

Finding the Best Journals for Writing: A Practical Guide from Decades of Daily Use

I have been filling notebooks since before I knew what a Moleskine was. For nearly thirty years, I have tested hundreds of journals, from the cheapest spiral-bound pads to handmade leather-bound books that cost more than a dinner out. Along the way I developed strong opinions about paper, binding, and size. I also learned that the best journals for writing are not the same for everyone. What works for a poet may frustrate a bullet-journaler, and what suits a morning-pages devotee may fail a travel sketcher. This guide reflects that reality. It is not a list of winners and losers. It is a set of observations from someone who has used all of them, often side by side, and who still gets a small thrill from opening a fresh page.

What Makes a Journal Great for Writing?

Before I share specific brands, it helps to understand the qualities that matter. Paper weight and texture are the first things I notice. Fountain pen users need a paper that does not bleed or feather. Ballpoint and gel pen writers care more about smoothness and resistance. Binding is another factor. A journal that lies flat is a joy; one that fights to close is a frustration. Ruling also matters. I prefer dot grid because it gives structure without shouting. But I have met writers who need blank pages and others who demand narrow lines. The point is that the best journals for writing are defined by the writer, not the manufacturer.

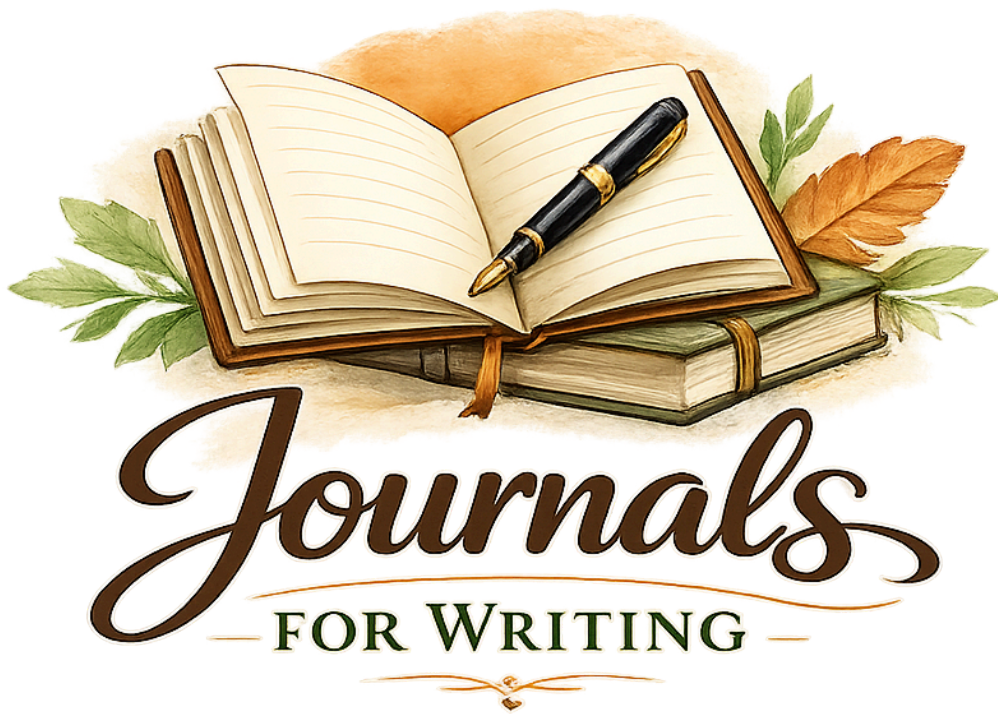
My Personal Testing Method

Over the years I have filled journals for daily journaling, novel drafts, meeting notes, and poetry fragments. I test each one for at least a month. I write with fountain pens, rollerballs, and occasionally a pencil. I check for ghosting, bleed-through, and how the paper feels under the hand. I also pay attention to the cover. A soft cover bends and fits in a pocket. A hard cover protects the pages but adds weight. These details matter more than you might think when you carry a notebook every day for a year.

The Brands I Keep Coming Back To

Moleskine

Moleskine is the most famous name in notebooks, and for good reason. The classic black cover and elastic closure are iconic. The paper works well with most ballpoint and gel pens. I have used Moleskine for travel journals and daily logs. The main drawback is that the paper is not fountain-pen friendly. Ink bleeds through easily, and the cream-colored pages show ghosting. Still, for quick notes and everyday writing, Moleskine remains a solid choice.



Leuchtturm1917

Leuchtturm1917 notebooks are my go-to for long-form writing. The paper is thicker than Moleskine and handles fountain pen ink much better. I love the numbered pages and the table of contents. The hardcover version lies flat when opened. I have used Leuchtturm1917 for novel drafts and daily journaling. The only issue is that the paper is not quite opaque enough for heavy ink users. But for most writers, it is a fantastic option.

Rhodia and Clairefontaine

Rhodia and Clairefontaine are French brands that produce some of the best paper for fountain pens. Rhodia pads have a smooth, coated surface that makes every pen glide. Clairefontaine

notebooks are similar but come in more sizes. I use Rhodia for brainstorming and quick drafts. The paper is so smooth that I sometimes write just to feel the pen move. The trade-off is that the coated paper can feel slippery with some inks. But for fountain pen lovers, these are essential.

Field Notes

Field Notes are small, rugged, and affordable. I carry one in my back pocket for capturing ideas on the go. The graph paper is fine for diagrams and lists. The covers are colorful and durable. The paper is not great for fountain pens, but it works well with ballpoints and pencils. Field Notes are perfect for rough notes, not polished journals. They remind me that the [best journals for writing](#) are sometimes the ones you actually use, not the ones you save.

Baron Fig

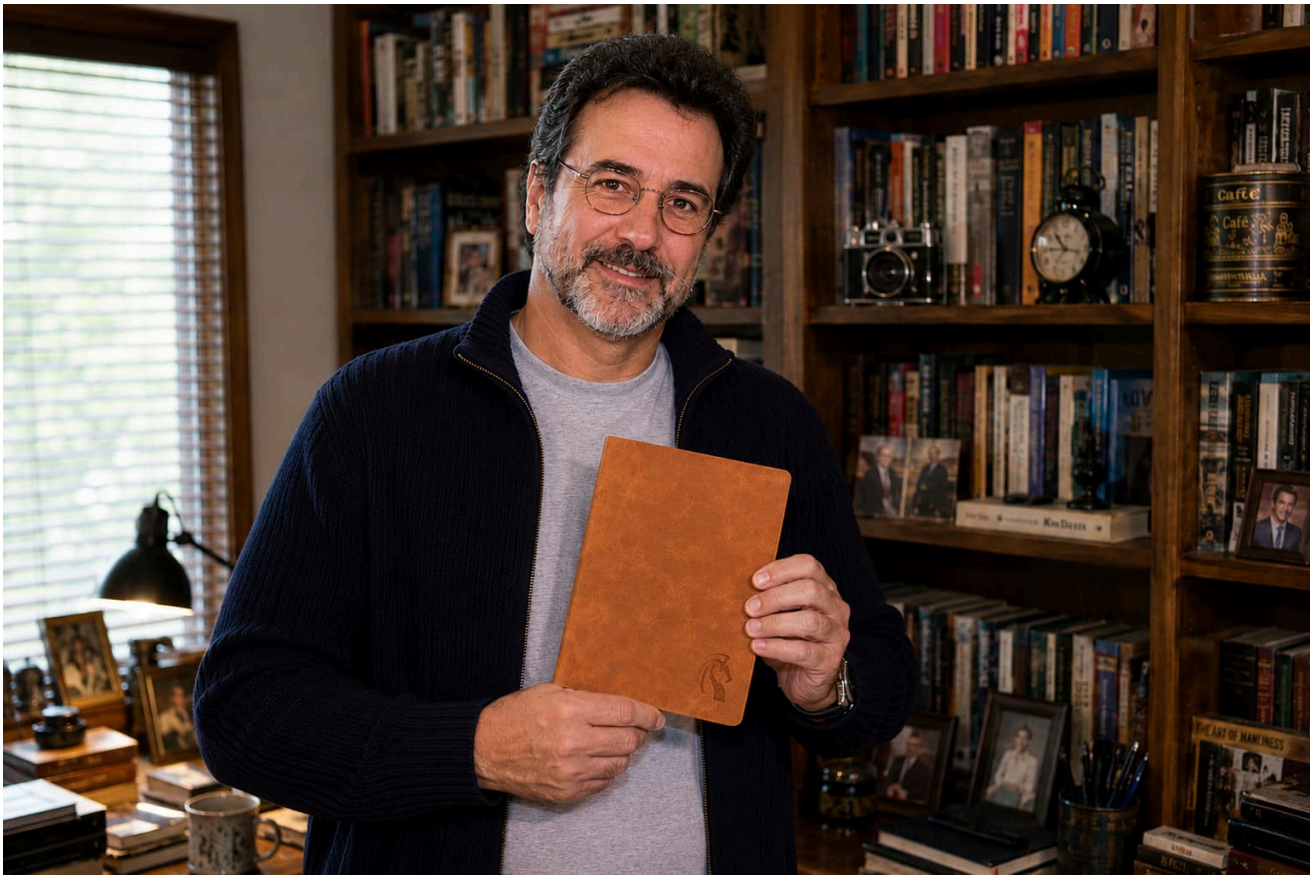
Baron Fig makes notebooks with a minimalist aesthetic and excellent paper. The dot grid is my favorite. The paper handles fountain pens well, with minimal bleed-through. The lay-flat binding is superb. I have used Baron Fig for project planning and daily journaling. The only downside is the price. They are not cheap. But the quality matches the cost.

Rocketbook

Rocketbook is a different kind of notebook. It uses special paper that works with Pilot Frixion pens. You can microwave the pages to erase them and reuse the notebook. I use Rocketbook for meeting notes and to-do lists. It is not for permanent writing, but it is great for iterative work. The paper is smooth and the pages are dot grid. For a writer who wants to reduce waste, Rocketbook is a clever solution.

Midori MD Notebook

Midori MD notebooks are a cult favorite among fountain pen enthusiasts. The paper is a plain, creamy white that shows shading and sheen beautifully. The binding is simple and elegant. I use Midori for my morning pages. The paper feels slightly rough, which gives a pleasant feedback. The main downside is that the covers are thin. They need a cover or a sleeve to stay clean. But the writing experience is unmatched.



Hobonichi Techo

Hobonichi Techo is a daily planner that doubles as a journal. The paper is incredibly thin, but it handles fountain pens without bleeding because of a special coating. I use mine for daily logs and habit tracking. The size is compact and fits in a bag. The main downside is that the paper is so thin you can see the writing on the other side. But it does not bleed through. It is a marvel of paper engineering.

Traveler's Notebook

Traveler's Notebook is a modular system. You buy a leather cover and then insert different notebooks for different purposes. I use one insert for daily journaling, another for notes, and a third for sketching. The paper is fountain-pen friendly. The leather cover ages beautifully. It is a system that grows with you. The downside is the cost of the cover and the inserts. But it is a joy to use.

Stalogy

Stalogy notebooks are popular in Japan for their minimalist design and excellent paper. The 365-day notebook has a unique layout that encourages daily writing. The paper is thin but handles fountain pens well. I use Stalogy for quick notes and creative writing. The binding is

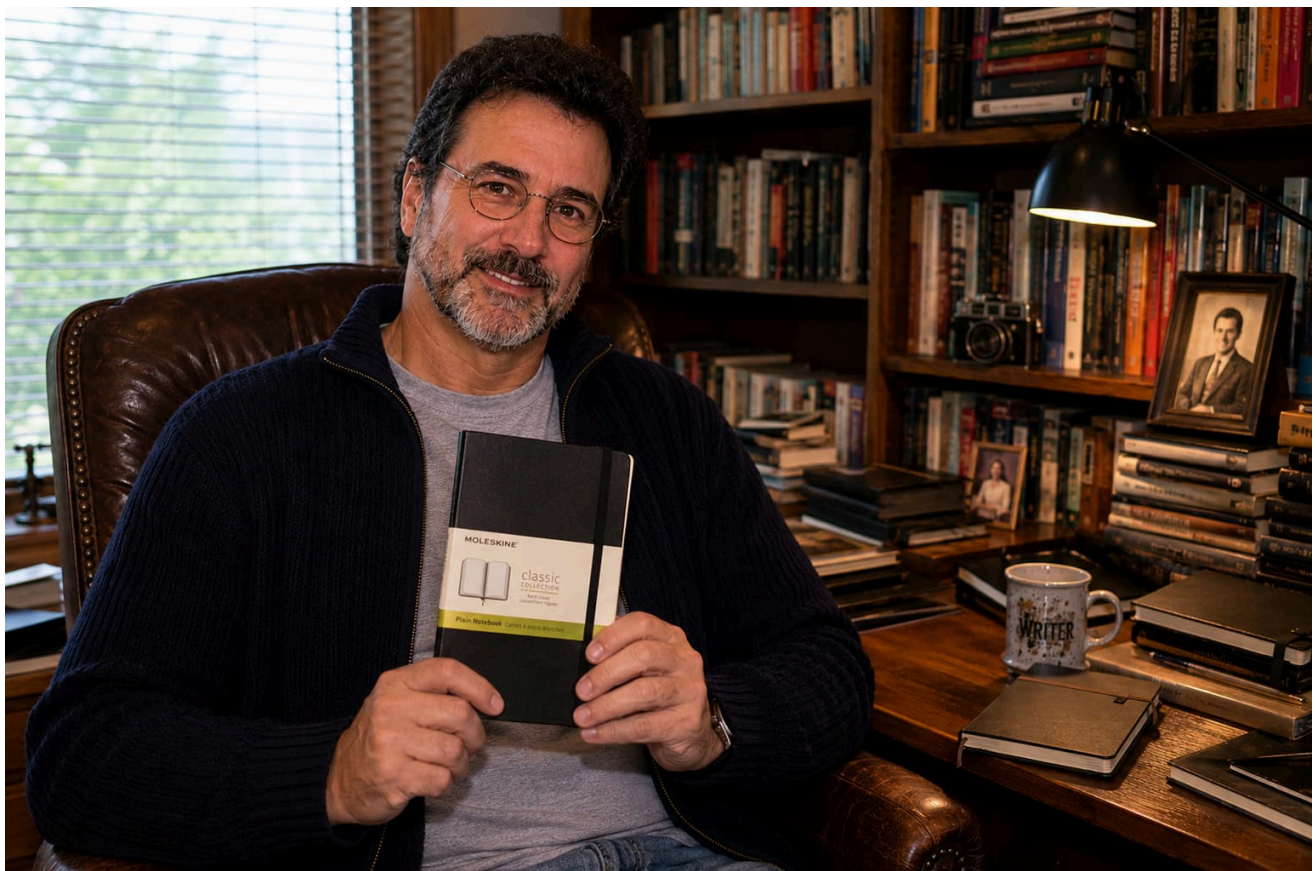
flexible. The only downside is that the paper can ghost a bit. But it is a solid choice for everyday writing.

Mnemosyne

Mnemosyne notebooks by Maruman are known for their smooth, white paper and micro-perforated pages. I use them for business notes and brainstorming. The paper is fountain-pen friendly and dries quickly. The binding is top-notch. The only issue is that the covers are not as durable as some others. But for a desk notebook, they are excellent.

Other Notable Mentions

I have also used Exceed notebooks, which are affordable and decent for ballpoint pens. Dingbats makes eco-friendly notebooks with dotted pages and a vegan leather cover. Archer and Olive offers thick, 100 gsm paper that is great for mixed media. Smythson produces luxury notebooks with ultra-smooth paper. Peter Pauper Press makes high-quality journals with interesting cover designs. Nuuna notebooks have a modern feel with grid patterns. Essentials Notebook by Minimalism Art is a simple, affordable option. All of these have their strengths. The key is to match the notebook to your writing habits.



Practical Advice for Choosing Your Journal

Do not buy a journal because it looks good on Instagram. Buy it because you will use it. I have made that mistake. I bought a beautiful Smythson notebook and then hesitated to write in it because I did not want to ruin it. That is the opposite of what a journal is for. The best journals for writing are the ones you fill, not the ones you display. So start with a brand that fits your budget and your pen. If you use fountain pens, go for Rhodia, Clairefontaine, Midori, or Leuchtturm1917. If you use ballpoints, Moleskine and Field Notes work fine. If you want something reusable, try Rocketbook. If you want a daily planner, Hobonichi Techo is hard to beat.

The Ritual of Writing

I have found that the act of choosing a journal is part of the writing ritual. When I open a new Leuchtturm1917 and write the first word, I feel a shift. The page is full of possibility. The paper, the binding, the size all contribute to that feeling. But the feeling does not come from the brand alone. It comes from the habit of writing. I have written in cheap spiral notebooks and expensive leather journals. The words that mattered came from both. So do not overthink the choice. Pick a notebook that makes you want to write. Then write. The rest will follow.