

A Practical Guide to Notebooks for Writers

Why the Right Notebook Matters

I've been writing long enough to have filled more than a few shelves with used notebooks. Some of them I finished cover to cover. Others I abandoned after a dozen pages because the paper bled through, the binding cracked, or the size just didn't fit my routine. Over time I learned that the notebook itself is a tool, not a talisman. The best notebooks for writers are the ones that get out of the way and let you work. They don't inspire you by their brand name; they earn your trust by holding ink cleanly, opening flat, and surviving a bag.

I tested a lot of them. I wrote morning pages in some, rough drafts in others, and kept a pocket notebook for stray lines. What follows is what I found after years of filling pages, not after reading marketing copy. If you are looking for a reliable companion for your work, the right notebook is worth finding.

Paper Quality Comes First

You can have the most beautiful cover in the world, but if the paper feathers or ghosts, you will stop using it. I learned this the hard way with a cheap spiral that turned every gel pen into a blurry mess. The paper that changed my mind was Tomoe River paper. It is thin but surprisingly strong, and it shows off ink better than any other sheet I've used. Fountain pen users love it, but even a Pilot G2 looks nicer on that surface. The catch is that Tomoe River paper is delicate. You have to be okay with a little show-through on the other side. I am, because the writing experience is that good.

If you prefer something more substantial, go with Clairefontaine or Rhodia. Both use smooth, coated paper that handles fountain pens and rollerballs without bleeding. Rhodia pads are a staple for drafting because they lie completely flat. Their staple-bound notebooks are affordable and easy to test before you commit to a hardbound model. Clairefontaine is similar but a touch smoother, and they make excellent spiral notebooks that resist tearing at the perforations.

What I Look For in a Notebook

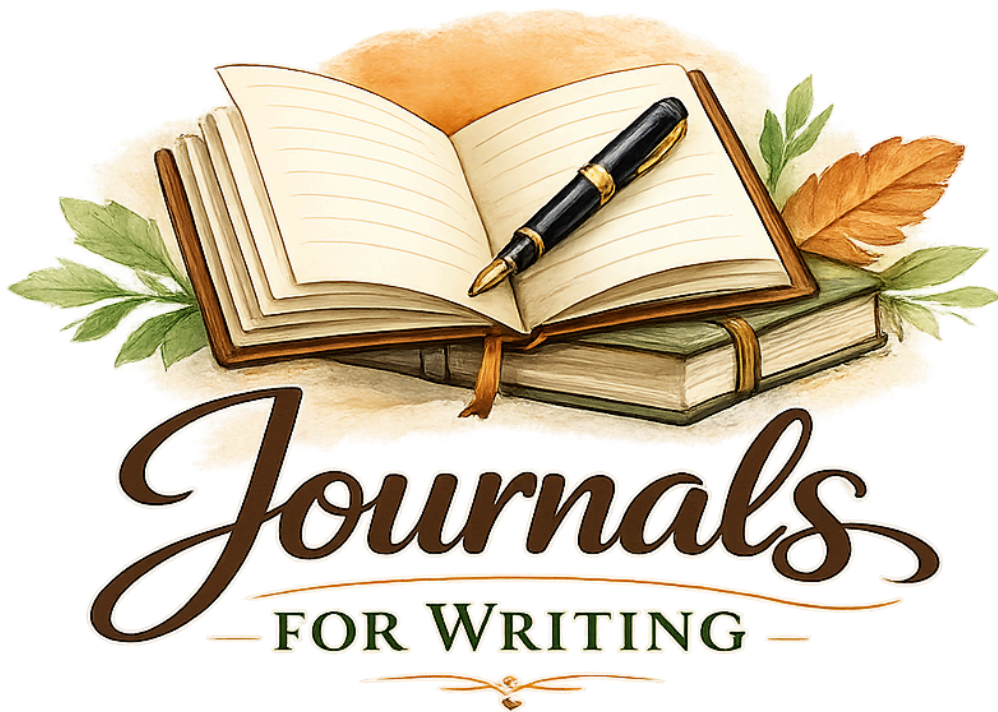
After trying dozens of brands, I settled on a few criteria that matter most for my writing. Yours might differ, but these give you a place to start:

- Paper that works with your pen. If you use fountain pens, look for Tomoe River, Rhodia, or Clairefontaine. If you use ballpoints or gel pens, most decent notebooks work, but avoid anything described as "craft paper" or "kraft."

- Binding that opens flat. Sewn bindings are best. Glued spines crack over time, especially if you force the notebook open.
- Size that fits your use. A5 is the sweet spot for me. It is big enough for a full page of writing but small enough to carry. Pocket-size notebooks like Field Notes work for quick notes but not for longhand drafts.
- Page count that matches your project. A 200-page notebook lasts me about two months of daily writing. I avoid anything under 80 pages for serious work.
- Ruled or grid lines. Blank pages sound romantic but slow me down. I prefer a light grid or narrow ruling. Dotted grids are a good middle ground.

Brands I Keep Coming Back To

I have used notebooks from almost every major brand. Some became favorites. Others I respect but do not personally reach for. Here is what I think about the ones that get mentioned most often.



Leuchtturm1917

These are the workhorses of the notebook world. They come in every color, they have numbered pages, a table of contents, and two ribbon bookmarks. The paper is good but not great. It handles most pens well, though I have seen some ghosting with wet fountain pens. If you want one notebook that does everything without fuss, this is it. The 1917 is the notebook I recommend to people who are just starting to take their writing seriously.

Moleskine

Moleskine is the name everyone knows, and I used them for years. Their paper has gotten thinner, and the coated surface does not handle fountain pens the way it used to. I still keep a

Moleskine pocket notebook for ideas because the size is convenient, but I no longer use their larger notebooks for drafts. If you write with a ballpoint or a fine-tip gel pen, they are fine. If you use a fountain pen, test it first.

Field Notes

These are tough little notebooks. I carry one in my back pocket for grocery lists, phone numbers, and lines I overhear. The paper is not fancy, but it holds up to a ballpoint or pencil. They are not [notebooks for writers](#) in the sense of a full manuscript, but they are unbeatable for capturing quick thoughts. I go through about four of them a year.

Rhodia

Rhodia makes the best paper for the price, in my opinion. Their staple-bound notebooks are my go-to for first drafts. The paper is bright white, smooth, and takes fountain pen ink beautifully. The only downside is that the covers are flimsy. They work best on a desk, not in a bag.

Midori MD

These notebooks have a cult following, and I understand why. The paper is a slightly cream shade that feels warm and soft. It handles ink wonderfully. The binding is simple and lies flat. Midori MD notebooks come in A5 and A6 sizes, and they are minimalist in the best way. They are my choice for morning pages because they feel good to write in every day.

Hobonichi Techo

The Hobonichi Techo uses Tomoe River paper and comes in a dated daily format. It is a planner, but I know writers who use it as a journal. The paper is incredible. If you want to write every day and see your progress across a year, this is a beautiful system. The downside is that it is expensive and you commit to the dates. For some people that structure helps. For others it feels constraining.

Baron Fig

Baron Fig makes well-designed notebooks with a focus on simplicity. Their dot-grid pages are clean, and the paper is decent with fountain pens. I like their softcover notebooks for carrying around. They are not as durable as Leuchtturm, but they are lighter. I have used a few and always enjoyed the experience, though they do not stand out in any single category.

Maruman Mnemosyne

These are less common but excellent. The paper is smooth and bright, and the spiral bindings are perforated so you can tear pages out cleanly. I use them for draft revisions and notes. They are affordable and consistent. If you write with fountain pens, try one. You might be surprised.



Kokuyo

Kokuyo makes a line of notebooks that are popular in Japan. Their Campus notebooks are cheap, durable, and have a subtle grid that is easy on the eyes. The paper handles gel pens well. I keep a few on hand for rough work and note-taking during research. They are not fancy, but they work.

Rocketbook

Rocketbook takes a different approach. You write with a Pilot Frixion pen, then scan the pages with your phone, and wipe the notebook clean with a damp cloth. It is reusable. I tried one and found it useful for quick notes that I wanted to digitize, but the paper does not feel like paper. It

feels like plastic. For longhand writing, I prefer the real thing. Still, if you hate wasting paper, it is worth considering.

Doane Paper and Exacompta

Doane Paper makes notebooks with a unique grid system that is designed for both writing and sketching. I have used their large format notebooks for brainstorming sessions where I need to draw diagrams alongside text. The paper is smooth and takes fountain pen well. Exacompta is another French brand, related to Clairefontaine, that makes excellent bound notebooks. Their paper is a pleasure to write on, though the covers are plain. If you care more about the writing surface than the look, Exacompta is a solid choice.

How I Use Notebooks for Different Kinds of Writing

I do not use the same notebook for everything. That would be like using the same knife to chop vegetables and carve a roast. Here is how I split my work:

- Morning Pages: I use a Midori MD A5 notebook. I write three pages every morning, longhand, without stopping. The warm paper and smooth surface make it easy to keep going. I have filled five of these notebooks so far.
- Drafts: I use Rhodia staple-bound pads or Maruman Mnemosyne spiral notebooks. These sit on my desk and I fill them with scenes, dialogue, and structure notes. I go through them fast, so I buy in bulk.
- Pocket notebook: I carry a Moleskine or Field Notes. It catches ideas when I am out walking, waiting for coffee, or stuck in a line.
- Project notebooks: For NaNoWriMo or any big project, I use a Leuchtturm1917. The numbered pages and table of contents help me keep track of word counts and chapter outlines.

Pen Choices Matter Too

You cannot talk about notebooks without talking about pens. A great notebook will not save a bad pen. My everyday writer is a Lamy Safari with a fine nib. It is reliable, comfortable, and cheap enough that I do not panic if I lose it. For ballpoint days, I use a Pilot G2 in 0.7 mm. It is smooth, dark, and works on almost any paper. I keep a few in every bag. If you prefer a rollerball, the Pilot G2 is hard to beat.

The combination of a good notebook and a good pen makes writing feel less like work and more like a craft. That matters when you are staring at a blank page at six in the morning.

A Note on Writer's Bloc

Writer's bloc is real, but I have found that the right notebook does not cure it. What helps is sitting down with a pen and writing anything, even if it is garbage. The physical act of moving a pen across paper changes something in your brain. I have had more breakthroughs in a cheap spiral than in an expensive leather-bound journal. The notebook is just the stage. The work is yours.

That said, a notebook you enjoy using makes it easier to show up. If you look forward to opening it, you will write more. That is why I keep testing notebooks. Not because I think the next one will unlock my potential, but because I want the path from thought to page to be as smooth as possible.



Final Thoughts on Notebooks for Writers

After all these years, I still get excited about a new notebook. There is something about a fresh stack of blank pages that feels full of possibility. The best notebooks for writers are the ones that help you turn that possibility into words. They do not have to be expensive. They do not have to be trendy. They just have to work for you.

If you are just getting started, buy a Rhodia pad and a Pilot G2. Write every day for a month. See how it feels. Then try a Leuchtturm1917 or a Midori MD. Compare. Notice what you like and what you tolerate. Over time you will learn what matters to you. That knowledge is worth more than any recommendation I can give.

I still use a mix of brands. I have a Maruman Mnemosyne on my desk right now, a Field Notes in my coat pocket, and a Hobonichi Techo in my bag for journaling. Each one has a job. None of them is perfect. But together they cover every kind of writing I do. That is what I look for in notebooks for writers: tools that fit the work, not the other way around.