

Choosing the Top Writing Notebooks: A Practical Guide from a Longtime User

After years of filling notebooks with everything from rough drafts to daily journal entries, I have learned that the right notebook can make the difference between a writing session that flows and one that feels like a chore. The paper, the binding, the size all matter more than you might think. I have tested dozens of brands, thrown out more than a few that bled through, and settled on a short list of reliable companions. If you are looking for the top writing notebooks, here is what I have found from real use, not from a spec sheet.

What Makes a Notebook Worth Using

The first thing I check is the paper. A smooth, fountain-pen-friendly surface is non-negotiable for me. I write with a TWSBI fountain pen loaded with a wet ink, and nothing ruins a page faster than feathering or bleed-through. Clairefontaine and Rhodia both use paper that handles fountain pens beautifully. Clairefontaine paper has a slightly waxy feel that keeps ink on the surface, while Rhodia offers a similar smoothness with a bit more tooth. Both are made with high-quality pulp and are great choices for everyday writing.

Binding comes next. I need a notebook that opens flat and stays open. Lay-flat binding is a must for me, especially when I am writing in the middle of a signature. Leuchtturm1917 uses thread-bound signatures that lie flat from the first page. Moleskine, on the other hand, uses a glued spine that cracks over time and does not open as flat. I have had Moleskine notebooks where the spine broke after a few months, leaving the pages loose. That is a dealbreaker for a daily writer.

Size matters too. A pocket notebook fits in a jacket but not a lot of text. Field Notes makes a sturdy pocket option that I carry for quick notes, but for sustained writing I prefer A5 or B5. Midori MD comes in both A5 and B5 and uses a soft, cream-colored paper that is a joy to write on. The Midori MD has a minimalist cover and a thread-bound spine that ages well. It is a favorite among long-form journalers.

Paper Weight and Texture

Paper weight is measured in grams per square meter (gsm). Most standard notebooks use 80 to 100 gsm paper. That is fine for ballpoint pens and most gel pens. The Pilot G2 works well on 80 gsm paper, though it can ghost on thinner sheets. For fountain pens or wetter inks, I prefer 120 gsm or higher. Archer & Olive uses 120 gsm paper that handles heavy ink with almost no ghosting. Their notebooks are also compatible with water-based media, which is a bonus if you like to mix writing with light watercolor washes.



Dot grid is my preferred ruling. It gives structure without the heavy lines of a standard grid. Many of the [top writing notebooks](#) now offer dot grid as a default option. Leuchtturm1917, Rhodia, and Dingbats all have dot grid versions. Dingbats uses 100 gsm paper with a vegan leather cover that feels soft to the touch. Their notebooks also have a pen loop and an elastic closure band, which are small details that add up over a year of daily use.

Bristol paper is another option if you want a heavier, more rigid sheet. It is not common in notebooks, but some specialty brands use it for art journals. Bristol paper is smooth and durable, but it adds weight to the notebook. For a travel journal, you might prefer something lighter.

Notable Brands I Have Tested

I have tried more brands than I can list here, but a few stand out for specific reasons.

- **Leuchtturm1917:** Excellent paper quality, numbered pages, and a table of contents. The 80 gsm paper works well with most pens, but I have seen ghosting with broad nibs. The cover is durable and the elastic band keeps the notebook closed. A solid all-rounder.

- **Rhodia:** The orange cover is iconic. Their paper is smooth and fountain-pen friendly. The Webnotebook has a lay-flat binding and a cloth bookmark. I have used Rhodia for years without a single bleed-through issue.
- **Moleskine:** I want to like Moleskine more than I do. The paper is thin and prone to feathering with wet inks. The binding cracks over time. That said, the classic look and wide availability make it a common first purchase. I just do not recommend it for serious fountain pen users.
- **Hobonichi Techo:** This Japanese brand uses Tomoe River paper, which is incredibly thin yet resistant to bleeding. The paper has a slightly crinkly feel and handles fountain pens well. The Hobonichi Techo is a dated planner, but the paper quality is exceptional. It is one of the few notebooks that can hold a lot of ink without ghosting badly.
- **Baron Fig:** A small US brand that makes simple, well-bound notebooks. Their Confidant model has a sewn binding and 100 gsm paper. The dot grid is clean and the cover has a soft, matte finish. Baron Fig also offers a pocket-size version.

Specialty and Bullet Journal Notebooks

Bullet journaling has driven a lot of innovation in notebook design. Notebook Therapy and Archer & Olive both cater to the bullet journal crowd with thicker paper and colorful covers. Notebook Therapy uses 160 gsm paper that can handle markers and paint. Their covers often feature intricate designs, which makes the notebook feel personal. Archer & Olive offers 120 gsm paper and a range of cover styles. Both brands use lay-flat binding and include a pen loop and a back pocket.

Dingbats is another brand that stands out. Their notebooks use 100 gsm paper with a soft, vegan leather cover. The pages are numbered and the notebook opens flat. Dingbats also includes a table of contents and a pen holder. It is a well-rounded option for someone who wants a durable, fountain-pen-friendly notebook without the high price of some premium brands.

Peter Pauper Press makes a line of affordable notebooks with good paper. Their covers are often decorative and the binding is sewn. The paper weight is around 80 gsm, which works well for most pens. They are not as well known as Leuchtturm1917 or Rhodia, but they offer good value for the price.



Digital and Reusable Notebooks

Rocketbook takes a different approach. Their notebooks use reusable paper that can be wiped clean with a damp cloth. You write with a Pilot Frixion pen and the ink disappears when heated. The pages are dot grid and the binding is spiral or wirebound. Rocketbook is not for everyone. The paper has a plastic-like feel and the ink can smudge if you touch it too soon. But if you want a notebook that you can reuse, it is worth trying. The digital scanning feature also lets you upload your notes to cloud services, which is useful for organizing ideas.

Where to Buy and Try Before You Buy

JetPens is my go-to source for trying new notebooks. They have detailed reviews, photos, and comparisons. They carry most of the brands I mentioned, including Leuchtturm1917, Rhodia, Midori MD, and Hobonichi Techo. Their customer service is good and they ship internationally. I also like to visit local stationery stores to feel the paper in person. Paper weight and texture are hard to judge from a screen. If you can, hold the notebook in your hands and write a few lines. That is the only way to know if the paper suits your pen.

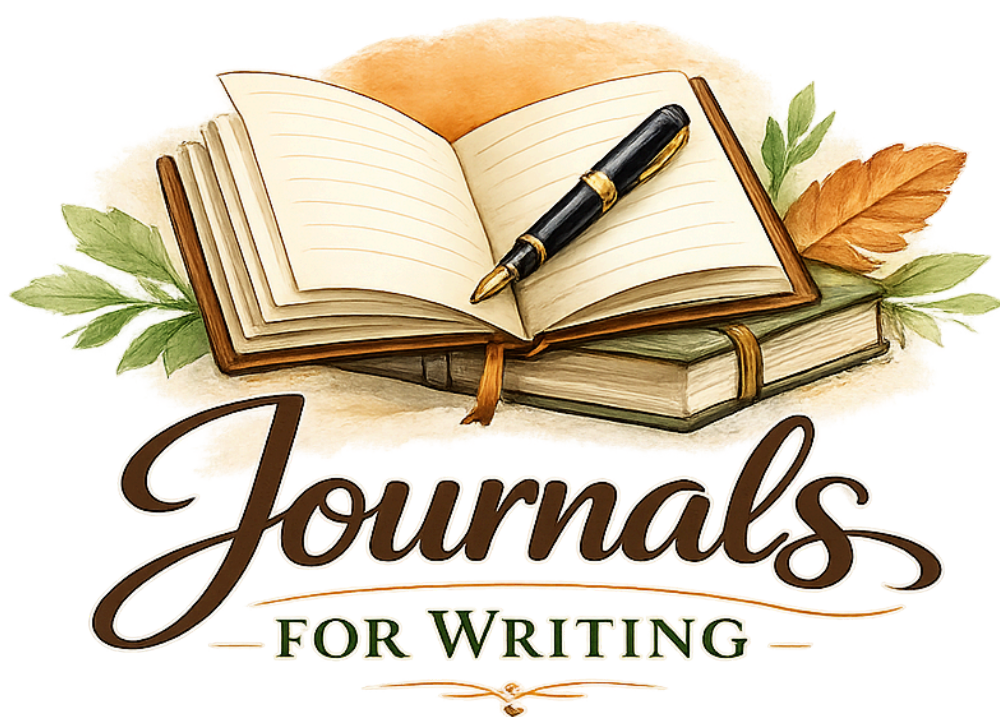
Strathmore is another brand worth mentioning. They make high-end art papers, but they also produce notebooks for writing. Their paper is thick and archival. Strathmore notebooks are more common in art supply stores than in stationery shops. If you want a notebook that will last decades, Strathmore is a strong choice.

My Personal Favorites for Different Uses

For daily journaling, I use a Leuchtturm1917 in A5 with dot grid. The numbered pages help me keep a table of contents, and the paper handles my TWSBI fountain pen well. For quick notes and ideas, I carry a Field Notes pocket notebook. The paper is not the best for fountain pens, but it works fine with my Pilot G2. For longer writing sessions, I reach for a Midori MD in B5. The cream paper is easy on the eyes and the binding stays flat.

If I am traveling, I take a Rhodia Webnotebook. The cover is sturdy and the paper is reliable. I have spilled coffee on it and the pages survived. Hobonichi Techo is my planner of choice. The Tomoe River paper is a pleasure to write on, even if the thinness takes some getting used to.

For bullet journaling, I use an Archer & Olive or Notebook Therapy notebook. The thick paper gives me the freedom to use markers and stickers without worrying about bleed-through. Both brands offer a variety of cover colors and sizes. Archer & Olive has a more minimalist look, while Notebook Therapy leans into artistic covers.



Rhodia also makes a top writing notebooks option in their classic orange cover. The paper is smooth and the binding is solid. I have used Rhodia for years and never had a problem with bleeding or feathering. It is a reliable choice for anyone who writes with fountain pens.

Final Thoughts on Choosing

The best notebook is the one that makes you want to write. Paper quality, binding, and size all matter, but so does the feel of the cover and the weight of the notebook in your hand. I have tried dozens of notebooks and I keep coming back to the same few brands. Leuchtturm1917, Rhodia, and Midori MD are my favorites for everyday writing. Archer & Olive and Notebook

Therapy are great for bullet journaling. Field Notes and Moleskine are good for casual use, but they do not match the quality of the others for serious writing.

If you are just starting out, buy one from JetPens or visit a local store and try a few. Write a page with your favorite pen. See how the paper feels. See if the notebook opens flat. That is the only way to know if it is right for you. After a decade of testing, I can say that the top writing notebooks are the ones that disappear in your hands and let the words flow. That is the whole point.