Commonplace

Save what you find. Find it again.

> *A complete guide to Commonplace — the local-first research scrapbook for Windows and Linux. From your first saved item to multi-collection libraries, tagged and searched, all living in a folder you own.*

Commonplace · getcommonplace.co.uk · 2026

Commonplace is a modern take on one of the oldest tools in knowledge work: the **commonplace book**, the personal volume into which careful readers once copied the passages, facts and observations they wanted to keep. It is built around a single conviction — **collecting is easy; finding it again is the hard part** — so everything here is bent towards retrieval. You save articles, PDFs, web pages, notes and images into a library on your own disk, and one fast search box reaches every word of it, your own notes included.

This guide shows how to use Commonplace, starting with a quick hands-on tour, then a section-by-section reference, and finally a set of worked recipes and answers to common questions. It assumes no prior knowledge — if you can save a file and click a menu, you can follow along.

The Commonplace website has further reading: a whitepaper on the philosophy behind the program and its name, and pages on why it is called "Commonplace" and where to get a licence.

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§ Installing and licensing Commonplace

Commonplace runs on **Windows 10/11 and 64-bit Linux**, and you can download it from getcommonplace.co.uk/downloads. There are four builds of the same application — pick whichever suits you:

- **Windows installer** (`.msi`) — installs into Program Files, adds Start-menu and desktop shortcuts, and registers in *Add or remove programs*.
- **Windows portable** (`.zip`) — unzip to a USB stick or any folder and run; no installation, no admin rights, nothing written outside the folder.
- **Linux tarball** (`.tar.gz`) — extract anywhere and run `Commonplace`; the .NET runtime is bundled, so there is nothing else to install.
- **Linux AppImage** — mark it executable and run; works across most distributions.

The same data folder is read by every build on either operating system, so you can move between them freely.

The Windows "protected your PC" warning

On Windows you may see a blue **SmartScreen** warning the first time you run a new download. This is normal for a newly published application that Microsoft has not yet seen many times — it is not a sign of anything wrong. Click **More info** → **Run anyway** to proceed. There is a fuller explanation at getcommonplace.co.uk/why-the-warning.

Licensing and activation

Commonplace is a one-off purchase: you buy a **licence key** once, activate it on each PC you use, and it is yours to keep, with free updates within the current major version. You can start with a **free 14-day trial** that unlocks every feature — it is the same build as the paid version and activates with a trial key exactly like a purchased one.

The first time you open Commonplace on a machine, the **Activate Commonplace** box appears. Paste the key from your purchase (or trial) email and click **Activate**; the program registers this device against your key and won't ask again on this machine unless the licence changes. Your key allows a set number of devices, and each PC you activate uses one slot.

- **Working offline.** After a successful activation, Commonplace re-checks your licence quietly in the background, but keeps working between checks if you are offline. Connect within the grace window and the clock resets automatically.

- **Moving to another PC.** Sign in to your **customer portal**, deactivate the old device to free its slot, then activate Commonplace on the new machine with the same key. Your data folder copies across as-is.

If a key won't take, copy it straight from your licence email — a stray space or a missing character is the usual culprit — and if it still fails, email `hello@getcommonplace.co.uk`.

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§ Getting started — a quick tour

The fastest way to understand Commonplace is to save a couple of things and then find them again. This tour takes about ten minutes.

1. Open Commonplace for the first time

When Commonplace launches it opens your collection and shows the **main window**: a narrow **activity rail** down the left edge, a **search bar** across the top, and three resizable panes — the **library tree** on the left, the **content** of the selected item in the middle, and the **Item Properties** editor on the right. A **status bar** runs along the bottom.

On a brand-new install Commonplace seeds a small sample collection called **My Collection** so you have something to explore: a *Theology* book and a *Software Ideas* book, each with a section or two and a handful of items of different types. Click around the tree — open a note, a link, the saved PDF — to see how the three panes work together.

2. Save your first item

Pick a section in the tree (say *Software Ideas* → *Ideas*) and click **+ Item** in the toolbar above the tree. A blank item opens in the **Item Properties** pane on the right. Give it a **Title** — that is the one thing Commonplace insists on before it will save — choose a **Type** from the dropdown, write something in **Notes**, and click **Save**.

That is the whole gesture. The item lands in the section you chose, and everything you typed — title and notes included — is folded into the search index straight away.

3. Save something real

The point of Commonplace is to keep *things you find*, not just typed notes. Try one of these:

- **Drag a file straight in.** Drag a PDF, Word document or image from your file manager onto the Commonplace window and drop it. Commonplace creates the right kind of item for you automatically — the fastest way to save something.
- Make a **PDF** item, click 📎 **Attach PDF…**, and pick a PDF. Its pages are rendered for reading in the middle pane and its text is extracted for search.
- Make a **Link** item, paste a web address into **Source URL**, and click 🌐 **Capture page** to fetch a clean reader-view snapshot you keep even if the original changes.
- Make a **Clipping**, copy anything to your clipboard, and click 📋 **Paste from clipboard** to drop it straight in.

4. Find it again

Click the **search bar** at the top, type a word you know is in there — a word from a note, a phrase from an article, anything — and press **Enter**. The left pane switches from the tree to a list of results drawn from across the whole collection: titles, notes, extracted document text, captured pages and PDF annotations all feed one index. Click a result to open it.

5. Tag it, so you can gather it

Open an item and type a few comma-separated words into the **Tags** box — `bible`, `to read`, `ideas`. Save. Now click the **Tags** button on the activity rail: every tag you have used is listed, and clicking one gathers every item that carries it, wherever it lives in the tree. Tags are headings you can browse by — the modern form of the "common place" the program is named after.

That is the loop: **capture, tag, find.** The rest of this guide walks through each piece in turn.

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§ 1. Concepts in one minute

Commonplace has a small vocabulary worth listing up front:

- **Item** — one saved thing: an article, a PDF, a captured web page, a note, some images, an attachment, a clipping, a free-canvas page, or a filled-in form. Every item carries the same spine of metadata — title, type, status, source, author, site, date, tags, notes and full extracted text — which is exactly what lets one search and one tag system span all of them.
- **Section** — a tab within a book that holds items. Sections can have **sub-sections** nested one level beneath them.
- **Book** — a collection of sections on a theme (Theology, Radio, Software Ideas). In the program's vocabulary the second level is a *Book*.
- **Collection** — a whole library, stored as its own database in its own folder on disk. You can keep as many separate collections as you like — work, study, home — and switch between them. (Where the website speaks of a *Library*, that is a Collection.)
- **Tag** — a lightweight label you attach to items. Tags live in a tree, can be reordered, grouped and merged, and one item can carry as many as you like.

The shelf metaphor ties it together:

> ***Collection → Book → Section → Item***

A book on a shelf, with tabbed sections, holding the things you save — a mental model you already know. The search and tags give it the retrieval power the paper version never had.

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§ 2. The main window

When Commonplace opens you see:

- **The activity rail** (far left, a narrow strip of icon buttons). Four buttons switch what the left pane shows or open a tool:
  - **Library** — the collection tree (the default view).
  - **Tags** — the tag browser.
  - **Form templates** — the gallery of form templates.
  - **Settings & Tools** — pinned at the bottom; opens the settings dialog.
- **The search bar** (across the top) — a box for full-text search with a **?** button that opens the syntax help, a **Search** button and a **Clear** button.
- **The library pane** (left) — the tree of your active collection, with a row of buttons above it: **+ Collection**, **Add Collection**, **+ Book**, **+ Item** and **+ Form**. When you run a search or browse a tag, this pane shows the matching list of items instead of the tree. Pinned along its bottom is the **Saved** panel — two always-on-hand lists, **Saved searches** and **Save Search results** (see *Search*).
- **The content pane** (centre) — shows the selected item: a PDF to read, an article, a captured page, an image gallery, a scrapbook-page canvas, or a form.
- **The Item Properties pane** (right) — the editor for the selected item's title, type, status, source, tags, notes and so on.
- **The status bar** (bottom) — a line of feedback about the last thing you did (for example, how many results a search found).

The three panes are divided by draggable splitters, so you can give whichever one you are working in more room. The window title reads **Commonplace**.

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§ 3. The shelf — collections, books and sections

Everything you save lives somewhere on the shelf. This section covers building and rearranging the structure; the next covers the items that go in it.

Collections

A **collection** is a whole library with its own database and its own folder of files on disk. Keeping separate collections — one for work, one for study, one for home — keeps unrelated material genuinely apart, and lets you back up or move any one of them on its own.

The buttons above the library tree manage them:

- **+ Collection** — create a brand-new, empty collection (its own database). You give it a name and, optionally, a colour.
- **Add Collection** — point Commonplace at an *existing* collection folder (one you backed up, copied from another machine, or restored) and add it to your list.

Right-click a collection (the top node of the tree) for more:

- **Add book** — add a new book to it.
- **Rename** — rename the collection in place (press **Enter** to commit, **Escape** to cancel).
- **Colour** — tint the collection's row from a palette of swatches.
- **Default item type** — choose which type new items default to (Note, Link, PDF, Article, Images, Attachments, Scrapbook Page or Clipping). Set this to whatever you save most often in that collection.
- **Remove from list** — drop the collection from your list. *This leaves its files on disk untouched* — it just stops showing it here; add it back any time with **Add Collection**.

Books

A **book** is the second level — a themed gathering of sections. Add one with the **+ Book** toolbar button or a collection's **Add book** menu. Right-click a book for its own menu:

- **Add section** — add a section to the book.
- **Rename**, **Colour** — as for collections.
- **Move up** / **Move down** — reorder the book among its siblings.
- **Delete** — remove the book (and everything in it).

You can also **drag** books to reorder them in the tree.

Sections and sub-sections

A **section** is the tab that actually holds items, and a section can contain **sub-sections** nested one level beneath it — useful for, say, a *Drafts* sub-section under *Articles*. Add a section with a book's **Add section**, and a sub-section with a section's **Add sub-section** (available when nesting is allowed). Right-click a section for:

- **Add item** — add an item directly to this section.
- **Add sub-section** — nest a new section beneath it.
- **Rename**, **Colour**, **Move up** / **Move down**, **Delete** — as elsewhere.
- **Promote (out a level)** — lift a sub-section back up to be a top-level section.
- **Demote (under section above)** — nest this section under the one directly above it.

Promote and demote, together with move up/down and drag-to-reorder, let you reshape the shelf as your material grows — exactly the "curate later" half of the program's philosophy.

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§ 4. Items and the Item Properties editor

Select any item — or start a new one with **+ Item** — and the **Item Properties** pane on the right becomes its editor. Its header shows **New item** or **Edit item**, with these buttons:

- 🖶 **Print** — open this item in your browser to print it (see *Printing and exporting*).
- ⭳ **Export** — save this item as a self-contained HTML file you keep (see *Printing and exporting*).
- **Save** — commit your changes. It stays disabled until the item has a title.
- **Cancel** — discard the changes you have made since the last save.
- **Delete** — delete the item (with confirmation).

Unlike some apps, Commonplace does **not** autosave an item as you type: your edits are committed when you click **Save**, and **Cancel** backs out of them. (Deleting a whole book or section from the tree, by contrast, takes effect at once.)

The fields, top to bottom:

- **Type** — the kind of item (see *Item types* below). Changing it switches which type-specific controls appear in the content pane. *Forms* are the exception: their type is fixed and shown read-only.
- **Status** — a simple lifecycle flag: **Unread**, **Read**, **Useful** or **Archived**. Use it to mark what you have got to and what earned its keep.
- **Title** — *required*. Until you give the item a title, **Save** stays disabled and a red note reminds you. Everything else is optional.
- **Source URL** — where the item came from on the web (and, for links, the page Commonplace captures from).
- **Author** and **Site** — who wrote it and what publication or site it is from. (Site is hidden for types where it doesn't apply, such as links and articles.)
- **Date added** — when you saved the item, shown read-only.
- **Tags (comma separated)** — type tags separated by commas: `bible, poetry, to read`. They become browsable headings (see *Tags*).
- **Notes** — your own free-text notes about the item. **Notes are folded into the search index**, so a word you write here finds the item later — your thinking is as findable as the source. Drag the grip beneath the box to make it taller.
- **Related** — beneath the tags, Commonplace lists other items that share a tag with this one or come from the same site. Click any of them to jump straight there — a quiet way to wander from one saved thing to its neighbours. The list appears only when there is something related to show.

Depending on the type, the editor also offers the capture controls described next — 📎 **Attach PDF…**, 🌐 **Capture page**, 📄 **Attach Word/RTF…**, 📋 **Paste from clipboard**, 🖼 **Add images…**, 📎 **Add files…**, and the scrapbook-page and form tools.

To delete an item you can use the **Delete** button in the editor, or right-click the item in the tree and choose **Delete**.

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§ 5. Item types

Every item is one of the types below. Whatever the type, it carries the same metadata spine — so one search and one tag system reach all of them.

Note

A **Markdown** note written in the app, with a live preview. Notes are the lightest item — no file, no capture, just your own words — and they are fully searchable. Use them for ideas, summaries, and anything you want to write rather than save.

Link — a captured web page

Paste a web address into **Source URL** and click 🌐 **Capture page**. Commonplace fetches the page, renders a clean **reader-view** snapshot in the content pane, and saves the page's text for search — so you keep a readable copy even if the original changes or disappears. ↻ **Refresh** re-fetches and replaces the stored copy, and ↗ **Open in browser** opens the live page. A link is *the page*, not just a bookmark to it.

PDF — read, highlight, annotate

Make a PDF item and click 📎 **Attach PDF…** to copy a PDF into your library. Its text is extracted for search and its pages are rendered for reading, with a full mark-up toolbar (see *Reading and marking up*). The editor shows the original file's name, path and size; **Refresh** re-imports it from its original location if the source has changed.

Article — a Word or RTF document

Click 📄 **Attach Word/RTF…** to import a `.docx` or `.rtf` file. It is copied into your library and shown **read-only** in a clean, formatted view, with its text extracted for search. Commonplace keeps and finds articles; it does not edit them — to change one, ↗ **Open externally** in your word processor, save, and **Replace…** the stored copy.

Images

Click 🖼 **Add images…** and pick one or more image files (multiple selection is allowed). They are filed together as a single item and shown in a two-column gallery. Click an image to open it at full size in your default viewer.

Attachments

Click 📎 **Add files…** to keep any other kind of file for the record — a spreadsheet, an archive, a font, anything. You can name each one. Each sits in the list with **Open in native application** and a ✕ to remove it. The files live in a readable folder beside the database, not locked inside an opaque blob.

Clipping — paste anything

Make a Clipping, copy something to your clipboard — plain text, formatted text, HTML, or an image — and click 📋 **Paste from clipboard**. Commonplace keeps the richest form it finds and shows it read-only: an image inline, rich text or HTML rendered, plain text as selectable text. It is the quickest way to grab a fragment without saving a whole file.

Scrapbook Page — a free canvas

A **Scrapbook Page** is a blank canvas you arrange freely, rather than a single document. Its toolbar offers 🎨 **Background** (a colour for the page) and **+ Text**, **+ Image** and **+ Link** to drop cards onto the canvas:

- **Text** cards hold Markdown — toggle each card between edit and rendered view.
- **Image** cards show a picture.
- **Link** cards are a clickable title and URL.

Drag a card by its header to move it, drag the bottom-right corner to resize it, recolour it with its 🎨 button, and remove it with ✕. Use a page to lay out related fragments — a moodboard, a plan, a set of quotations — however you please.

Form — fill in a template

A **Form** is an item filled in against a reusable **form template** (see *Form templates*). Rather than choosing it from the Type dropdown, you create one with the **+ Form** button, which asks you to pick a template; the form then opens with its layout locked and only its data-entry fields editable. Forms are for repeatable, structured capture — a reading record, a contact sheet, a logbook entry — where you want the same shape every time.

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§ 6. Capturing things

Capture should be close to one gesture; this section gathers every way material gets into Commonplace.

Drag and drop — the one-gesture way

The quickest way to save a file is simply to **drag it onto the Commonplace window and drop it** — there's no need to make an item or choose a type first. Drop a single file or several at once; Commonplace copies each into your collection and picks the right item type automatically:

- a **PDF** becomes a PDF item, with its text extracted for search;
- a **Word or RTF** document becomes an Article;
- **images** (PNG, JPG, GIF, BMP, WEBP) are filed together as a single Images item;
- **anything else** is kept together as a single Attachments item.

Dropped files land in the **section you have selected** in the tree — or, if you haven't selected one, in the first section of your collection. The last item created opens automatically so you can see it has arrived, ready to tag, rename or re-file. (Drop *files*, not folders.)

Every way in

- **A new blank item** — select a section and click **+ Item** (or right-click the section and choose **Add item**). The new item takes the collection's *default item type*; change it in the editor if you want something else.
- **A PDF** — 📎 **Attach PDF…** on a PDF item.
- **A web page** — paste the address into **Source URL** and click 🌐 **Capture page** on a Link item.
- **A Word/RTF document** — 📄 **Attach Word/RTF…** on an Article item.
- **Clipboard contents** — 📋 **Paste from clipboard** on a Clipping item.
- **Images** — 🖼 **Add images…** on an Images item.
- **Any other file** — 📎 **Add files…** on an Attachments item.
- **A laid-out page** — **+ Text / + Image / + Link** cards on a Scrapbook Page.
- **A structured record** — **+ Form**, then pick a template.

Whatever the route, the captured file is copied into your collection's `files/` folder (so the original can move or change without breaking your copy), its text is extracted into the search index where that makes sense, and the item is ready to tag and file — or to leave exactly where it landed and find by search later.

> ***Capture now, curate later.*** *Nothing forces you to tag or file an item before saving it — only the title is required. Hoard freely; organise when it suits you.*

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§ 7. Reading and marking up

PDFs and captured pages aren't just stored — they are read *inside* Commonplace, and you can mark them up where it matters.

The PDF viewer

Open a PDF item and the content pane shows its pages, one under another, with a toolbar across the top. Three tools, each a toggle:

- **Highlight** — drag across words to highlight them. Highlights are text-precise, anchored to the words rather than to a rectangle on the page.
- **Add note** — click a page to drop a **post-it**: a small draggable note you can type into and reposition by its header.
- **Draw** — drag to draw freehand ink on the page.

A row of five **highlight colour** swatches sets the colour for new highlights and ink. To remove a mark, right-click it and choose **Delete highlight** or **Delete drawing**. Everything you add is saved with the item and — for highlights and notes — fed into search, so you can find a PDF by a word you highlighted or wrote on it (see the `annotation:` filter under *Search*).

Captured pages

A Link item shows its saved reader-view snapshot in the content pane — clean, readable, and stored locally. ↻ **Refresh** takes a fresh snapshot from the URL; ↗ **Open in browser** visits the live page.

You can **mark up a captured page** as well as read it. Select a run of text and click 🖉 **Highlight** to highlight it; select a highlighted passage and click again to remove it. Use 📝 **Note** to drop a draggable post-it on the page — click the button, then click where you want it. Both kinds of mark are saved with the item and fed into search, so you can find a page later by a word you highlighted or wrote on it (see the `annotation:` filter under *Search*).

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§ 8. Search

Search is the heart of Commonplace, so it deserves a moment's study. The box runs across the top of every window; type a query and press **Enter** (or click **Search**). The left pane switches to a list of matching items drawn from the *whole active collection*, and the status bar reports how many it found. **Clear** returns you to the tree.

One index covers every searchable surface: item **titles** and **notes**, the **extracted text** of articles, PDFs and captured pages, **scrapbook-page cards**, **form** field labels and values, and **PDF/page annotations**. A search reaches all of it at once.

When a result matched inside a **scrapbook-page card** or a **form field**, opening it does more than show the item: Commonplace scrolls straight to the matching card or field and briefly outlines it, so you land on the exact place the word was found rather than hunting the page for it.

Search syntax

Click the **?** button beside the box for the full reference. In short:

- **Bare words** are combined with AND — `sea kayak` finds items with both words.
- "**Phrases**" in double quotes match exactly — `"sea kayak"`.
- **OR** widens a search — `red OR crimson`.
- **A leading** `-` excludes — `kayak -inflatable`.
- **Field filters** restrict a term to one part of an item: `title:`, `notes:`, `content:`, `annotation:`, `card:`, `tag:`, `type:`, `status:`, `author:`, `site:`, `notebook:`. For example `type:pdf creeds` finds PDFs mentioning creeds; `tag:bible` lists everything tagged *bible*.
- **Date filters** — `after:`, `before:` and `on:`, taking a year (`2026`), a month (`2026-06`) or a day (`2026-06-14`). For example `after:2026-01 ideas`.

Searches also do **prefix matching**, so a partial word finds the longer ones that start with it.

Saving searches and results

A search you run often needn't be retyped, and a list of results worth keeping needn't be reassembled. Both live in the **Saved** panel pinned to the bottom of the left pane, and both are stored inside the collection itself — so they travel and back up with it.

Saved searches are *dynamic*. Type a query, click ★ **Save** beside the search box, and give it a name; it appears under **Saved searches**. Click it any time to run the query afresh — it always reflects the collection as it stands now, so newly matching items appear and removed ones drop away on their own. Think of one as a standing question (`tag:bible status:unread` — "everything tagged *bible* I haven't read") rather than a fixed list.

Save Search results are *static*. With a result list showing, click **Save results** above it and name it; the exact items in view are frozen into a list under **Save Search results**. Unlike a saved search it never re-runs — it is the snapshot you took, ideal for "the sources I used for this essay". If an item is later deleted from the collection it simply drops out of the list; nothing else changes it.

Saved results stay editable after the fact:

- **Add an item** — select a result in any list, then click the **+** on the saved results you want to add it to.
- **Remove an item** — open the saved results and click ✕ **remove** on a row. The item itself is untouched; only its place in the list goes.
- **Rename**, **Move up** / **Move down**, **Delete** — the small ✎, ▲ ▼ and ✕ buttons on each row. Saved searches carry the same rename, reorder and delete controls. Deleting either kind never touches the items it pointed to.

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§ 9. Tags

Tags are Commonplace's lightweight classification system — the "common place" headings under which related material gathers. You add them per item in the editor's **Tags (comma separated)** box; you browse and organise them from the **Tags** button on the activity rail.

Browsing by tag

Click **Tags** on the rail to open the tag browser. Every tag you have used is listed as a tree, each with its item count. **Click a tag** and the left pane fills with every item carrying it, wherever that item lives in the books and sections. One item can carry many tags, so it surfaces under every heading you filed it under — a tag is a lens, not a folder.

Organising tags

Right-click a tag for its menu:

- **Rename** — rename it everywhere at once (Enter commits, Escape cancels).
- **Colour** — give the tag a colour, used on its chips.
- **Merge into** — fold this tag into another, combining their items.
- **Move up / Move down** — reorder tags within their level.
- **Group under tag above** — nest this tag beneath the one directly above it, building a tag hierarchy.
- **Ungroup (out a level)** — lift a nested tag back out.
- **Delete** — remove the tag (the items themselves are untouched).

Because tags form a tree you can reorder, group, merge and recolour, they grow with your material rather than ossifying — the curation half of the program, applied to how you classify rather than where you file.

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§ 10. Backing up and restoring collections

Because each collection is a self-contained database plus a folder of files, it backs up and restores as a single unit. Open **Settings & Tools** (the gear at the bottom of the rail) and use the **Backup & restore** controls:

- **Back up a collection…** — write one collection (its database and every stored file) to a single archive you can keep, copy, or move to another machine.
- **Restore as new…** — bring an archive back as a *brand-new* collection, added to your list. Your existing collections are left untouched, so a restore never overwrites what you already have.

This pairs with **Add Collection** on the library toolbar: a folder you restored or copied from elsewhere can be added straight to your list and opened in place.

> *Because your data is local-first, you can also back up simply by copying the collection's folder — see Where your data lives. The archive is just a tidy, single-file way to do the same thing.*

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§ 11. Printing and exporting

Every item has a 🖶 **Print** button at the top of its editor. Commonplace renders the item — laid out for the page according to its type — to a self-contained HTML document and opens it in your **default web browser**, where you print it the usual way (**Ctrl+P** / **⌘P**) or save it as a PDF from the browser's print dialog.

Each type prints to suit its shape: a note as rendered Markdown, an article in its formatted view, a captured page as its reader view, images as a grid, a scrapbook page with its cards laid out, a form with its filled-in fields, and so on.

If you want to fine-tune the look, **Settings & Tools** holds a set of **print styles** — a block of CSS per item type that you can edit and **Save**. Leave them alone for sensible defaults; adjust them if you have a particular layout in mind.

Exporting to HTML

Printing opens an item in your browser; **exporting** writes that same self-contained HTML to a file you keep. Click ⭳ **Export** at the top of any item's editor, choose where to save, and you get a single `.html` file that opens in any browser on any machine — no app, no account, nothing locked away. (A PDF item exports its extracted text; the original PDF is already a file you hold.)

To take a whole collection out at once, open **Settings & Tools** and click **Export this collection as HTML…**. Commonplace writes one HTML file per item into a folder you choose, plus an **index.html** that links them all — a portable, readable copy of everything you have saved, ready to archive or hand to someone who doesn't run Commonplace. It is the practical proof of the local-first promise: your material is never trapped.

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§ 12. Settings & Tools

The **Settings & Tools** button (the gear, pinned at the bottom of the activity rail) opens a dialog of application-wide options and housekeeping:

- **Version** — which build of Commonplace you are running.
- **Check for updates** — opens the Commonplace downloads page in your browser, so you can compare it against the version shown here and grab the latest build.
- **The Commonplace folder** — where all your collections live. It shows the current path, with **Open folder** to reveal it in your file manager and **Change…** to move everything to a new location (Commonplace relocates your collections and restarts).
- **Backup & restore** — **Back up a collection…** and **Restore as new…**, as described above.
- **Export to HTML** — **Export this collection as HTML…** writes every item to a folder of HTML files (plus an index page) you can keep, archive or share.
- **Print styles** — the per-item-type CSS used by 🖶 **Print**, with **Save print styles** to keep your edits.

Most people set the Commonplace folder once and never return here except to take a backup.

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§ 13. Where your data lives

Commonplace is **local-first** by design: there is no account, no server and no telemetry, and your material sits in a readable folder you can open, back up, copy, or walk away from.

Everything lives under the **Commonplace folder** (by default `%AppData%\Scrapbook` on Windows and `~/.config/Scrapbook` on Linux; change it in *Settings & Tools*). Inside it:

- `app-settings.json` — the list of your collections and which one is active.
- **One folder per collection**, each holding:
  - `scrapbook.db` — the SQLite database (with the FTS5 full-text index) of that collection's books, sections, items, tags and notes.
  - `files/` — the saved files themselves, in readable sub-folders by type (`pdf/` , `article/` , `link/` , `image/` , `clipping/` , `form/` , and so on).

Because the files are stored plainly rather than buried in a database blob, the folder *is* your backup: copy it, sync it, or archive it, and your library travels intact. Commonplace will open it again from wherever you put it.

> ***A note on names.*** *The program is presented as* ***Commonplace*** *and its second level is a* ***Book****, but the data folder and database keep their original* `Scrapbook` *names. This is deliberate — the experience was rebranded without moving anyone's data. If you go spelunking in the folder,* `scrapbook.db` *is the right file.*

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§ 14. Keyboard shortcuts

Commonplace is mostly a point-and-click program, but a few keys speed up the common moves:

Shortcut	Action
Enter (in the search box)	Run the search
Enter (while renaming a tree node or tag)	Commit the new name
Escape (while renaming)	Cancel the rename
Ctrl+P / ⌘P (in your browser after 🖶 **Print**)	Print or save the item as PDF

Most other actions live on the toolbar buttons, the activity rail, and the right-click menus throughout the tree and tag browser.

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§ Recipes — worked examples

Three short walkthroughs that combine the features above.

Recipe 1 — A reading library you can actually search

Goal: keep articles, PDFs and pages you mean to read, and find any of them by a half-remembered phrase.

1. Create a collection with **+ Collection** — call it *Reading*. Set its **Default item type** to *Link* (right-click the collection → *Default item type*) if web pages are most of what you save.
2. Add a **Book** (*To read*) and a couple of **Sections** (*Articles*, *Papers*).
3. Save things as you find them: a **Link** with 🌐 **Capture page**, a **PDF** with 📎 **Attach PDF…**, a Word document as an **Article**. Don't stop to file carefully — just give each a title and save.
4. Tag lightly as you go — `to read`, a topic or two — in the **Tags** box.
5. Weeks later, find a paper you half-remember: type a phrase into the search box. Because the full text of every PDF, page and article is indexed, the phrase surfaces the item even if its title says nothing about it. Mark it **Read** or **Useful** in the **Status** dropdown as you work through the pile.

Recipe 2 — A marked-up PDF you can return to

Goal: read a long PDF, highlight the parts that matter, and find them again by what you highlighted.

1. In any section, add a **PDF** item and 📎 **Attach PDF…**.
2. Read it in the content pane. Turn on **Highlight** and drag across the passages that matter; pick a colour from the swatches. Turn on **Add note** and drop a post-it where you want to say something to your future self. Use **Draw** for a quick mark in the margin.
3. Write a sentence in **Notes** about why this PDF earned its place, and tag it.
4. Later, search with `annotation:` plus a word you highlighted or wrote on a post-it — the PDF comes straight back, open it, and your marks are exactly where you left them.

Recipe 3 — Separate worlds, kept apart

Goal: keep work and personal research from bleeding into each other, but back both up easily.

1. Make two collections — **Work** and **Home** — with **+ Collection**. Give each a distinct **Colour** so you always know which you are in.
2. Build whatever books and sections each needs, and save into them. A search only ever covers the *active* collection, so work material never shows up while you're in Home.

3. When you want a safety copy, open **Settings & Tools → Back up a collection…** and archive each one. To move a collection to another machine, copy its archive over and use **Restore as new…** (or copy the folder and **Add Collection**).

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§ Frequently asked questions

Where does my data live? In a readable folder on your own machine — by default under `%AppData%\Scrapbook` (Windows) or `~/.config/Scrapbook` (Linux), wherever you point the *Commonplace folder* in Settings & Tools. Each collection is a `scrapbook.db` database plus a `files/` folder. No cloud, no account, no telemetry. See *Where your data lives*.

Do I have to save, or does it save as I type? You save deliberately. Editing an item commits when you click **Save** (and the title is required first); **Cancel** discards your changes. Structural changes in the tree — deleting a book or section — take effect immediately.

What's the difference between a Book and a Collection? A **Collection** is a whole library with its own database on disk; a **Book** is one themed gathering of sections *inside* a collection. Keep separate collections for genuinely separate worlds (work vs. home); use books and sections to organise within one.

Can one item appear under several headings? Yes — that's what tags are for. An item lives in exactly one section, but it surfaces under every **tag** you give it, and in any search it matches. A tag is a lens, not a folder.

I saved a web page — what happens if the original changes or vanishes? Nothing to your copy. 🌐 **Capture page** saves a reader-view *snapshot* and its text locally, so you keep a readable record regardless. Use ⟳ **Refresh** if you *want* to pull a fresh version.

Can I edit an article or PDF inside Commonplace? No — Commonplace keeps and finds documents, it doesn't author them. For an article, ↗ **Open externally** to edit in your word processor, then **Replace…** the stored copy. You *can* mark up PDFs and captured pages with highlights, notes and ink, which is different from editing the document itself.

How do I move my whole library to a new computer? Copy the Commonplace folder across, or back up each collection (**Settings & Tools → Back up a collection…**) and **Restore as new…** on the other machine. The same data folder works identically on Windows and Linux.

Is this just another notes app? No. Notes are first-class and fully searchable, but the organising idea is the *collection of saved things* — articles, PDFs, pages, images — not the page of prose. Think part OneNote, part Zotero, part Obsidian, but simpler, and built around keeping and finding rather than authoring.