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Context First Development: Building Better with AI

A framework for building with AI coding tools

Most AI builds fail not from bad code, but from missing context. This six-phase framework front-loads the thinking so the AI has what it needs before a single line is written. Lock the concept, encode the knowledge, then build.

Phase 1: Pre-Build

where the real work happens

1 Concept Lock

Define the product, the user, the problem. Write down what you will not build. The exclusion list matters more than the feature list.

- Project abstract
- Scope boundary & exclusion list
- Demo persona

2 Architecture & Decisions

Lock every technical decision before the build. Every decision deferred to build time costs 10x in context-switching and rework.

- Architecture design doc
- Decision matrix with rationale
- Brand & design brief

3 Knowledge Encoding

Highest-return stage. Externalize domain expertise into artifacts the AI can consume. It should already know the problem space before the build starts.

- Domain research docs
- Reusable prompt skills (3–4 max)
- Build sequence checklist

Phase 2: Build Window

execution, not exploration

4 Core Build

Follow the build sequence. Scaffold, input, processing, output, design, deploy. One commit per phase. Get the happy path live first.

- Deployed app with happy path
- Clean commit history

5 Enrichment & Hardening

Now improve it. Structured code review, security pass, prompt refinement, visual differentiator. Plan before building, even here.

- Code review findings
- Security checklist
- Enriched prompts

6 Delivery Prep

Work backward from evaluation criteria. Script the demo. Run a blind-spot brainstorm. Feature freeze: stop building, start polishing.

- Demo script
- Submission / handoff document