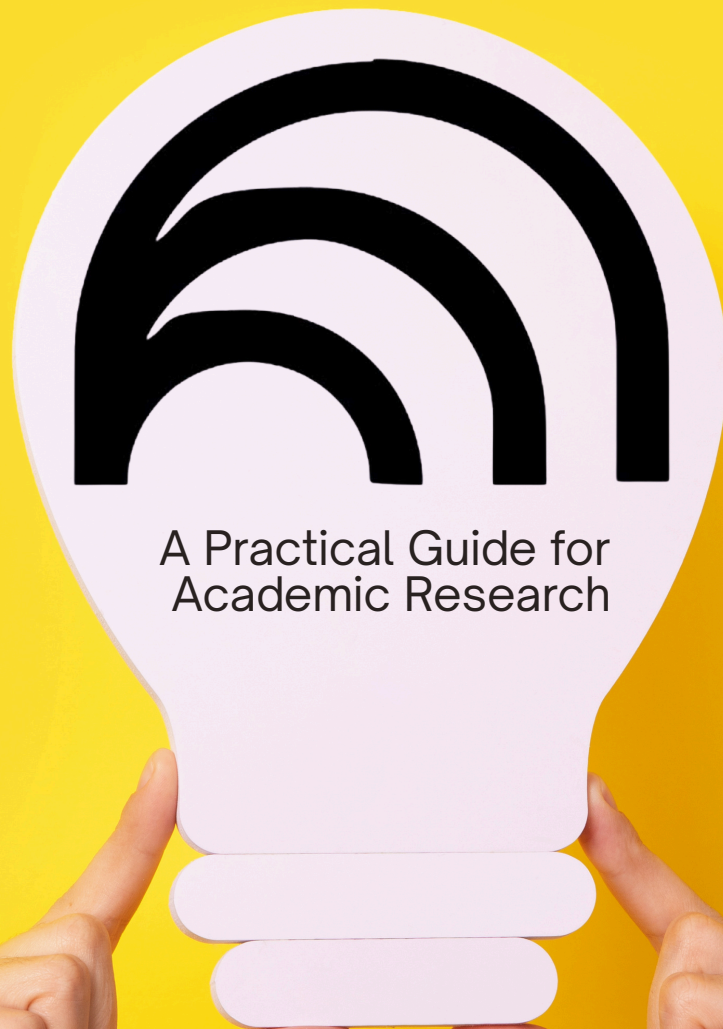




# RESEARCH SMARTER WITH NOTEBOOKLM



**Kee-Man Chuah**



**Research Smarter with**  
**NotebookLM**

*A Practical Guide for Academic Research*

**Kee-Man Chuah**

## Research Smarter with NotebookLM

*A Practical Guide for Academic Research*

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## About This Book

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Hello, and welcome! If you're holding (or reading) this guide, you're probably someone who does a lot of reading, note-taking, and research — and you've likely thought at some point: there has to be a better way.

The good news? There is. And it's called NotebookLM.

This book was written for academics — students, researchers, lecturers, and anyone else who regularly wrestles with large amounts of text. Whether you're writing a dissertation, reviewing a body of literature, or simply trying to make sense of a pile of PDFs, this guide will help you do it faster, smarter, and with far less frustration.

## What You'll Get From This Book

- A clear understanding of what NotebookLM is (and isn't)
- A step-by-step workflow you can actually use in your own research
- Practical prompting techniques for academic tasks
- Real examples, tips, and templates throughout
- Advanced techniques once you've got the basics down

## How This Book Is Structured

Think of this book as a journey. I start with the basics — what NotebookLM is, how to get set up, and how it works. From there, I build up to a full academic research workflow, then explore advanced features and real-world case studies. There's a quick-reference guide at the back for when you want to look something up without re-reading the whole book.

You can read it cover to cover, or jump straight to the chapter that's most relevant to you right now. Either way, I'd recommend at least skimming Chapter 3 — The Smart Research Workflow — as it gives you a mental model that makes everything else click into place.

### Remember

NotebookLM is a free tool from Google. All you need is a Google account to get started. No credit card, no special software.

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# Introduction

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## Why Your Research Workflow Needs an Upgrade

*"The library of the future will not be a place you go. It will be a tool you carry."*

— paraphrased from Jorge Luis Borges

Let's be honest for a moment. Research, as most of us learned it, is a bit of a slog.

You download twenty papers. You open them all. You start reading the first one, highlight a few bits, then get distracted by a footnote that leads you to another paper. Three hours later, you have a dozen tabs open, a few scattered notes, and only a vague sense of what you've actually learned. Sound familiar?

## Enter NotebookLM

NotebookLM is Google's AI-powered research and note-taking tool. Unlike general AI chatbots (which answer from their broader training data), NotebookLM is entirely grounded in the sources you provide. It reads your documents, and only your documents. That distinction matters enormously for academic work, because it means NotebookLM won't make things up or pull in information you didn't ask for.

## What This Guide Will Change

By the end of this guide, you'll have a complete research workflow that helps you:

**1**

### **Ingest sources quickly**

Upload papers, articles, and notes in minutes — not hours of reading.

**2**

### **Understand faster**

Ask questions and get clear, sourced answers from your own materials.

**3**

### **Synthesise smarter**

Find connections, contradictions, and patterns across multiple sources.

**4**

### **Write with confidence**

Turn your notebook outputs into strong first drafts and literature reviews.

This isn't about replacing your thinking — it's about freeing you up to do more of it. The reading, questioning, and critical analysis still has to come from you. NotebookLM just handles the heavy lifting.

Right. Let's get into it.

## CHAPTER 1

# What Is NotebookLM?

### *And why it's not just another AI chatbot*

If you've used ChatGPT or any other AI assistant, your first instinct might be to treat NotebookLM the same way — type a question, get an answer. That works, but it undersells what NotebookLM actually is.

The key difference is this: NotebookLM (<https://notebooklm.google/>) is source-grounded. Every answer it gives you comes directly from the documents in your notebook. It won't pull from the internet. It won't guess. If the answer isn't in your sources, it will tell you so.

## The Source-Grounded Difference

Imagine you're researching climate adaptation strategies in coastal communities. You upload twelve journal articles and three government reports. Now, when you ask NotebookLM "What are the most commonly cited barriers to adaptation?", it won't give you a generic internet answer — it will synthesise the answer from those fifteen specific sources, with citations.

That's enormously useful when you need to be sure your work is actually grounded in your chosen literature.

### Pro Tip

NotebookLM cites the specific source and even the section it's drawing from. You can click through to verify instantly. This alone saves hours of reference-checking.

## Core Features at a Glance

Here's a quick overview of what NotebookLM can do — I'll go much deeper on each of these throughout the book.

| Feature        | What It Does                        | Most Useful For               |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Chat Interface | Ask questions about your sources    | Quick lookups, clarifications |
| Source Panel   | Manage your uploaded documents      | Staying organised             |
| Notes          | Save AI responses as reusable notes | Building your argument        |
| Study Guide    | Auto-generate quizzes and summaries | Exam prep, revision           |

| Feature        | What It Does  | Most Useful For                      |
|----------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Briefing Doc   | Get an overview of your whole notebook                                    | Starting a new project               |
| Audio Overview | Listen to a podcast-style summary — and join in with the Interactive Mode | Commuting, revision, active review   |
| Mind Map       | Visual overview of key topics   | Spotting connections                 |
| Infographic    | Generate a designed visual summary of your sources                        | Posters, one-pagers, social sharing  |
| Slide Deck     | Create a full presentation directly from your sources                     | Conferences, seminars, teaching      |
| Data Table     | Synthesise information into a structured comparison table                 | Comparing sources, features, studies |

## What NotebookLM Is NOT

Knowing the limits is just as important as knowing the features. Here's what NotebookLM won't do:

### Watch Out

NotebookLM does not browse the internet. It cannot add new sources on its own. It cannot write your full paper for you — and you wouldn't want it to. And it cannot replace your own critical analysis and academic judgement.

I'll talk more about these limitations in Chapter 13. For now, the important thing is to think of NotebookLM as a tool for understanding and organising information, not generating it from scratch.

## Who Is It For?

NotebookLM works brilliantly for a wide range of academic users:

- Undergraduate students tackling their first dissertation
- Postgraduate researchers managing large bodies of literature
- Lecturers preparing reading materials or course notes
- Research assistants conducting systematic literature reviews
- Independent scholars keeping on top of a fast-moving field

Whether you have five sources or five hundred, NotebookLM scales with you. And because it only knows what you've given it, your work stays relevant to your specific research questions.

## A Brief History (and Why It Matters)

NotebookLM launched in 2023 as an experimental Google product originally called Project Tailwind. It was designed from the beginning with one goal: help people get more out of their documents. Since then, it has evolved significantly, adding features like Audio Overviews, mind maps, and multi-source synthesis.

Unlike many AI tools that were built as general-purpose assistants and then adapted for research, NotebookLM was built for this kind of work from day one. That intentionality shows in the details.

### Remember

NotebookLM is available at [notebooklm.google.com](https://notebooklm.google.com) — it's free and requires only a Google account. If you're at a university that uses Google Workspace, your institutional account will work too.

## CHAPTER 2

# Getting Set Up

### *Your first notebook in 10 minutes*

Right then — let's actually do something. This chapter walks you through everything you need to get started, from logging in to uploading your first sources. By the end of it, you'll have a working notebook ready to go.

### Step 1: Getting In

Head to <https://notebooklm.google.com>. You'll be prompted to log in with your **Google account**. Once you're in, you'll land on the main dashboard — a clean screen that shows any notebooks you've created (it'll be empty for now) and a button to create a new one.

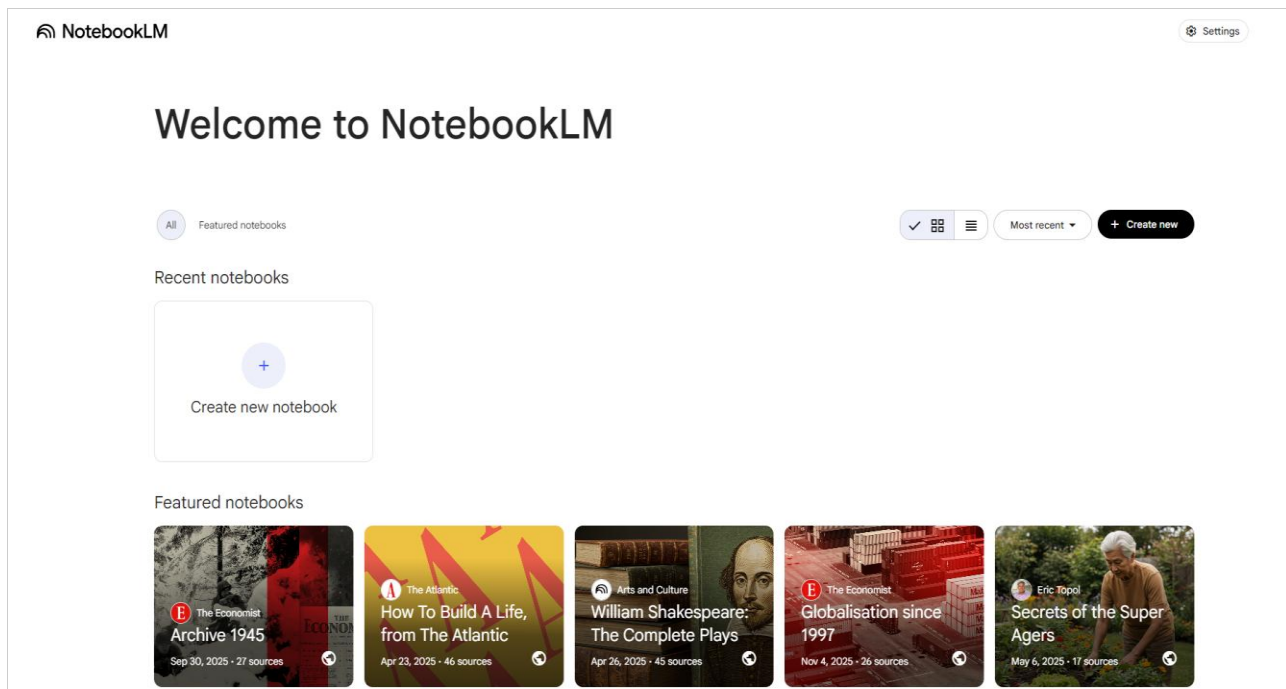


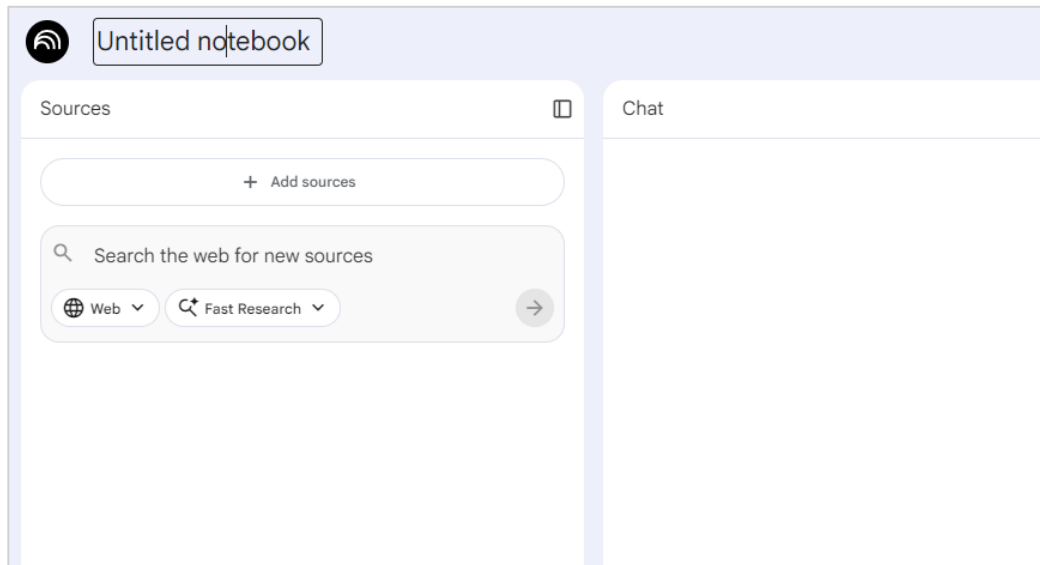
Figure 1: The NotebookLM dashboard — your central hub for all notebooks

#### Pro Tip

Use a browser like Chrome for the best experience. NotebookLM works on mobile too with its own app, but for serious research work, a laptop or desktop is much more comfortable as the screen is larger for viewing.

## Step 2: Creating Your First Notebook

Click the big "+ **Create New Notebook**" button. Give your notebook a meaningful name — something specific enough that you'll know what it's about in three months' time. "Literature Review" is too vague. "Lite Review of Climate Adaptation" is perfect.

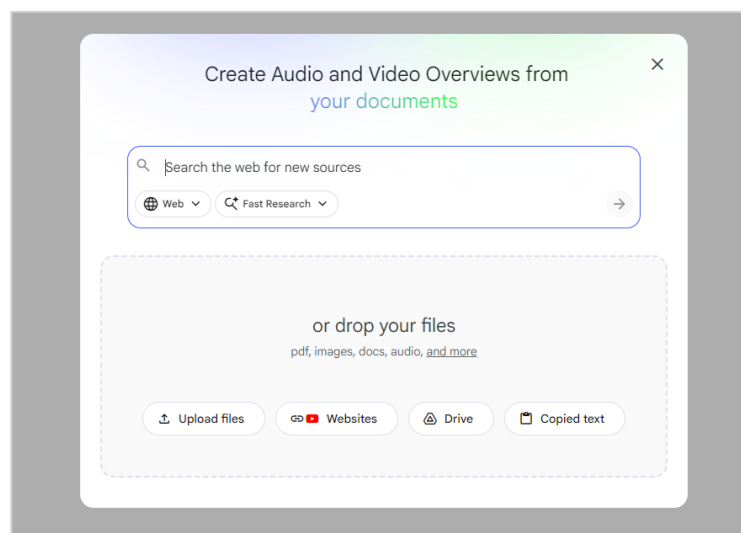


*The blank Notebook*

Think of each notebook as a separate research project or a different part of your writing. If you're working on multiple topics, create a separate notebook for each one. NotebookLM searches within a single notebook, so mixing sources from unrelated projects will muddy your results.

## Step 3: Adding Sources

Once you're inside a notebook, you'll see a Sources panel on the left. This is where everything lives. Click "Add Source" and you'll see a range of options:



*The upload options*

1. Upload a PDF, Word document, or text file from your computer
2. Paste in a URL from a website or online article
3. Copy and paste text directly
4. Add a Google Doc or Google Slide from your Drive
5. Add a YouTube video (NotebookLM will read the transcript)

For academic research, you'll mostly be uploading PDFs of journal articles, book chapters, and research reports. NotebookLM handles these beautifully, even scanned PDFs with OCR text.

### Pro Tip

NotebookLM supports up to **50 sources per notebook** (for free account users) and up to 25 million words of content. That's more than enough for most research projects — but for very large systematic reviews, you may want to split your sources across themed notebooks. For Pro users, you get to upload up to 300 sources per notebook.

## Step 4: Let NotebookLM Get to Work

Once you upload a source, NotebookLM processes it — this usually takes a few seconds to a minute depending on the file size. You'll see a small spinner next to the source name while it's working. When it's done, the source is ready to be queried.

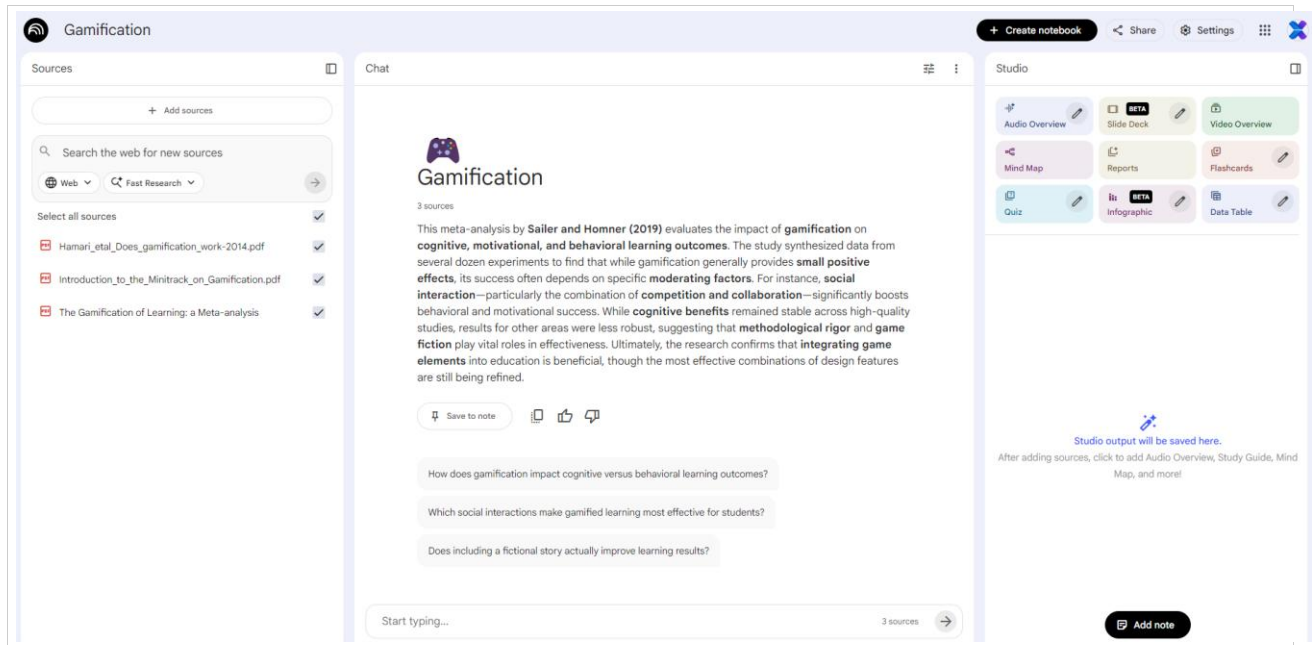
You'll also notice that NotebookLM often generates a short automatic summary of each source as it's uploaded. This is a handy first pass, but don't rely on it too heavily — we'll talk about how to get much richer outputs in later chapters.

## The Interface at a Glance

Here's a quick tour of the three main areas you'll use:

| Area           | Where It Is   | What You Do Here                                  |
|----------------|---------------|---|
| Sources Panel  | Left sidebar  | Add, manage, and select which sources are active  |
| Chat Interface | Centre panel  | Ask questions and get AI responses                |
| Studio Panel   | Right sidebar | Generate different content based on your sources. |

You can resize these panels by dragging the dividers — useful if you want more space for reading the chat or the notes. And you can close any panel you don't need for a cleaner working view.



The three-panel notebook interface — Sources (left), Chat (centre), Studio (right)

## Your Setup Checklist

Before you move on to the next chapter, make sure you've done all of the following:

- Created a Google account (or confirmed your existing one works)
- Logged into notebooklm.google.com
- Created at least one notebook with a clear, specific name
- Uploaded at least one source document
- Waited for the source to finish processing
- Asked one test question in the chat — just to see how it feels

### Your Very First Prompts — Try These Now

*"Give me a one-paragraph summary of this source. What is the central argument and what evidence does the author use?"*

*"What are the three most important points in this document?"*

*"Is there anything in this source that directly addresses [your research question]? Quote the relevant section."*

*"What questions does this source raise that it does not answer?"*

## CHAPTER 3

# The Smart Research Workflow

---

*The approach that changes everything*

Most people approach NotebookLM the same way they approach Google — type something, see what comes back, repeat. That works, but you're leaving most of the value on the table.

This chapter introduces the Smart Research Workflow, a five-stage approach designed specifically for academic research. Master this, and NotebookLM becomes something genuinely powerful.

*"The quality of your output is determined by the quality of your process, not the sophistication of your tools."*

## The Five Stages

1

### **GATHER — Collect and organise your sources**

Before you do anything else, assemble the materials relevant to your research question. Don't start querying until you've uploaded everything you intend to use for that particular project.

2

### **ORIENT — Get the lay of the land**

Use the Briefing Doc feature to get a high-level overview. This one way to understand what's in your notebook before you start asking detailed questions.

3

### **QUERY — Ask targeted, specific questions**

Move from broad overviews to specific, focused questions. Use the prompting techniques in Chapter 5 to get genuinely useful, nuanced responses.

4

### **SYNTHESISE — Connect and compare across sources**

Ask NotebookLM to identify agreements, contradictions, and gaps across your sources. This is where the real intellectual work happens.

5

### **PRODUCE — Build your notes and draft your output**

Save key responses as notes, organise them into an argument structure, and use them as the scaffold for your actual writing.

## Why Sequence Matters

The temptation is to skip ahead, to start querying before you've finished uploading, or to jump straight to writing before you've properly synthesised. Resist this. The workflow is designed the way it is for a reason.

If you start querying before all your sources are in, your synthesis will be incomplete and you'll likely have to repeat it. If you skip the Orient stage, you'll be asking questions without a proper sense of what's in your notebook — which means you'll miss things.

## Applying the Workflow: A Quick Example

Let's say you're researching the impact of social media on adolescent mental health. Here's what the workflow looks like in practice:

### Stage 1: Gather

You upload fifteen journal articles, two systematic reviews, two government reports, and a set of lecture notes. You give them meaningful names as you go. Your notebook is now your library for this project.

### Stage 2: Orient

You generate a Briefing Doc. NotebookLM gives you a four-paragraph overview of the key themes, major debates, and frequently cited authors across all your sources. Within five minutes, you know what's in your notebook.

The Briefing Doc can be found under Reports (Studio panel) but you can also prompt it directly in the chat box. It will then be generated on the right panel.

### Prompt to create briefing docs

"Generate briefing docs for all sources."

The screenshot shows a report interface in NotebookLM Studio. At the top, it says 'Studio > Report'. The report title is 'Research Briefing: Empirical Evidence and Effectiveness of Gamification', based on 3 sources. The content includes a section for '1. Source Analysis 1: "Does Gamification Work? — A Literature Review" (Hamari et al., 2014)', followed by 'Core Argument and Objectives' and 'The Theoretical Framework'. The 'Core Argument and Objectives' section states that the literature review seeks to synthesize early peer-reviewed empirical research to establish a coherent understanding of gamification's effectiveness, noting that while it generally shows positive trends, these are not universal and are contingent on implementation context and user characteristics. The 'Theoretical Framework' section explains that the study uses a three-part framework from Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Information Systems (IS) literature, incorporating Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to examine how design elements satisfy psychological needs to drive behavior. A 'Motivational Affordance' section defines it as specific game-like design elements implemented within a service to facilitate a gameful experience.

*Example of briefing doc for each source*

### Stage 3: Query

You start asking targeted questions: "What study designs are most common in this literature?" and "Which studies focus specifically on girls aged 13–16?" and "What do the systematic reviews conclude about causation?"

### Stage 4: Synthesise

You ask comparison questions: "Which sources argue that social media has a net negative effect, and which argue it's more nuanced? What's the key point of disagreement?" NotebookLM maps the debate for you, with citations.

### Stage 5: Produce

You save the most useful responses as notes. You organise those notes into a rough outline for your literature review. You now have a structured starting point for your actual writing.

#### Pro Tip

Keep a running document alongside NotebookLM where you record your own thoughts, questions, and emerging arguments. NotebookLM is brilliant at summarising and synthesising — but your original insights are yours. Don't let them get lost.

## Time Estimates (Realistic Ones)

One of the things people are often surprised by is how much time this workflow actually saves. Here's a rough comparison:

| Task                                  | Traditional Approach       | With NotebookLM Workflow              |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Reading 15 papers for key themes      | 8–12 hours                 | 2–3 hours (orient + targeted reading) |
| Building a source overview            | 3–4 hours of note-taking   | 10–15 minutes (Briefing Doc + notes)  |
| Identifying debate positions          | Hours of cross-referencing | 30–45 minutes (synthesis queries)     |
| First draft literature review outline | Half a day                 | 1–2 hours                             |

These aren't magical shortcuts. You still have to do the intellectual work. But the time spent on mechanical tasks (reading to find specific information, cross-referencing, re-reading to remember what was said) drops dramatically.

## CHAPTER 4

## Loading & Organising Your Sources

*What to upload, how to name it, and how to stay sane*

The quality of your NotebookLM experience starts with the quality of your source management. A well-organised notebook is a joy to work with. A messy one is a headache. This chapter shows you how to do it right.

### What You Can Upload

NotebookLM accepts a surprisingly wide range of formats. Here's a complete list:

| Format                         | Best For                                     | Notes  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| PDF (.pdf)                     | Journal articles, reports, book chapters     | Works best with text-based PDFs; scanned PDFs need OCR |
| Word doc (.docx)               | Drafts, notes, institutional documents       | Formatting is stripped but text is preserved           |
| Text file (.txt)               | Plain text notes, raw transcripts            | Simple and reliable                                    |
| Google Doc                     | Shared notes, collaborative documents        | Links directly from Drive; updates automatically       |
| Google Slide                   | Lecture slides, presentations                | Speaker notes are included                             |
| Web URL                        | Online articles, web pages                   | Some paywalled pages won't load                        |
| YouTube URL                    | Lectures, talks, documentaries               | Uses auto-generated transcript; quality varies         |
| Copied text                    | Quick additions, excerpts                    | Useful for short quotes or extracts                    |
| Image file (.jpg, .png, .gif)  | Screenshots, photos, scanned pages with OCR  | Visual data, handwritten notes, charts                 |
| CSV file (.csv)                | Spreadsheet data                             | Quantitative datasets, survey results                  |
| Audio/Video (.mp3, .mp4, .wav) | Recorded lectures, interviews, documentaries | Uses transcript; quality varies by audio clarity       |

Note: You are still not able to upload PowerPoint files (PPT/PPTX), so your slides have to be converted to PDF first.

## What Makes a Good Source

Not all sources are equal in NotebookLM. Here's what determines how useful a source will be:

- **Text quality** — scanned PDFs with poor OCR will produce garbled outputs. Always prefer digital text-based PDFs when available.
- **Length** — NotebookLM handles long documents well, but extremely long books may be better uploaded as individual chapters.
- **Language** — NotebookLM works in multiple languages but performs best in English.
- **Relevance** — only upload sources that are genuinely relevant to the research question for this notebook. Don't just dump everything in.

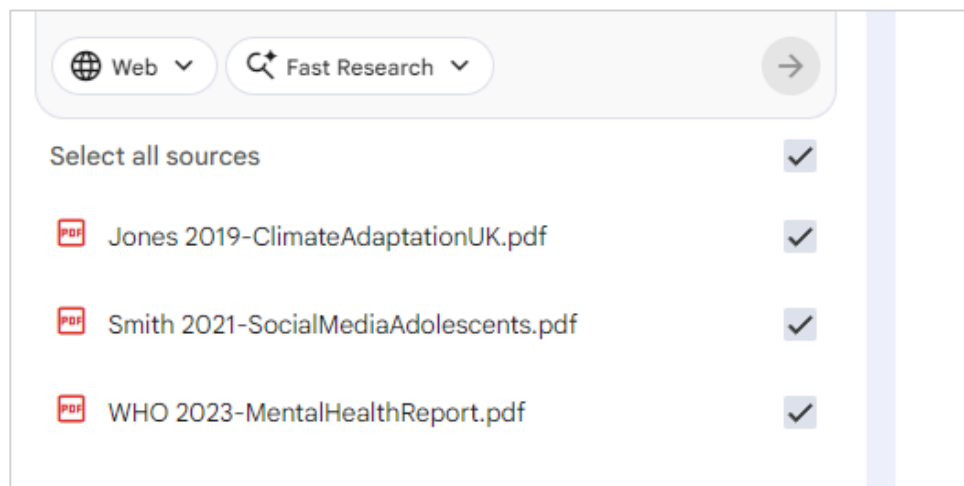
## The Naming Convention That Will Save You

By default, NotebookLM uses the original filename as the source title. If your files are named things like "download\_23847.pdf", you'll be in trouble. Rename your files before uploading — or rename them inside NotebookLM using the edit function on each source.

A good academic naming convention looks like this:

 **Recommended File Naming Format**

AuthorLastName\_Year\_ShortTitle



*Good naming convention for your sources*

This convention makes it instantly clear who wrote it, when, and what it's about. When NotebookLM cites a source in its responses, you'll see this name — so good naming means you can immediately tell what's being referenced.

## Organising Across Notebooks

One notebook, one research question. This is the golden rule. When your sources are all focused on the same topic, NotebookLM can synthesise across them meaningfully. If you mix sources from two different projects, the outputs will be confused and unreliable.

Some researchers find it helpful to create a "holding" notebook for unsorted papers, then move sources into project-specific notebooks once they're clear on where they fit.

## Selecting Which Sources Are Active

Here's a feature many beginners miss: you can choose which sources NotebookLM draws from when answering a question. In the Sources panel, each source has a checkbox. If you untick a source, it's still in your notebook but won't be included in chat responses.

This is incredibly useful for:

- Comparing specific subsets of sources side by side
- Temporarily excluding a source you suspect might be distorting results
- Focusing a query on sources from a specific time period or methodology

### Try This

Upload three papers that you suspect take different positions on a topic. Then query each one individually by keeping only that source active. Compare the responses. Then activate all three and ask NotebookLM to synthesise them. This is one of the most powerful research moves in the whole book.

## Keeping Your Sources Fresh

If you upload a Google Doc or a living document that gets updated over time, you'll need to refresh the source in NotebookLM manually — it doesn't auto-update. For PDFs, once uploaded, they're fixed — so always upload the final version of a document, not a draft.

### Remember

There's currently a limit of 50 sources per notebook. For very large projects, consider splitting by theme, time period, or methodology. This actually often improves your outputs, as the notebook stays focused.

### Source Audit Prompt — Run This After Every Upload Session

"List all the sources currently in this notebook. For each one, give me: (1) the author and year, (2) the main research question, and (3) one sentence on the key finding. Present as a numbered list."

"Are there any obvious gaps in my source collection? Based on what I have uploaded, what types of sources seem to be missing — for example, certain time periods, methodologies, or perspectives?"

“Check the sources and remove all unreliable sources”

Check the sources, and remove all unreliable ones

I have reviewed the provided sources and filtered out the unreliable ones. Here is the breakdown of the sources that have been removed from your list and the reasons why:

**1. Inaccessible, Error, or Anti-Bot Pages** These sources failed to load properly, resulting in "Access Denied," system errors, or Cloudflare bot-verification screens, meaning they contain no usable academic text:

- *Classroom Applications of Research on Self-Regulated Learning* | Scilit (Access Denied)
- *Feedback and Self-Regulated Learning: A Theoretical Synthesis* | Scilit (Access Denied)
- *Measuring self-regulated learning and the role of AI - Monash University* (Cloudflare verification loop)
- *Psychology, Developmental: Journal Rankings* | OOIR (Cloudflare verification loop)
- *Psychology, Educational: Journal Rankings* | OOIR (Cloudflare verification loop)
- *Shared Regulation in CSCL - ISLS* (Cloudflare verification loop)
- *Philip H. Winne - Google Scholar* (System error page)

**2. Predatory or Questionable Publishers** These sources belong to publishers frequently identified on academic watchlists (such as Beall's List) for lack of rigorous peer review and predatory publishing practices. (Note: The underlying articles they reference are famous and valid, but these specific publisher landing pages/citation indexes are unreliable):

*Example of source auditing. NotebookLM can help you check and remove unreliable sources*

## CHAPTER 5

# The Art of Academic Prompting

---

*Ask better questions, get better research*

Prompting is the skill that separates the researchers who get vague, generic responses from those who get targeted, genuinely useful ones. The good news is that academic prompting isn't hard — it just requires a bit of intentionality.

## The Three Pillars of a Good Academic Prompt

1

### Be specific about what you want

Vague questions get vague answers. "Tell me about climate change" will give you a broad summary. "What do my sources say about the role of sea-level rise in coastal migration in South-East Asia between 2010 and 2022?" will give you something you can actually use.

2

### Tell NotebookLM how to structure the response

Ask it to use bullet points, a table, a numbered list, or a specific format. "Give me a structured comparison table of the methodologies used in each source" is far more useful than "compare the methodologies."

3

### Ask it to cite as it goes

Always add "please cite the relevant source" or "include the source name for each point" to your prompt. This makes the output immediately verifiable and academically usable.

## Prompting Templates for Academic Research

Here are some of the most useful prompt patterns, categorised by task. You can adapt these for your own research

### For Getting an Overview



#### Orientation Prompts

"Summarise the key arguments made across all sources in this notebook. Use bullet points and cite the source for each argument."

"What are the three or four major themes that run through most of these sources? For each theme, identify which sources discuss it."

"Who are the most frequently cited authors or researchers across these sources?"

## For Deep Analysis

### Analysis Prompts

"What evidence do these sources provide for [specific claim]? Present the evidence in order of strength, with citations."

"How do [Source A] and [Source B] differ in their approach to measuring [outcome]? What might explain the difference?"

"What are the main limitations acknowledged by the authors across these sources?"

"Which sources use qualitative methods and which use quantitative? Summarise the key findings from each group."

## For Building Your Argument

### Argument-Building Prompts

"Find all evidence in my sources that supports the argument that [X]. Then find all evidence that challenges it. Present both sides with citations."

"What gaps in the literature do my sources identify? Are there research questions that remain unanswered?"

"Based solely on my sources, what would be the strongest argument for [position]? What would be the strongest counter-argument?"

## For Writing Support

### Writing Support Prompts

"Draft an introductory paragraph for a literature review on [topic], drawing only on the sources in this notebook."

"Give me five potential thesis statements for a paper on [topic] based on what my sources say. Keep each to one sentence."

"Turn these bullet points into a coherent academic paragraph: [paste your bullet points]."

## The Follow-Up Prompt — Your Secret Weapon

One of the most underused features in NotebookLM is simply asking follow-up questions. When you get a response, don't just accept it and move on. Probe deeper:

- "Which source says that most clearly?"
- "Can you give me a specific quote or data point to support that?"

- "Is there any source in my notebook that contradicts this?"
- "Can you explain that in simpler terms?"
- "Is this finding consistent across all sources, or is it from just one or two?"

Think of NotebookLM as a conversation, not a search engine. The more you push and probe, the better your outputs will be.

## What to Avoid

### Watch Out

Avoid very long, multi-part prompts that ask several different things at once. Break them into separate questions for cleaner outputs. Also avoid asking NotebookLM to give you information it doesn't have — if a topic isn't covered in your sources, it will struggle and may give you vague or unhelpful answers.

### Pro Tip

If you get a response that's too long or too broad, try adding constraints: "In no more than three bullet points" or "Focus only on studies published after 2015" or "Consider only sources that use randomised controlled trials." Constraints produce sharper outputs.

## CHAPTER 6

# Summarising & Synthesising

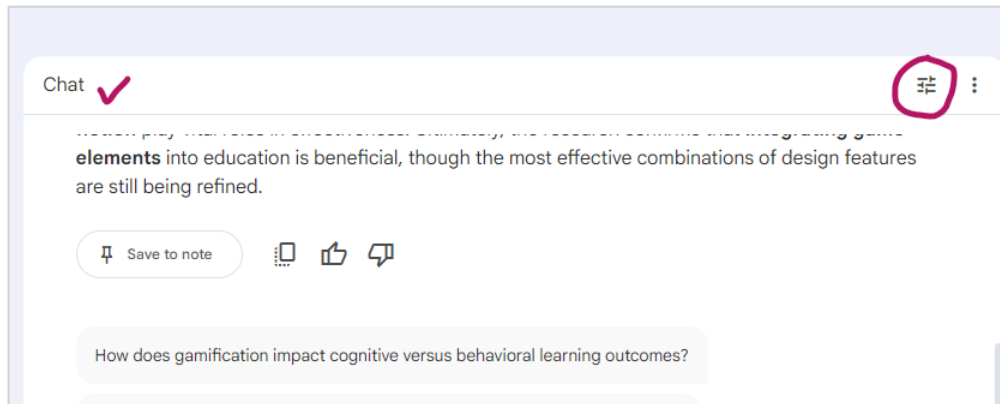
### *Making sense of your literature*

Summarisation and synthesis are not the same thing, and knowing the difference will significantly improve how you use NotebookLM.

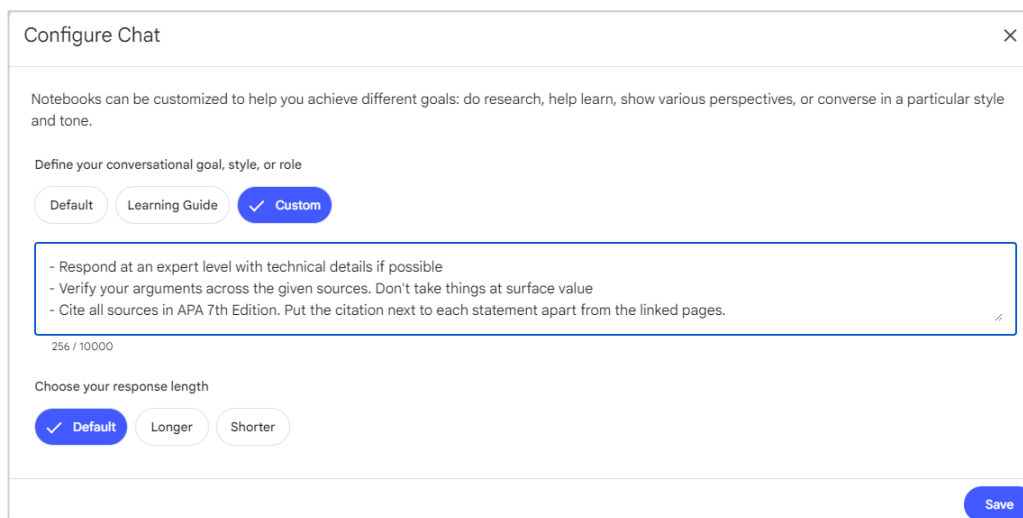
Summarisation describes what each source says. Synthesis identifies what they say together — the agreements, the tensions, the patterns, and the gaps. Good academic writing requires synthesis. NotebookLM is remarkably good at helping with both.

## Configure Your Chat

Before you start prompting for summaries or synthesis, it is important to configure your chat box to ensure that it provides quality output. Go to Configure Notebook to do this.



Choose Custom and key in the following example and save.



### The Configuration Prompt:

- Respond at an expert level with technical details if possible
- Verify your arguments across the given sources. Don't take things at surface value
- Cite all sources in APA 7th Edition. Put the citation next to each statement apart from the linked pages.

What this does is that it ensures the output is good quality at the level you want and not conversational. It also gives you the citation as required for easier identification of sources and smoother reading. You can of course customise this according to your preference. Please remember that this configuration is per notebook basis, so the other notebook may not have it configured automatically.

## Single-Source Summaries

To get a deep summary of one specific source, select only that source in the Sources panel (untick all others), then ask:

### Single-Source Summary Prompt

"Summarise this paper. Include: (1) the research question, (2) the methodology, (3) the key findings, (4) the main conclusions, and (5) any limitations the authors acknowledge."

This structured prompt gives you a ready-made abstract-style summary that you can save as a note and return to later. Do this for each of your core sources and you'll have a complete reference library within your notebook.

## Cross-Source Synthesis

This is where NotebookLM really earns its place. With all sources active, you can ask questions that cut across your entire notebook:

1. "What do all of these sources agree on?"
2. "Where do they disagree, and what's the nature of the disagreement?"
3. "Are there any findings that appear in multiple sources? Which findings appear only in one?"
4. "What theoretical frameworks are most commonly used?"
5. "How has the dominant view in this field changed over time (based on the publication dates of my sources)?"

### Pro Tip

When doing cross-source synthesis, always ask NotebookLM to include the source name for each point. This is critical for academic work — you need to know which source supports which claim before you put it in your writing.

## Building a Source Comparison Matrix

One of the most useful things you can do is generate a structured comparison of your sources. Here's a prompt that works beautifully for this:

### Comparison Matrix Prompt

"Create a comparison table of all the sources in this notebook. Columns should include: Author/Year, Research Question, Methodology, Key Finding, and Theoretical Framework. Use a table format."

Save this output as a note immediately. It becomes your at-a-glance reference for the entire literature — and it's the kind of thing that would take hours to produce manually.

## Finding the Gaps

One of the most academically valuable things NotebookLM can help with is identifying what your sources don't cover. Ask:

### Gap-Finding Prompt

"Based on my sources, what questions or areas remain underexplored? Are there populations, contexts, time periods, or methodologies that are notably absent?"

This is gold for identifying your research contribution. If all your sources focus on adults, and none look at young people — that's a gap. If all use surveys and none use ethnography — that's a methodological gap. NotebookLM will spot these patterns if you ask.

### Remember

NotebookLM can only identify gaps relative to your uploaded sources. It doesn't know what's in the wider academic literature. So while this exercise is genuinely valuable, don't treat it as a complete gap analysis — it's a starting point.

**Full Synthesis Workflow — Run These in Order**

"Step 1 — Give me a one-paragraph Briefing Doc summary of this entire notebook."

"Step 2 — What are the main themes? List them with the sources that address each one."

"Step 3 — Where do sources agree on [key topic]? Where do they disagree?"

"Step 4 — What does the strongest evidence in my sources say about [topic]? Rank the evidence by strength."

"Step 5 — What questions remain unanswered by these sources? List at least three gaps."

## CHAPTER 7

# Building Your Literature Review

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*Step by step, with NotebookLM as your research partner*

The literature review is the heart of most academic writing. It's also one of the most time-consuming, cognitively demanding parts of the research process. This chapter shows you how to use NotebookLM to make it significantly less painful without sacrificing the intellectual rigour that makes a literature review worth reading.

## What a Literature Review Actually Requires

Before we get into the NotebookLM workflow, let's be clear about what a good literature review needs to do:

- Demonstrate that you've engaged meaningfully with the relevant scholarship
- Show the development and current state of the debate in your field
- Identify where your own research fits and what gap it fills
- Use evidence to build an argument, not just describe what others have said

NotebookLM can help with all of these — but the final intellectual architecture has to come from you. What it does is remove the scaffolding work so you can focus on the thinking.

## Phase 1: Mapping the Territory

Start with the briefing doc or summaries (see Chapter 6). Then ask these mapping questions:

### Territory-Mapping Prompts

"What are the major schools of thought or theoretical positions represented in my sources?"

"How has the research focus in these sources shifted over time? What was being researched 10 years ago versus more recently?"

"Which authors are cited most frequently across these sources? Who seems to be considered foundational in this field?"

Take notes as you go. The answers to these questions will often form the skeleton of your literature review's introduction.

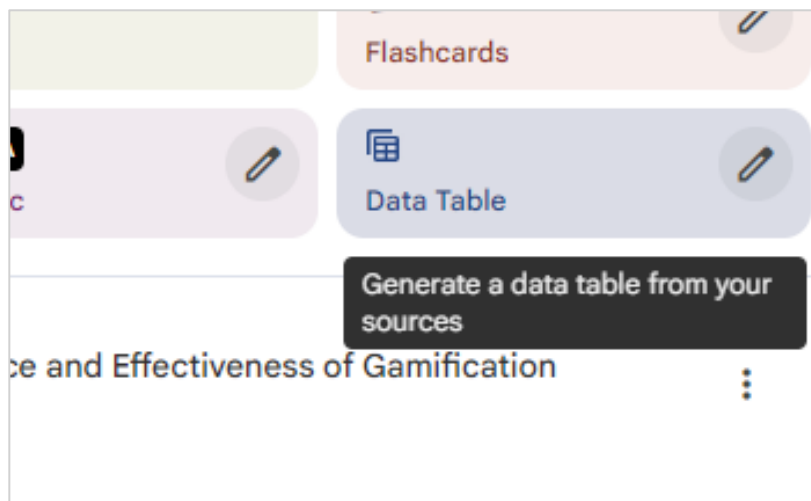
Apart from using briefing doc or summarise, you can also ask NotebookLM to generate a literature review matrix or comparison table to give you an overview of the sources you have. You have two ways to do this.

The first method is to directly prompt in the chat box as shown below: “*Produce a literature review matrix for all the articles covering key findings, implications, limitations*”. You can of course add other columns or sections as you wish (e.g., research questions, methods used, etc.).

produce a literature review matrix for all articles covering key findings, implications, limitations

| Article                    | Key Findings  | Implications   | Limitations  |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| Anthonyesamy et al. (2020) | Metacognitive knowledge ( $\beta = 0.253$ ), motivational beliefs ( $\beta = 0.251$ ), and resource management ( $\beta = 0.159$ ) significantly and positively predict digital literacy competency (Anthonyesamy et al., 2020) 1. Conversely, basic cognitive engagement strategies showed no significant relationship with digital literacy ( $\beta = 0.068$ , $p = 0.13$ ) (Anthonyesamy et al., 2020) 2 3. | To build sustainable lifelong learning, educators must cultivate students' metacognitive processes, resource management, and motivational strategies rather than relying on superficial cognitive tasks (Anthonyesamy et al., 2020) 4 5. | The study relied on purposive sampling of IT and Multimedia students from private universities in Malaysia's central region, utilized self-reported metrics, and did not examine the individual effects of specific sub-strategies within the broader domains (Anthonyesamy et al., 2020) 6 7. |
|                            | Three of four Self-Regulated Learning Strategies (SRLS) domains—cognitive engagement, resource management, and motivational beliefs—demonstrated a statistically significant positive influence on perceived learning   | Higher education institutions should establish practical guidelines for educators to foster  | The research was restricted to private universities utilizing blended learning in Malaysia, limiting generalizability: relied  |

The second method is to use the Data Table function in the Studio Panel. Click the pencil icon and provide the same prompt as above.



Data Table can also be used to extract key data or findings from each source.

## Phase 2: Identifying the Debates

Every good literature review has an argument. That argument usually centres on a debate — an area of genuine disagreement or tension in the literature. Ask:

### Debate-Identification Prompts

"What is the central debate or point of tension across my sources? Which sources take each side?"

"Are there any sources that challenge the dominant view? What is their critique?"

"What do my sources agree on? Is there any emerging consensus?"

Once you've identified the main debates, you have the thematic sections of your literature review. Each section should address one debate or theme, with sources marshalled as evidence.

## Phase 3: Building the Argument

Now you need to structure your review as an argument, not a list. Here's where NotebookLM becomes a writing partner:

### Argument-Building Prompts

"I want to argue that [your position]. Which sources support this? Which would I need to address as counter-evidence?"

"Draft a one-paragraph summary of the debate around [theme] for an academic audience. Include citations."

"What evidence from my sources would I use to justify the importance of my research question?"

### Pro Tip

Save every useful response as a note in NotebookLM. Label each note clearly — e.g. "Opening paragraph ideas", "Methodological debate", "Gap in literature". By the end of this phase, your Notes panel will contain the raw material for your entire literature review.

## Phase 4: Writing with NotebookLM

Here's an important caveat: NotebookLM can help you draft, but the academic writing needs to be yours. Use it to generate first drafts that you then revise, deepen, and make your own.

1. Generate a draft paragraph on each theme using the prompts above
2. Review it critically — does it accurately represent the sources? Have you checked?

3. Rewrite it in your own voice and with your own analytical lens
4. Verify every citation it includes — go back to the source and check
5. Add your own analysis, evaluation, and argument

### Watch Out

Never submit NotebookLM output directly as your own work. It is a drafting tool, not a writing service. The ideas, analysis, and argument must be yours. Always verify citations against the original sources. NotebookLM may misattribute a point.

### Literature Review Writing Prompts — Use These at the Drafting Stage

"Write an introductory paragraph for a literature review on [topic]. Draw only from my sources. End with a sentence that identifies the central debate."

"Write a thematic section on [theme] for a literature review. Structure it as: overview of the theme, key evidence from sources (with citations), and a brief evaluative comment on the strength of the evidence."

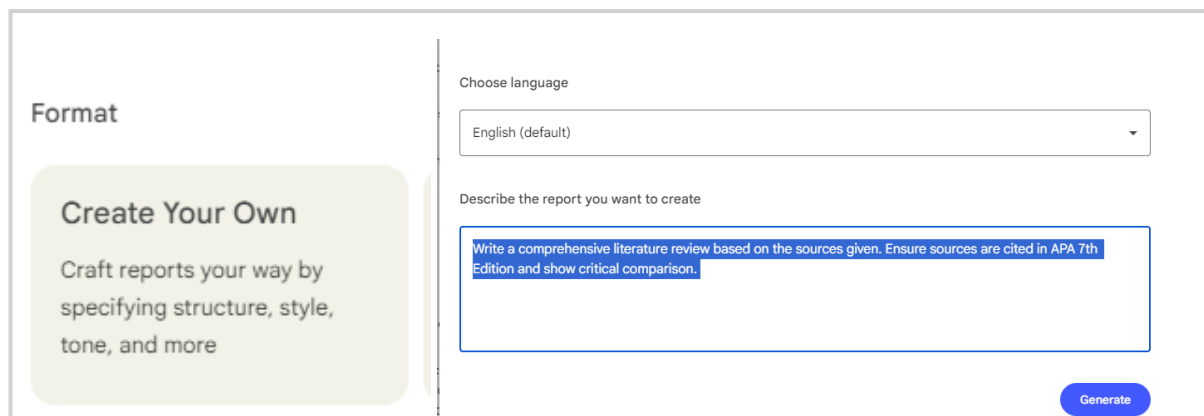
"Summarise the methodological approaches used across my sources in one paragraph. Note any dominant approaches and any notable absences."

"Write a one-paragraph conclusion for a literature review on [topic]. Summarise the state of knowledge and identify the gap that future research (including my own) could address."

"I have drafted this paragraph: [paste your text]. Does it accurately reflect what my sources say? Are there any claims that are unsupported or that I should qualify?"

## Generating a Full Literature Review Draft

You can also generate a full literature review draft by using “Create Your Own” feature in Reports. Click Create Your Own and type: use the prompt example as shown below:



**Format**

**Create Your Own**

Craft reports your way by specifying structure, style, tone, and more

Choose language

English (default)

Describe the report you want to create

Write a comprehensive literature review based on the sources given. Ensure sources are cited in APA 7th Edition and show critical comparison.

Generate

*Prompt: Write a comprehensive literature review based on the sources given. Ensure sources are cited in APA 7th Edition and show critical comparison.*

## **A Sample Literature Review Workflow in Action**

Here's how a researcher might use this workflow on a 3,000-word literature review on digital inequality in higher education:

- Day 1: Upload 20 sources. Generate Briefing Doc. Map major themes (access, skills, pedagogy, policy). Save as notes.
- Day 2: Run synthesis queries on each theme. Save key findings and debates as notes. Identify the central debate (is digital inequality primarily about access or skills?).
- Day 3: Draft three thematic sections using NotebookLM prompts. Revise each section in own voice. Check all citations against original sources.
- Day 4: Write introduction and conclusion (primarily own work, using notes for evidence). Edit for flow and argument coherence.

## CHAPTER 8

# Note-Taking and Study Guides

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### *Capturing and keeping what matters*

Notes are the output that carries over from your NotebookLM session into your actual writing. If you're not saving notes actively, you're doing only half the work. This chapter is about making the most of NotebookLM's notes system — and the other built-in tools that complement it.

## Saving Notes: The Basics

Every response in the chat can be saved as a note with one click. You'll see a small bookmark icon next to each response — click it and the response is saved to the Notes panel on the right.

You can also create notes from scratch by typing directly in the Notes panel. This is useful for adding your own thoughts, questions, or observations that aren't tied to a specific chat response.

## Organising Your Notes

Notes can be edited, renamed, and reordered. Develop a consistent labelling habit from the start. Here are some useful categories:

- Key definitions — core terms and how they're defined across your sources
- Author positions — where each major author stands on the key debate
- Evidence bank — specific findings, data points, and quotes (with citations)
- Gaps and questions — things your sources don't address
- Draft text — early paragraph drafts you've generated and revised
- My thoughts — your own analysis and emerging arguments

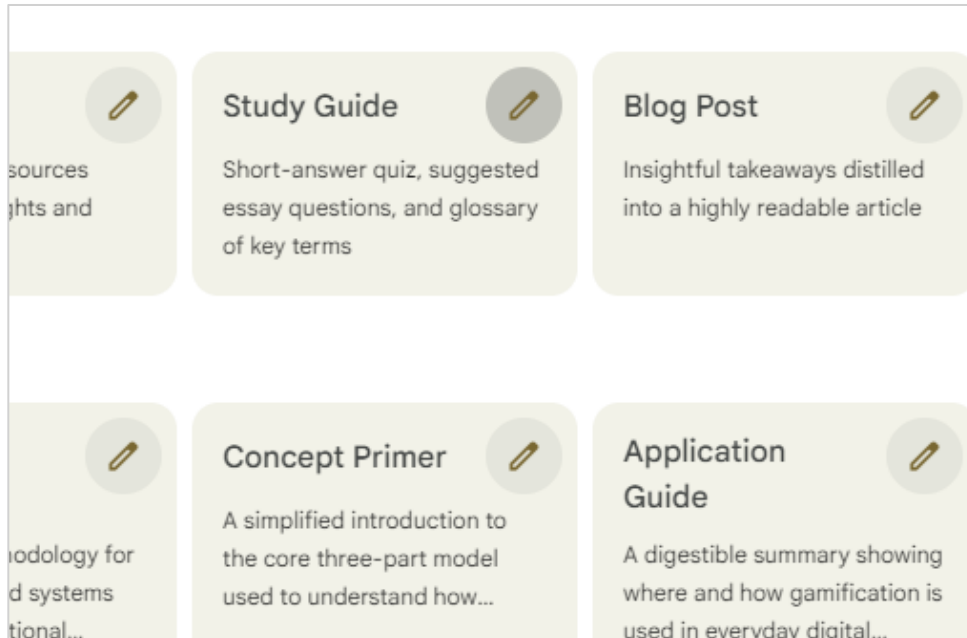
## The Study Guide Feature

This is one of the most delightful features in NotebookLM, and it's particularly valuable if you're revising for an exam or building your command of a new topic.

To generate a Study Guide, click the “Reports” button in the studio panel and select Study Guide. NotebookLM will automatically create:

- A set of key questions drawn from your sources
- Short-answer model responses to each question
- A glossary of key terms
- A multiple-choice quiz

For researchers, the study guide is less about rote memorisation and more about checking your own understanding. Run through the questions after you've done your initial reading — the gaps in your answers tell you where you need to go deeper.



### Pro Tip

Generate a Study Guide at the start of a new topic to get a clear picture of what you need to understand. Then generate one again at the end, after you've done your reading. Compare them — the improvement will be visible and motivating.

## The Briefing Doc — Revisited

I covered the Briefing Doc in Chapter 6, but it's worth saying more about how to use it strategically:

- Generate a new Briefing Doc every time you add a significant number of new sources — it will reflect the updated picture.
- Use the Briefing Doc as a source for your own introduction — it gives you a ready-made overview of the field that you can rewrite in your own voice.
- Share the Briefing Doc with a supervisor or colleague as a quick 'here's what I've been reading' update.

## Exporting Your Notes

NotebookLM notes can be exported to Google Docs with one click. This is enormously useful for the transition from research to writing. Once your notes are in a Google Doc, you can:

1. Organise them into a writing outline
2. Share them with a supervisor for feedback
3. Import them into any other writing tool

#### 4. Keep a permanent record outside of NotebookLM

##### Remember

It's good practice to export your notes at the end of each research session. NotebookLM saves your notebook automatically, but keeping a separate record of your key outputs in Google Docs gives you a backup and makes the transition to writing easier.

##### Note-Building Prompts – For Populating Your Notes Panel

"Give me a structured summary note for [Source Name]: research question, methodology, key findings, limitations. Format as a bullet list I can save directly."

"Create a definitions note: list the five most important terms or concepts used across my sources, with a one-sentence definition for each as used in this literature."

"Give me an evidence bank note: for each major claim I might want to make in a literature review on [topic], list the best supporting quote or finding from my sources, with citation."

"Create an author positions note: for each source, write one sentence summarising where that author stands on the central debate in this literature."

## CHAPTER 9

# Audio Overviews

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*Research on the go — yes, really*

Audio Overviews are one of those features that sound gimmicky until you actually try them — and then you wonder how you ever managed without them.

With one click, NotebookLM turns your sources into a 10–15 minute podcast-style conversation between two AI hosts who discuss, summarise, and debate the key ideas in your notebook. It's surprisingly good.

## What the Audio Overview Actually Is

The Audio Overview is a generated audio discussion based on your sources. Two AI voices explore the content in a natural, conversational way — they introduce key ideas, draw out interesting tensions, and occasionally push back on each other's interpretations.

It's not a word-for-word reading of your documents. It's more like eavesdropping on two well-read research assistants talking through what they've just read.

## When It's Most Useful

The Audio Overview is not a replacement for reading. It's a complement to it. Here's where it genuinely earns its place:

- Commuting or exercising — a brilliant way to review your research when you can't be at a screen
- Getting a first pass on a topic before you dive into the sources
- Re-orienting yourself to a notebook after a break — a 10-minute listen beats an hour of re-reading
- Sharing with a colleague who doesn't have time to read all your sources
- Checking whether your notebook covers the topic as broadly as you intended

## How to Generate One

1. Open your notebook
2. Click the "Notebook Guide" button at the top of the chat panel
3. Select "Audio Overview"
4. Wait 1–2 minutes for it to generate (it's doing actual work here)
5. Press play. Put your headphones in. You're done.

## Customising Your Audio Overview

Before you generate, you can optionally give NotebookLM some instructions about what to focus on. For example:

### Audio Customisation Prompts

"Focus the discussion on the methodological debates in these sources"

"Spend more time on the recent sources — the ones from 2020 onwards"

"Make sure the key findings from [Author X] are discussed clearly"

### Pro Tip

Listen to your Audio Overview before you start a writing session. It's a remarkably effective way to reconnect with your literature and get your thinking going — particularly useful if you've been away from a project for a few days.

## The Limitations

Audio Overviews are good, but they're not perfect. Some things to be aware of:

- The hosts occasionally over-simplify complex ideas — always go back to the source to check nuance
- They can't be directly cited in academic work
- They don't cover every source equally — the AI makes choices about what to emphasise
- The quality depends on the quality of your source texts — poor OCR means poor audio

### Remember

You can download the Audio Overview as an MP3 file. Some researchers keep a collection of these as a lightweight way to stay connected to their literature — especially useful when preparing for a viva or conference presentation.

## CHAPTER 10

# Infographics & Slide Decks

### *Turning your research into visual outputs – in seconds*

In November 2025, NotebookLM added two features that shifted it from a research tool into something closer to a full content production suite. Infographics and Slide Decks let you take everything in your notebook and turn it into polished visual outputs – without needing any design skills, PowerPoint expertise, or a separate tool.

For academic researchers, these features are genuinely useful. Whether you're preparing a conference presentation, creating a visual summary of a literature review, or explaining your research to a non-specialist audience, NotebookLM can now produce the first draft of those visuals for you.

## Infographics

The Infographic feature converts your source material into a professional visual summary – the kind of one-page visual briefing that would take hours in Canva, done in under a minute. It is powered by Google's Nano Banana Pro image generation model, which means the results look genuinely designed rather than templated.

The image shows a user interface for customizing an infographic. It has several sections: 'Choose language' with a dropdown set to 'English'; 'Choose orientation' with buttons for 'Landscape' (checked), 'Portrait', and 'Square'; 'Choose visual style' with six options: 'Auto-select' (checked), 'Sketch Note', 'Kawaii', 'Professional', 'Scientific', and 'Anime'; 'Level of detail' with buttons for 'Concise', 'Standard' (checked), and 'Detailed' (with a 'BETA' tag); and a text input field with the placeholder text 'Describe the infographic you want to create' and the example text 'Guide the style, color, or focus: "Use a blue color theme and highlight the 3 key stats."'. A blue 'Generate' button is located at the bottom right.

*Infographic customisation panel in NotebookLM*

### How to Generate an Infographic

1. Open your notebook and click the Studio panel
2. Click the Infographic tile
3. Choose your language and orientation (landscape, portrait or square)
4. Choose your visual style
5. Set the detail level – High for a comprehensive summary, Low for a quick visual overview

6. Optionally, add a custom prompt to guide the focus and layout. You can use my generator here <https://nlmprompts.keeman.app> for some styling ideas.
7. Click Generate — your infographic is ready in under a minute

### Pro Tip

The more specific your custom prompt, the more targeted the infographic. Describing the layout structure you want — pyramid, timeline, comparison grid — produces far better results than clicking Generate with no guidance.

## Customisation Options

Before generating, you can shape the output with instructions about:

- Layout style — pyramid, timeline, comparison grid, flowchart, map-based
- Audience — students, policymakers, clinicians, the general public
- Specific focus — which aspect of your research to visualise
- Brand colours or visual style preferences

### Academic Infographic Prompts

Create a timeline infographic showing how the theoretical frameworks in my sources have evolved from 2000 to 2024. Horizontal layout, high detail.

Generate a comparison infographic contrasting the methodologies used in my quantitative vs. qualitative sources. Use a two-column split layout.

Summarise the five key findings from my literature review as a numbered visual list with a short explanation for each. Portrait layout for academic poster use.

## Exporting Your Infographic

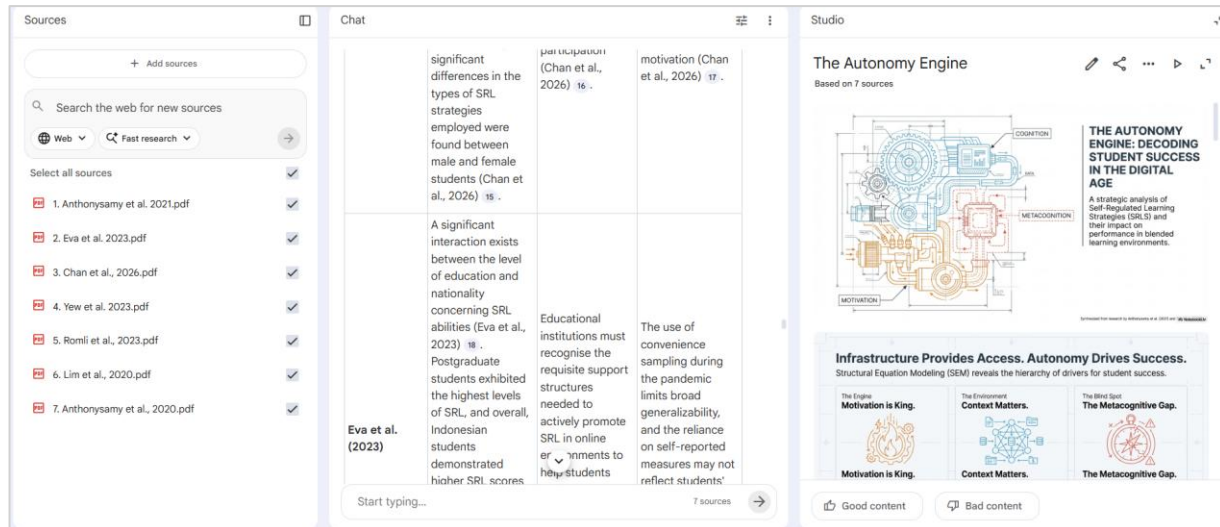
Infographics export as PNG files — ready to drop straight into a paper, poster, slide deck, or research blog. Use the three-dot menu and select Download. You can also share via a link if your notebook is set to allow access.

### Watch Out

Always review your infographic before sharing. NotebookLM is generally accurate but occasionally misrepresents statistics or oversimplifies a nuanced finding. A quick check against your sources takes one minute and is always worth it.

## Slide Decks

The Slide Deck feature generates a complete, visually designed presentation directly from your sources — AI-generated diagrams, charts, and structured content included. It is arguably the most powerful addition to the Studio panel, and for academic researchers it can save several hours of preparation time per presentation.



Generated slide deck on the right

## Two Types of Slide Deck

| Type             | What It Looks Like   | Best For   |
|------------------|--|--|
| Detailed Deck    | Full slides with rich text, visuals, and speaker notes — designed to be read without a presenter | Sharing research summaries, literature reviews, written handouts |
| Presenter Slides | Minimal text, strong visuals — designed to accompany a live spoken presentation                  | Conference talks, seminar presentations, viva preparation        |

## How to Generate a Slide Deck

1. Open your notebook and go to the Studio panel
2. Click the Slide Deck tile
3. Choose your deck type — Detailed or TED-Style Presenter
4. Set the language, length, and any custom instructions
5. Add a prompt to guide the subject focus and visual style
6. Click Generate — a full deck is ready in one to two minutes

## Exporting Your Slide Deck

Slide Decks export in two formats. PDF is ideal for sharing a finished presentation. PPTX lets you open and edit the deck directly in PowerPoint or Google Slides – useful for adding institutional branding, adjusting layouts, or refining individual slides before presenting. Export to Google Slides directly is also reportedly on its way.

### Pro Tip

Export as PPTX when preparing for a conference or seminar. Let NotebookLM generate the first draft, then spend your time refining the argument and content – not building slides from scratch. This typically saves two to three hours per presentation.

## Academic Use Cases for Slide Decks

- Conference paper presentations – generate a first draft from your paper or abstract
- Literature review summaries – create a clear visual overview for a supervisory meeting
- Research proposals – visualise your methodology and rationale for a funding panel
- Teaching materials – build lecture slides directly from your reading list sources
- Viva preparation – summarise your key arguments and evidence in structured slides

### OC Slide Deck Prompt Examples

Generate a 10-slide presenter deck summarising the key debates in my literature. Focus on methodological tensions. Audience: PhD researchers.

Create a detailed standalone deck covering the main findings from my sources, structured as: Introduction, Key Themes, Debates, Gaps, Conclusion.

Build a conference presentation deck for a 15-minute slot. One key idea per slide. Include speaker notes.

## Using Both Features Together

Infographics and Slide Decks are even more powerful in combination. Here is a workflow that works well for academic presentations:

**1**

### Generate your Briefing Doc first

Get a clear overview of your notebook before building any visual outputs.

**2**

### Create a Slide Deck for the overall narrative

Use the detailed standalone format to draft a structure across your key themes.

**3**

**Generate Infographics for data-heavy sections**

For any slide involving comparisons, timelines, or statistics, generate a dedicated infographic to replace a text-heavy slide.

**4**

**Export and combine**

Export both as PPTX and PNG, combine in PowerPoint or Google Slides, and apply any final branding.

 **Remember**

Both features are subject to a usage limit per notebook on the free plan. For most academic projects, the free limits are more than adequate. If you need more, NotebookLM Plus (available through Google One AI Premium) removes these restrictions.

## CHAPTER 11

# Advanced Techniques

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*For when you're ready to go deeper*

If you've worked through the previous chapters, you're already using NotebookLM well. This chapter is for when you're ready to take it further — more sophisticated prompting, multi-notebook strategies, and techniques that experienced researchers have discovered through experimentation.

## Multi-Notebook Strategies

Advanced researchers often maintain multiple interconnected notebooks. Here are three common approaches:

### The Funnel Structure

Start with a broad 'overview' notebook containing seminal papers across a wide topic. As your research narrows, create focused notebooks for sub-topics. This mirrors how real research develops — from broad reading to focused enquiry.

### The Debate Structure

Create separate notebooks for opposing positions in a debate — one for sources supporting Position A, one for Position B. Query each independently, then compare. This forces you to engage seriously with both sides and often surfaces the exact points of contention.

### The Methodological Structure

Group sources by methodology — one notebook for quantitative studies, one for qualitative, one for systematic reviews. Querying them separately reveals how different methodologies produce different kinds of knowledge about the same topic.

## Reverse Prompting

Rather than asking NotebookLM what your sources say, try asking it what questions your sources raise. This is a powerful technique for developing research questions:

### 🗨️ Reverse Prompting Examples

"What questions do these sources leave unanswered? List at least five."

"Based on the limitations discussed by the authors, what research would logically come next?"

"If a researcher read only these sources, what would they be most likely to misunderstand about this topic?"

## The Devil's Advocate Prompt

Ask NotebookLM to argue against the position you're building. This stress-tests your argument and often surfaces objections you'll need to address in your writing:

### 🗨 Devil's Advocate Prompt

"I want to argue that [your position]. Using only my sources, make the strongest possible case against this argument. Include specific evidence and citations."

## The Socratic Chain

This is a technique for going deep on a topic. Start with a broad question, then use each answer as the basis for a more specific follow-up. Keep going until you've reached genuine depth:

1. Start: "What do my sources say about X?"
2. Follow up: "Which of those sources provides the strongest evidence for that?"
3. Dig deeper: "What methodology did they use, and what are its limitations?"
4. Push further: "Are there any sources that challenge that methodology?"
5. Synthesise: "So what's the most defensible conclusion based on all of this?"

### 📌 Pro Tip

The Socratic Chain is particularly valuable when preparing for a viva voce or conference presentation — it forces you to think about the robustness of your evidence base in a way that passive reading doesn't.

## Working with Long Documents

When you upload a very long document (a book, thesis, or lengthy report), NotebookLM may not process every section with equal depth. To get the best results:

- Ask about specific chapters or sections explicitly: "In Chapter 3, what does the author argue about..."
- Reference specific page ranges if you know them
- Upload key chapters as separate sources if one document is very long

## The Pre-Writing Interrogation

Before you start writing, run your outline through NotebookLM as a series of questions. For each major claim you intend to make, ask: "What evidence in my sources supports this claim?" This ensures your argument is actually grounded in your literature before you start writing.

### Remember

Advanced users sometimes 'interview' their own draft writing by pasting it into NotebookLM as a text source alongside their research sources, then asking: "Does the argument in this draft align with what the sources say?" It's a powerful self-editing technique.

### OC Advanced Prompt Toolkit — For Experienced Users

"MULTI-NOTEBOOK: I have two notebooks on opposing positions of the same debate. Summarise the strongest argument for [Position A] based on Notebook A's sources. [Then switch notebooks and repeat for Position B.]"

"REVERSE: Based on the limitations and gaps discussed across my sources, write five research questions that would be logical next steps for this field."

"DEVIL'S ADVOCATE: I want to argue that [your thesis]. Using only my sources, build the strongest possible counter-argument. Be rigorous."

"SOCRATIC: What does the evidence in my sources say about [topic]? Then: Which source says this most convincingly? Then: What are that source's limitations? Then: Is there a source that addresses those limitations?"

"PRE-WRITING CHECK: Here is my draft argument: [paste argument]. Which of my sources directly support each claim? Flag any claim that is not clearly supported."

## CHAPTER 12

# Real-World Academic Workflows

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### *NotebookLM in action — from dissertation to journal article*

Theory is useful. Examples are better. This chapter walks through four realistic academic scenarios and shows exactly how NotebookLM fits into each workflow.

## Scenario 1: The Undergraduate Dissertation

Priya is a third-year sociology student working on her 8,000-word dissertation on food insecurity among university students in the UK. She has six weeks.

### **Week 1: Orientation**

Priya uploads 18 sources — a mix of journal articles, government reports, and charity publications. She generates a Briefing Doc and creates single-source summaries for each source. She now has a clear picture of the field without having read every paper in full.

### **Week 2: Synthesis**

Priya runs cross-source queries to map the main debates: is food insecurity primarily caused by financial constraints, poor budgeting skills, or structural factors? She identifies three competing framings in her sources, saves them as notes, and realises this debate will be the backbone of her literature review.

### **Weeks 3–4: Writing**

Using her notes and NotebookLM-generated paragraph drafts (which she rewrites in her own voice), Priya completes a 2,500-word literature review in two days rather than the week she'd budgeted for. She uses the extra time to write a stronger methodology chapter.

### **Weeks 5–6: Analysis and final draft**

After completing her primary research (interviews), Priya uploads her interview transcripts to a new notebook alongside key theoretical sources, and uses NotebookLM to help identify themes in the data relative to her literature. Result: a well-grounded, evidence-rich dissertation submitted on time.

## Scenario 2: The PhD Literature Review

Marcus is a first-year PhD student in environmental psychology. He needs to write a 15,000-word systematic literature review. He has 90 sources across three sub-fields.

Marcus creates three notebooks — one per sub-field. He runs synthesis queries on each independently, then uses the outputs to write three separate thematic sections. The inter-notebook comparison (done manually, using notes from each) reveals a methodological gap that becomes the central contribution of his PhD proposal.

### Pro Tip

PhD students: use NotebookLM to prepare for supervisory meetings. Generate a Briefing Doc before each meeting, and bring a printed or shared version. Your supervisor will be impressed by how clear your grasp of the literature already is.

## Scenario 3: The Journal Article

Dr Chen is revising a journal article for second review. The reviewers have asked her to engage more deeply with three specific papers she'd cited only briefly. She uploads those three papers as a standalone notebook and uses NotebookLM to get a thorough understanding of each one — their methods, their claims, and their implications for her own argument.

She then adds them to her main research notebook and runs synthesis queries to see how they fit with her broader evidence base. Within a day, she has the material she needs to respond to the reviewers' concerns confidently.

## Scenario 4: The Exam Revision Workflow

Jamie is a master's student preparing for a high-stakes written exam on international development theory. They upload course readings, lecture notes, and their own essay feedback into a single notebook.

6. Generate a Study Guide for a set of revision questions
7. Run through the quiz and identify weak areas
8. Ask targeted questions on the topics they're less confident on
9. Generate a comparison table of major theoretical frameworks
10. Use the Audio Overview to review on the bus in the week before the exam

Result: Jamie enters the exam with a genuinely integrated understanding of the literature, not just a list of names and dates to regurgitate.

## CHAPTER 13

# What NotebookLM Can't Do

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### *And what to do instead*

I've been enthusiastic about NotebookLM throughout this book, and rightly so. But no tool is perfect. Being honest about the limitations isn't pessimism — it's the only way to use it well.

## The Six Limitations You Need to Know

### **1. It Can't Verify Information Against the Wider Literature**

NotebookLM only knows what you've given it. If your sources contain errors, outdated findings, or biased framing, NotebookLM won't flag this — it will faithfully reflect whatever is in your notebook. This is why your own critical reading remains essential. NotebookLM isn't a fact-checker.

### **2. It Can (Rarely) Misattribute Citations**

NotebookLM is very good at citing correctly, but it can occasionally attribute a claim to the wrong source within your notebook — especially if multiple sources make similar points. Always verify citations before including them in your own writing.

### **3. It Can't Do Original Thinking**

NotebookLM can synthesise, compare, and summarise — but it can't have an original idea. The intellectual contribution of your research — your argument, your framing, your interpretation — has to come from you. If you find yourself using NotebookLM as a substitute for your own thinking, that's a warning sign.

### **4. It Struggles with Highly Technical Content**

Very technical content — complex mathematical equations, specialised chemistry notation, advanced statistical modelling — doesn't always process well. NotebookLM may oversimplify or misrepresent technical details. In highly quantitative fields, treat its outputs as orientations, not analyses.

### **5. It Can't Access Paywalled or Protected Content**

If you paste a URL that sits behind a paywall, NotebookLM won't be able to access the full text. You'll need to download the PDF yourself and upload it directly. Most institutional libraries provide PDF access through tools like JSTOR, Web of Science, or your university's library portal.

## 6. It's a Tool, Not an Author

This is the most important limitation of all. NotebookLM can generate text that looks like academic writing. It is not academic writing. Submitting AI-generated text as your own work violates academic integrity policies at virtually every institution. Use NotebookLM for research, orientation, and drafting scaffolds — not for producing finished work.

### Watch Out

Always check your institution's academic integrity policy regarding AI tools before using NotebookLM for assessed work. Policies vary significantly — and they're changing quickly. When in doubt, ask your lecturer or supervisor directly.

## What to Use Alongside NotebookLM

NotebookLM works best as part of a broader toolkit. Here are some complementary tools that experienced academic researchers use alongside it:

| Tool               | What It Does                  | Works Well With NotebookLM Because...                  |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Zotero / Mendeley  | Reference management          | Export your library to PDFs, then upload to NotebookLM |
| Connected Papers   | Visualises citation networks  | Helps you find sources to add to your notebook         |
| Google Scholar     | Search for academic papers    | Good source of PDFs to upload                          |
| Obsidian / Notion  | Personal knowledge management | Store and link notes exported from NotebookLM          |
| Word / Google Docs | Writing                       | The destination for your NotebookLM notes and drafts   |

## Conclusion

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### *Your next steps — and a gentle nudge*

You've made it to the end. And if you've been following along, you now have everything you need to transform how you do academic research.

Let's recap what you've learned. You know what NotebookLM is and how it differs from general AI tools. You've got a clear five-stage workflow — Gather, Orient, Query, Synthesise, Produce — that applies to any research project. You can write focused academic prompts that get genuinely useful outputs. You know how to use the Briefing Doc, Study Guide, Notes, and Audio Overview features. You've seen the advanced techniques and real-world workflows. And you know the limitations, which means you'll use the tool wisely.

### What to Do Next

Knowledge that doesn't become practice is just information. So here's what I'd like you to do this week:

1. Open NotebookLM and create a notebook for your current or next research project
2. Upload your first five sources
3. Generate a Briefing Doc
4. Ask five questions using the prompting templates from Chapter 5
5. Save three notes from the responses you find most useful

That's it. One session. After that, you'll find that the workflow starts to feel natural — and you'll wonder how you managed without it.

*"A tool is only as good as the hands that use it. But the right tool, used well, can change what those hands are capable of."*

— **Research Smarter with NotebookLM**

### Keep Learning

NotebookLM is actively developed and features change regularly. To stay up to date:

- Visit [notebooklm.google.com](https://notebooklm.google.com) — new features are often announced there
- Follow Google's official NotebookLM blog and release notes
- Connect with other researchers who use AI tools — their workflows will inspire yours

The future of academic research involves tools like NotebookLM. Researchers who learn to use them well will have a genuine advantage — not because the tools think for them, but because they free up cognitive space for the thinking that matters most.

Happy researching. You've got this.

## Appendix: Quick Reference & Prompt Library

Use this section as a lookup guide when you need a prompt quickly, without re-reading the whole book.

### The Smart Research Workflow at a Glance

| Stage         | Action  | Key Feature Used              |
|---------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. Gather     | Upload all relevant sources; rename clearly         | Sources Panel                 |
| 2. Orient     | Generate Briefing Doc; read single-source summaries | Notebook Guide → Briefing Doc |
| 3. Query      | Ask targeted questions with the prompts below       | Chat Interface                |
| 4. Synthesise | Run cross-source comparison and debate queries      | Chat Interface (all sources)  |
| 5. Produce    | Save notes, export to Google Docs, begin writing    | Notes Panel → Google Docs     |

## Essential Prompt Library

### Overview & Orientation

- "Summarise the key arguments across all sources. Cite each source."
- "What are the major themes in this notebook? Which sources address each theme?"
- "Who are the most influential authors or researchers mentioned across these sources?"

### Deep Analysis

- "What evidence supports [claim X]? Rank it from strongest to weakest."
- "How do [Source A] and [Source B] differ in their findings on [topic]?"
- "What research methods are most commonly used? What are their stated limitations?"

### Synthesis & Debate

- "What do all my sources agree on?"
- "Where is there genuine disagreement? Which sources take each position?"
- "What questions or gaps do these sources leave unanswered?"

## Literature Review Building

- "Draft a paragraph on [theme] using my sources. Include citations."
- "What evidence supports my argument that [X]? What counter-evidence exists?"
- "Create a comparison table: Author, Year, Method, Key Finding, Theoretical Framework."

## Critical Thinking & Challenge

- "What are the strongest arguments against [my position]? Use my sources."
- "Are any of my sources methodologically weak? What are their limitations?"
- "What would a critic say is missing from this body of literature?"

## Visual Outputs (Infographics & Slide Decks)

- "Create an infographic summarising the key findings of my sources. Use a timeline layout, horizontal orientation, high detail."
- "Generate a 10-slide presenter deck on [topic] from my sources. One idea per slide. Include speaker notes."
- "Build an infographic comparing the methodologies used across my sources. Two-column comparison layout."
- "Create a detailed standalone slide deck I can share with my supervisor as a literature review overview."

## Note-Building

- "Structured summary of [Source Name]: research question, method, key finding, limitation — as a bullet list."
- "Create an evidence bank: for each major argument in [topic], give me the best supporting quote or finding with citation."
- "Author positions note: one sentence per source summarising where each author stands on the central debate."

## Source Quality Checklist

- Source is in PDF or text format (not a scanned image without OCR)
- File is clearly named (AuthorYear-Title format)
- Source is directly relevant to this notebook's research question
- Source has been published in a credible peer-reviewed venue
- Source has finished processing (no spinner in Sources panel)

## Pre-Writing Checklist

- Briefing Doc generated and reviewed
- Single-source summaries saved as notes for all key sources
- Main debates and themes identified and documented
- Evidence bank note created with key findings and citations
- All AI-generated citations verified against original sources
- Notes exported to Google Docs

## NotebookLM Keyboard Shortcuts

| Action                      | How To Do It                                     |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Create new note             | Click '+ New Note' in the Notes panel            |
| Save chat response as note  | Click the bookmark icon next to any response     |
| Generate Notebook Guide     | Click the 'Notebook Guide' button in chat panel  |
| Select/deselect sources     | Use the checkboxes in the Sources panel          |
| Rename a source             | Click the three-dot menu next to the source name |
| Export notes to Google Docs | Click 'Copy to Docs' in the Notes panel          |



## **Kee-Man Chuah**

Faculty of Education, Language  
and Communication  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak  
[www.chuahkeeman.com](http://www.chuahkeeman.com)