

Mem AI: A note taking tool that should show its work.

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Abstract: This is my best work ever.

Mem interface evolution

Mem is a leader in the crowded application category for personal productivity note taking and task wrangling or “second brain” applications. Mem is well funded¹ [footnote] and has a passionate user community on Slack. I am a Mem subscriber and early adopter.

I like Mem because the interface is simple, implements a reasonable subset of Markdown² [footnote], and makes nice use of templates and Zapier. Mem continues to iterate the product, but in what direction? I will leave aside the debates on the Mem community Slack regarding two popular topics: Focus on basics like earch and iOS stability or Less AI, More Build Quality.

What I want to explore is the design goals for Chat. Chat is one of Mem’s AI implementations³ to help surface Mem content or support writing. The design team continues to experiment with large language models (LLMs) and how you interact with Chat. The Mem team is releasing often to the community.

As everyone explores the new AI-assisted interaction model, what is the ideal model? How much should the application reveal about decisions underlying the suggestions? I will use Mem Chat to explore these questions.

Mem Chat User Interactions

Chat is Mem’s implementation of LLMs. There are three scenarios to explore:

1. Chat Suggestions in the Sidebar
2. Chat Navigation, and
3. Chat Welcome

Overall, Mem designers did a nice job avoiding Norman’s criticism⁴ that AI chat interfaces are the “first new UI paradigm in 60 Years” where users tell the computer what to do. Unlike the prompt engineering of ChatGPT where you describe what outcome you desire, Mem is working hard to determine your intent; presumably from the content of the Mem and associated Mem collections.

¹ OpenAI leads \$23.5M round in Mem, an AI-powered note-taking app, from TechCrunch.

² Markdown Cheatsheet · adam-p/markdown-here Wiki (github.com) (<https://github.com/adam-p/markdown-here/wiki/Markdown-Cheatsheet>)

³ When using the initial release of Chat, previously called Smart Text or MemX, I observed the Mem syntax was very “technical” and could benefit from clear sentence structure in the prompts. MemX is Opaque

⁴ A recent paper from the astute Nielsen Norman reviews the new AI interfaces in [AI: First New UI Paradigm in 60 Years] (<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ai-paradigm/>)