

Choosing the Best Journals for Writing: A Longtime Writer's Guide

A Notebook Is a Personal Thing

After twenty years of filling pages, I have learned that the best journals for writing are not the most expensive or the most famous. They are the ones that make you want to write every day. I have tested dozens of brands, from budget-friendly options to luxury leather-bound books. Some worked for morning freewriting, others for travel notes, and a few became permanent companions for drafting stories. What follows is what I have learned about paper, binding, ruling, and the intangible feel that turns a blank book into a writing habit.

The first thing that matters is paper. If the paper bleeds through, ghosts, or feels too slick, you will stop using the notebook. I learned this the hard way with a beautiful cloth-bound book that feathered every fountain pen line. After that, I started paying attention to grams per square meter, coating, and fountain-pen friendliness. Brands like Rhodia and Clairefontaine make exceptionally smooth, coated paper that handles wet ink without bleed-through. Rhodia's staple-bound pads are cheap enough to use for daily drafts. Clairefontaine's notebooks, made in France with the same paper mill, offer similar performance in sewn bindings that lie flat.

But not everyone writes with a fountain pen. Ballpoint and gel pen users care more about feedback and smoothness. Leuchtturm1917 notebooks, with their numbered pages, table of contents, and two ribbon bookmarks, are a favorite among bullet journalists and long-form writers alike. The paper is slightly cream-colored, which reduces glare, and the dotted or ruled options give structure without being rigid. I have filled at least a dozen Leuchtturm1917 notebooks over the years. They work for almost everything, though the paper can show ghosting with heavy ink. For a cleaner look, try the Midori MD Notebook. Its cream paper has a soft, almost fibrous texture that slows your hand just enough to make writing feel deliberate. Midori's notebooks come in A5 and A6 sizes, and the covers are plain kraft or simple cloth. There is no flash, just function.

Notebooks That Travel and Endure

When I travel, I need something that fits in a jacket pocket or the outer compartment of a bag. Field Notes notebooks are the gold standard for pocket-sized grit. The covers take a beating, the paper survives ballpoints and pencils, and the graph or dot-grid options work for sketches as well as notes. I have carried a Field Notes memo book on every trip for the last ten years. They are not fountain-pen friendly, but they are tough and cheap. If you want something more durable, the Traveler's Notebook system uses a leather cover and replaceable inserts. You can

swap in a blank insert for writing, a lined one for planning, and a kraft-paper one for pasting ticket stubs. The leather ages beautifully, and the size is perfect for slipping into a backpack.



For writers who prefer a single, slim notebook that lasts a year, the Hobonichi Techo is hard to beat. Its thin Tomoe River paper is incredibly strong, despite being translucent. I use the A6 original, which has one page per day and a yearly index. The paper handles fountain pens with no bleed, and the book lies flat because of the thread binding. Hobonichi Techo is more a daily planner than a pure journal, but the writing space on each page is generous. I have kept one for three years now, and I find that the daily constraint actually encourages me to write something, even if it is just a sentence.

The Rocketbook is a different beast. Its synthetic pages are designed to be wiped clean with a damp cloth, allowing you to reuse the notebook. I use it for brainstorming and rough drafts that I later digitize. The Rocketbook works with Pilot Frixion pens, and the accompanying app scans your pages and sends them to cloud services. It is not a journal for posterity, but it is the [best journals for writing](#) rough material that you might otherwise lose. For writers who hate wasting paper, it is a practical tool.

Paper Quality and Binding Details

Paper quality is the single most important factor in a writing notebook. Beyond brand names, look for acid-free paper, which prevents yellowing over decades. Most of the brands mentioned here use acid-free paper. The binding also matters: lay-flat bindings let you write comfortably on the left and right pages. Sewn bindings are stronger than glued ones. I have had a glued notebook lose pages after six months of daily use. Leuchtturm1917 uses thread-bound booklets glued into the cover, which is robust, but the cover itself can crack if you bend it back. Midori MD notebooks use thread binding and a flexible cover that feels like a paperback book.

Rhodia and Clairefontaine offer staple-bound pads and sewn notebooks. Rhodia's top-bound Webnotebook has a soft cover and 80-gram ivory paper that is a dream to write on. The dots are faint, so they guide without dominating the page. Clairefontaine's classic cloth-bound notebooks have the same paper but with a more formal look. For a budget option with good paper, try the Exceed notebooks sold at certain retailers. The paper is similar to Leuchtturm1917 but costs half as much. I keep an Exceed notebook on my desk for quick notes, and it performs better than its price suggests.

Specialized Notebooks for Specific Writing Habits

Some writers prefer dot-grid, some prefer blank, some prefer narrow-ruled. I find that dot-grid is the most versatile because you can write in straight lines, draw tables, or sketch diagrams without the distraction of solid lines. Stalogy notebooks use a thin, semi-transparent paper and a minimalist dot grid. The paper is similar to Tomoe River but slightly thicker. Stalogy's 365 Day notebook has a full year of pages in a slim volume, which is both daunting and liberating. I used one for a project diary and filled every page without feeling cramped.

If you like a bit of color and personality, look at Baron Fig. Their notebooks have a cheerful, modern design and paper that handles most pens well. The ruling is a soft gray, and the cover is sturdy but flexible. They are not as refined as Leuchtturm1917 or Midori, but they have a character that many writers enjoy. Archer and Olive notebooks are heavy, with thick paper that can handle watercolor and ink washes. I use one for illustrated journaling, where I write and paint on the same page. The paper is thick enough that nothing bleeds through, but the notebook is heavy. It stays on my desk rather than going in a bag.



For luxury, Smythson makes leather-bound notebooks with ultra-fine paper. They are expensive, but the paper is exceptionally thin and strong. I received a Smythson notebook as a gift years ago and used it for a special project. The experience of writing on that paper is unlike any other, the pen glides with almost no resistance. However, the cost makes it impractical for daily use. Similarly, Peter Pauper Press produces handsome cloth-bound volumes with good paper at a midrange price. Their botanical-cover notebooks are a pleasure to look at, and the paper handles fountain pens reasonably well.

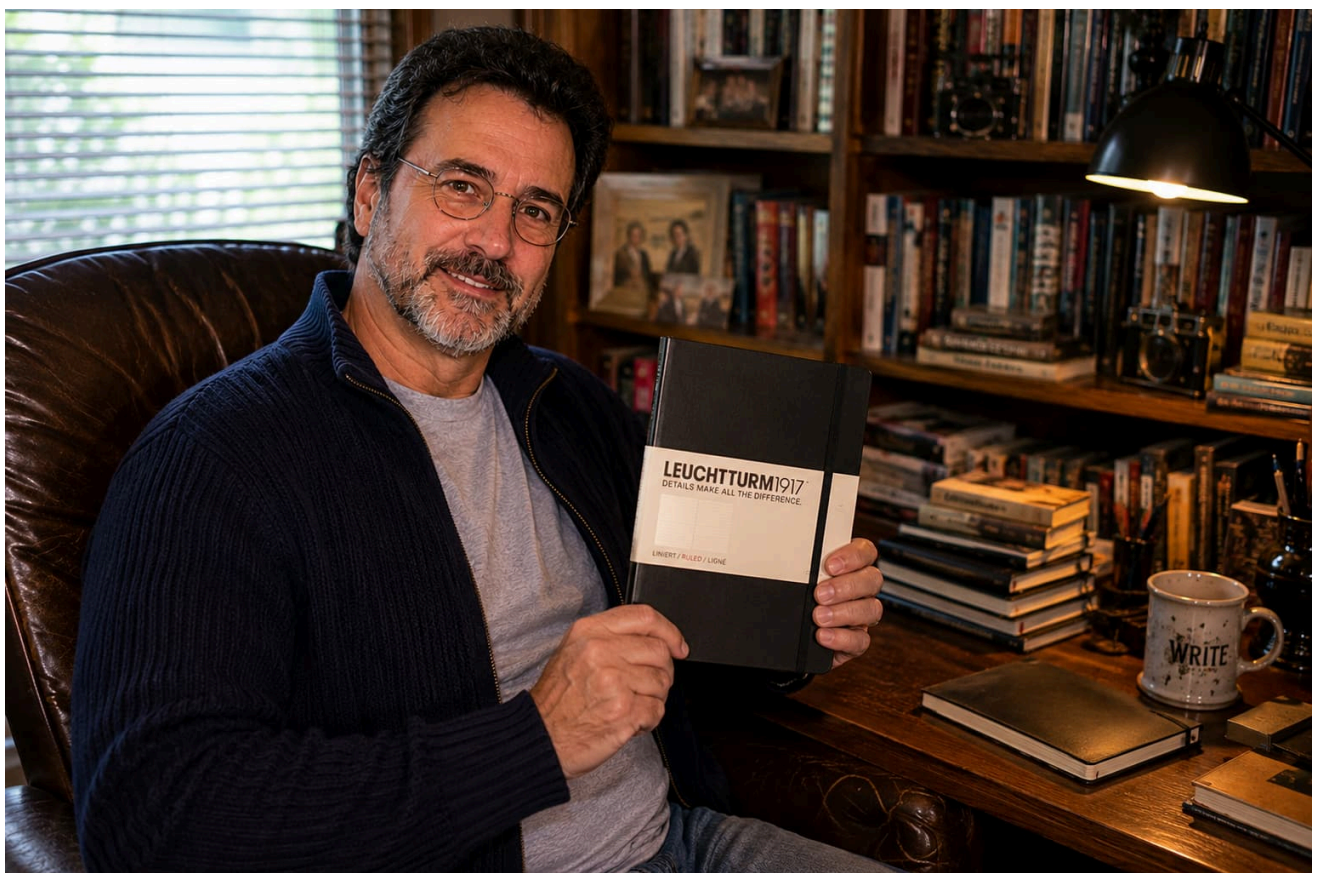
Minimalism Art and Nuuna take a design-forward approach. Nuuna notebooks have thick, uncoated paper and a modern, grid-heavy layout. The paper is rough, which gives a lot of feedback. Some writers love this; I find it slows me down. Minimalism Art notebooks are simple, with soft covers and cream paper. They are a good alternative to Moleskine for those who want a similar look but better paper. Moleskine itself remains popular, but its paper has become less fountain-pen friendly over the years. The brand's strength is its classic design and wide availability. For ballpoint or pencil users, a Moleskine is fine. For fountain pen writers, I would recommend Leuchtturm1917 or Rhodia instead.

Dingbats notebooks are another eco-friendly option. Their covers are made from cork or recycled leather, and the paper is acid-free and fountain-pen friendly. I have a Dingbats notebook that I use for nature journaling. The paper handles wet ink well, and the cork cover develops a nice patina. Essentials Notebook is a budget brand that offers surprisingly good paper for the price. I bought one for a workshop and ended up using it for months. The paper is smooth and white, with a layout that resembles Moleskine's but at half the cost.

Finding Your Own Best Journals for Writing

The truth is that the best journals for writing are the ones that fit your life. If you write mostly at a desk, a large A5 or B5 notebook with a hard cover works well. If you write on the go, a pocket-sized notebook with a flexible cover is better. I keep a Rhodia No. 16 pad in my bag for ideas, a Leuchtturm1917 on my desk for daily entries, and a Field Notes memo book in my shirt pocket for quick notes. This combination has served me for years.

Paper preference is deeply personal. I have friends who swear by the tooth of a Nuuna and others who love the slickness of a Rhodia. The only way to know is to try. Buy one notebook from a brand you have not used before. Write in it for a week. If you look forward to opening it, you have found a winner. If not, move on. A good notebook should not be a chore. It should be a reward.



I have also learned that the notebook is only half the equation. The pen matters, and the writing practice matters more. The best journals for writing will not make you a better writer by themselves, but they can remove friction. When you do not have to fight the paper or the binding, your mind is free to focus on words. That is the real value of a good notebook. It disappears into the background and lets you write.

In the end, I keep coming back to a few brands that have never let me down: Leuchtturm1917 for daily use, Rhodia for rough drafts, Midori for quiet reflection, and Field Notes for the road. But I still try new notebooks when I see them. The search for the perfect notebook is part of the pleasure of writing. There is no single answer. There is only the next notebook, and the next page to fill.