

THE PRACTICAL

NotebookLM Guidebook

Research smarter. Learn faster. Build source-grounded AI workflows.

2026 PROFESSIONAL EDITION

A beginner-to-advanced handbook for students, educators, researchers, professionals and teams. Includes workflows, prompt templates, classroom use cases, research methods, privacy guidance and quick-reference checklists.

Prepared as a practical guide • Verified against official Google documentation • August 2026

About This Guide

PRACTICAL • SOURCE-GROUNDED • CLASSROOM-READY

NotebookLM is Google's AI-powered research assistant designed around sources that you provide or discover. This guide focuses on practical use: how to organize notebooks, select sources, ask better questions, generate learning artifacts and verify AI outputs.

Important

Product features, plan limits and availability can change. The factual feature descriptions in this edition were checked against official Google NotebookLM Help and Google product documentation in August 2026.

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How to Use This Book

- Read Chapters 1-5 if you are completely new to NotebookLM.
- Jump to Chapters 8-14 for prompt templates and research workflows.
- Educators should focus on Chapters 15-17.
- Professionals and teams should focus on Chapters 18-20.
- Use the final quick-reference pages as your everyday cheat sheet.

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24 CHAPTERS + PROMPT LIBRARY

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1. What NotebookLM Is

THE CORE IDEA

NotebookLM is built around a simple principle: give AI a bounded set of sources, then ask it to help you understand, organize and transform those sources. This makes it especially useful when accuracy, traceability and context matter.

Mental model

Think of a notebook as a project room. Your sources are the evidence on the table. NotebookLM is the research assistant that reads the evidence, answers questions about it and creates useful artifacts from it.

Capability	What it means in practice
Source-grounded chat	Ask questions that are answered from selected notebook sources.
Inline citations	Jump back to supporting passages when citations are available.
Multi-format sources	Use PDFs, Docs, Slides, Sheets, Word files, PowerPoint, CSV, ePub, web pages, YouTube, audio, images and pasted text.
Artifacts	Generate study guides, audio/video overviews, flashcards, quizzes, mind maps, infographics, slide decks and reports.
Discovery	Find relevant web sources and add them to a notebook.
Multilingual support	NotebookLM supports 80+ languages.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Using only the selected sources, explain the main argument in plain English. Then list the five most important supporting points and cite the source passages for each point.

2. NotebookLM vs ChatGPT vs Gemini

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOL

Tool	Best for	Typical starting point
NotebookLM	Deep work on a defined source collection	Upload or discover source material first
ChatGPT	Broad problem-solving, writing, coding and creation	Start with a goal or question
Gemini	General Google AI assistance and multimodal tasks	Start with a prompt, file or Google ecosystem task

Rule of thumb

If the answer must stay close to a specific set of documents, NotebookLM is usually the better starting point. If you need broader ideation, coding or open-ended creation, use a general assistant.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Compare Source A and Source B. Identify agreements, contradictions, missing evidence and assumptions. Do not introduce facts that are not present in the selected sources.

3. Creating Your First Notebook

A CLEAN START MATTERS

1. Open NotebookLM and create a new notebook.
2. Give the notebook a project-specific name such as “IGCSE Physics - Waves” or “Client Website Research - Q3”.
3. Add the first set of sources. Start small and relevant rather than uploading everything.
4. Review the generated source summaries.
5. Select only the sources needed for your first question.
6. Ask a specific question and inspect the citations.

Naming convention

Use a consistent structure: [Project] - [Topic] - [Period]. Example: “Raspberry Pi Course - Sensors - 2026”.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a 10-line orientation briefing for this notebook. Explain what the sources cover, what they do not cover, and the best questions I can ask next.

4. Understanding Sources

WHAT YOU CAN ADD

Official NotebookLM documentation currently lists support for many common source types, including uploaded files, Google Drive files, websites, public YouTube videos, audio, images and copied text.

Source type	Examples / notes
Documents	PDF, DOCX, TXT, Markdown, ePub
Office/data	PPTX, CSV; Google Sheets supported with limits
Google Drive	Google Docs, Slides and Sheets
Web	Web URLs and Discover Sources results
Media	Public YouTube URLs, MP3/WAV and other audio formats
Images	Common formats such as PNG, JPEG, WebP, TIFF and HEIC
Direct text	Copied and pasted text
Gemini context	Gemini chats can be added as notebook context in supported experiences

Current standard limits

Google's FAQ lists up to 50 sources per notebook for standard access, with each source up to 500,000 words or 200 MB for local uploads. Limits vary by plan and can change.

5. Source Selection Strategy

BETTER SOURCES > MORE SOURCES

- Prefer primary sources: official documentation, policies, original research, specifications and first-party statements.
- Add high-quality secondary sources for context and interpretation.
- Avoid redundant copies of the same material.
- Use descriptive titles so you can reference sources by name in prompts.
- When a question concerns only part of the notebook, deselect unrelated sources.

Source hygiene test

Before adding a source, ask: Is it authoritative? Is it current enough? Does it directly help answer my project question? Can I legally use it?

COPY-READY PROMPT

Audit the selected sources for research quality. Group them into: primary evidence, secondary analysis, background context and weak/uncertain sources. Explain the reason for each classification.

6. Chat & Inline Citations

THE VERIFICATION LOOP

NotebookLM's strongest research pattern is question → grounded answer → citation → source inspection. Citations reduce friction when you want to verify where an answer came from, but they do not remove the need for human review.

7. Ask a narrow question.
8. Read the answer for claims and uncertainty.
9. Open supporting citations.
10. Check whether the cited text really supports the claim.
11. Ask a follow-up that challenges the answer or requests missing evidence.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Answer the question using only the selected sources. For each major claim, identify the supporting source. If the sources do not provide enough evidence, explicitly say “insufficient evidence” and explain what is missing.

7. Notes and Knowledge Capture

TURN RESEARCH INTO A SYSTEM

Use notes to preserve important findings, decisions, quotations you are allowed to retain, project questions and follow-up tasks. A clean note system prevents your notebook from becoming a collection of one-off chats.

- Create one note for key findings.
- Create one note for unresolved questions.
- Create one note for decisions or conclusions.
- Use consistent headings and dates.
- Periodically convert chat insights into durable notes.

Important limitation

Google's FAQ currently says deleted notes cannot be recovered, so avoid using NotebookLM as the only copy of critical project notes.

8. Prompting NotebookLM Effectively

A SIMPLE PROMPT FORMULA

Element	Question to answer
Task	What should NotebookLM do?
Scope	Which selected sources or sections should it use?
Audience	Who is the output for?
Depth	Overview, detailed analysis or expert-level?
Format	Table, outline, briefing, questions, lesson plan?
Evidence rule	Should it cite every claim or flag missing evidence?

COPY-READY PROMPT

TASK: Teach me the concept of [topic].

SCOPE: Use only [source names].

AUDIENCE: Beginner student.

DEPTH: Build from basic idea to exam-level understanding.

FORMAT: Explanation → worked example → common mistakes → 5 practice questions.

EVIDENCE: Cite the source for each key definition or rule.

9. Summarisation Prompts

FROM “SUMMARIZE” TO USEFUL OUTPUT

Executive summary

PROMPT

Summarize the selected sources for a busy executive. Give the objective, major findings, risks, decisions required and next actions.

Student summary

PROMPT

Summarize this chapter for a Year 9 student. Use simple language, define key terms and end with five recall questions.

Technical summary

PROMPT

Summarize the technical architecture, dependencies, assumptions, constraints and failure points described in these sources.

Meeting summary

PROMPT

Turn these meeting notes into decisions, action items, owners, deadlines, unresolved issues and follow-ups.

Evidence summary

PROMPT

Summarize only claims that are supported by at least one selected source. Flag disputed or unsupported claims separately.

10. Deep-Learning Prompts

TEACH, TEST, CORRECT, RETEST

COPY-READY PROMPT

Teach me [topic] in four levels: (1) child-friendly intuition, (2) school-level explanation, (3) technical explanation, (4) advanced implications. Use examples only from the selected sources.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a Socratic lesson. Ask me one question at a time, wait for my answer, then explain what I got right or wrong using the sources before asking the next question.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Identify the prerequisite concepts I need before learning [topic]. Build a 7-day learning sequence using the selected materials.

Learning principle

The best NotebookLM study workflow is iterative: explanation → retrieval practice → feedback → targeted re-study → retest.

11. Comparison & Synthesis Prompts

FIND PATTERNS ACROSS SOURCES

COPY-READY PROMPT

Compare [Source A], [Source B] and [Source C] in a table. Use rows for objectives, methods, evidence, conclusions, limitations and disagreements.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Synthesize the selected sources into one coherent explanation. Clearly distinguish consensus, minority positions and unresolved questions.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a contradiction map. List every meaningful point where the sources disagree, then explain what evidence would be needed to resolve each disagreement.

12. Research & Discover Sources

BUILD A BETTER SOURCE SET

NotebookLM can discover relevant sources from the web based on a research description, present recommendations and let you add selected results to the notebook.



Illustration: NotebookLM “Discover Sources” workflow (Google product blog).

12. Write a focused research question.
13. Use Discover Sources to identify candidate material.
14. Review the recommendation summaries before adding them.
15. Prefer authoritative and primary sources.
16. Ask NotebookLM to identify gaps in the source set.

COPY-READY PROMPT

What evidence is missing from my current notebook to answer this research question confidently: [question]? List the missing source types I should look for, ranked by importance.

13. Audio and Video Overviews

LEARN BY LISTENING AND WATCHING

Audio Overviews transform notebook material into an AI-generated spoken discussion. Video Overviews create a visual/narrated treatment of source material where available. These are useful for orientation, revision and accessibility, but should not be treated as replacements for checking the original sources.

- Use Audio Overviews for commutes, revision and first-pass comprehension.
- Use Video Overviews when visual structure helps explain a topic.
- Give the generated overview a clear focus rather than asking it to cover everything.
- Return to citations and original sources for exact wording, numbers and definitions.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create an overview focused on the three concepts students are most likely to misunderstand. Use one concrete example for each and finish with a short recap.

14. Study Artifacts

FLASHCARDS • QUIZZES • MIND MAPS • INFOGRAPHICS • SLIDES

Artifact	Best use
Flashcards	Definitions, formulas, vocabulary and recall
Quizzes	Retrieval practice and self-testing
Mind Maps	Relationships, systems and concept structure
Infographics	Visual summaries and high-level communication
Slide Decks	Teaching, briefings and presentations
Reports / Study Guides	Structured synthesis and revision

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create 30 flashcards from the selected sources. Prioritize concepts that are central, commonly confused or necessary for later topics. Avoid trivial facts.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a 20-question quiz with 10 easy, 7 medium and 3 challenging questions. Provide answers and a short explanation for each answer.

15. NotebookLM for Teachers

FROM SOURCE PACK TO LESSON PACKAGE

Teachers can use a notebook as a controlled content environment: syllabus + textbook excerpts + teacher notes + past papers + mark schemes + approved websites.

17. Build the source pack.
18. Ask for a syllabus map and prerequisite analysis.
19. Generate a lesson outline.
20. Create differentiated questions.
21. Generate a quiz or flashcards.
22. Ask for common misconceptions.
23. Create revision material and an audio overview.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Act as an experienced teacher. Using only the selected sources, create a 60-minute lesson plan for [topic] and [age/level]. Include objectives, starter activity, explanation, worked examples, guided practice, independent practice, misconceptions, assessment checks and homework.

16. NotebookLM for Students

A STUDY ASSISTANT, NOT A SHORTCUT

- Use it to explain difficult notes in simpler language.
- Ask for retrieval questions before reading the answer.
- Compare your own answer with the source evidence.
- Create flashcards only after understanding the topic.
- Use citations to return to the textbook or notes.
- Ask for a study plan based on your weak areas.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Do not give me the answer immediately. Ask me five diagnostic questions about [topic]. Based on my answers, identify my weak areas and then teach only those areas using the selected sources.

Academic integrity

Follow your school or institution's rules. NotebookLM can help you study and organize evidence, but submitted work should reflect your own thinking and comply with assessment policies.

17. Exam and Revision Workflows

A REPEATABLE 5-STEP SYSTEM

24. Upload syllabus, notes, past papers and mark schemes you are allowed to use.
25. Ask for a topic checklist linked to the syllabus.
26. Generate diagnostic questions.
27. Study weak topics with source-grounded explanations.
28. Retest with exam-style questions and evaluate your reasoning.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Analyze the selected past papers and mark schemes. Identify recurring concepts, command words and common marking requirements. Do not predict exact future questions; instead identify recurring skills and topic emphasis.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a revision checklist for [exam]. Divide it into Must Know, Should Know and Extension. For each item, point to the most relevant selected source.

18. Business & Professional Workflows

FROM DOCUMENT PILE TO DECISION SUPPORT

Workflow	Example output
Policy analysis	Requirements, obligations, gaps and actions
Client discovery	Needs, constraints, risks and open questions
Project onboarding	Architecture overview, dependencies and terminology
Meeting intelligence	Decisions, action items and unresolved points
Competitive research	Evidence-based comparison across selected sources
Due diligence	Claim verification and evidence gaps

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a decision brief for management from the selected sources. Include: issue, evidence, options, trade-offs, risks, recommendation, assumptions and unanswered questions. Cite every factual claim.

19. SEO & Content Research

SOURCE-GROUNDED CONTENT PLANNING

NotebookLM is useful for organizing a content research corpus, especially when you want to synthesize official product information, customer documentation, industry references and your own content standards.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Using only these sources, identify the main user questions, terminology, problems, objections and decision criteria related to [topic]. Group them by search intent: informational, commercial, transactional and navigational.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a content brief for [keyword/topic]. Include audience, search intent, key questions, required evidence, suggested H2/H3 structure, source-backed claims, gaps requiring further research and FAQ ideas.

SEO caution

NotebookLM can help synthesize evidence, but keyword volume, rankings and live SERP conditions require fresh SEO data from dedicated tools or web research.

20. Reports, Briefings and Presentations

STRUCTURE BEFORE STYLE

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a professional report from the selected sources. Structure: executive summary, objectives, methodology/source scope, key findings, evidence, risks, recommendations, implementation priorities and conclusion. Clearly mark any statements that are inference rather than directly stated in the sources.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Turn the report into a 12-slide executive presentation. Each slide should have one message, 3-5 supporting bullets and a note identifying which sources support the slide.

COPY-READY PROMPT

Create a one-page briefing note for a non-technical decision maker. Keep technical terms only when necessary and define them in plain English.

21. Sharing & Public Notebooks

SHARE WITH INTENT

NotebookLM supports notebook sharing, including public notebooks in supported accounts. Viewers can interact with shared material and generated artifacts according to the access model.

- Review every source before sharing.
- Assume shared viewers may be able to inspect notebook materials beyond the initial chat view.
- Do not publish copyrighted or confidential material without permission.
- Use public notebooks for curated learning collections, onboarding packs and public research resources.

Sharing principle

Treat a shared notebook like a shared folder plus AI interface: curate it carefully before giving access.

22. Privacy, Copyright & Responsible Use

KNOW WHAT YOU ARE UPLOADING

Google states that NotebookLM content is not used to directly train foundational AI models unless a user chooses to provide feedback. Feedback can include associated prompts, sources and outputs and may be reviewed under Google's feedback process. Workspace and Education protections differ and are described in Google's official terms.

Check	Good practice
Confidentiality	Do not upload material you are not authorized to process.
Copyright	Use sources you have rights or permission to use.
Feedback	Avoid including confidential data when submitting product feedback.
Verification	Check critical outputs against the original sources.
Public sharing	Review access and source visibility before publishing a notebook.

For organizations

If you use NotebookLM with work or school accounts, check your administrator's policies and the applicable Google Workspace / Education / Cloud terms.

23. Limits, Troubleshooting & Best Practices

DESIGN AROUND THE BOUNDARIES

Current standard-access limits listed by Google include 100 notebooks per user, up to 50 sources per notebook, 50 chat queries per day and 3 audio generations per day. Higher access tiers can increase these limits. Limits are subject to change.

Problem	What to try
Import fails	Check file size, word count, copy protection and supported format.
Weak answer	Narrow the source selection and make the question more specific.
Missing citation	Ask for claim-level evidence; very short sources may be referenced more broadly.
Conflicting sources	Ask for a contradiction table and separate evidence from interpretation.
Notebook too broad	Split by project or topic; notebooks do not reason across multiple notebooks simultaneously.
Mobile feature missing	Try the desktop/web version; mobile feature support can differ.

24. Quick-Reference Prompt Library

30 PROMPTS TO COPY AND ADAPT

01. Explain

Explain [topic] using only the selected sources. Start with a simple analogy, then give the technical explanation and three examples.

02. Deep learn

Teach [topic] progressively from beginner to advanced. Check my understanding after each section.

03. Summarize

Summarize the sources into key ideas, evidence, risks and actions.

04. Compare

Compare the selected sources by claims, evidence, assumptions, limitations and conclusions.

05. Brainstorm

Based only on the constraints and evidence in these sources, brainstorm 20 possible solutions and rank them by feasibility.

06. Rewrite

Rewrite this note for [audience] while preserving all source-supported facts and removing unsupported claims.

07. Questions

Generate 15 high-value questions that a careful reader should ask after reviewing these sources.

08. Gaps

What information is missing or uncertain in the selected sources?

09. Timeline

Build a chronological timeline of events and cite the source for each event.

10. Glossary

Create a glossary of technical terms with source-grounded definitions.

11. FAQ

Create a 20-question FAQ based on recurring issues in the sources.

12. Lesson

Create a lesson plan with objectives, examples, practice and assessment.

13. Quiz

Create a mixed-difficulty quiz with answers and explanations.

14. Flashcards

Create concise flashcards focused on high-value recall.

15. Misconceptions

Identify likely misconceptions and correct them with evidence.

16. Study plan

Create a 7-day study plan using these sources.

17. Executive brief

Create a one-page executive brief with decisions required.

18. Risk review

Identify operational, technical, legal or project risks mentioned or implied by the sources. Label inference clearly.

19. Action plan

Turn the findings into prioritized actions: Now, Next, Later.

20. Meeting notes

Extract decisions, tasks, owners, dates and unresolved questions.

21. Requirements

Convert the selected documents into a structured requirements list.

22. Architecture

Explain the system architecture, components, data flow and dependencies.

23. Research map

Group the sources by themes and explain how the themes connect.

24. Contradictions

List source contradictions and possible reasons for each.

25. Evidence table

Create a claim-evidence table with claim, source, support level and caveats.

26. Content brief

Create an evidence-backed content brief for [audience/topic].

27. Report

Write a professional report with findings, evidence, recommendations and limitations.

28. Slides

Convert the selected sources into a 10-slide presentation outline.

29. Audio focus

Create an overview focused on the hardest concepts and common misunderstandings.

30. Quality check

Audit your previous answer for unsupported claims, missing context, ambiguity and overconfidence. Correct it using the sources.

NotebookLM Workflow Cheat Sheet

THE 8-STEP METHOD

Step	Action	Outcome
1	Define	Write one clear project question.
2	Collect	Add authoritative, relevant sources.
3	Organize	Label, rename and deselect irrelevant sources.
4	Orient	Ask for a source map and key themes.
5	Interrogate	Ask narrow questions and demand evidence.
6	Verify	Open citations and inspect originals.
7	Transform	Create notes, reports, quizzes, slides or overviews.
8	Review	Audit the output for unsupported claims and gaps.

Best single prompt

Using only the selected sources, answer my question with claim-level evidence. Separate facts, interpretations and assumptions. Flag missing or conflicting evidence instead of guessing.

Official Sources Used for This Edition

VERIFIED AUGUST 2026

Official reference	Location
NotebookLM Help - Learn about NotebookLM	support.google.com/notebooklm/answer/16164461
NotebookLM Help - Create a notebook	support.google.com/notebooklm/answer/16206563
NotebookLM Help - Add or discover sources	support.google.com/notebooklm/answer/16215270
NotebookLM Help - Frequently asked questions	support.google.com/notebooklm/answer/16269187
NotebookLM Help - Privacy and Terms of Use	support.google.com/notebooklm/answer/17004255
NotebookLM Help - Work or school Google accounts	support.google.com/notebooklm/answer/16337734
NotebookLM Help - Public and featured notebooks	support.google.com/notebooklm/answer/16322204
Google Product Blog - Discover Sources	blog.google/innovation-and-ai/models-and-research/google-labs/notebooklm-discover-sources/

Because NotebookLM evolves quickly, check the official Help Center for the newest limits, availability and account-specific features before publishing policies or training material based on this guide.

End note

The most effective use of NotebookLM is not “ask AI for an answer.” It is: build a strong evidence set → ask a precise question → inspect the evidence → transform verified understanding into useful work.