The later sections contain the safety controls, so truncating the file changes more than its length. Prompt Three is long; give it a roomy surface (a coding agent, a repository instruction file, or a chat that accepts long pastes).

6. When something goes sideways

- **"The AI started building without asking me."** Say: *"Stop. Re-read the governance: recommend first, wait for my explicit approval before changing anything."* In lane B it will re-read the file; in lane A it re-anchors on the pasted rules. This correction works, and using it is normal, not failure.
- **"It seems to be ignoring the files in the folder."** Say: *"Read GOVERNANCE.md, DAY_1_WORKSHEET.md, DECISIONS.md, and LESSONS_LEARNED.md in this folder, then confirm what tier this project is."* If the tool genuinely cannot read files, you are in a chat window - use lane A's full prompts instead.
- **"It says everything works. Should I believe it?"** No - ask: *"Show me the actual output of the tests you ran."* Requiring evidence is rule one of the whole method, and the AI is instructed to expect you to ask.
- **"I don't code at all. Is this still for me?"** Yes. Lane A requires zero code. The interview designs the system; where code is needed, the AI writes it and must explain and verify it. The tier system exists precisely so a small personal build stays small.
- **"I'm lost."** Open the Architecting Agency PDF and read just "Zero to your first success." It re-orientes you in ten minutes.

7. License, updates, and support

- **License.** Personal, single-user. Use it for your own work, your employer's, or your clients', and keep your copy forever. Please don't resell, republish, or repackage the files.
- **Cost.** Nothing. The whole suite is a free download at micahrobertson.com/architectingagency. There is no account, no email gate, and nothing to buy.
- **Updates.** There is no mailing list to be on, so checking is on you, and it is quick. The download page shows the date the current edition was posted. Compare it to the version stamp on your files, and re-download if yours is older. Every file in a release carries the same version number, so if your files disagree with each other, you have mixed two releases and should re-download the whole zip.
- **Support.** Questions, or a problem with your files? Use the contact form at micahrobertson.com. That is the support line, and it is me.
- **Not legal advice.** Professional guidance, provided as-is; the regulatory sections are a starting point, not counsel.

The full terms ship as `LICENSE\_v1.3.1.md`.

If you only do one thing

Unzip the Starter Kit, open the folder in an AI tool, and paste `START\_BUILD`. With nothing installed, paste Prompt One into a fresh chat instead. From there, answer honestly, approve deliberately, and ask to see the evidence.