

Digital Note-Taking with OneNote

Never miss a flash of inspiration, capture it! We all have thoughts, ideas, and information we come across daily that we would like to keep and organize for future use. The best digital note-taker is Microsoft OneNote that can do everything, works on pretty much any device, and the basic version is free with almost no feature restrictions. Evernote is the main competition to OneNote, but it's expensive to get all the features you'll need (\$70 per year) and has bugs that slow down performance or just make it frustrating to work with. Google Keep and Apple Notes are OK, but only have very basic note-taking. Everyone needs a tool like OneNote.

What is Digital Note-Taking?

Digital note-taking is taking thoughts, ideas, and information that you might need to use in a day, week, month, year, or in ten year. and store it in a digital format. Information goes beyond just text and includes everything including multimedia. In the past we used paper notebooks, post-it notes, napkins, articles cut out of magazines/newspaper, website pages printed, typed notes, handwritten notes, eMails, your brain (hope you remember), your friends brain (hope they have a better memory than you), photo, PDF file, voice/video recording, freehand drawing, scans, screen captures, drawings, sketches, annotation, highlight pen, and more. OneNote can handle all this and more.

A big advantage of digital over traditional methods is the sync functionality that makes your information accessible and updateable from virtually anywhere on any device at any time. Make the info even better by adding typed text, highlighting, or ink annotations. Even share and collaborate with others. A digital note-taker is NOT a word processor replacement, just like you don't use a hammer to screw in a screw. Some of your notes may turn into a formal document in a word processor at the end of your process.

Practical Uses for Digital Note-Taking:

- Lists - Shopping Lists, To-Do Lists, and Recommendations (services, products).
- Ongoing Note-Taking - Home or Work project notes, Personal Data Repository, Interaction log with people, Web Sites, eMails, Magazines, Lectures, Presentations, Meetings, and Classes.
- Idea Canvas - Mind-Mapping, Brainstorming, and any info that might be helpful in the future.

Microsoft OneNote

OneNote at a glance:

- Requires a Microsoft account. You can access OneNote through the web-based interface and/or download the app/software on your devices for free. The app/software gives you more features than the web-based.
 - A free Microsoft account provides 5 GB of OneDrive cloud storage to sync the info on all devices (Cloud/Web, Apps, browser, Win & Mac). Paid Microsoft 365 Personal (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Outlook, Skype, Sway, Publisher, and Access). \$69 per year, one user, up to 5 devices, and 1TB OneDrive storage and unlock features like stickers and the math assistant. It is possible to store your info/notebooks on your local hard drive, but I do not recommend it since they would not be available on other devices or backed up.
 - Organize info - Three levels with "Notebooks", which contain "Sections", which contain Pages. Pages can have embedded info like excel and an infinite number of canvases. Notebooks can be saved locally and/or synced via Microsoft OneDrive.
 - Powerful text editing - Formatting similar to Word with styles. OneNote is Not a replacement for a word processor.
 - Ink/draw - Add thoughts, text, and annotate using a mouse or touchpad on a PC or your fingers or stylus on a mobile device on any info. Select the Draw tab in the ribbon and pick the type of pen.
 - Mix media - Record audio notes, online videos, images, files, links, and just about anything.
 - Tag - Highlight can't-miss notes with Important and To-Do tags.
 - Clip and save - Use the OneNote Web Clipper to save content with a single click. I use the Chrome extension.
 - Share/collaborate - Share notebooks with coworkers, friends, and family. Multiple people can work on a note at the same time and see each other's changes.
 - Backed up, versioned, and synchronized - Prevents data loss and allows info to be accessible anywhere.
 - Undo/redo/editing - Makes your notes a "living", dynamic information repository, rather than static documents that are difficult to edit after-the-fact and can become obsolete.
 - Copy/paste text from images - High level of accuracy when converting graphics to text.
- Cons - Limited search function, Limited text formatting, Limited (free) storage 5 GB.

Tips

It's very easy to take notes, but much harder to use/find them. YOU need to organize and find them. These tips should get you started.

- Every piece of content that's added to a page comes in its own field or box. You can resize any box or drag and drop it to change its position on the page. For some types of content, this works well, but it can also lead to messy, ugly pages.
- The Notebook > Section > Page > Subpage schema is of the utmost importance here. The reason is you can only share at the notebook level. You can share a link to a section or a page, but the person you send it to must have permission to the whole notebook to access it. You choose whether the access will be edit or view only.
- When you create a new note quickly, you need a place to save it where it won't get lost. Create a section called “_Inbox” and set it as the default storage location.
- You never know when you will need your old content or notes. Instead of deleting, create an “Archive” folder in OneNote and add the old notes in that folder. If you need further organization inside your archive folder, you can create sections and tags inside it.
- Use the Search to find what you are looking for in text, handwritten notes, and even words shown in pictures.
- Convert handwritten notes or images into text.
- Password-protect notes from prying eyes. When you password-protect a Section, all of its pages will be locked. Note: No one will be able to open your locked note if you lose the password.
- A template is a page design applicable to new pages in your notebook to give them a uniform appearance, appealing background, and consistent layout.
- Turn on “grid” when using a stylus to take notes.
- Regularly clean out your notebooks. Delete, combine, archive, and reorganize.
- I keep OneNote open all the time on my desktop, so it is ready to go to lookup or add any info.
- Tags help you find existing notes. They can narrow down what you see in a particular folder or show you all notes tagged with a common theme across multiple folders.
- You can have too many tags. The more you add tags, the sloppier they can get. From time to time, cull your tags and look for near-duplicates or unused tags.
- When something comes to mind you want to write down but you're seriously rushed, dictate. Most smartphones have a speech-to-text function. Start a new note, press the microphone icon on the keyboard, and speak whatever you want to write down. Alternatively, you can record a voice memo and transcribe it later.
- I create Sections that use the same name as my Browser Bookmarks and eMail Folders.

Additional Links and Information

Carondelet Tech Help Resources: <https://carondeletvillage.org/tech-help-resources/>
Questions or comments can be sent to TCKreuzer@gmail.com