The best note-taking apps for collecting your thoughts and data

These days, we are all dealing with huge amounts of information, from meeting notes to social media, to photos and videos, to whatever else we've collected – and we are all trying to find some way to store it, organize it, and find it when we need it.

If you want to get really basic, you can use a spreadsheet or create a simple set of word-processing documents. Otherwise, you can try what is somewhat inaccurately described as a note-taking app. These apps, at their simplest, store your notes and other thoughts and, at their more complex, are capable of manipulating any and all content you want to drop into them.

One of the most well-known has been Evernote, which has gone through quite a few changes over the years, both financially and in its feature set. I've been using it for my personal notes for years, and while I feel that it's become way too overblown (and too expensive), I haven't been able to motivate myself to pull my decade of data out of there. At this point, though, I'm not sure I'd recommend it to a new user – especially now that it's limiting the features of its free version even more than it used to.

However, there are a lot of others out there now with a wide range of options, from just plain notes to applications that can do almost anything as long as you have the time and an inclination to learn. I've looked at a bunch, and these are some that looked most promising, from the most simple to the most complex.

In the end, though, the app you use will largely depend on your personal needs. Here are more details on our top picks in this category.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Bear Markdown Notes
Shiny Frog

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*Evernote has been a well-known app for collecting data since 2008.*

Evernote started out in 2008 as an innovative and well-regarded note-taking app. Over the years, however, its reputation has suffered as it worked through privacy missteps, increased fees, and an interface that can feel bloated and feature-heavy. It is now owned by app developer Bending Spoons and has moved its operations to Europe (laying off most of its US employees in the process). And as of December 2023, , making it essentially unusable for most users except as a trial version.

That being said, the paid version of Evernote still does what it does well, especially if you’re one of those users who has stuck with it for a while. The basic look and feel of the web app hasn’t changed much, although the homepage now shows recent notes, a scratch pad, and recently captured websites. (The homepage can be personalized with other widgets if you have a paid account.) There are several ways to organize your notes: they can be tagged and / or assigned to folders, and folders can be grouped into named “stacks.” You can create to-do notes. You can search within all your notes, clip webpages in a variety of ways, and sync up to two devices. You can upload up to 60MB of data a month with a maximum note size of 25MB. And Evernote has been adding AI features such as AI Note

Cleanup, currently in beta, which uses AI to “tidy up” your notes.

In other words, Evernote has become a fairly complex product, although, as mentioned before, you’ll want to look at the paid versions to use it properly. The Personal plan lets you sync an unlimited number of devices, upload up to 10GB of data a month with a maximum note size of 200MB, connect a Gmail account, and more; the Professional plan adds additional app integration and a variety of other features.

Cost: Limited free version available. Personal plan costs $14.99 a month or $129.99 a year. Professional plan costs $17.99 a month or $169.99 a year.

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Joplin is an open-source app that, on first glance, looks like a somewhat simpler version of Evernote. It has the list of folders (also known as notebooks) on the far left, a column listing the contents of the folder to the right of that, and then a space to show the contents of the highlighted entry.

A major difference, though, is that Joplin produces straightforward Markdown files (as opposed to Evernote’s proprietary .enex format), and there is actually a toggle that lets you see each file in markdown or, if you prefer, rich text. Which is handy, especially if you like to look at code; my only problem is that links are not live in the rich text format – although there is probably a way to tweak that.

And that is a second interesting thing about Joplin: if you want to be able to personalize your app, you can. There are a variety of plugins, and you can even create your own scripts and plugins using the Extension API. If, on the other hand,

you’re not comfortable with coding and APIs, Joplin’s existing extensions should provide you with plenty to work with. You just may need to consult its lively user forum.

In order to synchronize Joplin among your devices, you need to set it up with one of several existing cloud services (such as Dropbox or OneDrive). You can also use Joplin Cloud, which is available in Joplin’s paid plans: Basic, which includes 2GB storage space and 10MB per note or attachment, and Pro, which offers 30GB storage space, 200MB per note or attachment, and other features.

Cost: Free version available. Joplin Basic costs €2.99 ($3.27) a month or €28.69 ($31.36) a year; Joplin Pro costs €6.69 ($7.32) a month or €80.28 ($87.89) a year.

UpNote Co.

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If there’s one way to describe Notion, it would be ambitious. You can start with several different types of formats — a table, a board, a timeline, a calendar, a list, a created template, or just an empty page. If you’re an individual, you can create an unlimited number of pages, share your data with a number of apps, including Slack and GitHub, and share your content with up to 10 “guests” for free. In fact, for most people, free will be quite sufficient. There are some limitations — for example, file uploads are limited to 5MB — but not enough to really count. A Plus version adds unlimited uploads and some additional group features.

Like Evernote and other higher-end apps, Notion organizes its notes into folders — except in this case, each note can act as a folder and can contain other notes, which can contain other

notes. Notion also seems to be constantly adding new features, such as AI writing capabilities and new types of sharing options.

In fact, its lack of limitations may be a problem for some users. If you like to really get into the workings of a complex app and screw around with it until it does everything you want it to do – and then some – then you may want to check out Notion and play a bit with its features. (For example, I currently use Notion to track my various workflows and upcoming tasks.) However, if all you want to do is write down your thoughts with maybe a few extra options, you might want to go with something a bit simpler.

Cost: Free version available. Plus version costs $10 a month or $96 a year.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Other apps to try
There are a lot of note-taking apps out there, and while not all made our “best of” list, there are others that might suit your needs, so I thought I’d mention them here.

- is Apple’s version of Google Keep (or Keep is Google’s version of Apple Notes). It’s a free, built-in, simple way to take notes, save photos, scan documents, and make sketches, provided you are using an Apple device.
- **Simplenote** is a text-only app that offers straightforward note-taking for anyone who just wants to, well, take notes.
- **Workflowy** is an online app that uses an outline format and is actually more flexible than it looks at first.
- **Anytype**, which is still in beta, is an interesting and complex app that, like Obsidian, can be fun for those who really like to investigate how to personalize their applications.

- **Zoho Notebook** is a free app that organizes your notes by dividing them into separate notebooks; each notebook can also contain audio files, photos, or other attachments.

Correction, November 16th, 2023, 4:25PM ET: *I originally stated that Obsidian is open-source software. It is not. I regret the error.*

Update January 4th, 2024, 2:08PM ET: *This article was originally published on November 16th, 2023, and has been updated since to add UpNote, summarize several apps at the bottom of the article, and update the pricing.*

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