

Joplin for Note Taking

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Note taking is very important to me. I keep everything in my notes, from ideas for blog posts like this one, to code snippets, to web pages, to plans of never started businesses, and so much more.

The Big Three

In my electronic note taking journey, I started, like many of us, using good old Evernote. But around 2014 I got tired of the changes in the UI, and started looking elsewhere. I tried Microsoft OneNote for a while; it is weirdly OK in many ways, yet it is also so clumsy in others, that I never totally clicked in it. Being stuck in the Apple galaxy for many years, I felt in the trap of moving to Apple Notes, a major mistake.

The biggest issue with the three big note taking apps I mentioned above is always the same: export. Once you use any of these apps, migrating to another is almost impossible. The worst offender is Apple Notes, by far, which also had the worse synchronization of all, because Apple has many talents, but iCloud synchronization isn't one of them. The app lost many of my notes, and many of the changes I made on my notes. Infuriating.

Bear and Others

I then used Bear; I loved it and I was a paying customer of theirs for years. I truly believe that if you are working exclusively with Macs, iPads and iPhones, it is by far the best option. I know that Bear used the same synchronization engine than Apple Notes (iCloud) yet I have never had any problems with Bear. I guess they know how to use iCloud better than Apple. I stopped using Bear, though, I because I wanted a cross-platform solution for my notes.

I also tried Simplenote, Org Mode for Emacs (yes, I did try it), Boost Note, and nb. As good as they are (for example, Simplenote had the fastest and greatest synchronization engine I've seen in ages) none of these worked for me, to be honest.

Enter Joplin

And then one day in January 2017 I discovered Joplin. It was a relatively unknown project in GitHub with a few thousand followers. I installed it and tried it.

And it was love at first use.

Joplin had already all the features I wanted:

- Cross-platform: Windows, Mac and Linux.
- Markdown-based.
- For plain-text notes and to-do lists.
- Alerts for to-do items.
- Notebooks, sub-notebooks, and tags.
- Searchable.
- CTRL+P for fuzzy-searching notes, notebooks, tags...
- Note history.
- Synchronization with Dropbox (and many other cloud services and mechanisms, including plain filesystem).
- Mobile app for iOS and Android.
- Integrated note encryption.
- Themable.
- Support for math content (equations, etc).
- Browser extension for Firefox & Chrome.
- Terminal application, with an `ncurses`-like TUI, and also with a nice set of CLI options (`joplin ls`, `joplin cat abcdef123`, etc).

These days, the GitHub project has almost 24'000 followers. It has grown *tremendously*, it is fast, and I have literally left it open in the background of every computer I've used in the past 4.5 years.

The future of Joplin looks interesting; apparently they are working in their own sync server, which would be distributed as a Docker image, so that you can run it anywhere. I am sure I'm going to use it at some point.

Also, the desktop app features lots of nice new features: a spell checker; support for screenwriting with Fountain and diagramming with Mermaid; and sooo much more.

I'm grateful for this application!