

How to live your life in text files

Hi, friends! Welcome to *Installer* No. 26, your guide to the best and *Verge*-iest stuff in the world. (If you're new here, welcome. So psyched you found us, and also you can read all the old editions at the *Installer* homepage.)

This week, I've been playing with the **redesigned You.com** for AI research, trying out the **Phanpy** Mastodon client, getting back into **Zombies**, **Run** after reading Vee Song's **great story about Fantasy Hike**, and reading the new **"lost chapter" of *The Martian*** before probably just rereading ***The Martian*** again.

I also have for you some non-earbud earbuds, a nerdy video about nerdy stuff, a new to-do list app, a new thing in ChatGPT, and much more. Let's do it.

(As always, the best part of *Installer* is your ideas and tips. What are you doing, reading, watching, playing, testing, cooking, lifting, soldering, or charging right now? What cool stuff are you into that everyone else should also be into? Tell me everything: installer@theverge.com or +1 203-570-8663. And if you know someone else who might enjoy *Installer*, forward it to them and tell them to subscribe here.)

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A while back, I got really close to moving all my personal docs, email, calendar, and files into Skiff, which was basically a privacy-focused Google Drive competitor. Stuff got busy, and moving all that stuff is a big project, but it's been on my list for a while. Super glad I didn't get to it, though, because Skiff was just acquired by Notion and is now shutting down.

If I've learned one thing in my years of covering tech, it's that nothing is guaranteed to stick around, no matter how much you love it or how popular it is. Things change, mistakes happen, stuff disappears. And every time it happens, I get a little more religious about something that Steph Ango, the CEO of Obsidian, likes to say: *file over app*.

The idea of "file over app" is to care a lot more about your data itself than the app or platform it's in. Like, the app you're using now? Probably not going to be around in 50 years. Text files and JPGs and PDFs? Way more likely to still be here! So invest in formats that last, not apps that don't.

What that means for me, personally, is that I try to turn my life into text files and their equivalents as often as possible.

- I use an iOS and Mac app called **NotePlan** for daily notes and task management – the app is built on top of a folder of Markdown files I can easily use anywhere else. **Obsidian** and **Logseq** are both the same way and are both excellent (if very different) apps.
- I use the bookmarking service **Raindrop** to store all the links I care about, for *Installer* and everything else, and once a week I export all my links as a CSV file and again as a text file.
- **Day One** is where I keep my actual journal, and every month or so I export the whole thing to a PDF.

- Once a year or so, when I'm feeling both bored and ambitious, I'll back up my entire camera roll and Google Photos library to an external hard drive. All the other stuff goes into Google Drive, and onto that same hard drive.

I try to find apps that are made with text files in mind. When I can't, I try to find apps with good, durable export systems, and make sure I'm backing things up often. I'm done getting stuck inside an app I can't trust to be around for long.

There's a lot more for me to do here, and frankly still a lot of stuff in my life that will disappear if some big-name services delete my account or go offline altogether. (I'm still trying to figure out whether my email and calendar are things I should be archiving...) But I now have years of journal entries, daily tasks, project archives, and more in a format I'm confident I'll be able to at least open and look at on my neural face-puter in 2096. And it makes me feel better, so I figured I'd share.

Oh, and by the way, there are so many great text editors out there. **Typora** is probably the best writing app I've ever used. If you write code, you already know **BBEdit** and **VS Code** and **Sublime Text**. **Nota**, **Ulysses**, **iA Writer**, and a bunch of others all do a good job of helping you both write and organize. Living in text files doesn't mean living in Notepad or TextEdit; you really can have the best of both worlds. Text files forever!

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Here's what the Installer community is into this week. I want to know what you're into right now as well! Email installer@theverge.com or message +1 203-570-8663 with your recommendations for anything and everything, and we'll feature some of our favorites here every week.

"I've been playing the new **Dominion** card game app! Dominion is a deckbuilding game from back in the day, and it's got several (I believe 15) expansions so far. Previous iterations of the game online and in app form never fully realized their potential. This is the best implementation of the game to date. There is offline play against AI, matchmaking, and you can also do private matches with friends via a Nintendo-esque friend code system." – Matt

"I've been listening to and immensely enjoying **Worlds Beyond Number**, an actual play narrative podcast from the best folks to ever do it." – Caleb

"I received my **Retroid Pocket 4 Pro** in the mail this week after about a month of waiting from China. It exceeded expectations, and I'm having a great time emulating N64, GameCube, and PlayStation 2 games. On Saturday I had a friend over, and we played couch co-op games just like the good old days using a USB-C hub and a couple controllers. Highly recommended for a huge nostalgia kick." – Nicholas

"Having fun playing old Nintendo titles on the **Miyoo Plus**. Such a great device. Feels like a time machine." – Jamie

"I'm playing, and overwhelmingly impressed with, **Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown**. It feels like a love letter to *Castlevania* and *Metroid*, and heavily inspired by *Hollow Knight*... but also innovates in some really clever ways. It also runs incredibly well on the Switch." – Steve

"Probably one of the most used apps on my phone is **Mela**, by

Silvio Rizzi. It's a thoughtfully designed recipe app designed to share with your family. It has a shared family recipe library and integrations with Reminders and Calendar to ensure my fiancé and I are always on the same page. Oh, and it also has a built-in RSS reader for finding new recipes!" – Liam

"It's called ***What Happened Last Week***, and it's a great way to keep up with news from countries that are not often reported on in places like Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It contains clear explanations and contexts on developments so it is easy to read even if you have never heard of the names in the story. I find it really useful and complementary to the big Western news sources." – Richard

" is Finland's entry to Eurovision this year, and it's amazing on so many layers. Watching the video on YouTube is mandatory for full appreciation." – Sighjinks

"The new season of ***Game Changer*** on Dropout started this week, and it's a treat as always!" – Noah