

Finding the Best Journals for Writing: A Practical Guide from a Lifelong Journaler

Why Your Notebook Matters More Than You Think

For years I treated notebooks like disposable scratch paper. I grabbed whatever was cheapest at the office supply store, usually a spiral-bound pad with thin pages that bled through to the next sheet within minutes. My handwriting looked like a messy scrawl because the pen skipped on the paper. I gave up on journaling three times before I realized the problem wasn't my discipline, it was the notebook itself.

When I finally invested in a decent notebook, the whole practice shifted. The paper felt smooth under my fountain pen, the binding lay flat, and the cover made me want to open it. That experience taught me something: the best journals for writing are not about luxury or status. They are about removing friction between you and the page. Over the past decade I have tested dozens of brands, filled hundreds of pages, and learned what works for different styles of writing. Here is what I found.

What Makes a Journal Good for Writing?

Before diving into specific brands, let us talk about the qualities that separate a useful journal from a frustrating one. Paper quality is the first thing. If the ink feathers or bleeds through, your writing looks messy and you lose the back of the page. A good journal uses paper that is at least 80 gsm, though many premium options go higher. The surface should be smooth enough for fine nibs but with enough tooth to keep the pen from sliding uncontrollably.

Binding matters just as much. A notebook that does not lie flat when open forces you to hold it with one hand while you write, which is awkward and tiring. Sewn bindings are more durable than glued spines, and lay-flat construction makes a huge difference for long writing sessions. Page count is another consideration. A 200-page notebook feels substantial, but if you are testing out a new brand, a smaller one like a Field Notes or a Stalogy lets you commit without too much risk.

Then there is the subjective factor: the feel of the cover, the size of the grid or dot pattern, the color of the paper. These details sound trivial, but they determine whether you actually pick up the notebook every day. The [best journals for writing](#) are the ones that call you back to the page.

My Personal Favorites, Tested Over Years

Every writer has a different hand, a different pen preference, and a different workflow. I have listed these brands in the order that I reached for them most often, but your mileage may vary.



Leuchtturm1917

This was my first serious notebook. The Leuchtturm1917 has 80 gsm paper that handles most fountain pens well, though very wet nibs can ghost slightly. The numbered pages, table of contents, and pocket in the back are practical touches. The notebook lies flat after a little breaking in. It is a solid all-rounder that works for daily journaling, bullet journaling, or long-form writing. I have filled seven of them.

Rhodia and Clairefontaine

Rhodia uses Clairefontaine paper, so I group these together. The paper is exceptionally smooth and bright white. It handles ink like a dream, no feathering, no bleed-through, even with heavy fountain pen ink. The Rhodia webnotebook has a soft cover that feels nice in the hand, and the Clairefontaine staplebound notebooks are great for shorter projects. The trade-off is that the paper can feel too slick for some ballpoint pens, and the orange cover is not to everyone's taste.

Moleskine

Moleskine is the most famous name in this space, but I have mixed feelings. The classic notebooks use 70 gsm paper that is not great for fountain pens, it feathers and bleeds with wet inks. However, the Moleskine brand has a cultural cachet that makes the notebook feel special. If you use a ballpoint or a fine gel pen, the paper is fine. The elastic band and bookmark add a nice touch. I keep one for travel because the compact size fits every pocket.

Midori MD Notebook

The Midori MD Notebook is my current favorite for pure writing pleasure. The paper is cream-colored, smooth, and slightly absorbent, which makes fountain pen ink dry quickly and look rich. The notebook is unpretentious, it comes in a simple paper cover that you can personalize. The binding is strong and lies flat from the first page. It is not the cheapest option, but the experience of writing on Midori paper is hard to beat.

Hobonichi Techo

For daily journaling that includes scheduling, the Hobonichi Techo is brilliant. The paper is thin but handles fountain pen ink surprisingly well because it is Tomoe River paper, which is coated to prevent bleeding. The day-per-page layout gives you room to write a paragraph or two each day. The notebook is small and fits in a bag easily. The only downside is that the thin paper can show ghosting if you write heavily on both sides.

Traveler's Notebook

The Traveler's Notebook system is more of a modular setup than a single notebook. You buy a leather cover and then insert different refills, blank, grid, lined, or dot. You can carry a calendar, a journal, and a sketchbook all in one cover. The leather ages beautifully and the refills are inexpensive. I use mine for field notes and brainstorming. The system rewards people who like to customize their workflow.

Baron Fig

Baron Fig notebooks have a minimalist design and high-quality paper. The dot grid is subtle, and the binding is sewn so it lies flat. The paper is 90 gsm and handles most pens without issue. The company also makes a Confidant version that is threadbound and opens completely flat. I like these for first drafts because the simple look does not distract me.

Field Notes

Field Notes are small, durable, and affordable. They are perfect for pocket carry, I use them for quick notes, lists, and ideas that come up during the day. The paper is not fountain pen friendly on the standard editions, but they have special editions with better paper. For ballpoint or

pencil, they are excellent. The brand also has a sense of humor and a strong identity, which makes them fun to collect.

Rocketbook

Rocketbook is different because it is designed to be reused. You write with a Pilot FriXion pen, then scan the pages with the Rocketbook app and wipe the notebook clean with a damp cloth. The paper is not as satisfying as high-quality fountain pen paper, but the cloud integration is very useful for people who want to digitize their notes. I use one for meeting notes and temporary lists.

Stalogy

Stalogy notebooks have thin, lightweight paper that feels like Tomoe River but is a bit less coated. They are very slim and come in sizes up to A5. The paper handles fountain pens well, though there is some ghosting. The minimal cover and black binding look sharp. I keep a Stalogy in my bag for on-the-go writing.



Mnemosyne

Mnemosyne notebooks from Maruman have excellent paper that is very smooth and bright white. They lie flat and the spiral binding allows you to fold the cover back. The paper is great for all pen types, including fountain pens. The design is utilitarian, a plain black cover with a simple label. These are reliable workhorses that do not cost as much as some premium brands.

Exceed by Amazon

The Exceed brand is a budget option that surprised me. The paper is 90 gsm and handles fountain pens reasonably well for the price. The binding is sewn and the notebook lies flat. The cover is faux leather and looks more expensive than it is. If you are on a tight budget or want to try a larger notebook without spending much, Exceed is a decent choice.

Dingbats

Dingbats notebooks are made with 100 gsm paper that is thick enough to handle fountain pens, markers, and even watercolor washes. The covers are made from vegan leather and come in vibrant colors. The binding is sewn and the notebook opens flat. I use Dingbats for creative writing and sketching when I want more paper weight.

Archer and Olive

Archer and Olive notebooks are similar to Dingbats in that they use thick paper (120 gsm) and have a premium feel. The covers are hardbound and come in many patterns. The paper is excellent for fountain pens and brush pens. These are heavier and more expensive, but the quality is top-notch. I gift these to friends who are serious about journaling.

Smythson

Smythson is a luxury brand that makes beautiful notebooks with cross-grain leather covers and gilt-edged pages. The paper is thin but surprisingly fountain pen friendly, it is a coated stock that minimizes bleed. The price is high, but the craftsmanship is undeniable. I bought one as a present for myself after finishing a novel draft. It felt appropriate for a milestone.

Peter Pauper Press

Peter Pauper Press makes decorative notebooks with themed covers and high-quality paper. The paper is 80 gsm and handles most pens well. The covers feature artwork from various artists. These are good if you want a notebook that looks distinctive on your shelf.

Nuuna

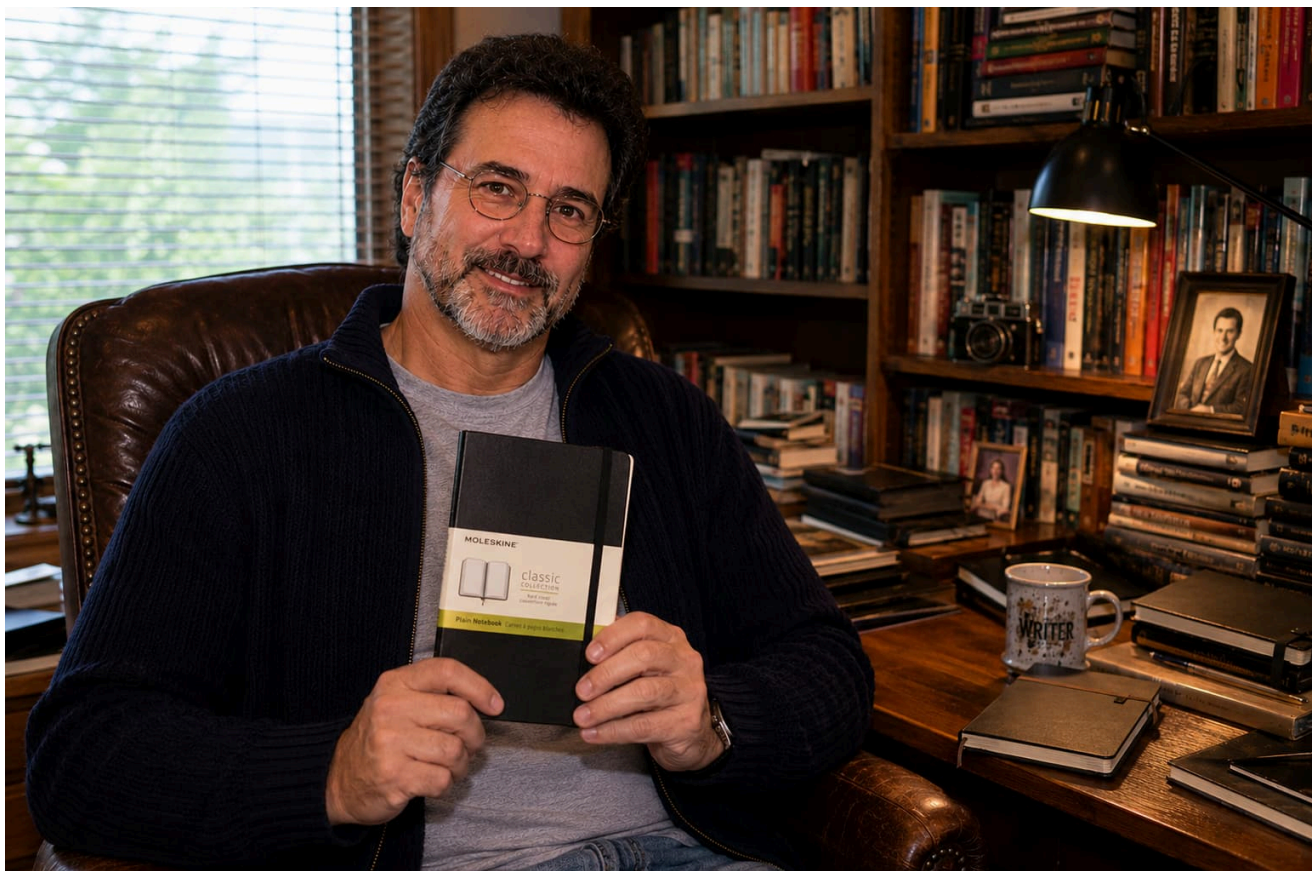
Nuuna notebooks are known for their thick, white paper and minimal design. The paper is 120 gsm and very smooth. They come in unusual sizes like A5+ and have dot grids with fine spacing. The covers are made of a soft-touch material that feels pleasant. I like Nuuna for writing with gel pens and fine liners.

Essentials Notebook by Minimalism Art

Minimalism Art makes a line of Essentials Notebooks that are simple and affordable. The paper is 100 gsm and handles fountain pens well. The binding is sewn and the notebook lies flat. The cover is a plain kraft or black board. These are no-frills notebooks that do the job without fuss.

How to Choose Your First Quality Journal

If you are new to serious journaling, start with a mid-range option like the Leuchtturm1917 or Rhodia webnotebook. They are not too expensive, they perform well with a variety of pens, and they are widely available. If you prefer a smaller, pocketable size, try a Field Notes or a Stalogy. If you want the best possible paper for fountain pens, go with the Midori MD Notebook or a Clairefontaine staplebound notebook.



One thing I have learned is that the best journals for writing are not necessarily the most expensive ones. A Smythson notebook is a beautiful object, but a fifty-cent composition book can serve you just as faithfully if that is what you use. The key is to find a notebook that feels right in your hands and that you look forward to writing in every day.

I keep a rotation of three notebooks at any time: a Midori MD for personal journaling, a Leuchtturm1917 for work notes, and a Field Notes for quick ideas. This system has worked for me for years. But your system will look different. The important thing is to start writing and let the notebook be a tool, not a barrier.

Final Thoughts

Choosing a journal is a personal decision that involves paper, binding, size, and aesthetic preference. The brands I have mentioned represent the best journals for writing that I have found through extensive use. But the real magic happens when you stop researching and start filling pages. The notebook that makes you write more is the right one for you.

I still remember the day I switched from a cheap spiral to a Leuchtturm1917. The writing felt different, more intentional, more satisfying. That feeling has never gone away. If you are on the fence, pick one of the notebooks from this list, buy it, and write the first page tonight. You will not regret it.