NotebookLM - Introduction

NotebookLM is a free, AI-powered tool from Google designed to help users interact with and learn from their documents. Described as a “personalized AI research assistant,” NotebookLM summarizes uploaded sources and generates insights into their content. It works by analyzing uploaded files, including Google Docs, PDFs, text files, web pages, and even copied text. It then uses Google’s Gemini AI model to allow users to ask questions, summarize information, and create new outputs based on those sources.

More About NotebookLM

There are several really powerful features in this tool, but the biggest advantage is the concept of “source-grounding.” This just means that, instead of trying to use the entirety of the internet as a source, NotebookLM limits its content knowledge to only the sources you have active in the open notebook. This is huge because the internet is FULL of incorrect information. The ability to specifically point NotebookLM to a set of sources and have it become an “instant expert” on all of that content is a huge deal.

Don’t misunderstand… this is not just a tool that will regurgitate the information you feed it. Instead, it “reads,” “watches,” and “listens” to the content you provide, makes connections, and interprets it… similar to if you studied and tried to compile a working knowledge of the sources on your own. Once given the resources, you can:

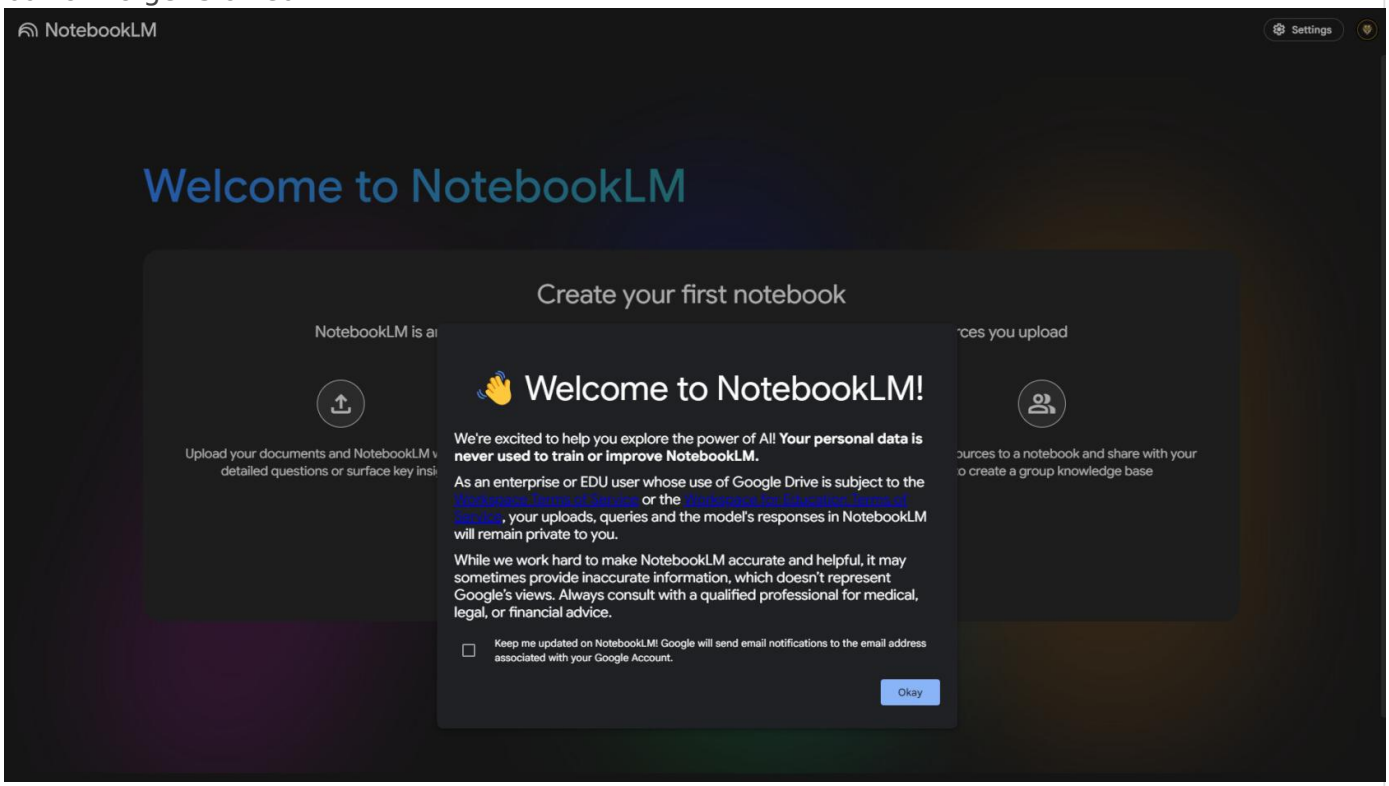
- Ask questions at ANY depth of knowledge that would be contained in the sources (ex: “Explain the concept of crop rotation to me. Assume that I have no knowledge of agriculture” or “Explain the concept of crop rotation to me. Assume that I have doctorate-level knowledge of the chemical makeup of various soils but don’t understand the nutrient requirements of common crop types.”)
- One click study guide to cover all of the source information
- One click briefing documents to provide an overview of the sources
- One click FAQ generation over the sources
- One click timeline generation for chronological aspects of the sources
- One click (or advanced) podcast style generation.
- Add your own notes based on conversations with the AI

Creating Your First Notebook

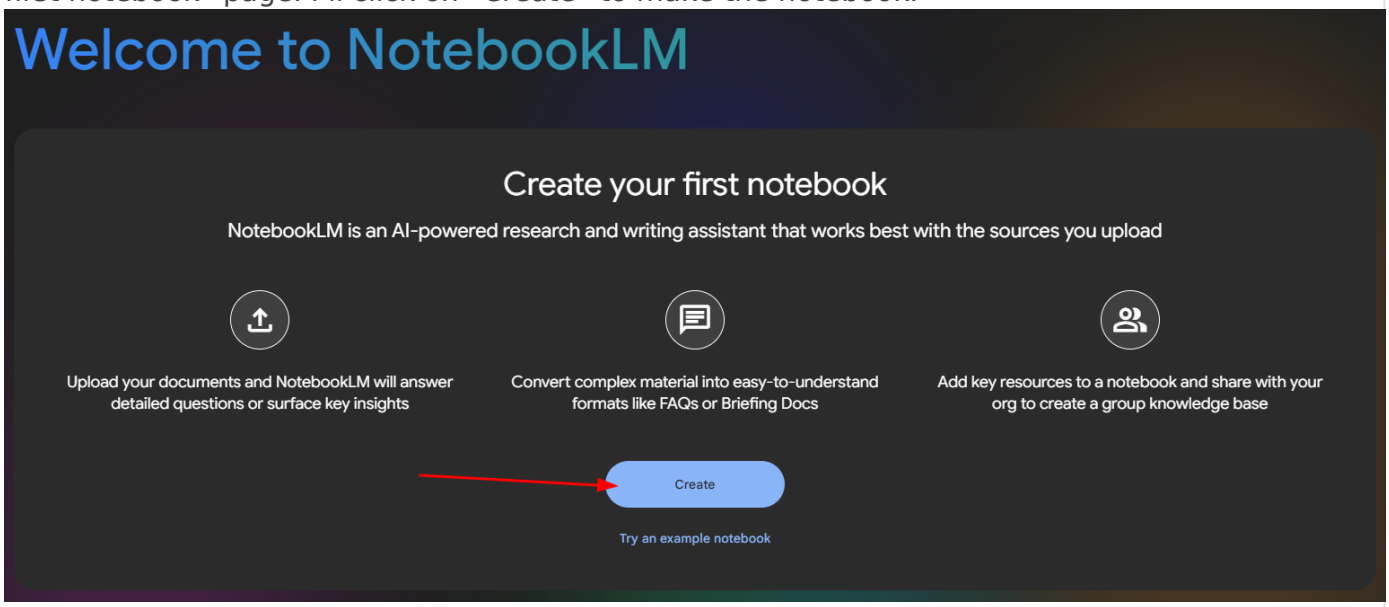
Show Instructions

Visit notebooklm.google.com

On your first visit, you will get a welcome message. You can choose to check the box if you want emails when new features are added to NotebookLM, or you can just click on the “okay” button to get started.



We don’t have any notebooks yet, so, again, just for the first time, we will get the “Create your first notebook” page. I’ll click on “Create” to make the notebook.

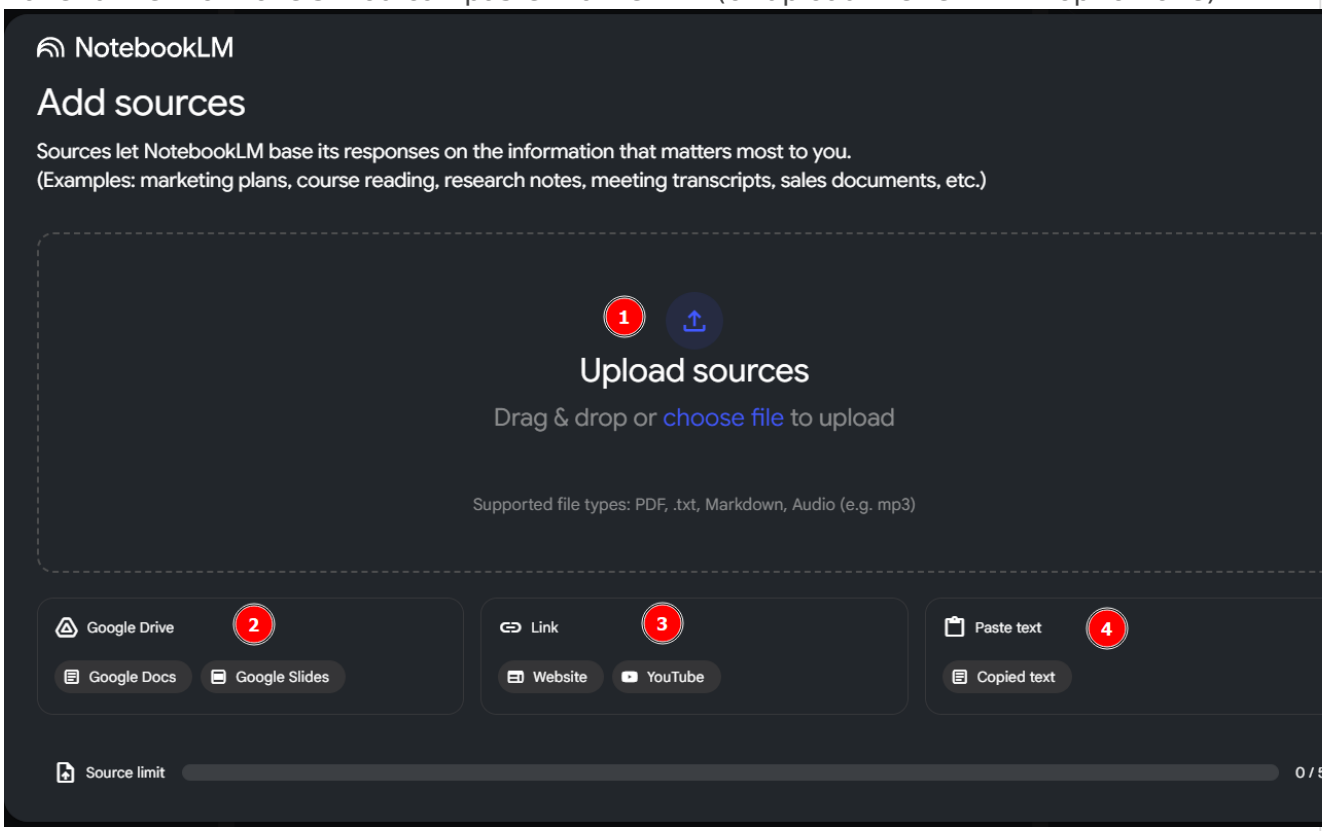


Great! When you create a new notebook, you will automatically get this “Add Sources” prompt. We can open this prompt manually to add more sources, but we will talk more about that later. For now, we have 4 primary source types that can be added.

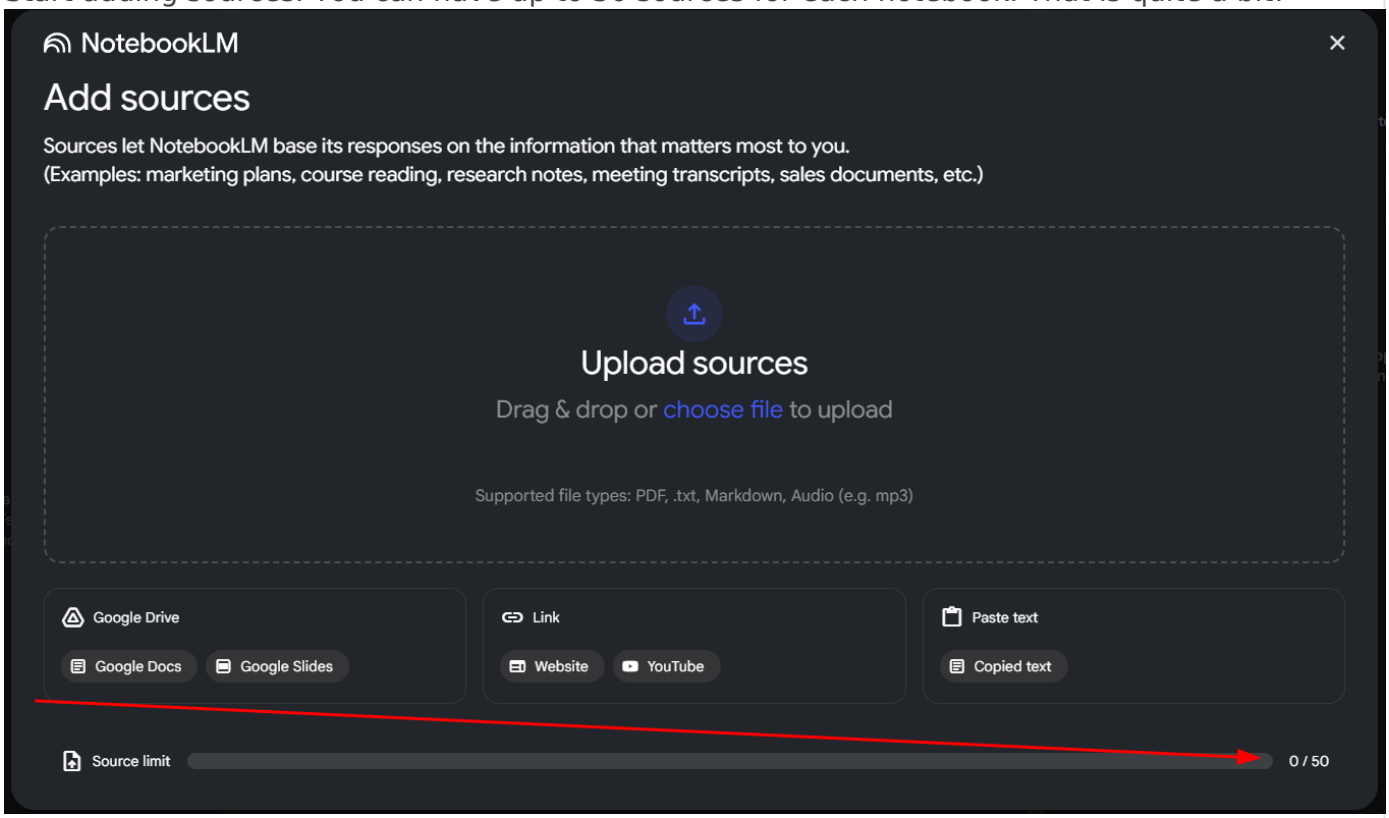
1. Uploaded sources: these can be things like PDF documents, word documents, audio files, text files, and that sort of thing. These are files that are currently on your

computer, for example, you may have downloaded a PDF from Lexus Nexus. You can upload that PDF here. NotebookLM will read it and use it for all future interactions within this notebook.

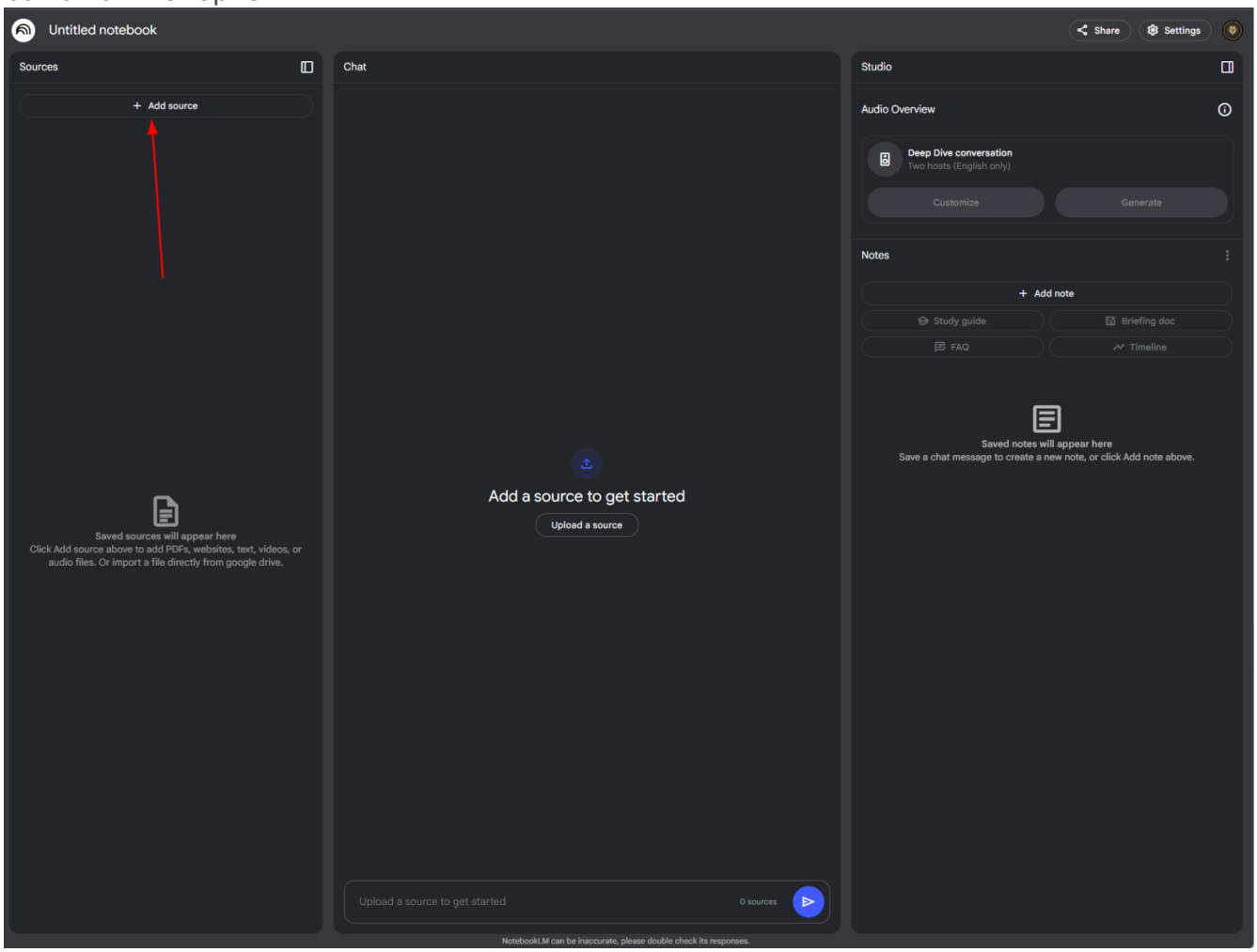
2. Google Drive sources: If you have a Google Doc or a slide, you can select it from your drive.
3. Links: Provide either the link to a website or to a YouTube video. Super handy!
4. Paste text: Sometimes you will be in a situation where the website blocks NotebookLM. No worries! Copy the text you want, and paste it in. Also, sites like Project Gutenberg have full text of novels. You can paste that text in (or upload the text with option one).



Start adding sources. You can have up to 50 sources for each notebook. That is quite a bit!

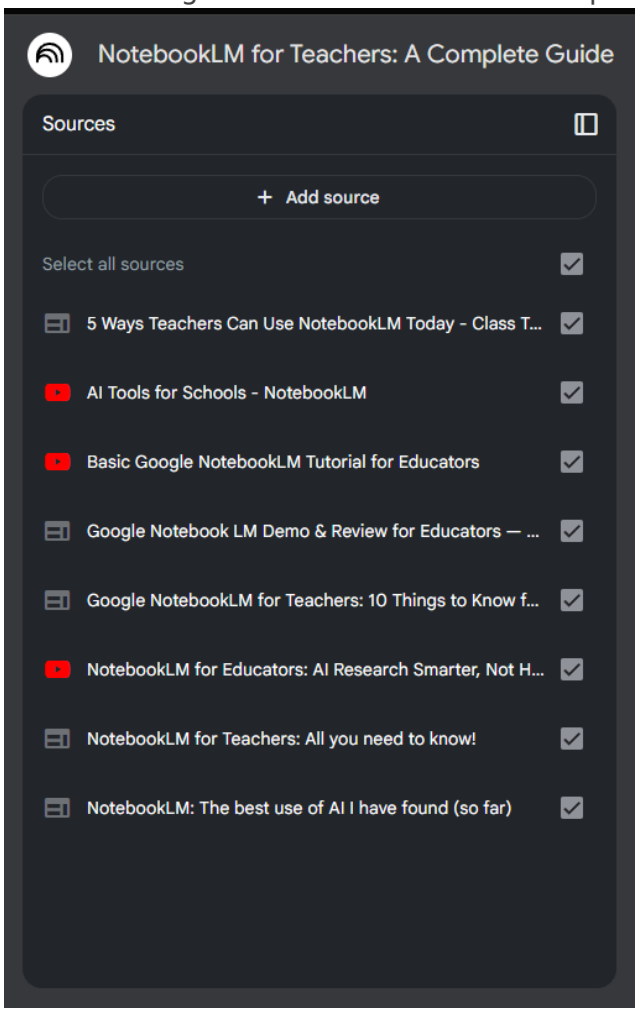


If you accidentally closed the add source window, or to add more sources, click the Add source button at the top left!

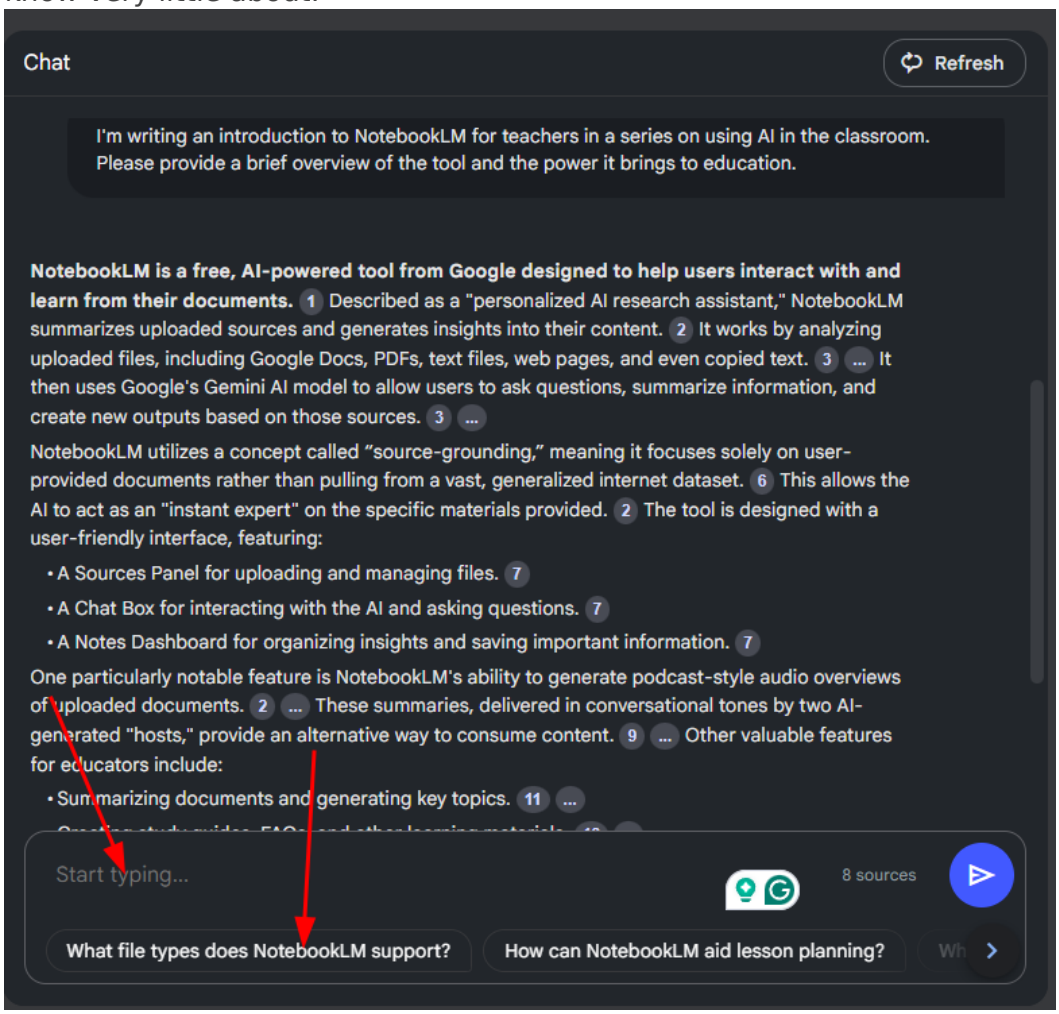


Your sources will now appear in the source list on the left. Each source has a checkbox to the right. If it is clicked, that means that the source will be active in any of the conversations or actions you have with NotebookLM. If it is unchecked, that source becomes dormant and ignored.

Example Use case: I could add a rubric as a source, then I could add each student's essay in a separate Google doc or PDF. Then I can check only the rubric and a single student's essay. Now when I ask NotebookLM to "analyze the student essay to see how well it adheres to the assigned rubric. Offer suggestions for improvement, areas that are particularly well executed, and suggestions for further research based on this student's demonstrated knowledge." NotebookLM should give me a pretty thorough response to that, and it should be pretty valuable insight for me to formulate a response to the student.



Once we have our sources uploaded and selected, we can use the center area to ask questions and guide the research. We can type whatever we would like, but NotebookLM does an initial reading, and it will offer some questions below the text input area. You can click one of these to get the conversation started. This is particularly helpful if the content area is something you know very little about.

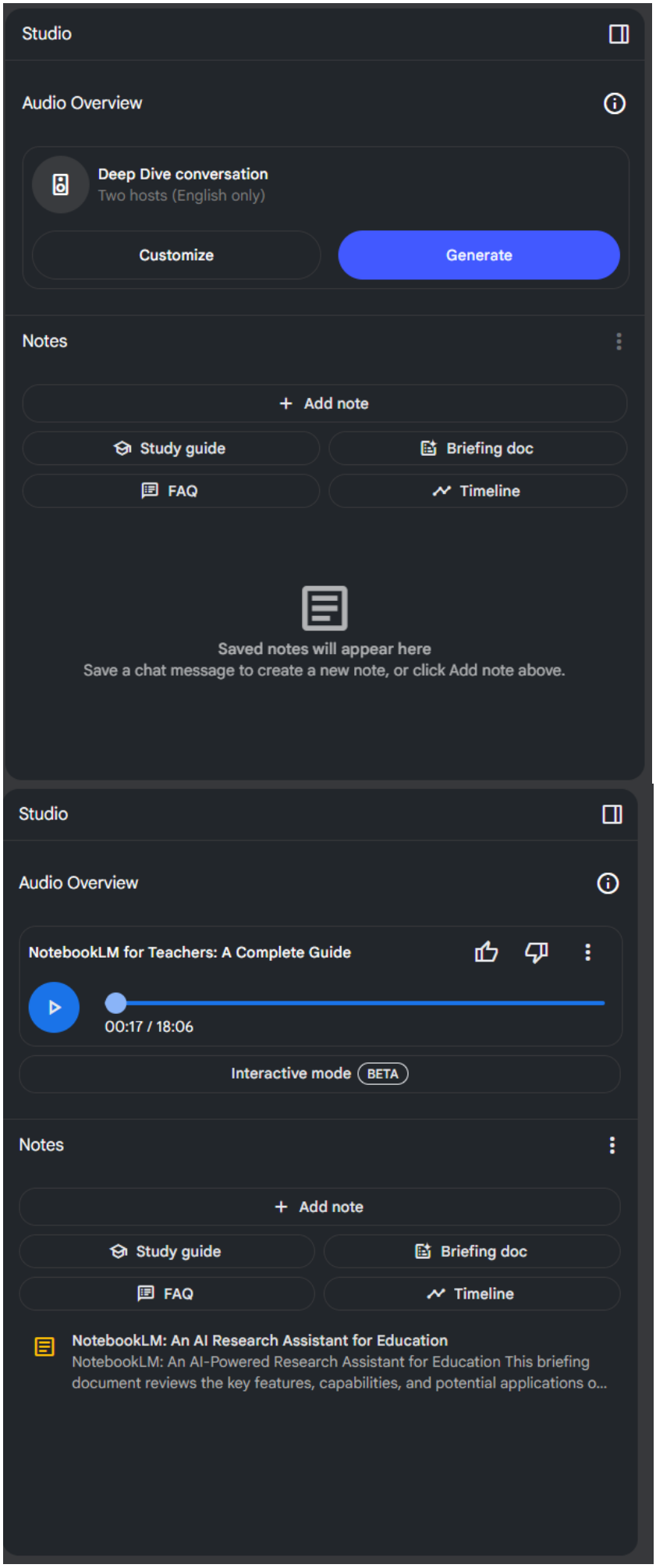


The Studio/Notes panel is on the right. There is an Audio Overview section that allows you to generate a podcast-style conversation between two AI hosts, one male, and one female. I've included an example below. It is pretty slick. If you would like, you can click the "Generate" button, and the system will automatically take all of the content and present a podcast that covers the research sources in an overall sense. If you click on the "Customize" button, you can guide the conversation, meaning that you can require the conversation to delve more deeply in specific directions, set a language level, assume a content knowledge level, and many other potential guided parameters.

In addition to the audio overview, you have the main "Notes" features. Clicking on the "Add note" button will let you create a note of your own making. You can type whatever you want, and it will be collected at the bottom of the panel.

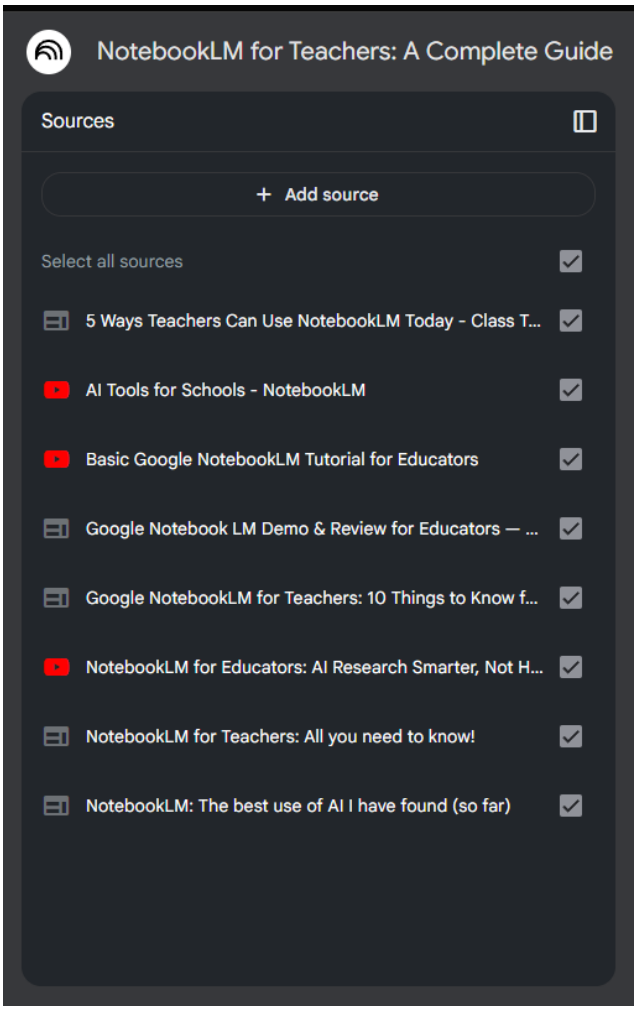
Clicking on any of the other buttons in this panel will automatically generate the element that is indicated on the button. Once clicked, NotebookLM will place these items in the Notes panel.

You can click on a note at any time to open it in an expanded view. I've included the FAQ option below.



Sample Output

My Sources



Deep Dive conversation (Podcast)

> **drive.google.com**
>
> Google Drive file.

NotebookLM FAQ

What is NotebookLM?

NotebookLM is a free, experimental AI tool developed by Google that acts as a personalized research assistant. It helps users organize, analyze, and synthesize information from various sources like documents, PDFs, websites, and even audio files. Users can create digital “notebooks” containing up to 50 different sources, each with a maximum of 200,000 words. NotebookLM uses Google’s Gemini AI model, which has a large token window allowing it to process and understand large amounts of text.

How Does NotebookLM Work?

NotebookLM utilizes a process called “source-grounding,” meaning it focuses specifically on the documents you upload rather than pulling information from the broader internet. This makes it an “expert” on your chosen material. Once you’ve added your sources, you can ask NotebookLM questions about the content in a chat-style interface. The AI then analyzes your sources and provides summaries, answers to your questions, and generates insights based on the information provided.

What Can I Do with NotebookLM?

NotebookLM offers a range of functionalities for various tasks:

- **Summarization**: Quickly grasp the main points of lengthy documents or multiple sources.
- **Question Answering**: Ask specific questions about your uploaded content and receive direct answers with citations.
- **Insight Generation**: Discover connections and themes within your sources that might not be immediately apparent.
- **Content Creation**: Generate different outputs like study guides, FAQs, timelines, briefing documents, and even podcast-style audio summaries.
- **Data Extraction**: Pull specific information like lists or data points from your sources.

How is NotebookLM Different from Other AI Tools?

NotebookLM stands out from other AI tools in a few key ways:

- **Source-Grounding**: It focuses solely on the user-provided documents, leading to more accurate and relevant responses.
- **Citation Feature**: All answers are linked back to the specific source material, allowing for easy verification.
- **Audio Summary Generation**: It can create engaging, podcast-style audio overviews of your content, offering a new way to consume information.

Can Students Use NotebookLM?

Currently, NotebookLM's terms of service restrict use to individuals aged 18 and older. However, educators can utilize the tool to create resources for their students, such as study guides, summaries, or audio overviews, and then share those outputs with students.

What are Some Examples of How Educators Can Use NotebookLM?

- **Lesson Planning**: Generate summaries of complex texts, create study guides for specific chapters or units, or develop differentiated materials for various learning levels.
- **Professional Development**: Analyze research articles or policy documents to extract key insights or create briefing documents for collaborative discussions.
- **Research**: Analyze large amounts of data from student surveys, interviews, or focus groups to identify trends and patterns.
- **Personal Learning**: Deepen understanding of a subject by summarizing and analyzing multiple sources, generating questions, and creating personalized study guides.

What are the Limitations of NotebookLM?

- **Potential Inaccuracies**: While NotebookLM strives for accuracy, it is still under development and can sometimes generate misleading or incorrect information. Always double-check its output.
- **Bias**: AI models can reflect biases present in their training data. Be aware of potential biases and critically evaluate the information presented.
- **Over-Reliance**: Avoid becoming overly dependent on the tool for critical thinking or decision-making. Use it as a support tool to enhance your own analysis and understanding.

How Can I Get Started with NotebookLM?

You can access NotebookLM by visiting notebooklm.google. Create a free account and start experimenting by uploading your own documents or trying out the example notebooks provided.

What are Some Tips for Using NotebookLM Effectively?

- **Start Small**: Begin with a topic or document you're already familiar with to test the tool's capabilities.
- **Experiment with Questions**: Ask a variety of questions to explore different ways of interacting with your sources.
- **Use Citations**: Verify information by referring to the original sources through the provided citations.
- **Share with Others**: Collaborate with colleagues or students by sharing notebooks and resources.
- **Stay Informed**: Keep up with updates and new features as NotebookLM continues to evolve.

Originally posted by Cory Robbins on the West Fork Technology Hub (2025-01-21).

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