Basic Markdown Reference

What Works Almost Everywhere

This is the **core subset of Markdown** that works across virtually all platforms, parsers, and implementations. If you stick to these elements, your markdown will render correctly whether you're using GitHub, Reddit, Obsidian, VS Code, GPT instructions, Claude Skills, or any other markdown-supporting platform.

Headers

Heading 1

Heading 2

Heading 3

Heading 4

Heading 5

Heading 6

Note: Always include a space after the # symbols. Some parsers are strict about this.

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Emphasis (Bold and Italic)

italic or _italic_

bold or __bold__

bold and italic or ___bold and italic___

Rendered as:

- *italic* or *italic*

- **bold** or **bold**

- ***bold and italic***

Best Practice: Use asterisks (*) rather than underscores (_) for broader compatibility.

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Lists

Unordered Lists

- Item 1

- Item 2

  - Nested item 2a

  - Nested item 2b

- Item 3

Alternative syntax:

* Item 1

* Item 2

  * Nested item

Best Practice: Use hyphens (-) for consistency. Indent nested items with 2 spaces.

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Ordered Lists

1. First item

2. Second item

3. Third item

   1. Nested item 3a

   2. Nested item 3b

Best Practice: Use sequential numbers even though most parsers will auto-number. Indent nested items with 3 spaces (to align with parent text).

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Links

[Link text](https://example.com)

[Link with title](https://example.com "Title on hover")

Rendered as:

- [Link text](#)

- [Link with title](#)

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Images

![Alt text](image-url.jpg)

![Alt text with title](image-url.jpg "Image title")

Best Practice: Always include alt text for accessibility.

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Inline Code

Use `backticks` for inline code.

Rendered as: Use backticks for inline code.

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Code Blocks

Fenced Code Blocks (Preferred)

```

code goes here

multiple lines supported

```

With Language Specification

```python

def hello():
```

```
    print("Hello, world!")
```

Indented Code Blocks (Legacy)

    code goes here

    indented with 4 spaces

Best Practice: Use fenced code blocks (triple backticks) with language specification for syntax highlighting.

Works in: ✅ Most platforms (some very old parsers may not support fenced blocks)

Blockquotes

> This is a blockquote.

> It can span multiple lines.

>

> And multiple paragraphs.

Rendered as:

This is a blockquote. It can span multiple lines.

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Horizontal Rules

***

___

Best Practice: Use three hyphens (---) with blank lines above and below.

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Line Breaks

Hard Line Break

Line one

Line two (two spaces at end of line one)

Alternative (more explicit):

Line one\

Line two (backslash at end of line one)

Paragraph Break

Paragraph one.

Paragraph two. (blank line between)

Best Practice: Use blank lines for paragraph breaks. Two trailing spaces for hard line breaks within a paragraph.

Works in: ✅ All platforms

Escaping Characters

Use backslash (\) to escape markdown characters:

* Not italic asterisk

\# Not a heading

\[Not a link](not-a-url)

Common characters to escape: \ ` * _ {} [] () # + - . !

Works in: ✅ All platforms

What This Guide DOES NOT Include

The following markdown features are **NOT universally supported** and are covered in the Compatibility Quick Reference Guide:

❌ **Tables** - GitHub Flavored Markdown only
❌ **Task lists** - GitHub Flavored Markdown only

❌ **Strikethrough** - Not in CommonMark, varies by platform

❌ **Footnotes** - Platform-specific

❌ **Definition lists** - Rare support

❌ **Abbreviations** - Rare support

❌ **Emoji shortcodes** - Platform-specific

❌ **HTML** - Support varies wildly

❌ **Math/LaTeX** - Platform-specific extensions

❌ **Syntax highlighting in inline code** - Not standard

❌ **Auto-linking** - Behavior varies

❌ **Heading IDs/anchors** - Not standard

Best Practices for Maximum Compatibility

1. **Always include blank lines** around headers, lists, code blocks, and blockquotes

2. **Use asterisks (*)** for emphasis rather than underscores

3. **Use hyphens (-)** for unordered lists rather than asterisks or plus signs

4. **Include alt text** for all images

5. **Specify language** for code blocks when possible

6. **Avoid mixing markdown with HTML** unless absolutely necessary

7. **Test your markdown** on target platforms before deploying

8. **Use consistent indentation** (2 spaces for nested lists)

9. **Include a space after #** in headers

10. **Use explicit line breaks** (blank lines) rather than relying on parser behavior

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Why This Subset?

This guide includes only the **original Markdown specification by John Gruber (2004)** plus fenced code blocks, which have become a de facto standard across nearly all modern parsers.

What this means:

- Your content will render correctly on GitHub, GitLab, Bitbucket

- Your content will work in Reddit, Discord, Slack

- Your content will work in documentation tools like MkDocs, Hugo, Jekyll

- Your content will work in note-taking apps like Obsidian, Notion, Bear

- Your content will work in AI systems like GPT instructions.md and Claude Skills

- Your content will render in any CommonMark-compliant parser

When you need more: Refer to the Markdown Compatibility Quick Reference Guide to understand which extended features work on which platforms.

Quick Test

If you want to test whether a platform supports basic markdown correctly, try this sample:

Test Document

This is a **bold** test with *italic* text.

Lists

- Item one

- Item two

  - Nested item

1. First

2. Second

Code

Inline `code` example.

```python
print("Hello, world!")
```

Links and Quotes

[Example link](#)

> This is a blockquote.

End of test.

If all of these render correctly, the platform supports basic markdown properly.

Version

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Part of: [MARKDOWN_FLAVORS](https://github.com/ArchieCur/MARKDOWN_FLAVORS)

Companion Document: Markdown Compatibility Quick Reference Guide

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Feedback

Found an issue? Have a suggestion? Open an issue at github.com/ArchieCur/MARKDOWN_FLAVORS