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Gemini Notebook: an AI that works only from your sources

> Gemini Notebook answers from the documents you give it, with citations you can click; it still makes mistakes, so check the quoted source.

What it is

Gemini Notebook is a research tool from Google. Until July 2026 it was called NotebookLM; Google describes it as the same product under a new name, with some new features. You create a **notebook** for one topic, add your **sources** (the documents it may use), and then ask questions. Its chat answers come from those sources, not from the whole internet, and each answer carries **citations**: small numbered links that show the exact passage it used.

Sources can be PDFs, Google Docs and Slides, web pages, audio files and YouTube videos. Each notebook is separate: it cannot see what is in your other notebooks.

Think of a researcher handed one box of files and told: answer only from this box, and show me the page.

As of November 2026 (check the maker's page), it runs in a web browser and in phone apps, and notebooks also appear inside the Gemini app.

Why it matters

- Answers are tied to your documents, so you can see where each point came from and check it in seconds.
- The **Studio** panel turns sources into other formats: study guides, briefing documents, mind maps, and Audio and Video Overviews.
- An **Audio Overview** is a spoken summary, in one of four formats: a two-host deep dive, a short single-speaker brief, a critique or a debate; a **Video Overview** is a narrated slide-style video. Audio Overviews can be made in more than 80 languages.
- A **mind map** is a branching diagram of the main topics; you can click a branch to ask about it.
- Google states that answers can still be wrong, and that Audio and Video Overviews "may contain inaccuracies" (Gemini Notebook Help), so the human check stays.

How to do it

1. **Check** that your organisation allows the tool and which account to use; Google says most work and school accounts have access, if the administrator turns it on.
2. **Choose** sources you are allowed to share with the tool; start with public or made-up documents (see guide 10).
3. **Create** one notebook per topic and add the sources.
4. **Select** which sources each question should use, then ask in plain words.
5. **Click** the citations behind every important point and read the original passage.
6. **Save** useful answers as notes, or create a study guide, briefing or overview in Studio.
7. **Share** carefully: viewers can read all sources and notes, editors can also change them.

Example

A team must learn a new 40-page travel and expenses policy.

Before: everyone reads it alone and asks HR the same questions.

After: one person creates a notebook with the policy and the expense form, then asks:

```
Using only these sources:
1. List the 10 rules staff most need to know, with a citation for each.
2. Write an FAQ of 8 questions a new starter would ask.
3. If the sources do not answer something, say "not in the sources".
```

The owner clicks each citation, corrects one rule that was summarised too loosely, asks HR to confirm two answers, then shares the notebook as view-only with a short Audio Overview for people who prefer to listen.

Common mistakes

- **Assuming "from your sources" means "always right".** Fix: open the citation and read the original sentence.
- **Uploading confidential files to a personal account.** Fix: use your organisation's approved account, and only the data it allows.
- **Mixing old and new versions of a document.** Fix: keep one current version per notebook and remove the rest.
- **Sharing a notebook as editor by default.** Fix: give view-only access unless someone needs to change sources.

Try it this week

1. Pick two or three public documents on one work topic, such as a published regulation or a supplier's public guide (3 minutes).
2. Create a notebook and add them (2 minutes).
3. Ask five questions you already know the answers to (5 minutes).
4. Click every citation and count how many answers were fully right (5 minutes).

Going further

- **Data use, as Google states it:** your data is not used for training unless you send feedback, and then Google may review that interaction. With a work or school account, uploads, chats and outputs are also not reviewed by people. Check your account type's terms before uploading.
- On Google Workspace, Google lists the tool as a core service on many business and education plans; it is available only if the administrator turns it on, and public link sharing is for personal accounts only.
- Ask for a briefing document from your sources, then compare it with the originals before sharing it.
- Some plans add a cloud computer per notebook that can run code for data analysis; check any numbers it produces (see guide 09).
- To compare it with other research tools, see guide 41.

Key words

- **Notebook**: a workspace for one topic, holding its sources, notes and outputs.
- **Source**: a document, web page, video or file the tool is allowed to answer from.
- **Citation**: a link from an answer to the exact passage it came from.
- **Grounded answer**: an answer built only from the sources you supplied.
- **Audio Overview**: an AI-made spoken summary of your sources.
- **Mind map**: a branching diagram of the main ideas in your sources.

Sources

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