

Finding the Best Journals for Writing: A Practical Guide

Why the right journal matters

I have been keeping a journal for over thirty years. In that time I have filled more notebooks than I can count, tried every binding and paper weight you can imagine, and learned a few hard lessons about what makes a notebook usable. The best journals for writing are not the most expensive ones or the ones with the prettiest covers. They are the ones that get out of your way. They make you want to write, and they do not fight back when you do.

A bad journal can kill a writing habit. Paper that bleeds through, spines that crack, covers that fall apart after a month. I have abandoned notebooks halfway through because the experience became frustrating. But the right one, even a simple one, can keep you coming back day after day. That is the real test. That is what I look for when I recommend the best journals for writing to anyone who asks.

What makes a journal work for a writer

Paper quality comes first. If the ink bleeds, if the pages feel rough, if the pen skips or feathers, you will not enjoy writing. I prefer notebooks with at least ninety gram paper, preferably one hundred or more. Fountain pens, which I use most days, need paper that can handle wet ink without ghosting through to the other side. Clairefontaine and Rhodia both use high quality paper that handles fountain pen ink beautifully. Rhodia has a smooth, coated finish that makes every nib glide. Clairefontaine is similar but slightly more absorbent, which can help dry times.

Binding matters too. Lay-flat binding is a big deal for me. A notebook that stays open on its own lets you write without holding the pages down. Leuchtturm1917 notebooks do this well. They have thread binding that lets the book lie flat from the first page. Moleskine notebooks, which are probably the most famous brand out there, do not open as flat. They have a stitched binding that tends to curve inward, especially in the first half of the book. I still use Moleskine for travel because they are durable and widely available, but I do not reach for them when I am sitting at a desk for a long session.

Page layout is another consideration. Some writers want a blank page for sketching or diagramming. Others want ruled lines for neat prose. I like a dot grid. It gives enough structure to keep my writing straight but stays out of the way for drawing or making lists. Leuchtturm1917 offers dot grid options, and so does Baron Fig. Baron Fig notebooks have a clean, minimalist design and paper that takes most pens well. Their dot grid is subtle, which I appreciate.



Notebooks for daily journaling

For everyday writing, I want something that is easy to carry and comfortable to use. The Hobonichi Techo is a cult favorite among journalers for good reason. It uses thin, light paper that somehow handles fountain pen ink without bleeding. The paper is Tomoe River, which is famous for its ability to show sheen and shading from fountain pen inks. The Hobonichi Techo comes in a compact size that fits in a jacket pocket, and it has a yearly calendar built in. I have used it for daily logs and found it reliable.

Another strong contender is the Midori MD Notebook. This is a simple, unadorned notebook with cream paper that feels wonderful to write on. The paper has a slight tooth that gives you some feedback without being rough. Midori MD notebooks come in several sizes, and they are thread bound so they lie flat. I have gone through three of them over the past two years. They are one of the most consistent products I have used.

Field Notes are smaller and more utilitarian. They come in a three-pack with different cover designs, and they are meant to be carried everywhere and used up quickly. The paper is not the

best for fountain pens, but it handles ballpoints and pencils fine. I keep a Field Notes notebook in my car for jotting down ideas when I am out. They are cheap enough that you do not feel precious about them, which is a good thing for a writer.

Notebooks for fountain pen lovers

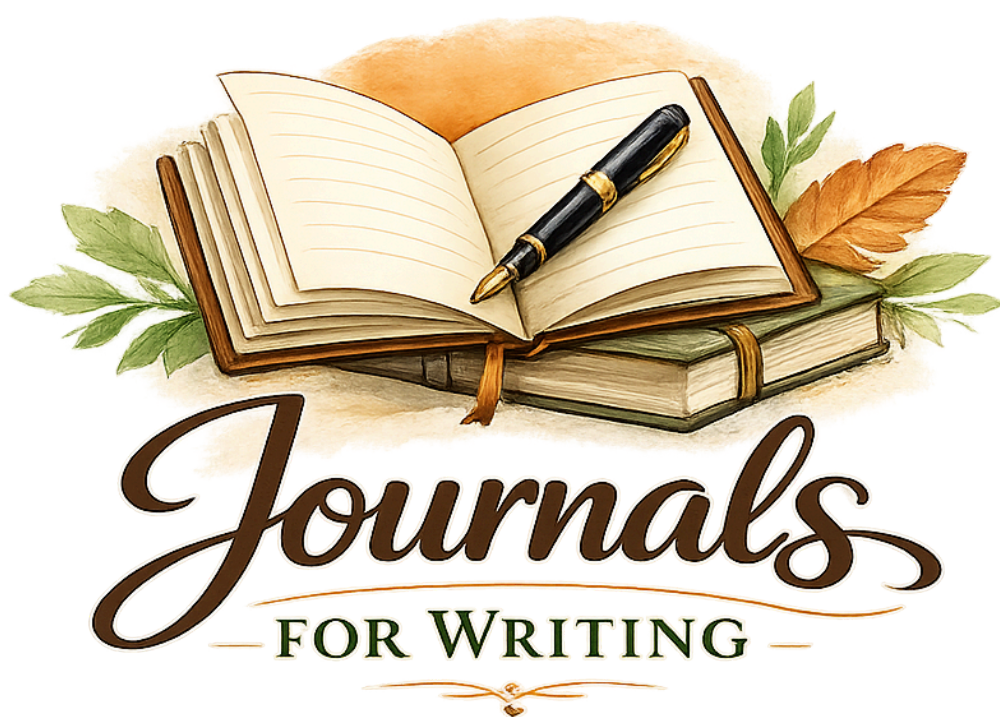
If you use fountain pens regularly, you need paper that can handle the ink. Stalogy notebooks use a thin, smooth paper that shows ink properties well. The pages are slightly translucent, which gives the notebook a light feel, but the paper does not bleed. Stalogy is a Japanese brand, and their notebooks have a minimalist aesthetic that I enjoy. They come in a range of sizes, from pocket to A5.

Mnemosyne notebooks by Maruman are another excellent choice for fountain pen users. The paper is bright white and very smooth. Ink dries reasonably fast, and there is almost no feathering. Mnemosyne notebooks have a distinctive cover with a horizontal line pattern, and they lie flat. I have used them for note taking and long-form writing both.

Dingbats notebooks use a vegan leather cover and cream paper that is fountain pen friendly. The paper is thick enough that you do not see ghosting, and the binding is sturdy. Dingbats also include a pocket in the back cover, which I find useful for storing loose notes or a pen. They are a newer brand compared to some of the classics, but they have earned a place in my rotation.

Notebooks for travelers and planners

Traveler's Notebook system is popular among people who want a modular setup. It is a leather cover that holds one or more thin notebooks inside. You can swap them out as you finish them. The paper is good, though not the best for heavy ink. I have used a Traveler's Notebook for trip journals and found it easy to carry. The leather cover develops a patina over time, which gives it some character.



Exceed notebooks are a budget option that still performs well. They are sold at some big box stores and have a decent paper that handles most pens without major problems. They are not as durable as the premium brands, but they are a good starting point if you are not sure what you want yet.

Notebooks for bullet journaling and creativity

Bullet journaling requires paper that can handle a lot of writing and some drawing. Archer and Olive notebooks use thick paper, often one hundred sixty grams, which means almost no ghosting. They are popular among bullet journalists who use markers or watercolors. The

paper is bright white and takes ink well. Archer and Olive notebooks are expensive, but the paper quality justifies the price for heavy use.

Nuuna notebooks have a distinctive look with geometric covers and a dot grid that is smaller than usual. The paper is smooth and works with most pens. I have found Nuuna notebooks to be well made, though the smaller dot grid can be a little distracting if you prefer a more open page.

Peter Pauper Press makes affordable notebooks with a classic look. Their paper is decent for the price, and they offer a range of sizes and colors. They are not as refined as some of the Japanese brands, but they are a solid choice for everyday writing or gift giving.

Specialty notebooks and niche picks

Smythson is a high end brand known for their Panama notebooks. The paper is extremely thin and light, which makes the notebooks slim even with many pages. The paper handles fountain pen ink well, though it does ghost a little. Smythson notebooks are expensive, but they have a certain elegance that some writers appreciate. I own one and use it for special projects.

Rocketbook is different from everything else on this list. It is a reusable notebook that uses special paper and a companion app. You write with a Pilot Frixion pen, which uses heat erasable ink. When you finish a page, you scan it with the app, and then you microwave the notebook to erase the ink. I have mixed feelings about Rocketbook. The paper does not feel as nice as regular paper, and the scanning process adds friction. But if you are concerned about waste or want to digitize your notes easily, it is worth considering.

Essentials Notebook by Minimalism Art is a no frills option with a vegan leather cover and thick paper. It is a good choice if you want something simple and durable without paying a premium. The paper handles most pens well, and the binding is sturdy.



After testing all of these, I keep coming back to a few favorites. For daily journaling, I use a Leuchtturm1917 in A5 with a dot grid. The paper is reliable, the binding lies flat, and the built in page numbers and table of contents help me stay organized. For travel, I use a Midori MD Notebook because it is light and the paper feels great. And for carrying in my pocket, I use Field Notes because they are cheap and replaceable.

The [best journals for writing](#) are not the same for everyone. You have to consider what you write, where you write, and what tools you use. If you use fountain pens, you need paper that handles wet ink. If you write mostly with ballpoints or pencils, you have more freedom. If you carry your notebook everywhere, you need something durable and slim. If you write at a desk, you can afford something bigger and heavier.

I have given away dozens of notebooks to friends who were just starting out. The ones that stuck with journaling all found a notebook that fit their habits, not the other way around. That is the real lesson. Do not force yourself to use a beautiful notebook that you are afraid to write in. Find something that invites you to fill its pages, even if it is not fancy. That is what makes the best journals for writing, in the end. A notebook that gets used.